

Childlikeness

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[0:00] In Mark and Luke. And I want to look at those because they give us a little bit of extra information.! And then I just want to lead through these little headings. People brought little children to Jesus.

Let the little children come to me. That's Jesus' words. Do not hinder them. And the last point is the one that captures a little bit of where we were a month ago. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

But I wonder, even just before I launch in, as you think of children, can you picture, I can almost think of just walking down the road and I see some rather uninvolved fathers plugged into their earphones, pushing a push chair with a small child.

And you think, what a missed opportunity that they're not engaging. There might not be much coming back from a little one who's not able to talk yet. But people who are just not quite with the opportunity.

And I see other people who are full of care. And even if there's not, they're just talking, even if there's not much coming back, just a difference of attitude, isn't there? And how it finds us and tests us out.

[1:06] This is our passage. And I highlight in blue a bit that the... I'll put the next one up. That's the NIV. If you've got the old NIV in front of you, I think it does say, then little children were brought to.

Yeah? The new NIV says, then people brought... I think they're just trying to make a little bit of sense of the English because towards the end of that sentence it says, but the disciples rebuked them. And you're trying to work out who's being rebuked.

But we are talking about people bringing children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray. The word for children, the Greek...

I'm not a Greek scholar, but it is very much little children. And another parallel passage here in Mark tells us a little bit more. After the disciples rebuked them, this is in Mark 10, and I'm just highlighting in red that it's a sort of extra information.

It says in Mark only, it says, when Jesus saw the disciples rebuking people, he was indignant. Right? The rest of them just go on to say as if he's calmly saying things.

[2:13] Jesus is very cross that the disciples are stopping the children being brought to them. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

That was what was in Jesus' mind. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them is also an extra word given in that one. And the Luke passage uses a slightly different word, and it's very clearly about newborn babies.

So in the context of putting it together, there are two different words being used. This is young children. And one of these says that, you know, Jesus took them in their arms. So these are not teenagers.

Okay? So people brought little children to Jesus. Now, that in itself needs a little bit of unpacking. Who were the people?

And who were the children? Now, you don't have to turn to it, but in Mark 10 and verse 10, you do get a clue as to where Jesus was. And he was most likely in a house in Capernaum.

[3:20] And that's where his disciples were there. You can imagine door openings and Jesus being very important and people guarding access to Jesus. And most likely, the children were, literally it says, led forward.

But probably these are the children of believers in the house that was hosting Jesus. Parents, I would think, who have been blessed by Jesus.

They've seen him and his teaching. They've seen his miracles. And they are wanting Jesus to bless those dear to them. Very reasonable thought, isn't it, really?

Bringing their little ones to Jesus. Powerful example to us. And immediately, there is a challenge to us if you have got young parents.

Perhaps it's stating the obvious, but do you long to bring your children to Jesus? Now, of course, at one level, you'll say yes. Yes, of course we do.

[4:22] But when the rubber hits the road and you're really trying to work out day to day how you do this, it really tests, I think, how you long to bring your children to Jesus.

Now, Jesus is no longer physically here, but we can still bring our children to Jesus by his spirit. We are longing to see that blessing from him.

So there is relevance to us, I think, in thinking about all this today. Now, if I launch onto some wider Bible context, perfectly reasonable, we thought, for these people in Jesus' day, wanting to see Jesus bless them.

But let me just bring you some different verses, a few here from Deuteronomy. And I'm just using the bits in blue to highlight the things in this word that are about the children and the descendants. But this is, of course, around the time after God has rescued his people from Egypt and by mighty acts and all of that.

[5:26] But it's that old covenant time where there is a particular blessing for the children. Let me just read what I've got there. I'm selecting parts from verses 34 to 37.

And has any God ever taken a nation for himself by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm?

You were shown these things so that you might know the Lord is God and besides him there is no other. And because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants, notice.

Remember Ben was telling us about God choosing things last Sunday morning. Because he chose your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt. A couple of other verses on a similar tack.

This is later in Deuteronomy. The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live.

[6:34] And this one also. These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live.

And so that you may enjoy long life. Now a few bits missed out there. But you get the gist of this that to God's people of Israel there was a great expectation that those, that current generation would pass on things to their children and that God's blessing would carry on down the generations.

