

PERMIT THE CHILDREN TO COME

Mark 10:13-16

If you were to write up a plan as to how to reach the world for Christ, what would your plan include? What would you propose? Marketing? Internet? Mass evangelism?... What about loving your family? Last week came away from the Gospel of Mark with an understanding of just how crucial marriage is to a disciple of Jesus Christ because “As the marriage goes, so goes the family, so goes the nation, so goes the world.” But today we’re going to look at really the second key relationship in that statement and it’s the next logical relationship. It’s a short account but it is powerful and reveals God’s heart for children, which should be our heart as well as His disciples.

Mark 10:13-16

“And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it all.” And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.”

I’m excited about this brief account because I don’t think it’s just convenient that it follows a text talking about marriage. I think it’s intentional by the Spirit of God to reveal to disciples of Christ that marriage and family should be a priority. Aside from our relationship with God, these are the most important relationships in our lives.

I. **JESUS BLESSES THE CHILDREN. (VV. 13, 16)**

The text tells us that children are being brought to Jesus to be blessed by Him. The Greek word for children, *paidion*, has been used both of an 8-month-old in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT-LXX) and a 12-year-old girl we saw in chapter 5 that Jesus healed (5:41-42). I think it’s safe to say these could be children of all ages being brought to Jesus but Luke’s gospel does specifically mention babies (18:15-17). It’s the 2nd time in Mark we’ve see Jesus with children in His arms (9:36) and using children to teach adults lessons on discipleship.

The blessing of children in Jewish culture, having a rabbi or elder lay his hands on a child’s head and prayerfully pronounce a blessing on them, is a typical, proper, and traditional thing to do. You’ve may have already recalled in your mind some of the OT patriarchs like Jacob, laying his hands on a child’s head to bless and seek God’s favor on their lives (Gen. 48:14). Well, parents in Jesus’ day would continue the custom by bringing their children to a synagogue and have the elders bless them. It’s a very normal thing to do. These parents recognize God is with Jesus, or rather that Jesus is God, and are seeking His favor on their lives.

And compared to the rest of the Greek and Roman world, Hebrew culture really elevated the worth and value of a child. Children were seen as **blessings** throughout the Old Testament. Not to have children was sorrowful and disgraceful to them. But not so much in avenues of secular society.

Hellenistic Society

The great significance and grace of what Jesus is doing though is really made apparent when studied in light of things taking place in **the historical background during this time**. Hebrew culture may

have elevated the children but many in this Greek & Roman, Hellenistic society, didn't. A normal way of thinking was that the children were only a blessing in so much as what they could offer to the family in return.

The fact that children might be looked at as worthless drains on society might be immediately recalled by how nonchalantly **Herod** massacred all the male infants in order to try and take out the newborn King Jesus. He didn't think twice about it (Revelation 12 reveals it was Satanic too).

I've also told you this before but they practiced "**exposure**" as well. A parent or parents might leave any unwanted infant outside and just expose them to the elements, leaving them on the city's dung piles and garbage heaps. It was their form of abortion, infanticide. Some would be picked up by infertile couples, some made slaves, some used for the most wicked gratification and some were really taken home and loved and many by Christians. It was Christians who sought them out and raised them on their own. Nevertheless, the catacombs are still filled with tiny graves and inscribed on them, "adopted daughter" or son of whoever.

In ancient Rome, the father had what was called *patria potestas*, or absolute father power, to do what he wanted with his family and the power extended to life and death.ⁱ A person could be put to death by a simple command from his father for any reason up until about AD 60. Take, for example, this papyrus letter found written by a man named Hilarion to his expectant wife: "Hilarion, to his wife, heartiest greetings. And to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we tire still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If - good luck to you!--you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is it girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry."ⁱⁱ

This was the reality children faced then and still in some places today. Having a fallen sin nature, mankind is just not generally child-friendly by nature – the exception being our own children. This is why there are so many fostered and adopted and aborted. We gasp at that Hilarion letter, but the mentality still exists today, with feminists referring to the baby in them as a parasite. It's an ugly reality that reveals the depravity of man to treat children as burdens and as disposable. So thank God for Christianity, taking Jesus' example, that wherever Christianity has gone in the world they mobilized care for children. Our love for children should differentiate us in this world, making us stand out.

Jesus' taking these children in His arms and blessing them is a warming picture against a cold and dark backdrop. It's revolutionary in a world that is generally not child friendly.

II. THE DISCIPLES **REBUKE** THE PARENTS BRINGING CHILDREN. (Vv. 13; Lk. 18:15)

While Jesus is blessing them, the disciples start to stand in the way and rebuke the parents. It's not much different from chapter 9 where they tried to stop another man's ministry. They're just lacking spiritual perception and insight, maybe thinking children were not worth Jesus' time and protecting His busy schedule and energy. You can see them now as His supposed bodyguard, "*Move along lady, Jesus doesn't have time for distractions! Don't disrupt the Master!*" The word suggests a strong rebuke (8:33), whatever it was. Jesus, however, rebukes them back with righteous anger! He was **indignant**, the text says. And gave them one positive and negative command.

