

Sermon for Prevent Child Abuse Month

Grace Through The Eyes Of A Child

by Chris Carroll

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16

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Today, as we focus on the importance of children, I am so thankful for the children that we have here at our church. Seeing their enthusiasm for wanting to come to church and for studying and talking about Jesus gives me great joy.

But it also is a reminder for us of the importance of getting our children involved in church. Not only will it help them to have a closer relationship with God, but it will also compel in us the desire to learn a thing or two about grace when it comes to Jesus and his relationship with children.

Jesus loved children and that is found all throughout the New Testament. Whether it is with Jesus feeding the five thousand through the help of a young boy, or Jesus as we see in this passage encouraging the children to come to him, it is evident that Jesus loved children and wanted to share with them what Grace is all about.

Let's see how Jesus extends grace to children and how we should do it as well. The first thing we see is that

1. Jesus Encourages Children To Come to Him

As our story starts off, we see that people are following Jesus and they are doing something that is common. In verse 13, the people brought their children to Jesus. This was not a one-time thing, but it seems that it happened all the time. Whenever Jesus was in town, parents made sure that their children had the opportunity to see Jesus.

Think: standing in line to see Santa. But this fellow is real.

This was Jesus, the very Son of God, the one who could do all things. And parents wanted to make sure that their children were able to spend quality time with Jesus. Because they knew that Jesus cared strongly for children and that he wanted and enjoyed praying and blessing these children.

But not everyone that day was all happy about these parents bringing their children to Jesus for some quality time with Jesus. No the group that seemed to have the most problems were the disciples although at this point in our story they don't act like disciples, rather they act like bodyguards.

You know the type. Though they were not big they were still burly, and they did not like the interruption of the parents trying to get a few moments with the savior. The disciples were just hoping the kids would want to play hide and go seek. They did not need to waste the Savior's team. He had other things to take care of.

Or maybe the disciples were jealous. Maybe they saw these parents and children as another intrusion and a drain of Jesus energy and time. Maybe they were like—"Look people, we are his disciples. He is teaching us he does not have time for you." Yet they completely missed Jesus mission and why he had come to this earth.

These bodyguards were so upset about these parents and children taking up their time with Jesus that the NIV says that they rebuked them. Now the word "rebuke" is a very strong word. It's the same word that Jesus used when he rebuked the wind and the sea to stop. What the definition means is to seriously tell someone off, to reprimand someone sharply.

It's kind of like this. As the parents bring the kids I can picture the bodyguards or disciples saying "Come on, get out of here. Can't you see that this is Jesus? He doesn't have time. He's busy with us -- would you quit bothering Him? Why don't you take your kids to the Burger King Playland? They're not welcome here!

Yet what they were about to realize is that Jesus does care and cared much more than the disciples. They did not value children and Jesus did more than just value them, he loved them and cared for them deeply.

Now we could spend the rest of our time talking about what big goobers these guys were for not wanting kids to see Jesus. But maybe we need to think about that for a minute. Some of us may be more like the disciples than we care to admit. When Jesus heard what the disciples were doing, he was very angry and annoyed (v14). Their actions went against Jesus whole mission and he was not going to tolerate it.

Jesus wanted to show that his grace is sufficient for all people including children. He had a love for children and it is evident that even back then children had a love for Him and he wanted nothing in their path to disrupt them from coming to him.

Things have not changed. Jesus still wants to have a personal and viable relationship with children and you and I need to make sure that we do not put obstacles into their paths. It means that we should see it as a priority that children have opportunity to learn about God.

As parents, grandparents and friends to children we should give our best to getting children into church and bringing them into a relationship with Jesus. It means for us to stop making excuses and be an example and be in church and get them into church. Jesus told the disciples and he tells us today in verse 14 that we should not hinder children.

What that tells me is that children want to come to Jesus, but the problem is the adults who stand in the way. We must be careful to not become a stumbling block to our children and to encourage them to experience the grace and love of Jesus that is available to all.

This is especially true for parents. Ephesians 6:4 shows that how we treat our children will have a direct impact on their spiritual development. It says Fathers and mothers, grandparents and others, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

We have a responsibility to bring our children up in a church but also in a Christian home. Let them come to the Lord through your bible reading, through your prayer life and through your willingness to be involved in God’s ministry.

