

Introduction | Jesus and Children

¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.

The Kingdom of God is all about restoring the relationships that were destroyed by sin in the beginning. The Bible says that through Jesus, God is reconciling all things to Himself. The reconciliation of a relationship with God leads to reconciliation of a relationship with self, with others, and even with creation itself. It will be tempting for those who do not have children, or have grown children, to check out. Jesus is not instructing moms and dads in this passage—he is **teaching disciples what it means to be disciples**. All disciples, not just Christian parents, have a responsibility to disciple children.

How we live our lives will influence **FOUR different generations**. Our decisions will impact the generation that came before us; the generation that we ourselves are in; the generation of our children, and even the generation of our grand-children. This is both passive and active, in other words, it *will* happen naturally but it *should* happen intentionally. Such intentionally requires a major readjustment of priorities according to a value system contrary to the world. This is not a sermon designed to guilt you into serving in Kid's Road. But, if we all truly understand the nature of God's Kingdom and what Jesus reveals He values most, **we should be overwhelmed with requests instead of vacancies to shepherd His children.**

Two Views of Children

The culture of Jesus day loved children but diminished their value. They viewed them as consumers OF society and not contributors TO society. They were not only socially, they were physically weak. Even if a child survived infancy, many died before the age of 12. Infants and young children were often brought to elders or rabbis to be blessed for this very reason. The disciples *rebuke* the parents who are bringing their infants and young children to Jesus. Apparently there are a lot of people too as the disciples get decidedly upset—so much so they rebuke them to basically leave Jesus alone.

Jesus had a very different response to the children. Throughout Matthew, Jesus has always spoke positively of children. In Matthew 6.9: Jesus declares, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**" In Matthew 11.25: Jesus thanks the Father for **revealing his true identity to children** versus the wise. In Matthew 18.2-4: Jesus tells his disciples they must turn and become **like children** in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 21.15-16: Jesus identifies the **praises of children as fulfillment of prophecy** which says that the mouths of babes and infants are how God establishes strength to defeat the enemy. Now, here in Matthew 19.13-14: Jesus declares the kingdom of heaven **belongs to children** SUCH AS THESE.

In other words, **children give us the clearest picture of what it means to enter the Kingdom of heaven**. Those who gain entrance to the Kingdom of heaven are not the loud, proud, strong or the rich...it **belongs to the quiet, humble, weak, and poor. In the eyes of the world, these are the ones we are least attracted to, but in the words of Jesus, these are the ones we must be most concerned about**. Even though Jesus is talking about REAL CHILDREN, he is also talking about ALL SPIRITUAL CHILDREN—anyone who enter the Kingdom heaven.

If we are going to enter the Kingdom of God, we must become a child of God. If we are going to live as a Child of God, we must love children. **And if we are going to love them, then we they must be SOUGHT for, BROUGHT to, and TAUGHT about Jesus.**

Children need to be SOUGHT | "Let them Come to Me"

Like a lost sheep, children need to be sought out—they need to be found. Where are all of these children that we are supposed to find and care for? There are three places where we find children.

1. **Our Family:** We believe that parents are responsible for the spiritual training of their young and old children. Deuteronomy 6 teaches that before God, parents, not churches have the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture of their children. We believe in partnering with, not replacing, parents in nurturing the faith of children so that, by God's grace, they will be well equipped to spread a passion for the supremacy of Jesus to the next generation. Many of us have failed in our God-given responsibility to spiritual lead your homes, abdicating it to other people, institutions, or groups. You are charged to protect those in your care. You are charged to learn and teach truth. You are charged to set and example and lead. You are charged to PASTOR your FIRST CHURCH.
2. **Our Church:** There is a reason why "family" language is used so often when describing the church. It is supposed to function like family. Who are those in your care? Look around. God has brought all of you here for a purpose. All of our passions, giftings, skills, experiences, wisdom has collectively been gathered to worship, serve, and grow in all unity and glory to God. One does not have to be an elder or a deacon in order to contribute to the "work of ministry." Not everyone will be called to plant a church, serve as a deacon, or lead a ministry, but **all members of the church have responsibilities as family members.** The life and health of the church is dependent upon PASTORING ONE ANOTHER.
3. **Our World:** As disciples, we also have a responsibility disciple those not only those in our family and our church, but those in the world. Specifically, three categories:

The UNBORN | The Kingdom of heaven belongs to children saved by grace before they have a chance at life. Statistically, there have been over 200k abortions performed this year, 2,600 yesterday. Worldwide this year there have been over 7.5million...since Roe vs. Wade in 1973, over 57 million in the US alone. While we may not know every fact surrounding every abortion...we do know this: 1) every abortion kills an innocent human being. 2) Every unborn human being is a person made in the image of God. We also know that the abortion rate in 2014 was the lowest it has been since 1973...because people have not remained silent or passive. **We have a responsibility to the unborn.**

The UNWANTED | The Kingdom of heaven belongs ONLY to adopted children. The United States Foster Care – including legally-free kids, about 500,000. The number of professing Christians in America is 225,000,000. This works out to about 450 Christians per child in the system in the US, or, 1,730 Christians per legally-free child. The number of Washington State Foster Children is about 10,000. The number of churches in Washington is about 5,000. Did you know that if two families in every church in the state of Washington adopted that the need for adoption would be eradicated? **We have a responsibility to the unwanted.**

The UNIMPORTANT | Jesus is talking about children, but also more than children. The Kingdom of heaven belongs to the dependent, unable, helpless, passive, weak, and unimportant. These are very different than the people we let into our kingdoms or clubs. **We have a responsibility to the unimportant.**

We all have a tendency to focus on caring for ONE of these areas, often at the EXPENSE of the others. We need to balance the competing tensions that exist between the three to avoid idolatry of any one.