And if you think it's only in the Old Testament if you look carefully in Peter's sermon in Acts 2 the people were cut to the heart and they respond this is verses 37 to 39 Brothers what shall we do?

And Peter replied and you know this well I expect repent and be baptised every one of you and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the promise is for you and your children for all who are far off for all whom the Lord your God will call and this is getting a bit trickier in the verses to fully understand but I will put it in here 1 Corinthians 7.14 Paul is talking about a particular context when one spouse in a marriage is not a believer and he says for that unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband otherwise your children who would be unclean and that's a very Jewish thing about clean and unclean your children would be unclean but as it is they are holy now I'm not going to get into some people will look at these verses and they'll think there you are it's absolutely clear that all the children who are born to believers you know they're going to become believers and it's not it needs much more careful looking at than that it's not saying that but it is saying some people do pick up that there's infant baptism from here we don't practice that

I think our practice is more that if there's a new child and you want to ask God's prayer and blessing on them for the parents to have strength and for the church to have strength we dedicate them they have a thankfulness for them but we know at that point that those children are not being made a

Christian by our dedicating them but we are longing to see God's blessing on them so there is a sort of privilege for being children of believing parents whichever way you look at this there is a privilege they grow up knowing this environment of instinctively even around the meal table people are thanking God for things and they are learning about God and of course as we'll come on to see they're watching their godly parents aren't they are they godly?

[9:34] they're watching their parents and they see things that most of us don't inconsistencies don't they? yes so and the last part of this thing under the heading of bringing people to where were we?

sorry under the first heading how can we bring our children to Jesus now this is challenging isn't it? this is where the rubber hits the road how can we bring our children to Jesus at home?

can we be a good example? that sounds nice and easy doesn't it? I mean we know the principles well enough if the children's behaving right you say oh you know this is what you've done wrong yeah we'll say that but can you be a good example?

now what does that mean? in the way you live out your walk with God is there something inviting about your experience of God that the children can see?

does it all look dutiful and a bit grim? be careful it doesn't we need to be a good example there is a need for consistency in our behaviour let your walk with God inspire the children so the first point here be a good example and another tip here don't worry if you make mistakes in front of your children it helps them to know that you need forgiveness and a saviour too yeah?

[11:07] you don't have to pretend to be unreal don't be a hypocrite don't get one of those certificate of hypocrisy now if you read the small print there what does it say?

this is given to a hypocrite of the first order for saying one thing and doing just the opposite yeah? children are very good at spotting this yeah?

they might not give you a certificate like that but if you are saying one thing and your life is doing another goodness me yeah? don't be a hypocrite be a good example here's a second one now these are not coming out of bible text but these are just a bit of common sense from someone who's been a parent and I live with someone who's who's very focused on little ones as well have the closest relationship possible with your children particularly when they're small they might not seem to be giving much back when they're small but if you can have the closest relationship possible then to be sure when the testing times come then there will be something that they can still engage with you about yeah?

talk with them often listen well we're not many of us are great listeners are we? we think we just want to say what what the right thing is are we listening? perhaps the men are a little bit more prone not to listen so well women are a bit more natural I think with these relationship things with children talk with them often listen well when they're getting a little older it's worth anticipating the peer pressure problems that are coming isn't it?

and try and talk about them at home before they hit them in the face school pressure oh you know if you're a Christian you're probably the only person not doing this or that anticipate those problems and talk well what about this one though?

[13:06] don't be too busy there's a picture there both parents heavily into something and the child's trying to get some attention it's getting nowhere yeah? now of course modern life yeah I mean which of us who are parents especially with two or three kids at home feel we've got lots of time but goodness me when the children need your attention and that you know if they are consistently feeling ignored because you are too busy then you're giving a strong message a bad message you're not going to keep a close relationship with them another option here it's a pretty obvious one but it's an essential one pray if you're trying to bring your little children to Jesus bring your children to Jesus to pray sometimes that's just in the context you're exploring a pain with God you wish it had happened so far but it hasn't but you're acknowledging you're helpless in this you can try and be a good example but otherwise you know that if God doesn't act but don't think it's like a nothing resort because if you are pouring out your heart to God pray that's an important thing to do another important one is to train your children go back to

