



Let the Children Come

Luke 18:15-17

Study Helps and Application

In a culture where children were considered a burden until they were strong enough to contribute to the family, Jesus valued them and loved them. Even the disciples were impatient with the people bringing their little ones to Jesus--wasting his time. Mark's record even mentions that Jesus was indignant--not with the people and their children, but with the disciples who failed to treasure the children.

Discussion 1: Your attitude towards children.

- *What could you do differently to make Jesus more clear, more near, more sweet to your kids?*
- *Are you impatient with children?*

[Have you as a parent ever put your child's wants, comforts, needs, etc. ahead of your own? ... similarly for a spouse or even a good friend? Why did you do it? Compounding those reasons and applying them to Christ and His Kingdom is what we are talking about.]

- *Does a restless child in church service overly distract you?* [Yes, the parents should remove a child who continues to be noisy... but why not take a moment to thank God for the child instead of grumbling to yourself?]
- *Do you have unrealistic maturity expectations?* [We can find ourselves expecting kids to be far more mature than we were! By the way, this is even more of a temptation in nurturing babes in Christ--expecting them to grasp certain doctrines, practice spiritual disciplines, etc.]
- *Do you tell children the truth?*

[Of course full disclosure of adult topics is not called for, but how often do we "shelter" them from things because *we* are afraid to talk about them? e.g. Death, sex (more specific as they grow up), immorality, etc.]

- *Can you think of ways you can bless the children?*

[Are the children's ministry needs going unmet? Can you give a tired mom & dad a break with a surprise night out? ... other ideas?]

Discussion 2: Our community group's attitude towards children.

- *What are the children doing during CG meeting time? How can we improve their discipleship opportunities?*

[There is huge variety here. This is just a time to think about these things again. Have we allowed the children's activities to be an afterthought?]

- *Have we developed the mutual trust that we can speak into each other's children's lives?*

[You like it when someone commends your child for something, but are you open to other adults in your CG correcting or rebuking your child? On the other hand, are you far too anxious to rebuke someone else's child? See the previous discussion on impatience!]

- *Is there something you can or should do to invest in others' kids?*

Discussion 3: The child-like nature of the Kingdom.

- *What's commendable about child-like-ness?*

- Wide-eyed wonder
- Humility, lowliness
- Nothing to bring – no work; no accomplishments; no bartering whatsoever
- Dependence, trust in mother and father
- Expectancy (to be fed, protected, ...)

- *Is that a fitting word picture of you in relation to God? Are you that spiritually needy?*

- *Are you trusting God during trials (tribulations, temptations, ...)?*

- *How is this child-like-ness different from child-ish-ness?*

[Here we must discuss the expectation of growth. The child-like virtues of dependence, trust, and naiveté with respect to evil, are not out to be outgrown, but *immaturity* is not a virtue.]

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:2** Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--

^{ESV} **Hebrews 5:12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:15** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 14:20** Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

^{ESV} **2 Peter 3:17** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- *How can we encourage one another in child-like-ness while at the same time discourage child-ish-ness?*

[This is no oxymoron. To live with child-like faith is to have absolute trust in God's love and provision. To reject child-ish-ness is to grow in wisdom and maturity. You may recognize the two doctrines we hold in tension: the *sovereignty of God*--in which we place our child-like faith, and the *responsibility of man*--that demands of us obedience in the pursuit of wisdom and the understanding of "all that he has commanded" (John 14:15)]

- *What does it mean to live in child-like faith? Discuss the implications:*
 - *Worry* [The most obvious application. How is this related to unbelief/distrust of God's provision?]
 - *Risk taking* [Wisdom here is huge (next question), particularly in distinguishing worldly wisdom from Godly wisdom. E.g. "Should I cut back my career pursuits and give more time to Kingdom work?" If God has clearly given me a heart for the people of (Guatemala, Thailand, ...), and gifted me with teaching and mercy, ...should I follow God's call to full time missionary work (Quit my well paying job to do it)? "Should I sacrifice my family life to pursue career?" ...]
- *How do we exhort one another towards maturity?*

[Do you love your brother or sister enough to encourage/commend them when they are trusting God in their trials?]

[Do you love your brother or sister enough to tell them when they are being childish? (Not encouraging unkindness--do it gently). Is your brother or sister feasting regularly on God's Word? Assembling with God's people? Practicing spiritual disciplines? prayer, fasting, giving, ... *If you don't ask them and encourage them in growth, who will?*]

- *Are we pursuing wisdom (God's prescribed decision-making means) or are we childishly looking for short cuts?*

[Childish laziness is sin. DSC has a whole short course on decision making and the will of God. In it many of the myths of pop-religion (primarily superstition (treating the Bible like a Ouija Board or Magic 8-Ball), and pagan divination (looking for secret messages in billboards or license plates...) dressed up in Christian lingo) are dispelled in favor of wisdom.]

