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“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10,14).

Bless the Children

Central Truth: Children must be included in our ministry.

L177. Date: January 1995. **Text:** Mark 10:13-16; II Timothy 1:3-5; 3:14-15.
Topic: Children; Family.

Would you like to share one of the tenderest moments in the life of Christ? Here it is: Jesus blessing the little children (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). It is the charter for all Christian education and ministry to children.

The location of the record is significant. It follows immediately a discussion of marriage and divorce in Matthew and Luke. It underscores the statement, “*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward*” (Psalm 127:3). The permanence of marriage and the blessing of children are basic Bible doctrines.

I give special attention to the little children in my congregation. I want them to grow up with two assurances: (1) church is a place where they love you, and (2) the pastor is my friend. In a world that has lost its moral and spiritual moorings, children will need something stable as they grow up. The church is an ideal place for them to find love and acceptance, plus faith in the Lord.

Bring the Children to Jesus

Parents must assume the responsibility of bringing their children to Jesus. We are not told who brought the children to Jesus, but we assume it was their parents. It was a Jewish custom for a rabbi to pray for and bless a child on his first birthday. So parents wanted a “God bless you” from the kind of person they knew Jesus to be. They wanted their children to see

Jesus, hear His words, and feel the touch of His hands. (Those hands, so tender in blessing the children, were later nailed to a cross; and they bear the nail prints to this moment.)

Hannah brought her young son Samuel before the Lord. Joseph and Mary brought their baby Jesus before the Lord. It is appropriate for mothers and fathers to do the same today. A simple ceremony of dedication, followed by a lifetime of instruction, will produce children who grow up and count for God. Many churches practice the dedication of little children. It is appropriate.

Some do not agree with bringing children to Jesus. Jesus' disciples “*rebuked*” those who brought them. The term means to interfere in their actions — to stand in their way — and scold them. Why did the disciples respond so strongly? (1) The coming of the children interrupted a very serious discussion of marriage and divorce. They wanted the discussion to continue. But Jesus showed that people are of primary concern to Him. He could continue the discussion later; little children needed His attention then. (2) The disciples were concerned for Jesus' welfare. He was busy, too busy with adults to deal with little children. At times they were so busy they had no opportunity to eat (Mark 6:31). But Jesus was not too busy to bless the little children. (3) They were bothered personally by the children and / or their parents. So they would send them away for personal convenience. We do not know the inmost motive of the disciples. We only know that Jesus did not agree with them. Learn this lesson well: “Jesus loves the little children/ All the children of the world/Red and yellow, black and white,/They are precious in His sight;/Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

Jesus receives every child who is brought to Him. Mark says Jesus was “*much displeased*” at the disciples' actions. (That term means “indignant, angry.” It shows the intensity of Jesus' love for all children.) He rebuked the action, saying, “Permit the little children to come to Me.” Jesus knew the importance of the children to God. He desired every spiritual benefit to be theirs. He did not consider their coming an interference. And that should be our attitude toward children.

Jesus said, “*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). That statement indicates two great truths. (1) So-called “original sin” does not keep children from God's grace. They are under the watchful care of angels who have direct access to the presence of God (Matthew 18:10). They are kept safe in grace until the age of spiritual responsibility, and they must trust Jesus personally. (2) The kingdom of God is received by an adult with a childlike humility and clinging trust. The disciples thought the children must

become as they were before God was interested in them. Jesus said the adults must become as children before God would receive them. (Adults must not be childish; instead, they must be childlike in humility and faith.)

Jesus blesses every child brought to Him. The Bible reports, “*He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*” (Mark 10:16). Can you picture that precious scene? How like our Lord! (1) He enfolded them in His arms and drew them to himself. That reminds us of Isaiah 40:11: “*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*” (2) He put His hands on them. The parents would never forget and would often remind their children of it. Someone has said, “Whenever you put your hand on a child's head, you put it on a mother's heart.” (3) He blessed them. Think of that! We do not know if there was a formal blessing pronounced upon each child or if He gave a different blessing. It is enough that “*He . . . blessed them.*”

O how I wish I could have brought my dear children to Him then; and yet, my wife and I did. In those days there was no formal dedication of children in our church. But in our hearts, before our Lord, we gave our children to Him. Have you brought your children to Jesus?

