

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Philippians 2:3-8 and Hebrews 12:2 on June 15, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Modern Family**  
**Today's Focus: Off Center**

**“Start Moving From Off-Center to Christ-Centered”**

Hello Friends,

Here's the big idea that we've been building upon in this series, *Modern Family*. It's true for all of us. When it comes to family life, no matter what family situation you might be in right now, there is a gap between your real, everyday family and the ideal, picture perfect family.

And generally we don't like to see that gap. We don't like to have that gap pointed out to us. It makes us tense. Or it makes us feel guilty or defensive. So what we've done as a society is we've started saying, “Hey, let's just normalize this gap. We'll just laugh at it. We'll just say, “Hey you know this is just the modern family here. We're all just so jacked up. Ha ha look at our dysfunction.” But into this tension, into this gap walks Jesus. And whenever Jesus talks about any issue, but especially about family issues...Jesus refuses to let go of the ideal. He never compromised on the ideal picture perfect family, but at the same time he also never condemned those who fell short of it who came to him in faith. This is such good news!

So we see in Jesus someone who says, “I love you. I forgive you. I've got your back for what's real in your family when you fall short. So let's keep fearlessly moving forward to what's ideal. I'll be there for you. I'll keep helping you. I'll keep extending to you my strong arm of grace and I'll keep picking you up. Let's keep moving forward together towards how life works happiest and best according to the blueprint designed by God who is also now your gracious, perfect, Father in heaven too.”

Now today, friends, we're going to start taking a look at a very specific issue of this gap between the ideal family and our real family situation that we find ourselves in. It has to do with parenting. With God's help we want to start **moving the modern family from being off-center to being Christ-centered.**

So I'm going to be gearing the applications today more towards those of you who have children living under your roof right now. Now for those of you who don't though, I want to share something with you as we get into this topic. We are a church family and I believe we all need each other. We need the wisdom and the experience of the oldest generation and we need the youthful energy and curiosity of the youngest generation. So God brings us together as a church family to worship and to encourage one another. Moreover, as God's people we all have a certain level of responsibility to help shape the next generation.

And besides, everybody can be a family member to somebody. Even if you don't have kids or grandkids of your own, you can be a family member to somebody. Maybe you'll be an aunt or uncle. Maybe even it's just going to be in God's plan for your life that you'll have some friends and they'll be the ones who have kids. Maybe you'll get to be a baptismal sponsor or a Godparent to a child. What this means though is that all of us get opportunities to help shape how children develop. So even if my applications are geared towards especially towards parents, a lot of the principles we're going to talk about today apply to all of us. And you're all smart people so I trust you'll figure out how to take some of this and apply it to yourself.

Now I'm going to make a few general points today to help identify the problem before we really dig into the Bible together like we always do to find God's plan and principles for how to fix it. **1) A family's off-center when CHILDREN are parents.** What does this look like? It's maybe a little tricky to talk about because it's one of those things I think that we all notice immediately in other families, but rarely see when it happens in ours. Have you ever seen a child who's got his parents trained to give in? Where there's always this perfectly timed temper tantrum in the worst possible place because he knows that Dad or Mom will end up giving him whatever he wants right whenever he wants it?

I know about this because I used to do this. Now I didn't always get away with it. My parents had boundaries. For the most part I knew where the boundaries were and I knew that if I crossed them I would be disciplined. But when I was a boy, if I whined, like while I was at Shopko with my Grandma who lived nearby, my Grandma would end up buying me a Starting Lineup figure for example.

You remember these? {prop} There are more where these came from if you know what I mean. So you can imagine how I got all these! Often I would whine until she bought me one. And of course I would be happy then until the next time we were together at Shopko and you know what I would do? I would whine until I got another Starting Lineup figure or two because now the precedent had been set that I was going to set the boundaries. I was going to get what I want. And what I wanted kept becoming bigger and bigger and more and more as I learned I could expand the boundaries that I created.

