

# STRENGTHEN + + +

| PASTOR GREG GRIFFITH

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First, I want to say to all campuses, happy Mother's Day to every mom out there. But I also want to say to moms that have been praying to be, or yet to be moms that have been praying to become a mom, we're praying with you. And don't give up. Don't forget that the Lord, it took 25 years for Sarah to be blessed with the child of Isaac.

And for moms that are walking through with loss, whether it be a loss of a child before birth or a loss of a child after birth, you're not alone. And there is a promise that God will turn your mourning to dancing. So moms, whether you're celebrating on a mountaintop or this day is a day walking in the valley, you are not alone. And we are walking with you this day and every day.

I want you to think for a moment about a memorable experience you had as a child. I remember this beautiful woman named Grandma Marie. She was this woman at our church growing up. And she was like First Lutheran Church's Mother Teresa. She'd always be surrounded with a bunch of kids. This little 4'10 woman that had a cane, but she just would give these amazing hugs. And I don't believe she had children of her own, but she had hundreds upon hundreds of grandchildren that loved to see her every single week. And she's a woman that I will always remember, that I thank God for, and I look forward to a reunion when Jesus comes again.

Now I want you to think about a special memory from when you were a teenager. Mine is remembering sitting at, when I was 17, finishing up high school, about a month left until I graduated. And I'm sitting at, I vividly remember, I'm sitting at our dining room table. My dad's on the couch. My mom's on the other side of the couch. And I say, "Hey, guys, I think that when I'm 18, before I head off to college, I'm going to get an earring." And my dad looked at me and he said, "No, you're not."

Now if you know my dad at all, my dad's a pretty black and white linear guy, pretty old school, ex-cop, right? Like there's just certain things you do and you don't do in his mind. And earrings were something that girls had, and not guys. It was 1995, right? My dad was born in 1944, so he grew up in a different generation. And I said, "Dad, I said, this is kind of something that's normal now. Like it's just..." At that time, I was just getting one. And he said, "Nope." And he said, matter of fact, "Greg, if you try to get an earring, well, consider that I will cut off all funding for you for college and beyond." Like that's how important it was.

And at that moment, my mom stepped in and she said, "Larry, it really is just an earring." She gave my dad a little bit there. She said, "If he wants to be foolish enough to mark his body forever, that's up to him. But it could be a lot worse. And it's time that maybe we let him make his own decisions." To which then I got an earring. And then for a short season, when anyone would call, before cell phones, when anyone would call the house and say, "Is Greg there?" My dad would say, "Who? I don't have a son anymore. I have a daughter, if you'd like to talk to her."

It's a short season. Memories are something that we all have, and there's a plethora of them. And what makes a memory stick for us is really when someone like Grandma Marie just consistently shows up with a hug and a care that you know you're safe and you're loved, outside of even people that are supposed to love you. Memories are like when my mom steps in and courageously extends grace and understanding, even when it doesn't make sense for her. But she wants to meet me where I was at. And we all have them.

And today, as we continue in our series, as we look last week at what it meant in Let's Go to Sustain the Ministries We Love, today we're talking about strengthening the ministries that we love and that we have. We're talking specifically of strengthening ministry in kids and students and in our facilities and what that looks like.

And so when we talk about Let's Go, we talk about it being one body, all of our campuses with one mission for one movement. And what I love about King of Kings is the truth that we know here and actually a truth that every local church has. We don't have to sit there and say, "Boy, it would be so great if we got to this point or that point to be able to do more with kids or with students or with our facilities."

Because the truth of the matter is, everything we need to reach our own community and the community around us is actually foundationally already given to us. It's called ABCD, Asset Based Community Development, which means that you already have everything we need in this community and in this place to strengthen ministry for our kids, our students, and our facilities. We don't need to dream about if God would only provide because he's already put it here.

It's about whether we will step up and step in to what God has given. And this is biblical. Paul writes about this in Philippians 4:19, "My God will meet all of your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." Everyone everywhere say needs. God will meet them.

So let's dive in to our philosophy and our belief here at King of Kings. First, we believe that kids are ministers too. First of all, understand this, Jesus never undervalued children. Jesus did not look at kids as someday, somehow they should be talking. Kids are ministers too, right here and right now. And what Jesus was saying is that kids are to be heard. Kids are to be seen. Kids inspire you and I to aspire to be more like them.

Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 18: At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him and placed the child amongst them. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, unless you change," everyone everywhere say change, "and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me."

And so we aspire to become like children. That's why I eat dessert first. But in truth, we aspire to be like a child in their boldness and the courage of faith, of sharing their faith, of living their faith. They are not the future church, they are the present church right here and right now. They're ministering and discipling to you and to me everywhere.

They are uninhibited by life's lessons and jadedness and hurts and heartaches and scars and rejection. So Jesus calls us to be like a child and to put that childlike faith into play when that evil foe would try to have his way with you. Psalm 82, through the praise of children and infants, you've established a stronghold against your enemy, the devil, to silence that evil foe and the avenger, his minions.

And so it is with praise like children and infants, laughter and love that we do that. I love what our former children's pastor, for a long time, who built an amazing foundation of kids' ministry here at King of Kings across all of our campuses, said, Pastor Roger Timer said this: kids are ministers too because kids are disciples and disciples minister to others. It's simply what disciples do, but kids can do it in their unique way, sometimes better than wrinkled people. I don't know who he was thinking about for that, probably himself.

For example, consider how easily they can show love or share a hug. You've heard them pray, "Wow, faith like a child." And if you tell them about Jesus and his love, it's a story they love to share. And then he went on to tell a joke of a child sharing the love of Jesus, just with complete honesty.

He said a dad asked his little girl what she was drawing a picture of, and she said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And her dad replied, "But nobody's ever seen a picture of God." Just like an adult, right? Like to come and say, "Oh, you're not really able to do that." And then the little girl thought for a moment and then replied, "Not until now, but I'm almost finished." Faith like a child.

What does it mean to have faith like a child and to have kids minister to us? It's where we see kids that are filled with hope that overflows in abundance of them. And why do kids have hope? Because no one's ever told them that it's impossible.

But they laugh and they're filled with unashamed laughter at whatever makes their heart and their insides leap for joy. And they let out the cutest of laughs that when you hear a child just laugh and laugh and laugh, you can't help to remember what that was like. And they laugh.

They love anyone and everyone because they just love people. And they love because their heart is filled with love and they want to extend that love to others. And they don't have fear building up walls. And lastly, they trust. They trust deeply because they have an innate sense to simply believe.

So they don't have this mindset that says, "If you can't understand it, you can't believe it." They're willing to do a cannonball and trust that they'll be caught. They're willing to trust in a Savior and in a God, even though they can't put all the pieces together, they say, "I don't need to." And so they minister to us.

And that's why I love at King of Kings, our belief and our understanding that when we invest in children's ministry, we're not believing that we're babysitting. We're not finding things for them to do so they don't bother us in worship. We're actually commissioning the next wave of ministers. And we're acknowledging that they're already working miracles right here, right now amongst us.

And we don't look at popcorn as a gimmick so that they just sit there and say, "I'm excited to come back and I want to get more." We look at it as another way for them to share a meal as they leave and as they go and as they share the Savior. And we're thrilled to see the buttery fingerprints of children all over our walls and our hands and our shirts.

And that's why I want to share with you everywhere what I'm excited about that God is doing through your investment. And if you're not in, I want to invite you to get in on Let's Go because we believe kids are ministers too.

And here are some of the things that we're going to be doing. Just a small foretaste of just a few of the things that are going to be happening. That we're going to be investing in children with needs and so we're going to be building a sensory room for those children that need a little extra sensory space. For them to minister to one another too. And to minister to continue to minister to us.

And we're going to be giving resources because I've got to tell you, when I became a dad and all the hubbub of getting all the stuff and everything there, somewhere along the way, I lost the parent manual that they gave me at the hospital. But if we're honest, parenting's hard. And none of us are prepared for it. And I'd like to say it gets easier, but it doesn't seem to be.

But there are resources that we need to provide to parents and so we're going to be providing resources from Focus on the Family so that you not only can be ministered by your children to you about Jesus, but you can also prepare and resource to be able to minister to them. So together as a family, you can grow further and stronger in the love of Christ.

We're going to be refreshing and redesigning the kids' worship space at our Millard campus. We're going to be putting at Northwest an interactive game system where kids can come and invite and have fun with friends and grow deeper in Jesus. And these are just a small piece of what's happening as we continue to strengthen our kids' ministry. Not in entertainment, but in equipment for them to minister to you and to me and to anyone that God puts before them.