Children need to be BROUGHT | "Do not Hinder them"

Jesus gives us two different commands regarding children, namely, let the little children come to me AND do not hinder them. Not only do children need to be SOUGHT, they need to be BROUGHT. Few of us probably hinder the children through actively stopping them from coming to Jesus. **But many of us hinder children through our PASSIVITY and INDIFFERENCE, much like the disciples.** Their reaction to the interruption of children is quite different than the religious Pharisees of earlier, or the rich man we will see next week. More than likely, the disciples rebuked because there were others to reach...to spend time with that would be more productive. **THE DISCIPLES WANTED JESUS TO SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE MORE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE OR HELP.** Jesus is too important to be bothered. Jesus is too busy to be interrupted. Jesus is too driven to be slowed. **Or, said another way, children not worthy or worth it.** , Whether it be our own children, the children in the church, or children in the world, we hinder them from meeting Jesus because we value the wrong things.

We may tell ourselves, or others differently, but our actions speak much louder. At home, we consider our children an interruption to the greater task. In our church, it is easier to get people to rally around building a home in Honduras than shepherding a heart on Sunday. In our world, we sit back passively as millions of children are murdered, thousands of children are abandoned, and countless people are ignored because they are unimportant in our eyes. Our flesh convinces us that we're too important, too busy, or too focused on greater tasks. **According to Scripture, there is nothing more important and there is no greater task than introducing children to Jesus.** As the disciples try to shield Jesus from "unnecessary" ministry to those who cannot contribute, Jesus makes it clear that this IS the ministry.

These children do not come to Jesus on their own initiative...someone has to bring them.

Children need to be TAUGHT | "He laid his hands on them"

And once they are brought, they need to be taught. Children need to be taught the same things that adults need to be taught. Namely, the gospel:

You need SOMETHING | All children need to be taught that everything is broken. Our identities are broken evidenced by all of self-help gurus, pills, and books written to help us find meaning. Our sexuality is broken evidenced by the overwhelming amount of perversion we celebrate and make available. Our marriages are broken evidenced by all of divorces and cohabitations. Our economy is broken evidenced by greed, unemployment, and poverty. Our justice is broken evidenced by countless lawsuits, perverted laws, and the abandonment of penalties. Even nature itself is broken evidenced by it being too cold, too hot, too wet, too windy, and too polluted. **We need rescue.**

You do NOTHING | All Children need to be taught we cannot fix ourselves. Children need to be taught that we are broken on the inside and nothing on the outside can fix us. Like infants, we have absolutely no power to save ourselves. Better morality, education. or good work is going to fix our heart problem.

In an interview with *World Magazine*, Phil Vischer, the creator of *Veggie Tales* (sold the franchise in 2003) says how he realized that the "Christian" message of those talking vegetables was not Christianity at all. He said: *I looked back at the previous 10 years and realized I had spent 10 years trying to convince kids to behave Christianly without actually teaching them Christianity. And that was a pretty serious conviction. You*

can say, “Hey kids, be more forgiving because the Bible says so,” or “Hey kids, be more kind because the Bible says so!” But that isn’t Christianity, it’s morality. . . .

And we come before our savior with absolutely nothing to offer. The heart transplant we require is a completely free gift totally devoid of human effort or merit. **We need to repent.**

You get EVERYTHING | All children need to be taught even though you come to Jesus with nothing, by grace through faith, you get everything from Him. When I say “ALL CHILDREN” I mean every little child and adult-child of God. We never ever outgrow our need to hear the gospel. The Gospel is the good news that God became man in Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have and died the death we should have...in our place. Three days later, He rose from the dead proving that He is the Son of God offering the gift of salvation to all who will repent and believe in Him. The gospel has never been about what we have done or can do for God—but about what God has done for us. **We need to receive.**

Conclusion | Getting Everything Changes you

Getting everything changes everything. Believing you are loved means becoming a child of God. And becoming a child of God means you are empowered to love God’s children. **The gospel of Jesus declares love to be more than sentiment.** We must fight the passivity of our flesh that says I am too important, too busy, or too focused on greater tasks and seek to bring God’s Kingdom to those whom Jesus says it belongs.

God’s children need to be **SOUGHT, BROUGHT, and TAUGHT.** Our responsibility to introduce more people to Jesus begins with our family, extends into the church, and overflows into the world. Because Jesus gave us life, we will love the **UNBORN children.** Because Jesus adopted me, we will love the **UNWANTED children.** Because Jesus elected a group of weak fools like us, we will love the **UNIMPORANT “children”.** Because Jesus thinks it is important to STOP what we are doing to TOUCH and PRAY for the LEAST OF THESE...so shall we.