

## Child Dedications at Oakwood

### The Gift of a Child

There is a great joy, excitement and anticipation that comes with having a child. There is responsibility, challenge and cost as well. So many thoughts and feelings surface as you stand at the trail head of the path marked parenting. Yet, for all the adventures you have ahead, there is also an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the gift you hold in your arms. You want to give your best and be your best for this child. You want to “do it right.” And for all those reasons and many more, you are considering taking part in a child dedication service.

### Important Elements of a Child Dedication

First is the recognition that the child you hold is not yours, but God’s. God is the author of life. Your child is not an accident, mistake or even the outcome of your choice. The child you hold today is a miracle of God’s creative power. This life, with all its uniqueness and potential, is a gift God has given you. No person has your child’s exact personality, gifts or fingerprints.

*Psalm 139:13-14 - <sup>13</sup> For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

We live in a day when human life is the subject of political debate and social choice. Human life is often devalued and, at will, can be discarded. But our church stands on the foundation of God’s Word, giving voice to the unborn and valuing every human life. For this reason, we rejoice in you and your child. Every child is part of God’s plan and purpose.

### An Opportunity to Celebrate

In 1 Samuel 1, a woman named Hannah yearned for a child. Her greatest desire was to be a mother. Yet, she experienced disappointment after disappointment, and remained childless. She continually cried out to God and, in time, God gave her the gift of a son. When Samuel was born, Hannah said,

*For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore, I also have given him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be given to the Lord.*

Understanding that the child born to Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, was a gift from God, Hannah stood before God and offered praise and thanks for His gift in their lives.

A dedication service is as much for the parent as for the child. Following the statement of Hannah’s grateful expression of praise to God, the Bible says Hannah and Elkanah worshipped the Lord in the temple. They gave public witness to their commitment to honor God’s plan for their child and serve as partners in the task of honoring God in their home.

### A Commitment to God’s Plan

A child dedication is a celebration of God's gift, but it is more. A child dedication is not just about the child. It is about the entire family. Standing in a church and celebrating the gift of your child is the first step but following Christ and seeking His wisdom in the rearing of your child is the journey. A child dedication is really a parent/child dedication.

A child dedication is also a celebration of the gift you have received from God. The church is the best place to celebrate the arrival of children because it is a gathering place for worship. We want to join you in gratitude and joy as we celebrate God's gift placed in your arms.

We want to embrace you and the challenges that lie ahead, praying for you and encouraging you as you look forward to all God will do through the life of your child.

### **God has Given You a Gift**

This gift is also a responsibility and a challenge, encouraging your dependence upon God day by day. A child can bring you to your knees like nothing else in life. You may be thinking, "I do not know if I understand what God expects of me or if I can do all He would require." In His wisdom and love, God provides a path. In the book of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, you are given your "job description" as a parent.

- *You are to love God and pursue your relationship with Him daily.*
- *You are to honor God by obeying His word in your life.*
- *You are to teach your child to love and respect God.*
- *You are to provide spiritual and moral training for your child according to God's Holy Word.*

Faith is not passed on to a child through a dedication service but rather through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

You are acknowledging your need for God's wisdom, guidance and strength in parenting. You are affirming the commitment of your heart to follow Christ and obey His Word. You are surrendering yourself to honor God by being a faithful steward of the gift He has entrusted to you. You are promising to raise your child in the training and instruction of the Lord, with the desire that, one day, your child will receive Jesus as their personal Savior.

What does God expect? What does God require? He desires simply that you develop a relationship with Him so your child can see, understand and embrace a relationship with Him. It involves all of life and encompasses the daily journey of parenting.

The role of mom and dad is intended to be a partnership with God in nurturing and shaping the life of your child. Being a parent is challenging. Some parents have said, “We spent the first two years teaching our children to walk and talk, and the next 18 years to sit down and be quiet!”

God has not left you without instructions for parenting and He has not left you to do this task alone. Oakwood Church desires to stand with you and support you on this journey of parenthood.

We are embracing our responsibility to support families by teaching God’s Word, serving one another in love, training up disciples of Jesus, and pointing others to Christ. We understand the importance of maintaining an atmosphere that inspires faith, challenges growth and provides opportunities to serve.

Believing we have been charged with sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the next generation, we enthusiastically affirm you and your child, praying for God to work through us together to make an eternal difference in the life of your child.

Our commitment to children and student ministries provides opportunities for spiritual and emotional growth. We want to encourage your journey with your child and have given much attention to developing your relationship with Jesus Christ.

While no church is perfect in all it provides for parents and children, the commitment of our church is to do all we can for Christ today and for the generations to come.

## **How Can I Be a Godly Parent?**

Present your child to God as Hannah and Elkanah did, asking Him to give you wisdom, grace and faith to see your child’s value through His eyes and not just your own. This is not something you do just on child dedication day, but every day as you behold the wonder of your child’s growth and development.