And as they grow, they're going to step then into a student ministry because we know that students shape the lives of their friends. Students get to where they have a discipleship group of two or three like Jesus did. Where they're deep with just a few, but that relationship is a connection to each other where they share life, their deepest valleys and their greatest mountaintops, where they share their secrets and their fears and their worries, and where they share their faith to one another.

And we know that God values young people. For it was a teenage David that conquered Goliath. For it was Jeremiah who was called from the womb and embraced that calling in his youth. For it was Mary that was told as a teen that she would bear a child and that she didn't say, "Please, no, I don't want this." She said, "How am I so highly favored by the Lord?"

Teenagers have a deep faith. Students have a deep faith to share, and we should not look down on them. We should not just say, "Go to your corner until you come out with a fully formed brain at 25 or 26." Instead we share what was given in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone look down on you, students, because you were young. But instead be that example for all the believers, us, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity."

And we acknowledge that it is in teens that the Spirit gives them visions and dreams. In Joel 2:28-29, "Afterward, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young will see visions, and you will light and show us a way."

And we see that happening in our student ministry across our campuses. Edie, one of our students at the Millard campus, said this, "I like going to student nights because I feel strongly connected to a lot of messages that are talked about. And I have a great connection to Lane and Haley. They are truly my best friends, and they understand me even when I don't understand myself. And even when neither of us understands, they'll still sit and listen to me talk. No matter what, I know I can always go to student nights and see Lane or Haley there, and have someone to talk to. Even when I haven't been to students all summer, they always make me feel welcome. They make student nights more special for me, and God really speaks to me through music and messages."

Deep connection with each other, a welcomeness and a belonging together, a growing through the Spirit of God in their worship and in the Word.

Chase said, "I love student ministry because I feel it's a great way to connect with new people and have fun while still learning the gospel." This is what God continues to do in our student ministry. As he builds connections, and as he builds growth in worship and in the Word, and as he builds relationships together.

And it's why through our investment in students through Let's Go, we're going to continue to invest in students. We're going to continue to invest in the student-wide movement that is a beacon of light for the nation through something called One. And One is a student ministry that is across all churches here in the Omaha region.

And when I got here seven years ago, One had hundreds of students that would meet at Christ Community once a year in August. And there they would worship, and they would pray together, and they would hear great speakers. And over the years, it has grown, and it has become the largest student gathering in the Nebraska state, as well as the Midwest region, the largest annual student gathering in that area.

And last year, it grew so big that it became unsafe to continue to hold it at Christ Community. And so last year, they rented out the Ralston Arena. And there last year in August, over 3,500 students gathered to worship, to pray together, to relate and to connect with one another, and to give God glory, and to hear and to go into the new year strengthened in faith in their local communities.

And I'm proud that our church is a church that joins in that movement. And God continues to bless that movement. Matter of fact, it is so great that last year, 3,500 were at Ralston. And this year, together with One and the Within Reach community, we've just said, I think Ralston Arena is too small.

So this year, in a step out of faith and trust for God, One in August, where our students will be there as well, we'll gather with over probably 5,000 students at the CHI Center, where those students will shout and sing and praise God.

We invest in mission experiences to Guatemala. And right now, we're exploring possibly Chile, where our student director Chad and Seth have just gotten back from a vision trip. We have a student camp where students are able to go this summer. There's 20 or so of them that are heading up to Colorado to worship and to praise and to be amongst God's beauty and nature and see that they are special in the eyes of the Lord.

And we'll continue to invest in our ways to broadcast student ministry to all of our campuses on Wednesday nights. And when we got to Fremont and asked them about their student ministry at the start, they told us that they didn't really have any students in high school, and they only had a few in middle school.

And can I just say what God is doing through King of Kings and in this place, that only a few weeks ago, Fremont had 28 students at their student night.

You see, this is not a generation that is saying, "Put us on the sidelines, leave us alone until our brains are formed." It's a generation saying, "We are prepared and ready to share the gospel to anyone and everyone that God puts into our relational midst."

And I got to experience that as a student as well, where my faith formation was built in my church and where I had a best friend through middle school and through early years of high school that was an atheist. And we would take walks on early out days in high school to the Taco Bell. And on those walks, sometimes, occasionally, I would say, "Ross, do you really not believe that there's anything after we die?" We'd have those deep conversations because we had a relationship. And I had a faith formation as a child and as a minister.