One time I remember making her feel bad because my sister went to the store with her and she got something and I wasn't at the store to have her buy something for me. I mean yikes. My Grandma is the most generous person I know and I took advantage of my Grandma's generosity. This was my sinful nature rearing its ugly selfish head, for sure. I feel bad about this. I've told my Grandma I'm sorry for acting like that. But parents, do you see your kids doing this to you? It's probably because you're letting them. **A family's off-center when CHILDREN are parents.**

You want to know what's happening in a family dynamic like that where you as parents don't say No to your kids? The child becomes the one who exerts authority. The child becomes the one who sets the boundaries. And all of sudden the child becomes the parent and the fourth commandment is turned upside down which says, *"Honor your Father and Mother that it may go well with you...."*

In other words God has given parents the authority. They are the ones who should be setting boundaries. They are the ones who should be saying no. They are the ones who shouldn't just act like helicopters who come swooping in to rescue their children all the time so that their kids are always happy and they always get what they want and they're never wrong and they never have to experience the consequences for their sinful actions or their not getting what they want. You know with all the commandments, God has given them to us for our ultimate wellbeing and our good; in this case of the fourth commandment, it's for the well-being especially of children. So **a family's off-center when CHILDREN are parents.**

But there's another problem with this. This is the flip side of it. A family's off-center when a parent acts like a child. Now you can probably think of lots of ways this might play out. But one way is when a parent, though an adult, becomes a dependent of the child. How can this happen? This can happen when a parent tries to live through their child as if their own well-being, success, and sense of accomplishment depends on their child's well-being, success, or sense of accomplishment. You ever see this happen? It happens when a parent places

the burden for their own happiness upon their child so that a parent's whole identity is impacted by whether their child behaves properly or gets straight A's or earns that sports scholarship or sees enough playing time on the field or even if their kid's life just turns out the way they want it to.

There are actually a number of stories from the Bible that help us understand how this can actually be a subtle form of idolatry when a parent's desires and a parent's happiness are so bound up in their children that it can destroy their relationship not only with God but with their family.

Just one example of this is found in book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. A man named Jacob was married actually to two wives. This was no picture perfect family situation by the way. Rather what we see in family situations like this over and over again in the Bible is that it didn't work out so well. It never does when people live contrary to God's blueprint. In this particular case God had blessed Jacob and Leah with children, but thus far hadn't blessed Jacob and Rachel with any children. So Rachel feels devastated because her whole identity is wrapped up in having kids. Now certainly there was extreme cultural pressure in that day to have children to begin with, but it's still a powerful example of what happens whenever our desire and our happiness is bound up in someone or something other than God.

Listen to this: *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"* (Genesis 30:1) Now there's nothing wrong with the desire to have children. God says children are a blessing. But like with all God's richest gifts like children, the gifts themselves make poor replacement gods. Rachel here bares her soul yet comes off sounding a lot like she's whining, doesn't it? And it wasn't like Jacob wasn't trying here, ok folks! But you see here's the thing. We adults can act like children sometimes when we try and squeeze our heart's desire out of our kids.

Now I'm guessing some of you might be thinking, "Well I'm just trying to give my kids every opportunity that I can in life. I'm just trying to help them learn how to be successful. I'm making all these sacrifices for them by driving them here and there and doing this for them and spending all this money on them and giving them all the experiences." But in reality sometimes it might be the case that you're really doing it for you. Each of you will have to search your own heart on this. But if your heart's desire is wrapped up in your kids turning out a certain way or them liking certain things or being good at doing certain things, then you're bound to be disappointed if not devastated because you've made them the center of your happiness and the center of your life and God never intended it to be that way.

You want to know why else this is a problem to have child-centered homes? Because **2) Child-centered homes produce SELF-CENTERED children.** This is where we end up either way—when children act like parents or parents act like children. **Child-centered homes produce SELF-CENTERED children.** Spoiled. Entitled. Irreverent. Selfish. Kids who grow up to be that way as adults and who locate their sense of worth in what they do or how much they have. In our quest to see our children grow up to be great at doing things—to be great at sports, and to be great at academics, and to be great in their careers...we don't want to miss raising our kids to be good people who have integrity and morals and are honest and compassionate towards others.

You see I think there is a big difference between being a good person and a person who is good *at* doing something. For example, remember Lance Armstrong? He was really good *at* cycling. He was great even. The greatest ever. But would any of you say that you want your kids to grow up and be great like Lance Armstrong?