- The **positive**: “Permit the children to come to Me”
- The **negative**: “do not hinder them.”
- Then He gives them a **lesson**: “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not receive it at all.”

What did He mean by this lesson? Well, I think there’s a literal sense and a principle sense for disciples.

A Literal Sense

I think it’s difficult to make the point from this verse alone but I think **Scripture is consistent** in its testimony that children who die will be in heaven. The analogy to me wouldn’t work if there wasn’t truth in the statement that the kingdom belongs to this kind – meaning children. With so many children aborted and dying, this is **comforting and proper** for us to address here. I’ll just make mention of these few passages.

One of them is **Ezekiel 16:20-21**. God is pronouncing judgment on Judah through the prophet Ezekiel for being a harlot with false gods and foreign wives. God says one of the main reasons for the coming judgment and exile by the Babylonians is for their child sacrifice. These are likely pagan children born to foreign wives. *“Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughter My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire.”* God says these children are *“My children”*. He personally claims them as His own.

Same situation, different prophet – **Jeremiah 19:4** – God says, *“they’ve filled this place with the blood of the innocent.”* God them innocent. Does that mean children aren’t sinners by nature? No. They are dark, sinful beings to but they don’t know better. They can’t discern good from evil yet or choose to rebel or believe.

It made **Jonah (4:11)** sad when Nineveh repented and God withheld judgment, but God didn’t want to judge Gentile Nineveh and He expressed a reason why: *“Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand...?”* It’s a reference to children who don’t deserve the judgment that the parents were about to bring on.

You’ll remember when David lost his son in **2 Samuel 12:22-23**, he assumed and had great **comfort** in the fact that he would see his child again in the afterlife.

In **Matthew 18:10, 14**, Jesus mentioned children had **guardian angels** and were **not to be despised** and it was not His will that they should perish.

1 Timothy 4:10 says Jesus is “the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.” We know that’s not teaching universalism – that everyone is saved – so who what is it saying? He died for the whole world but only those who believe are saved. Yet at the same time it seems written in such a way that it would include those whom it is not impossible for them to believe or make any decision for Christ – those who have special needs and can’t make a decision for Christ. I think it’s safe to say that they are precious to God and have a place in His arms. That there is a grace reserved for them until they reach an accountable age. If this is true, they are the greatest model for grace.

❖ **Children and those with special needs are the greatest model of God’s grace.**

Because they can do nothing to earn heaven. Just this last week I was out to eat at Helen's and a special needs gentleman who worked there came up to me and introduced himself and we were friends immediately! He had the biggest smile and shook my hand and gave me three hugs and told me he loved me before he left. That man made my day and I told everyone at the table that that man is a gift from God to us.

A Spiritual Principle Sense

Jesus is saying is that those who have believed and are disciples will have certain **childlike qualities**. Not childish, but childlike. They're going to be saved the same way as a child – by grace and completely helpless and needy.

❖ **Salvation comes to those who realize they are helpless to save themselves and completely needy of a Savior.**

I think that's the main thought here since the Pharisees were just in the backdrop in the previous text and they think they're worthy of heaven by all that they've done! Children, especially the babies, have nothing to show. They can't make any claim on heaven but must simply receive it as a gift, and they typically do receive things confidently and freely.

Well, we're all like these children whose have zero to boast about before God and before others. Since He requires perfection to enter heaven, all we can do is boast in Christ's sacrifice for our sins on the cross and the perfect righteousness He offers us in Him. His blessing of salvation is freely given to those who will simply receive it by faith in Christ.

But here's where we come full circle as disciples – the **application** I want us to consider. **If God blesses children, so should we!**

III. DISCIPLES OF JESUS WILL ALSO BLESS CHILDREN. (Eph. 6:4)

I mean that in every senses of the word. Christians should just be those who seek to bless children in any way they can and the way the Lord calls them too, even if it's adoption and foster care or whatever. And you know, one of the greatest ways you can bless them is just by **living and interacting in such a way that by your Christlike lifestyle, they are blessed**. Children need you to live out the gospel and raise them biblically.

Jesus said, "Permit the children to come, and, do not hinder them." And I think it's powerful to think that by the way we live, we are either *permitting* them to come or *preventing* them (and the same could be said for everyone around us). We're asking, does my words and my ways direct them to Jesus? The Apostle Paul, just like Jesus, gave a *negative and positive* command for parents, and fathers especially, seeking to raise children as disciples should in **Ephesians 6:4**. This is it:

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath,
but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Some translations might say, "don't provoke them to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Another verse in Colossians says, "Fathers, don't exasperate [embitter] your children so they don't lose heart." I like that word exasperate. It just sticks and has a well rounded sense as to how we should *not* parent. You don't want to parent in such a way you're your kid loses heart. Sometimes, the negative is more impactful like this question we'll ask: "*How do we provoke our children to anger and bitterness? How do we exasperate them?*"

1. If you want to exasperate your children, preach the gospel but don't live it.

Nothing will supercharge your children away from Christianity like being a hypocrite. If you want your children to disconnect from you and Christianity when they graduate, just be a hypocrite who claims forgiveness and hope and life but doesn't extend that to others or it isn't evident. Our lives either support the gospel or supplant it in their minds. All of us fall short, and we don't pretend we don't, but it's critical to live out the gospel at home.