Deuteronomy some of you will know this well these commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts what does it then go on to say impress them on your children and love this sort of sentence about daily life isn't it talk about them when you sit at home when you walk along the road

I suppose in modern context it's when you're driving a car probably when you lie down and when you get up impress them on your children and there's a verse in Proverbs that talks about starting children off on the way they should go and even when they are old they will not turn from it so there's a lot in here about training your children needs a lot of wisdom though doesn't it I mean some people can be very regimented you can say at a regular time we're going to sit down and we're going to do this little lesson and sometimes children might not be reacting very well as parents with particular children you're going to have to work out what works with your children but somehow or other even if you use off the cuff conversations to land a subject and then pursue it that might be a better system but you need to train and show that the principles of God's word that are living in you can help and guide them so children need good bible teaching it's kind of obvious isn't it you can give them some of that at home as parents the church will also help in this but they also need don't they a positive experience of church life because there's a whole a whole lot of other relationships people of all ages different nationalities so they need the bible but they need that relationship of lots of different living people because probably even spiritually you don't have all the gifts that will help your children and they'll probably respond to the spiritual life and someone else maybe they'll latch onto and it might not be who you're expecting so that's the end of part one and then Jesus we notice he's saying let the children come when the disciples are trying to get in the way let them come and that was quite a surprise to them they thought that the master surely had much more important things to do but just notice the high value that Jesus places on the children in that whatever he was doing he stopped didn't he he says to the disciples no I'm not happy let them come and one by one

I don't know how many there were but one by one he's placing hands on these children he's praying and blessing them he changes his plan he wants to give the children time and then one of those passages we read which we looked at a month ago or so just remember this though whoever welcomes one of these little ones welcomes me Jesus said that these vulnerable small children saying when you reach out and welcome them Jesus is saying you're welcoming me he's personally involved he's personally identifying with these little ones and here's another verse in the Psalms that talks about children they are a heritage from the Lord offspring a reward from him like arrows in the hand of a warrior do you think about your children like this Mark?

arrows in the hand of a warrior are children born in one's youth blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them so there's an encouragement for large families so how much do you value your children or are you perhaps going back to some of the other points in danger of being too busy and not giving enough time and then you soon find years have gone by they've grown up and you've lost the closeness of a relationship be careful let the children come how much do you value your children do they know it so that was a brief point but then it's part of the other phrase that Jesus says here do not hinder them this is in verse 14 the disciples rebuked the people when Jesus saw this he was indignant and he said to them let the little children come to me do not hinder them the disciples definitely thought

Jesus had more important things to do and Jesus' response would have been quite startling to them but it says as we read through this passage and actually if you just look at one or two of the other parallel passage we touched on at the beginning he says he took the children in his arms he placed his hands on them and blessed them he did not want them hindered from coming to him so do we hinder our children coming to Jesus of course you say no wouldn't dream of it not consciously no you wouldn't would you but sadly this is all too easy it's all too easy to do so we won't look at all of those points in reverse but think of the discouragement of a bad example now I just want to bring an extract from a child psychologist many of you will not know about this but take it from me this Dr. [20:03] Virginia Axline was a specialist in play therapy with disturbed children and she wrote a beautiful story about the emergence of a strong healthy personality in a previously deeply disturbed child I hasten to add she's not a believer this psychologist I don't think the child was but the book is called Dibs in search of self and I just want to quote you

a little bit because in the context of a lot of conversations with a disturbed child this is just a little bit that talks about God and Dibs is the young disturbed child we're not completely sure probably six or seven years old I wonder what God is like Dibs said grandmother told me once God was our father in heaven father is another way of saying papa I wouldn't like God to be like papa because sometimes I don't think papa loves me but grandmother says papa loves me but if he does why don't I know it grandmother loves me