Jesus encourages children to come to him. The second thing is that we are to see:

2. Jesus Encourages Us To Learn From Children

Notice the last part of verse 14 and verse 15: “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

Now it is interesting that Jesus teaches us what grace is all about through the eyes of a little one. In order to understand grace, we must become like a child.

So why does God say that little children have the kind of faith and trust needed to enter the Kingdom of God? Well think about it. Think about your children. They drive to school only if they are old enough to drive, but smaller children need someone to take them. What about cooking? Does your child cook? Not typically.

Adults are usually responsible for that.

These examples reveal the kind of dependence and helplessness and faith that is required of all people to enter the Kingdom of God.

At the heart of the answer is this: children are precious in their own right...and... they stand for something bigger than themselves. They model the kind of dependence and helplessness and insufficiency and faith that is required of adults to enter the kingdom of God.

Verse 14 says, “to such as these” belongs the kingdom. That’s the meaning of their unique existence – they point us to grace, to God’s undeserved favor that is poured out on the Cross for sinners.

Fighting over the last piece of chocolate cake, Mom comes in and says “Now I need to put some Godly teaching skills into this.” She wants the fighting kids to understand how to handle this properly. So, she asked the kids: “What would Jesus do about this?” The youngest one said: “Jesus would make more cake.”

When it comes to grace we can understand it through the eyes of a child. See it clearly demonstrated that God's acceptance has nothing to do with what you have done. Rather his grace comes to us simply based on his desire.

3. Jesus encourages us to Love Children Completely

We see this in our final verse this morning. Look at verse 16.

All these kids and parents wanted was just some face time with Jesus. They were not expecting what they got. For when these children came to Jesus, he went beyond what he was asked to do. He bent down, picked them up, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

He put love into action as he demonstrated his love and his grace in a real on way.

Oh if we could only learn some lessons from Jesus in how to love children. How my heart breaks as over and over I read in the paper horrific stories of families in crisis and putting their children directly in the middle of the turmoil.

It seems that instead of offering blessings to our children that we are setting them up for despair. We are encouraged in this story today to return to blessings. To stop becoming frustrated by our children and instead become involved with our children and offer them blessings.

In the book The Blessing by Gary Smalley and John Trent, described are the various types of blessings that children used to receive during the time of Jesus.

The blessing had 5 parts.

2. Meaningful touch
3. A spoken message
4. Attaching "high value" to the one being blessed
5. Picturing a special future
6. An active commitment to fulfill the blessing

That is what happened in this passage. You might be familiar with the picture that is found in bibles that depict this story.

Here is Jesus providing a meaningful touch by touching the children and putting them in his arms. The act of touch is a key to communicating warmth, personal acceptance and affirmation.

Mobbed by onlookers and protected by His disciples, Jesus could have easily waved to the children from a distance or just ignored them altogether.

Second, when Jesus blessed them, He did it with a spoken message. In many homes today, words of love and acceptance are seldom heard. A blessing becomes so only when it is spoken. Jesus spoke to the children. Acknowledged their importance.

Third, Jesus attached high value to children. The meaning of the verb, “to bless” literally means, “to bow the knee.” When the text tells us that Jesus blessed the children, it means that He thought so much of them that He showed reverence, and even awe for them.

The fourth element of the blessing is the way it pictures a special future for the person being blessed. Wouldn't it be great to know what Jesus said to these children? I wouldn't be surprised if He told them about the ocean full of blessings in store for them as they become fully committed followers.

The last element of the blessing pictures the responsibility that goes with giving the blessing. Words alone cannot communicate the blessing; they need to be backed up with a commitment to be there.

I'm sure Jesus said, “No matter what happens, remember that I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age.” This is how Jesus demonstrated His love for children – and we can do the same by touching, talking, valuing, giving a special future, and committing ourselves to being there for them.

Let children come to Jesus.

Let's all commit today, that we will ALL do our part to surround our kids with support and encouragement.

Let's commit to be a church that creates a safe environment for our teenagers.

Let's commit today to treat our young people with dignity by respecting boundaries and being examples of purity in our speech and actions.

Let's commit to being grace-givers.

Would all those who work with children and teens in any way please stand. Let's show our appreciation.

Now, all parents and grand-parents and guardians please stand. Let's show our appreciation.

Finally, let's ALL stand as we say to our kids-we are here for you. We believe in you. We love you.