

“GO FOR THE GOAL”

Mark 10:13-16

INTRODUCTION

1. I don't know about you, but I love the honesty of children.

Eg. I heard about a Sunday School teacher who was discussing the Ten Commandments with five and six-year olds. After explaining the commandment to “honor your father and your mother” she asked, “Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?”

Without missing a beat, one little boy said,

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Eg. Another Sunday School teacher asked her children as they were leaving her class, “*And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?*” One little girl replied,

“Because people are sleeping.”

One three year old named Reese learned the Lord's prayer like this, “

“Our Father who art in Heaven, Harold is his name.”

Another little boy wrote these words in a letter to God,

“Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay?”

2. But anyone who is responsible for little children knows it's not all joy and laughter. In fact, one exhausted childcare worker said:

“Give me 200 active two-year-olds and I can conquer the world.”

But maybe this comment in Reader's Digest several years ago best reflects our own world:

“It isn't easy being the parent of a six-year-old today. However. . . . it's a small price to pay to have someone around the house who understands computers.”

3. Years ago one author said,

“The true test of a society is how it treats its children.”

Eg. Author George MacDonald wrote:

“When we are out of sympathy with the young, then I think our work in this world is over.”

Eg. A developmental psychologist named David Elkind studied a cultural phenomenon in our country called “The Hurried Child Syndrome.” He said that the Hurried Child Syndrome robs our kids of childhood and places them on an unnatural time table to adulthood that's harmful to mental and physical health. His conclusion is:

“Let's let our kids be kids.”

4. Because there's so much misunderstanding, and even abuse, of children in our world, it's appropriate that we look at what Jesus said about children in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

If you have a copy of the Bible, I invite you to turn to this section of Scripture on this Children's Sunday as we uncover four important principles from Jesus that will help us develop a health prospective on children. These are four insights that should guide every parent, teacher and childcare worker.

Let's pick up the story in verse 13, and notice what Mark tells us about Jesus' interaction with children:

"People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 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. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16)

Now first I want you to see...

1. THE PASSION OF JESUS FOR CHILDREN

The Bible says,

"People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant."
(Mark 10:13-14a)

Parents in Jesus' day brought their kids to the Lord because they recognized He was a unique teacher. It was the custom of Jewish parents to bring their children to any great teacher of the law so the rabbi could pray for the kids and bless them. These parents brought their youngest children – even infants – to Jesus for that purpose.

But the disciples were like body guards for Jesus. They got in the way! After all, He was busy man...He had people to heal, questions to answer...and the world to save! Why in the world would He want to take time for children?!

Eg. In the days of the Roman Empire, unwanted children were often abandoned by their parents because they were viewed as a nuisance or a financial liability. Some parents would just toss their babies into a ditch and let them die of exposure. Fathers had absolute control over whether children would live or die.

Jesus had a far different view of children than that. So the Bible says, "He was indignant."
*If you want Jesus to get angry-mess with babies

There are only two or three times where we're told that Jesus got really angry with His followers. This is one of those times! He might have been angry because He felt sympathy for these little children because of the world into which they were born. He might have been angry because He knew that any one could come to Him regardless of their age. He might have been angry because He knew that no one was outside of the love and the plan of God, even a child!

Earlier in Jesus' ministry He was even stronger about all of this. Look at these words from Matthew 18:

"Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes Me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."
(Matthew 18:5-6)

Jesus had a passion for kids!

Eg. If you think that we emphasize Children's (start slides) Ministries too much around here, we're just trying to follow the example of Jesus. For the last two weeks, we've had a team in Southeast Asia that has participated in the dedication of our new orphan home in Thailand.

Many of you have given thousands of dollars helping to construct this orphan home and sponsor these children. Do you know why? Because every child matters to God.

I want you to watch the following video that gives us a glimpse of what is happening today at our orphan home in Thailand.

First, if I'm to develop a healthy perspective on children I've got to understand the passion of Jesus for children. Then I must also understand...

2. THE PRIORITY OF JESUS WITH CHILDREN

Look at the next few words in verse 14:

"He said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them.'" (Mark 10:14b)

It's easy to think that children today have it much better than children of ancient times. But if you know the truth about our culture, you might hear about neglect or divorce or abuse and other kinds of problems. You could hear even a sense of hopelessness about the future. You might hear a longing to be loved. (abortion-3 million)

It's no wonder that Jesus was so strong in his comments. Literally He's saying, *"Don't even think of*

hampering the children. Don't even think of standing in their way."

That's one reason I am so grateful for the ministry God has entrusted to our church with children.

On a typical Sunday over 300 children are in this building to learn about Jesus from loving teachers and helpers who demonstrate what it means to go for the goal of a relationship with God.

Every summer, our church hosts a Vacation Bible School that's second to none anywhere. Somewhere around 600 children are in this building learning about Jesus from almost 300 workers.

We often have a couple of dozen Neighborhood Bible Clubs scattered all over the county during the summer to introduce children to what it means to have a relationship with God.

This past fall over 600 children were reached with God's love through Upward Basketball every week.

-You can read about that in this month's edition of Good News.