Probably not, right? Because he was also great at cheating and lying. Or how about Tiger Woods? One of the great golfers of all time. But he is also one of the great cheaters of all time and not in the same way as Lance Armstrong if you know what I mean.

We all know deep down that there is a difference between raising someone to be a good person and raising them to be a person who is good *at* doing stuff, right? And if we raise children to be self-centered because we want them to be great at doing something that we want for ourselves, then we shouldn't be surprised when they grow to be adults who think the world revolves around them and that they deserve to get whatever they want no matter what the consequences to others. So here's what happens. **Child-centered homes produce self-centered children.** Now I'm sure sometimes this is accidental. I'm guessing if I asked you today, "How many of you want your kids to become selfish and to feel entitled and then to become adults who think the world revolves around them and they always deserve to get what they want and there shouldn't be any consequences for their behavior?" ...not too many of you would raise your hand. Right? But that's what happens when we have child-centered homes. **Child-centered homes produce self-centered children.**

So if you don't want that...what else can you put in the center of your home so that you will not raise narcissistic, self-centered children but children who are secure in who they are, children who are filled with joy, who have lives filled with meaning, significance, and purpose and who value other people? We find it here in the book of Philippians 2:3-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* In other words none of your actions should be done because you think, "This is about me. This is about my pride, my happiness, my desire, my glory, what I want, or my getting noticed." The Bible says, "Don't do anything because you are hungry for glory, because you are starving for attention, or because you need to be recognized in order to feel important." But *in humility consider others better than yourselves.* Now a quick word about humility. This doesn't mean, "I have very low esteem, I am a worthless piece of scrap." No, humility means rather that you are so secure in who you are as a child of God through Jesus that you are now free to be concerned about other people like Jesus was. You can look at other people, other families even, other people's kids, and not feel jealousy creeping in.

<sup>4</sup> *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* Of course we are at such a disadvantage here in our country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because there isn't much in our culture that pushes us in this direction to look out for other people. All the advertisements that bombard us are geared towards you getting for yourself and customizing all the newest and best stuff according to your own personal tastes and desires and telling you this is what you deserve. But the Apostle Paul says, "No, snap out of your narcissistic inward gaze and look outward towards other people and what's best for them." Parents, what's best for your kids? Here's what applies all of us whether we are adults or children: <sup>5</sup> *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.* So if you want to know what a life looks like that isn't desperate to squeeze glory and recognition and acceptance out of other people, look at Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.* Here's what this means. Jesus Christ is a member of the Trinity along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. So Jesus is the Son of God, eternal in nature, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is worshiped by angels. Creation itself declares his praise. He has all the glory in heaven and earth. He has all the recognition and acceptance and importance. Yet he did not consider all this as something he had to cling to desperately. Here's what he

did instead.<sup>7</sup> *but made himself nothing.* Literally in Greek it says he made himself empty. Empty of what? Glory. He said, “Yeah I’m the Son of God from eternity but I’m going to empty myself of my glory for your benefit so that I can fill up the glory that you are lacking and that you are craving.” And this is what Jesus did. He *made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*<sup>8</sup> *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

The glory that we lack and the identity that we lack and the purpose and balance that we lack... Jesus said, “I’m going to give all that to you.” And what Jesus did when came to this earth is he said, “I’m ready to trade places with you before the holy and righteous God so that He can become your loving Father too. You’ve got sin on your record. I’m going to take that on my record and I’m going to take that to the cross and die to pay for the sins you committed so that your record can be made clear. And then all the glory and dignity and honor that I have as the Son of God, I’m going to give that to you....so that when you come to me in faith, my Father in heaven will look on you and he will place his name upon you in baptism and you know what he will say?”