Acknowledge your inadequacy to be what God requires apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ. The first step to becoming the parent your child needs is to acknowledge your need for a relationship with God and to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

Today, we read and hear about dysfunctional families. Maybe you have struggled to overcome family failure and injury in your own life. The truth of the matter is we are all dysfunctional because of a universal problem called sin. The Bible is clear on this –

*Romans 3:23...for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

You may think you should be a spiritual giant to be a parent. This is far from true. In fact, in order to be the best parent you can be, you must admit that you are a sinner who needs a Savior. Once you have experienced forgiveness and received the gift of new life in Christ, you have a new capacity to lead, love and live. A church ceremony cannot provide

spiritual blessings for your child. No one has a mystical or magical power to wave over your child at birth. But your life can become a source of spiritual blessing once you receive Christ and live for His purpose, allowing Him to shape your family and your future.

Resolve to pursue a daily walk with Christ. Prayer, singing, thanksgiving and Bible reading can all play a part in your daily routine as you invest in the life of your child. Developing an atmosphere of love, security and growth can flow from your personal relationship with God.

Elevate God's Word in your life and home. The Bible is filled with specific instruction and guidance for parents. It challenges us to love and honor each other, to affirm and value our children, and to discipline and train them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Scripture presents principles and values for your safety and the welfare of your child.

As you prepare for this dedication service, examine your life. Ask the Lord to reveal areas of needed adjustment. Then, commit to walk in obedience to His Word day by day. You see, you are the greatest spiritual influence in your child's life. Your child needs to see and understand your submission to God's Word. For this reason, the Bible declares in *Proverbs 1:7* - *...the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

- Nurture faith in your children.
- Let your home be filled with love, laughter, prayer and song.
- Tell your children that God loves them and has a plan for their lives.
- Read great stories to them from the Bible.
- Make prayer a practice at mealtime, bedtime and other times in the day.
- Pray daily for the salvation of your children at an early age and for their lives to be lived wholly for Jesus Christ.
- Take your children to church and let them grow up worshipping with you and seeing you serve Jesus.

Too many neglect involvement in the local church. A vibrant church can make all the difference in your walk with Jesus, the strength of your family and the reality of a child's faith.

### **Frequently Asked Questions about Child Dedication**

Question: *Why don't you baptize babies?*

Answer: The practice of infant baptism is simply not found in the Bible. It comes out of history and church tradition. Baptism is one of two ordinances (believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper) given to the church by Jesus Christ. Examples and directives for the proper practice of these ordinances are found throughout Scripture. Baptism is for believers – those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Baptism is only seen in the Bible when someone receives Christ and confesses Him as Savior and Lord. Baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, symbolizing life before Christ and new life in Him. While the intent of infant baptism is to identify a child with the Christian faith, baptism cannot

secure salvation. Each child must hear and respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For this reason, we have a service of dedication to Christ for parents and their children, but we do not confuse this dedication with baptism, which follows a profession of faith.

Question: *Do you provide reserved seating for family and friends?*

Answer: Yes, there will be a reserved seating area near the front for family and friends and photography is allowed.

Question: *Do I need to attend a Child Dedication Orientation prior to my child's dedication?*

Answer: Yes. This orientation will help bring a fuller understanding of what it means to dedicate your child and to help strengthen parents and families.

Question: *Is there an age limit for child dedication?*

Answer: There is no specific age limit. However, dedication is most appropriate for younger children, approximately age 4 and under. But each family will be considered on an individual basis. Often children are adopted after this time and we support families who are beginning this exciting chapter of life.

Question: *Can the biological parents participate in a child dedication service if they are not married?*

Answer: While we honor the life of each child and encourage parents married and unmarried to embrace the importance of spiritual commitment for children, a child dedication service is intended to reflect the teaching of scripture on family life. Because of our understanding of marriage as presented in God's Word, we believe every public act of worship is to conform to His standards. For those who are unmarried or living together, taking steps to acknowledge and surrender to God's plan for marriage in your life would take precedence over participation in a child dedication. At Oakwood Church we are here to help you walk through the biblical understanding of marriage and to offer premarital counseling.

Question: *Can a single parent participate in a child dedication service?*

Answer: Yes. We want to do all we can to encourage your walk with Christ. Single parenting is double duty in child rearing. As a church family, we desire to be part of your extended family. We hope to provide compassionate support, spiritual growth and a variety of ministries to enable you to succeed in parenting your child.

## Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete Child Dedication interest form.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read through this child dedication handout.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend a Child Dedication Orientation or discuss this with one of the Oakwood Pastors.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Select a photo of your child to be used on Child Dedication Sunday.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Select a Bible verse to honor this event.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Invite your family and friends to the dedication service.