

# CHILDREN: GIFT AND MODEL

The Ellis family could hardly put words to how thankful they felt to own a home. It took years of saving. Louis had worked a second job, and his wife, Bernadette, took extra shifts at the hospital.

But their excitement was nothing compared to their two children, ages twelve and nine. When the family got the keys, they prayed together—before the moving truck even arrived. Then the two children started planning where their beds would go in their new rooms. Maybe they would even get to paint their rooms a new color!

Fast forward six months, and disaster struck. Louis, a gym teacher, fell off a ladder while working an odd job during the summer. Bernadette held his hand while the doctor explained why this kind of bad break would probably need surgery. She tried to put on a brave face for the kids, but later on the phone with a friend, she found herself sobbing about all the uncertainties they faced. Would Louis be able to work? Would their insurance cover the full cost? Would she be able to get more shifts right away?

The next morning, there was twelve-year-old Courtney knocking at the door, wanting to give her mom the biggest hug. “Mom, I overheard when you were talking about Dad, the hospital, and everything. Do you remember when you told us that God is with us, no matter the problem?”

“You know,” her mother said while holding back tears, “you are growing up so fast. When did you get so smart?”

**1 What is an example of something you learned from a child?**

**2 What is your image of childlike faith?**

**3 What simple lesson do you need to learn again and again?**

<sup>36</sup> And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, <sup>37</sup> Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

<sup>42</sup> And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

<sup>42</sup> “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.”

## Welcoming the Children

The disciples argue among themselves as they travel to Capernaum. Once they arrive, Jesus asks, “What were you arguing about on the road?” (Mark 9:33). They are quiet, probably because they are ashamed. They had been debating who would be greatest in Jesus’ kingdom once He took over—perhaps imagining an imminent physical and political kingdom to replace Roman rule.

So Jesus does something to teach them what true greatness looks like: “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (v. 35).

He does something strange. He takes a child—a person of the lowest social status in first-century Judean society—and puts the child “among them” (v. 36). Jesus treats the child as one made in God’s image, every bit as worthy of God’s love and respect as the adult disciples.

Here they are, trying to vie for position and leadership. But their teacher puts a child before them. If only they could have some of the best qualities of children: wonder, dependence, enthusiasm, guilelessness. If only they weren’t so concerned about whether a task was beneath them. No task was too lowly for Jesus—emphasized when He washes their feet (John 13:1–17; compare Mark 10:42–45).

While Jesus embraces the child, He says to His disciples, anyone who welcomes and serves a little one in Jesus' name welcomes Jesus—and also the Father (Mark 9:37). Those who care for others in Jesus's name, especially those who cannot care for themselves, are caring for Jesus Himself, and would be rewarded accordingly (Mark 9:41; compare Matt. 25:31–46). Jesus desires generosity toward young and old, regardless of social standing.

Everyone who believes in Jesus is of great value; so much so that anyone who “causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble” will face enormous consequences (v. 42). Just as every good deed is remembered and rewarded, every act with evil intent shall be remembered and repaid. In fact, Jesus declares, it would be better if those who cause one of God's “little ones” to stumble were to lose their lives. You can see how greatly Jesus wants to protect the tiny faith of a child!

**1 Why is a child such an important example to the disciples?**

**2 What does it mean to “welcome” a child (v. 37)?**

**3 Why does Jesus warn about terrible consequences for anyone who harms children?**



The design of millstones has been consistent for agrarian societies across cultures. These two stones are too heavy for all but the strongest individuals to lift.

© Ahmet Kus/Getty Images

<sup>13</sup> And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

## Blessing the Children

Jesus and His disciples go from Capernaum to Judea and across the Jordan (Mark 10:1). After debating with the Pharisees as to what constitutes grounds for divorce, Jesus goes into a house, where He continues to teach. There in the cramped quarters of an ancient house, people bring their children to Jesus “for him to place his hands on them” (v. 13). It could be that Jesus is in the habit of offering this kind of blessing, as a rabbi.

But the disciples rebuke the parents for approaching Jesus with their children. Can’t they see that Jesus is in the middle of important theological matters while he debates the Pharisees? The disciples are probably trying to protect their weary master. After all, neither they nor Jesus would have had much time or space for themselves as they traveled.

They are projecting their own exhaustion and frustration onto Jesus. And perhaps Jesus’ warnings about His impending death are starting to sink in, making the disciples sense that something important and dangerous is about to happen as they get nearer to Jerusalem. Jesus has an urgent mission that can’t be interrupted! But, of course, Mark is showing that the disciples had completely missed the significance of Jesus’ earlier teaching to them.