Instruct the Children About Jesus (II Timothy 1:3-5; 3:14, 15)

Note the heading, “Instruct the children about Jesus.” I purposely used the word instruct instead of the word teach. Teach means to impart knowledge and skills; instruct implies systematic teaching in a particular subject. The spiritual education of your child should continue through the years, and you should add “*precept upon precept; . . . line upon line; here a little, and there a little*” (Isaiah 28:10). Paul gave Timothy the proper procedure in the spiritual instruction of a child (II Timothy 1:3-5; 3:14, 15).

Instruct the children in order to lead them to faith. Paul wrote to Timothy, “*I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also*” (II Timothy 1:5). “*Unfeigned*” faith is genuine, sincere, and unqualified. Timothy's grandmother first had that faith, and she passed it on to her daughter. Then the two of them instructed the child Timothy, passing the faith to him. The goal of all spiritual instruction of children is to lead them to personal faith in Jesus. Is that the way you are instructing your children and/or grandchildren?

Instruct the children even when the family is spiritually incomplete. Acts 16:1-3 reports that Timothy was of mixed-blood parentage. His father

was a Greek (Gentile), and his mother was a Jewess. She had married outside her faith (or she was not a believer when she married), for nothing is said of the “*unfeigned faith*” dwelling in Timothy's father. If the father does not lead in the spiritual training of the child, the mother must. Each generation must teach the next generation the things of God. Remember that eternal issues are at stake. Do not allow an uncooperative mate to keep you from the spiritual instruction of your children. It is more difficult when a partner will not assist, but it must be done without him or her. Children from a spiritually “broken” home can be led to faith and can make a contribution in the service of God. Timothy did!

Instruct the children from birth. Paul wrote to Timothy, “*From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (II Timothy 3:15). The common Greek word for child is *teknon*; it means “one born.” The word that Paul uses here is *brephos*, which means “infant.” That means that Lois and Eunice began Timothy's spiritual education while he was still a baby.

When is a child old enough to begin hearing about Jesus? He should hear the name in his mother's womb before he is born. (Unborn children can hear the mother's voice as well as other sounds about the mother.) She should sing to him about Jesus and talk to him about Jesus, even before birth. The best lullaby is a song about Jesus.

A mother asked her pastor, “How old should my child be before I begin religious instruction?” He asked, “How old is your child now.” “Three years,” she replied. “Oh mother,” the minister responded, “you have just lost three of the best years.”

Instruct the children to lead them to salvation (verse 15). Oh that Christian parents would assume the responsibility to lead their own children to faith. The church will assist; the pastor will counsel. But let the parent know the joy of leading the child to Christ, then bring him to the pastor to confirm the conversion and talk of baptism. There is no joy like the joy of bringing your loved ones to Jesus. The faith that is in you can be in each of your loved ones by your witness.

Instruct the children for life. The principles instilled in childhood and youth will enable them to live by them through all of life (verse 14). More is involved than just “getting my child saved.” There is a life to be lived; there is a King to serve; there is a Savior to present to the lost. Christian discipline is exercised by the parent upon the child until the child is able to function as a well-disciplined and self-disciplined person.

Christianity is more than a one-time conversion experience long ago. It is more than a “pie in the sky by and by after I die.” Move your faith from

“then and there” to “here and now.” To be a Christian means to have a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, a relationship that continues to grow day by day. Teach that to your children and live it yourself.

Be diligent and creative in teaching your children from infancy through adolescence to young adulthood. Never be content until you have accomplished your goal of bringing them to Jesus and bringing them up in Jesus. Children are special blessings from God (Psalm 127:3). They are of the highest value, even the unborn who are aborted so carelessly today. Christian stewardship demands that we minister to the children.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are children of such importance to God?
2. How did Jesus show the value He placed on children?
3. Why did parents bring their children to Jesus?
4. How can parents bring their little children to Jesus today?
5. Why do some rebuke others for bringing children to Jesus?
6. How does Matthew 18:10 show God's interest in children?
7. How is one converted and becomes as a little child?
8. How can you bring your children (of whatever age) to Jesus?
9. How can a grandparent help bring grandchildren to Jesus?
10. Why does God call us His “children” in Christ Jesus?