Memory Verse

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:4** Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Additional Resources

- *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp
- *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung



Let the Children Come

Luke 18:15-17

Happy Mother's Day! I'd like us to look at a passage of Scripture that has obvious connections to moms, but is applicable for all of us. Turn to Luke 18. But let's first think about the chapter as a whole.

Luke 18 provides a series of snapshots of conversion and salvation (some parables, some stories)

1. vs 9-14 – the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (4 wks ago)
2. vs 15-17 – Children (today)
3. vs 18-27 – the Rich Young Ruler
A reverse example – how NOT to try to enter the kingdom
Jesus tells us “how hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom” (24)
4. vs 35-43 – Blind Bartemaeus cries loudly in the street, pleading with Jesus to heal him.

Do you see the connecting themes? Need, lowliness, and bold-but-humble faith.

Read Luke 18:15-17

What's happening in this passage?

> Parents want their children to be blessed, to be right with God – like every parent does.

> They believe in Jesus enough to know that he can bless their children. There's faith in this.

Luke emphasizes that these are infants – different Greek word than the other passages which more generally refer to children (like our English word “children” which can mean a lot of different ages). Luke's word is specific – newborns or those still breastfeeding.

> The disciples have a problem with this. In fact, they're so concerned they're “rebuking” the parents.

But why? The passage doesn't say, but we can hypothesize some possible reasons:

- Ministry is to adults and not children.
- They thought Jesus is too important to take time for children (as is usually the case with important people).
- Maybe it's simply that children tend to be noisy and unpredictable and time consuming. Maybe the disciples were thinking “*Jesus can surely bless these kids all at once instead of individually; and he can do it from afar – each one doesn't have to come to him and sit on his lap like he's Santa Claus. Whatever Jesus wants to do with these*”

kids – if anything – it doesn't have to involve the messiness and unpredictability of rotating kids in and out. Does it, Jesus?"

- All this is delaying the journey to Jerusalem, and Jesus keeps saying how important that is.

Whatever the reason for the disciples' discouragement to the parents/children, Jesus makes it clear that his disciples' rebuke is not at all on point. He rebukes the disciples.

- Mark 10:14 says that Jesus was "*indignant*" about the disciples' actions. It made him angry.
- Jesus has already made this issue pretty clear: *Read Luke 9:47-48*

In fact, it's important to see that this theme is no small theme in Matt, Mark, and Luke. (Matt 18:1-6; Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 9:47-48; Luke 18:15-17)

→ This thing of Jesus with children is recorded in 3 out of the 4 gospel accounts

→ In 2 of the there are two different occasions of him doing it

→ IE, this might be something Jesus did often, something he eventually was known for, and it's certainly something that, later on, the gospel writers would see as important.

I want us to notice three things about these stories.

1. Jesus ENJOYS Children

This isn't the main point of this story, but it seems to me to be implied. He enjoys their company.

Matt, Mark, and Luke all stress the gentle, appropriate physicality of Jesus with children

Luke 18:15 – he *touch*ed them

Matthew 19:13 – he *laid his hands* on them

Mark 10:16 – "*he took them in his arms*" (word for hugging)

Whatever else these stories illustrate and imply, they show us that, in fact, Jesus didn't think he was too busy or too important for children. He wanted them to literally, physically, come to him; he wanted them on his lap; he wanted to embrace them; he wanted to pray over them and to bless them.

Yes, he wanted them to come to him because they make for a perfect object lesson in how to come to Jesus and receive the gospel, but doesn't it seem that there's something more immediate, more affectionate, than that? Jesus isn't sterile or distant about any of this. He's much more relational, affection, even physical than he needed to be...if all he wanted to do is use children as an illustration.

He could have said "*Children – that reminds me of what the kingdom is like*" and gone on from there - and never held them or prayed over them. But he doesn't. That's

how he illustrates other things, like a tree (sees from afar and talks about it – but doesn't go up and hug it).

→ As usual, Jesus is doing two things at once. He is loving on children and then using children as an illustration for how anyone, young or old, receives the kingdom.

JC Ryle: *"Let us learn from these verses that the Lord Jesus cares tenderly for the souls of little children. Young as they are, they are not beneath His thought and attention. That mighty heart of His has room for the babe in its cradle as well as the king on his throne."*

This isn't a single guy being naïve about how fun children are. Jesus believes that time away from the crowds for rest and recuperation is right and needed (Luke 5 – he would often slip away from the large crowds for prayer and quietness; Luke 9 – he withdrew himself). So he's not implying that moms should never need a break from the kids. He's never saying that kids aren't sometimes *frustrating, disobedient, dirty, or sinful*.