Jesus is thus “indignant” at the disciples’ actions (v. 14). Soon after this moment, He will again foretell His death (see vv. 32–34). Time is of the essence. But the disciples need to get it, to understand what *being a disciple* actually requires, while Jesus is there to teach them. He tells the disciples to let the children come, “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (v. 14). Jesus wants no one to be barred from coming to Him, regardless of their status. Every person has value, created in God’s image. The children reflect that truth without question—and it is the disciples who are missing it.

Jesus then states His point in a plain manner. Children are not only an example of innocence, but they illustrate something central about faith. People who come to Jesus thinking they have all the right answers and thoughts are not really submitting to Jesus as a teacher. On the other hand, children are persistently listening and learning—using their eyes and ears to put lessons into practice.

Anyone who refuses to receive the kingdom of God as a child will never be ready to enter it (v. 15). The adults who follow Jesus should be more like children, receiving Jesus and His kingdom with a sense of wonder and enthusiasm. Like children, the disciples need to be fully present before God and to trust His rule in their lives, without precondition. As Jesus declared in Capernaum, those who wish to be great in God’s kingdom will humble themselves to become a “servant of all” (Mark 9:35). That kind of obedience requires a childlike spirit.

Jesus rebukes the disciples, but He blesses the children. With open hands, Jesus shows the meaning of *welcome*. On His mission to Jerusalem, on His way to die, Jesus has all the time in the world to spend with them.

**1 Why do you think that people wanted Jesus’ blessing for their children?**

**2 What is Jesus’ definition of His greatest disciple?**

**3 Where do we fall short of giving time to children?**

## Becoming “Like a Little Child”

Jesus gives us an challenging assignment: we must receive the kingdom like a little child, or we will not receive it at all. We are left with questions—not unlike the questions of Nicodemus in John 3 who wondered about being “born again.” *What does it mean to receive the kingdom like a little child? What if we are fully grown and don’t remember what it is like to be a child?*

Put simply, a child trusts. A child embraces. A child looks at the world as if it were enchanted. A child helps others and asks for help. That’s how we should be with our heavenly Father, who gives “good gifts” when we ask (Matt. 7:11).

As adults, many of us struggle with trust, wonder, or receiving help. Many of us choose to work things out on our own, out of pride, fear, or both. But we can unlearn the coping mechanisms we’ve developed as adults in order to learn to trust God again. We can let go of our control. Parents and caregivers appreciate when a child asks for help. We need to trust God with the things that we can’t handle.

Of course, there is a difference between childlike faith and merely childish ways. Other parts of Scripture urge adults to welcome the maturity and wisdom that comes with age and experience (1 Cor. 3:1–2; 13:11; Heb. 5:12–14). But we never cease to be God’s children (1 John 3:1). As we walk in the guidance and confidence from the Spirit, we learn the real meaning of trust.

**1 What does it mean to receive God’s kingdom like a child?**

**2 What qualities should we *not* adopt, to receive God’s kingdom like a child?**

**3 Where do you struggle most with having a childlike faith?**

## Childlike Wonder

The older we get, the harder it can be to experience awe over something new. Jesus invites us to receive His kingdom with the wide-eyed wonder of a child. This week, your invitation is to take a trip down memory lane to recall a cherished moment when you (or, perhaps, another child) experienced something new, exciting, or overwhelming. It wouldn't hurt to break out the photo books to remember the occasion.

**How might your experience show the way that Jesus wants us to welcome His kingdom? With a spiritual friend or in a journal entry, you could begin with these words:**

*There is something different about the way a child looks at things . . .*

### Key Text

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

—Mark 10:15 KJV

Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

—Mark 10:15 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of April 20 through April 25

**Mon.** Proverbs 24:1–6—By Wisdom a House Is Built.

**Tue.** Luke 2:40–52—Growing in Divine and Human Favor.

**Wed.** Ephesians 5:21–33—Submit to One Another.

**Thu.** Joshua 24:15–21—Choose Whom You Will Serve.

**Fri.** Joshua 24:22–28—We Will Serve the Lord.

**Sat.** Matthew 19:3–9—An Inseparable Union.

**Next Week:** Deuteronomy 6:3–9; Matthew 19:3–9

*We will talk about raising children and honoring family relationships.*

*Take a moment to pray for a child who is not related to you or in your family, but dear to you.*