2. If you want exasperate your children, make them feel like a burden and not a blessing.

Make children feel like they're always in the way of what you want to do and what you're trying to get done rather than slowing down and including them in it.

3. If you want to exasperate your children, don't express any love to them.

Don't tell them you love them or hug them or take any real efforts to meet with them individually to find out how they're really doing. For fathers in particular, pretend that if you show them too much love, they'll become soft because that's how many of us were raised. Love was looked at as feminine. That's how this world views love. But you and I both know that real love is difficult. Agape love is sacrificial giving of one's self for the true good of others. It's hard. It isn't for wimps. It's God's love on the cross that won us over and what is going to win your children and this world.

4. If you want to exasperate your children, don't discipline them.

One of the ways we know God loves us is that He disciplines us.

Hebrews 12:6

"The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son."

He disciplines so that we might share in His holiness and holiness is a good thing. Even for the unbelieving world, there is a common grace for living a life on biblical principles. Children, believe it or not, actually like boundaries and some parameters. I read a story once about children appreciating a good moment of discipline because 1 spanking was better than 50 scowls throughout the day. Research shows kids with too much autonomy are actually insecure and feel unloved.

Proverbs 19:18

"Discipline your child while there is still hope. Otherwise you will ruin their lives."

Proverbs 23:13-14

"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you correct them with the rod, they will not die. Discipline them with the rod and save their souls from Sheol."

When you read that, don't think of a parent out of control in anger and frustration. You want to discipline with patience and intentionality and love. **Excessive or abusive discipline will exasperate them just as no discipline will.** Excessive discipline will crush the child's heart and they'll become a shell of human being that they used to be.

Also, before you discipline, think: "***Am I disciplining childishness or rebellion?***" There is a difference. Rebellion insinuates standards have already been set and broke. But also

ask, parents, “*Am I being consistent in my discipline?*” If you overlook an infraction several times but then punish the child severely the fourth time without warning, you will confuse and exasperate your child.ⁱⁱⁱ Child rearing requires great care and balance.

5. If you want to exasperate you children, demand too much from them.

Don't them be kids and run around or play. Don't play with them or have fun with them. Make sure that in all the sports they get involved in, you treat them like they should be playing like a professional. Expect them not to miss a pop-fly or ground-ball or easy catch. Rather than that, learn to laugh at their mistakes. Just this week my wife was making banana bread and while she wasn't looking my toddler turned the oven up all the way! He was just doing what mom was doing, right?

6. If you want to exasperate your children, don't be give positive reinforcement.

Always be talking down to them instead of building them up and encouraging them in what they do well. Even Jesus when He went to correct the 7 churches in Revelation, told them what they were doing well before He told them they needed to correct some things. It helps correction to be received well by an individual.

7. If you want to exasperate your children, show favoritism.

Just like Isaac and Rebekah did with their kids in the OT, Jacob and Esau, favor one over the other and say things like, “Why can't you be more like your brother?” Expect them all to have the same personalities and gifts and talents and favor the one that is most like you.

8. If you want to exasperate and provoke your children, ignore your spouse.

Make sure you don't take time to work on your marriage as husband and wife. Obviously from last week, we saw how important it is to have a healthy marriage. Unhealthy marriages will create serious generational damage.

Malachi 2:15

“Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his.
And what does he want? Godly children from your union.”

9. If you want to provoke your children to wrath, don't teach them the Word of God.

This way, they can go through life frustrated and without guidance in this world of bizarre ideas and really have nothing to say for it at the end or in eternity. They might not thank you now for teaching them the Word and preaching the gospel to them, but someday they will thank you and appreciate you – at least in eternity.

Lastly, just look at the positive command again.

10. If you don't want to exasperate your children, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Teach your children about God and His Word all day, every day, in both **formal** and **informal** settings.^{iv} I think that's how these early Christians would've understood this – in light of the OT concepts already laid out, with Deuteronomy 6:4 being the touchstone.

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

I think you get the point of this without going into great detail. It’s all the time. You speak God’s Word, you teach it, you memorize it together, you write it on your walls and timeline and computer background. That’s why every time the 1st Impressions Team goes to put up a new picture I say, “Why not make it a Bible verse we can be fed by it over and over and memorize it through repetitive exposure?” That’s how we should teaching our children God’s ways... constantly. Formally and informally.

So are we including the children in our lives to be part of following Jesus? That’s what Mark is all about. Losing ourselves and following Christ. ***Are we following Jesus in respect to the children in our lives?*** If you want to be a disciple and reach the world for Christ, go love your family.

ⁱ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishing, 2015), 243.

ⁱⁱ *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, IV. no. 744, cited by Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911) 154-155.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B101004/how-to-provoke-your-children>

^{iv} Paul Benware, Brian Harris, *Leaders in the Making* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 24.