But he is demonstrating that KIDS in general are PRECIOUS.

- Psa 127 – it is good to have a lot of them
- Psa 128 – they're like olive plants around your table (richness, strength, energy, promise)
- Prov 17 – grandchildren are the crown of old men

And kids have some unique lessons for us (we'll come back to that – but here's the point for now...). We should watch them, even study them. We should enjoy them. Jesus did.

→ So laugh at them; laugh with them. Cuddle them. Wrestle with them. Pretend with them.

See that there is some biblical, holy sentiment behind *"enjoy them – they grow up so fast."*

→ Parents of teenagers, parents of tweeners, enjoy them too. They're still in a sense children, and the same applies to them. They have lost their baby chub, and they now have big teeth, and changing voices, and B.O., social awkwardness...but Jesus loves them. Work to follow him in this.

Moms--thank you that you are often the hands and feet of Jesus to our children. God has designed it that way. He has put something in you of nurturing, gentleness, warmth, and patience that he, generally speaking, has not put in dads – at least not the same way. We thank God for you ladies – moms or not, because this is who you are and we love it and are blessed by it.

2. Jesus BLESSES Children

In those passages on Jesus and children, we see him blessing children.

- He touched them as a symbol of blessing them

- He prayed for them
- He tells us to not hinder them coming to him (Luke 18:16; Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14)

All this implies that we must point children to Jesus. That's what the parents of those children did - they brought their children to Jesus. By extension, we should in many ways, and so many times over, bring our children to Jesus. That means:

- We pray for our children
- We should teach our children about him
 - Read the Bible with them
 - This should start early and continue in age appropriate ways
 - A catechism
- There's the ministry of the church to children
 - Children's Ministry (thank you!!!)
 - Corporate Worship

JC Ryle: "...let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of our children. Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost or saved and let us strive to bring them to Christ. Let us make them acquainted with the bible as soon as they can understand anything. Let us pray with them and pray for them and teach them..."

To point them to Jesus, savingly, means that moms and dads will have to in a sense, in some ways, point their kids away from mom and dad and toward Jesus. Mom and dad can be a kind of savior/helper in some ways, for some things, but not when it comes to the kingdom. No small part of a child entering the kingdom is to see Jesus doing something that no mom or dad can ever do. One way of pointing your kids to Jesus and not to you is by confession your own sin to them; talking of your sin and your need for a Savior.

→ What could you do differently to make Jesus more clear, more near, more sweet to your kids?

→ Is there something you can or should do to invest in others' kids?

3. Jesus Teaches the CHILD-LIKE NATURE of the KINGDOM

There's no other way to enter the kingdom than like a child (read Luke 18:17)

** What are the child-like characteristics of the gospel? **

- Wide-eyed wonder
- Humility, lowliness (don't think cocky teenager, but baby)
- Nothing to bring - no work; no accomplishments to reference; no bartering whatsoever

- Dependence, trust in mother and father
- Expectancy (to feed them, protect them ...)

Read Luke 10: 21: Is that really a fitting word picture of you in relation to God? Are you that spiritually needy?

What this child-like nature IS NOT

1. Not a basis for infant baptism – nothing of infant baptism in this passage
2. Not a basis for bad childhood evangelism – children can be converted at a young age, but that’s not the same thing as immediately giving assurance because
 - a. they said a prayer
 - b. or thought hell sounded scary
 - c. or thought Jesus sounded pretty nice
 - d. or want to do what big sister and brother have already done.

This passage isn’t emphasizing childhood conversion. It is emphasizing the child-like nature of coming to Christ. That’s why it says (Luke 18:16) “to such belongs the kingdom.” It doesn’t say “to these specifically belongs the kingdom.” But it says “to such as these.” They’re an *illus*.

3. Not an encouragement of general thoughtlessness. Sentimental Christianity often takes about “a childlike faith” as one that disregards doctrine or prizes prayers that begin with “dear Abba Daddy.” But the Bible many times warns us not to be like children. IE there’s a sense in which childlikeness is spot-on, and another sense in which it is dead wrong.

→ The child-likeness of the kingdom is *humility, lowliness, nothing to bring, no work, no bragging, no accomplishments, dependence, complete trust, even expectancy in someone else’s ability.*

One closing application: We come to Jesus as children, and then that word picture continues forever and ever. We are still his children. So we must continually recognize his *care, provision, protection, guidance.* We must continue in, even grow in, child-like trust.

→ We must trust him in our *trials*. That’s one mark of those that have come to him as children for salvation. Is that you?

Next Week’s Text

Luke 18:18-30



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