I know it because I feel it deep inside deep inside me now there's just an example of maybe there's a problem with the father maybe he's just a bit of a different character and doesn't give out much emotion but to the child he thinks that one of the parents loves grandparents loves him a lot the other one he's not getting that message when he hears that God is a father this is beginning to cause a problem to his idea of God as a father so a bad example there could be lots of other examples we've touched on being a hypocrite saying one thing and doing another what about poor relationships how common it can be that parents are so tied up with their own problems that they can't step out of them to really engage with the needs of growing children this is another area I mean we talk about the basic thing of having sin forgiven but the other area of God's salvation it can bring healing because most of us have some sort of baggage or another from our childhood and we need healing and if we don't deal with some of our own problems if we don't experience something from God in healing we get still so tangled up in ourselves we can't move out of ourselves that's a very God like quality to a selfless energy that will focus on other people and what about homes where there is no discipline we talked about training the child in the way they should go what about no discipline or perhaps very harsh discipline these are all areas that will hinder or can hinder so then the last point I want to go through and some of this is recapping where we were a month ago but it is in some of these parallel passages actually I think in Matthew 19 it does say verse 14 let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these and that passage we read which we did look at a month ago it talks about challenging the disciples who were wondering about who was the greatest to change and become like children so it's worth thinking about the qualities in children that we do well to still admire truly

I tell you anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it that's in Luke 18 and unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven and whoever takes the lowly position of this child the photos come on a bit out of sequence but just recapping a few qualities of children that it's very good to admire one of them is that they trust deeply and that's what the picture relates to you can picture the excitement of this complete abandonment of a child who if the father isn't switched on and catches him it's going to be a catastrophe but the child is full of trust and that is a picture of how deeply we should trust God they are dependent they know it if you don't give them a shelter over there if you don't give them a bed and shelter and food where else are they going to get it from they are dependent on you they are teachable when they get a bit older sometimes they get mouthy but by and large when they're small they are teachable they are authentic what you see is what you get they don't tend to hide behind masks if they're unhappy you will know it they are imitators that's a challenge isn't it as you're trying to be godly parents at home if you're not living out consistently the life they'll copy you they are imitators and they have a sense of wonder perhaps they see things for the first time and maybe some of us need to recover a sense of wonder when we've seen things in creation or too many times and we've lost the ability to pause and praise

God for it and point it out but it touches on this aspect the Philippians 2 reminds us do nothing out of selfish ambition rather in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but those of others and I just hasten to add this is not natural to people God is the one who is very selfless and it's only by God's spirit living in you that you learn to be so as well and these are repeats from last time but lovely quotes from C.S.

[26:02] Lewis humility is not thinking less of yourself but it's thinking of yourself less and I will just give you this picture that I think you appreciated last time just a small image of a child this is actually our middle granddaughter Amy who's seven years old we have this little picture and it's just interesting that when she's round we can picture up

and say look there's a famous ballerina and she says no it's not a famous ballerina it's me because she understands where she's at she's not pretending to be something else but it's just a picture of being like a child in that healthy sense!

So how else can you test whether you learn the humility of a child fundamentally do you understand you're mortal and sinful compared with God who is eternal and holy do you ask for help when you need it are you grateful for what you have what's the alternative moaning do you spend time listening to others or in conversations are you just itching for them to shut up so that you can get your bit in these are tests of humility and there were some lovely pictures I'm giving the right credit this time Charles Mackesy has done some lovely illustrations about a horse and a boy and a mole and his I'm so small said the mole yes said the boy but you make a huge difference so that's the lovely thing about being small and what's the bravest thing you've ever said asked the boy help said the horse asking for help so let me sum up do you long to bring your children to Jesus I'm sure our answer is an affirmative yes do you value them highly but in each of these things the challenge of it do you show it how do you work it out to parents can you be a better example at home can you build deeper relationships do you train your children do you pray for them I'm sure you do all of these things but can you do them more so others of you who are not parents if you look around in the church there might be some families who are really struggling there are some in our midst who are practically single parent families lots of children responsibilities perhaps if you don't have children responsibilities and if those families might welcome you there's a few ifs there maybe you could help do something to help is there more that you can do to value children even just to notice them and have conversations in and around in church grandparents role so I just put that down in finishing

Wendy and I are grandparents ourselves but we have just by listening to some other people talking about grandparents this is a very privileged position because actually most parents are particularly busy handling it every day grandparents are a little bit more out of it they've got more experience of life they have a very precious role and the children will know that they have been given more time so important but that's all I want to say so thank you for listening we will say some