You know, every child eventually answers a number of questions that will determine their destiny in life.

The first question every child will answer is this:

- Who am I?

This is really a question of identity.

The Bible tells us about Moses' sense of identity in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews:

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter." (Hebrews 11:24)

Moses knew who he was and who he was not. He was honest about his heritage and who God created him to be.

It makes all the difference in the world what you believe about your own existence. If you believe that you're nothing more than the random act of time and chance, it affects your view of life. But if you believe that God created you for a purpose, it has a dramatic impact on how you're going to spend your life.

The Psalmist said it like this:

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:14)

Frankly, this is one of the reasons we established Wooster Christian School over 20 years ago.

Some of you don't know that we sponsor a Christian School that meets in this building five days a week, 180 days a year. We have about 185 students in Pre-K through 8th grade. God has used our school in dramatic ways in the lives of children through the years. I want you to hear the testimony of what Wooster Christian School has meant to just one of the families in the school in recent years.

The first question every child will answer is, "Who am I?"

The second question is

- What is most important? (Question of Priority)

Then, we're told that. . .

"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." (Hebrews 11:25)

God wants us to base our priorities in life on what lasts for eternity. The temptation of sin is everywhere. Jesus invites us to follow Him by faith and live with eternity in mind. People might disappoint you. They might even criticize you. But regardless of difficult circumstances and difficult people, every child needs to learn to look ahead to what lasts rather than what is temporary.

There's a third question every child has to answer about life. . .

- What will I do with my life? (Question of significant responsibility)

For Moses, we're told. . .

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:26)

Moses was able to take the long view of life. He even welcomed difficult times because he knew God was working through him. Sooner or later every child has to answer, "What impact will my life have on others?"

And then there's a fourth question every child has to answer . . .

- Will I live by faith? (Question of Perseverance)

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27)

Adversity is a part of life. But faith in God Himself enables us to overcome adversity. I don't know any better place for a child to learn to answer these four questions than in a God-honoring home, church and school. All three of those are like legs of a stool that have to be equally balanced in teaching the truth of God in life.

But there's something else in this story that helps us develop a healthy perspective on children. We see. . .

3. **THE PROTECTION OF JESUS FOR CHILDREN**

Look at these next words. Jesus said:

"...For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14c)

Jesus looks at the babies in front of Him and says, *"The kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these."*

What's that mean? He's just saying that babies like those in front of Him, prior to the time when they can place their own faith in Jesus Christ, belong to the kingdom of God. In other words God extends His grace to them. This doesn't say anything about some right or ritual or infant baptism or even the faith of the parents.

I believe based on this Scripture that if a baby dies, that baby goes into the presence of Jesus Christ because they are uniquely in the care of God Himself. I don't know how God does this other than by His grace. I do know that it's available because of the death of Jesus Christ for their sin.

Some of you in this room have lost children. Some of you have experienced the heartbreak of a miscarriage or the death of an infant. Few things in life are more difficult than that. I want you to know I believe that if you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, if you have placed your faith in Jesus, you will see that little infant again. David said it like this in 2 Samuel:

*"...I will go to him, but he will not return to me."
(2 Samuel 12:23b)*

When David's infant son died, he knew he would see that baby again because of the grace of God.

So Jesus emphasizes in this passage a passion for children and His priority with children and His protection of children. But there is one more principle in this passage. That involves...

4. **THE PATTERN OF FAITH JESUS SAW IN CHILDREN**

Look at this next verse.

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"
(Mark 10:15)*

In other words if we're to be a part of God's kingdom, we have to come like a child. What does that mean? It means we come with an honest view of ourselves. A little child is completely dependent on adults for care. That's exactly what God wants of us in our relationship with Him. He wants us to see our own inadequacy and our own sin for what it is. And then He wants us to fully lean all of our weight on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Folks, no where is that more clearer than in the humility and simplicity and dependence of a baby.

Most children are very trusting. That's what God invites us to do with Him. He wants us to have faith that completely trusts Him.

It is the faith of the tax collector who said: *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* (Luke 18:13)

That's what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 18. Look at these words.

"He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

"Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:2-4)

CONCLUSION

1. Jesus could have spent time with more influential people. Instead He realized the value of children. He could have focused more on His image and His career. Instead He spent time with those who could do nothing to help Him. He could have used the children for public relations to kiss a few babies and pose for the cameras of his day. Instead Jesus looked foolish to most people, but not to children.

2. His words are unmistakable. He isn't making suggestions. He gave some clear commands. Let the children come and don't even think about standing in their way. In fact, having faith like a child is the only way you can be a part of God's kingdom.

Eg. I want to do something I almost never do to close. I want you to listen to a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

"I was too ambitious...and thought to out-do all men and success."

'Til God came to me and said...'Keep within this guideline: attempt less than others. And so I stand and work with Christ's little ones...content.'"

Will you bow your heads? Everyone in this room has a decision to make today. It has to do with our commitment to Christ Himself. Will I come to Him on His terms? And how will my commitment to Christ be demonstrated with children?

You've been making things too complicated in your faith-childlike faith.