You see, student ministry doesn't just change the lives of the students right here. It changes the lives of everyone those students will ever know. And that's where we have our church home to come back for a great place where we learn and know and our community to refill as ministers of the gospel. This gift that God has given us at all of our campuses that we call home, our home church where we belong and where we know others will belong.

And this is the house of the Lord that he gives to you and to me to be good stewards of, not owners, stewards, overseers.

Psalm 84: "How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty? My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you."

And 1 Corinthians 3:16-17: "Don't you know, you yourselves are God's temple? The Spirit of God dwells in your midst." And it is where this temple is then refilled and rebuilt and refreshed and renewed to go back into the world and to be a light to the community that he's given us.

And so these walls are not walls. They're where the work of God happens. Gary and Barbara said this: "A manufacturing plant became a ministry center. The word is taught and kids and adults are equipped and leaders jump out of the boat of the status quo, encouraging people to do whatever the Lord asks."

However, new Dan Whithorn from Millard also said, "We've developed close friendships with tremendous spirit-filled people through Sunday morning services, men's ministry, small groups, intercessory prayer. Our family has moved from being comfortable in our pews to being challenged to worship, grow or serve and go. And we have found that by putting our lives in his mighty hands, he's allowed us to jump out of the boat into the arms, which is the only place we want to be."

See, God has given us amazing facilities, but these walls have stories and lives are touched and the word is preached and proclaimed. And we're cared for one another. We love one another. We encourage one another. We cry with one another. We laugh with one another. We high five one another.

And it's a place where we gather kids, students and aged alike. And we get resourced, equipped and empowered to go and to be the very house of God in the community that God has called us.

So Let's Go calls for us to care for this house, your campus with the same love that God has shown by giving it to us.

So we don't neglect this house. Instead, we look at how do we strengthen our foundations.

Matthew 7 says that everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and they beat against the house. And yet it did not fall because its foundation is on the rock.

So the foundation of our facility tells a story, a story of walls and windows and doors that welcomed us in, that transformed our lives, that brought us into community with God and with each other and with the world. And it continues to transform us to be reliant and authentic, courageous and generous with all that we have and all that we are.

There was a foundation that was given to us, a foundation for our students, for their preparation to go into a world and into a culture that is like shifting sand. That they are prepared to be uncommon and not common like the world, but uncommon as a disciple of Christ. And that builds a foundation for our kids, for all generations, where our kids become and learn that they are ministers too.

And they share the love of Jesus generation to generation to their children and children's children so that moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas can share the memories of seeing their children share the love of Jesus.

And that we have a trust to know, as Proverbs 22 says, that we start children off the way they should go and even when they're old, they will not turn from it.

So Let's Go is building the kingdom stronger. Because we know that when we strengthen our facility, we do build the kingdom stronger. We know that when we invest in our students, we make heaven fuller. When we pour into our kids, we make lives greater.

Someone loved you enough to make a memory for you that you still remember as a child. Someone invested time, energy and encouragement for you as a student to be courageous and bold in your faith. Someone took care of a facility that was your home, that you walked into throughout the week and said, "This is where I belong."

And now it's our time. Nehemiah says this, "I told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me, the king that had said to me," and they replied, "Let us start rebuilding." And so they began this good work.

So Let's Go. This is our moment. This is our Let's Go time. Not because we have to, not because we're obliged to, but because we've experienced the love of God in this place.

And so together we want every child, every teenager, every person and family who walks through these doors and these halls to experience the same very thing.

So Let's Go.

So I want to invite you right now to everyone everywhere to rise. I want you to put out your hands straight forward in the posture of prayer to our God to be commissioned, to say, Let's Go for what God is doing through you and for you through students and kids and our facilities and our campuses.

"Hey God, we come before you right now and we thank you that you've called us to say Let's Go. We ask that you lead us to be people who are those who are faith shapers through investing, loving, encouraging, high-fiving kids as ministers too. To invest in students and to encourage and equip them and to cheer them on as they share with two or three who they've gathered along to connect with. Thank you for this place that we get to call home at King of Kings, whichever campus it is where we get to see that these walls are a foretaste of the temple that we will dwell in in the house of the Lord forever.

Until that day, let us continue to say, Let's Go!"

And all God's people everywhere said, "Amen."