He will say, “This is now my son whom I love. This is my daughter whom I love. This is my dearly loved child who is holy and forgiven and an heir or eternal life in heaven with me.” Friends, Jesus Christ gives you an identity that is beyond anything you could ever achieve by being a good enough parent or a good enough child or by being good enough at doing *anything*. You are accepted by grace. And this means that you now have a purpose too that is worth living for—to give God all the glory for everything in your life. Jesus’ love for you literally turns you now away from yourself and turns you towards helping others discover their brand new life in him and what’s best for them.<sup>4</sup> *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Now what does this look like in the family? Let’s go to Hebrews 12:2 - *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* The verb here in Greek is an interesting one. *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.* It means to focus our attention without distraction. Let us focus our attention without distraction on *Jesus*. Why? Because he’s the beginning and end of our faith. He is the source and the conclusion of our faith. It’s not all about you. It’s not about what you want. It’s about Jesus. It’s about Jesus *who for the joy set before him endured the cross.*

Try and imagine this conversation... “Hey, Jesus, here are all the angels of heaven worshiping you.” “That’s great, I’m going to endure the cross.” “Now why would you do that, Jesus?” “So I can fill up my glory starving people with my glory so they can live with the joy that I will secure for them after I win the victory on their behalf.” *Scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* In other words when it was all said and done and Jesus had won the victory over sin, death, and devil...Jesus said, “Now I’m going back to my position of glory. I’m ascending into heaven where I will be ruling over all things as before in the presence of my Father till I come again.”

What can we derive about parenting from this verse? I don’t want to overcomplicate what it is simple truth even if it’s not immediately obvious. If child-centered homes produce self-centered children... that means **3) Christ-centered homes produce God-centered people.** So if we want kids who will have a strong sense of security and identity, kids who aren’t going to be swayed here and there by every wind of influence in this world, kids who aren’t craving love and attention from just anyone who comes along, then they need something in the center besides themselves. They need the strength and identity and love that comes from

Jesus Christ. And when you decide to build a home that like, a home where it's not kids at the center, not mom at the center, not dad at center, not recreation or academics or sports at the center, but Jesus at the center...you will raise God-centered kids who are led by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them who will guide them to make wise decisions and choices in life, who will lead them to be more and more like Jesus as they look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others.

So we'll get into some of the details of what this looks like next week, but just imagine if Jesus stood at the center of everything in your life. His love. His goodness. His word. How would that impact your children? How would that impact your parenting? How would that impact your family and our church? Just imagine what would happen if your family **started moving from off-center to Christ-centered!**

Let's pray about that. Dear Father in heaven, on this Father's Day, thank you for making us a part of your family through the work of your Son Jesus by the power of your Holy Spirit. Thank you for being our perfect Father. I for one know I'm not the perfect father to my own children and I know there are people here today who are hurting because they didn't have a perfect father in their life when they were children...or even in some cases a good father. That's part of this tension that we feel again today as we've seen the gap between the ideal and the real when it comes to our family of origin or our current family situation.

But we thank you, Father, for telling us that your grace is enough to cover that gap. We thank you for sending Jesus your Son to rescue us for all the ways we have been short-sighted or simply self-centered. And now give us today, as we leave place of worship, your peace and wisdom to raise up our families in our church who keep you at the center of their lives. We know that if you are at the center then there would be more love in our homes, more forgiveness for each other, more patience, more acceptance, more willingness to serve each other and our neighbors...and that would impact everything.

Jesus, thank you for emptying yourself of glory to fill us up. Give us the wisdom to know how to apply your word today in our families and give us the courage to make some changes where needed to your glory. Help us always be people who know you first and foremost as our Savior and who want therefore to follow you as our example. Amen.

## **My Next Steps**

**Connect:** How would children's lives in the modern family context today be different (and better) if their lives were focused on knowing Christ and on serving others?

**Treasure:** *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:4).

**Challenge:** Take some time to ask yourself who is really the center of your home. Is it the kids? Is it you? Or is it Christ?

Talk about implementing at least one of the following ways (or make up your own) to make your home more Christ-centered this week:

☑ Pray together as a family. Read the Bible. Use the resources we send home with the kids at Bible Quest.

- ☒ Stop rescuing your kids. Let them feel the consequences of their action and lead them to repent.
- ☒ Say no. Every desire is not a need.
- ☒ Set and enforce boundaries that are informed by the Bible.
- ☒ Help your children serve others emphasizing Christ's love for us as our motivation.
- ☒ Other?