

The little children and life - Matthew 18.1-14

Ask someone who is parent or think about your parents. You know when people have kids, they often spend time just watching the kids when they're asleep. My mate and his wife had a baby recently. He started explaining his love for his new daughter. He said, 'Before, I've loved something because they've loved me back - my wife, family, mates. But with Victoria, it's the first time I've ever just loved somebody without them loving me back.' He went on to speak about how deep his love was for his baby daughter.

The same can be said for God - he has that kind of unconditional love for you - only much deeper, much wider and beyond words. Go to your Bible and find John 3.16 and write out the verse, replacing the word 'world' with your name..

Memorise this verse (John 3.16). It's a great idea to memorise Bible verses. If they're your weapon of attack, you need to know them for when the enemy strikes. Troops don't go into battle without their guns and knowing how to use them. Nor should we with our spiritual weapons (Bible and prayer). See Ephesians 6 for more.

Questions

Many times in the Christian life we have questions. If I were to ask you what questions you had, I'm sure there'd be loads of interesting and controversial stuff. The question the disciples asked Jesus was, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?'

Write down a list of people the world thinks are / were great and why:

GREAT PEOPLE	REASON WHY

The interesting point to note will be that some people who the world think are great or the greatest, may not be the people that God chooses. For example the world may say, 'Elvis Presley was the greatest.'

God sees all people as equals but he may choose to honour the selfless lady who has served poor people in Brazilian slums for a lifetime without honour.

On the other hand, people may think that ladies such as Mother Theresa were the greatest. They would list her Godly loving qualities and commitment to the poor and needy.

God's Answer

To answer his disciples, Jesus invited a child to talk to him. Now if you've ever seen politicians on TV, you'll see they like to have shots of them standing with children or babies, makes them **look** trustworthy (and I emphasize the word 'look') ! Sometimes the children are very uncomfortable. If you've ever seen pictures of Saddam Hussein when he was Iraqi leader, you'll see many photos where kids squirm around him. You see, I think sometimes kids have an in-built sensor that tells them some people are OK. Anyways.. we see that this kid was quite happy being with Jesus - literally, a child of God.

Change and be like a child

This was the challenge of Jesus. In all seriousness, what did Jesus mean? Ideas?

1. _____
2. _____

What didn't Jesus mean?

1. _____
2. _____

Jesus says that a requirement to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to become like a child - to be humble like a child. In fact, Jesus says to make yourself humble like a child.

Let's think of the characteristics of children. Write a couple down:

1. _____
2. _____

For me, kids follow their loving parents. They trust and learn to trust their judgement, or not. If a good, loving dad says 'Let's go out' the kid will go with the dad. If a mad, violent dad says, 'Let's go out' the kid may be suspicious and hang back. But we're talking about God here who is the perfect father. To become like a child means to become trusting in God's decisions, that he knows best, that he won't leave you and that his way is right, that he will be there to guide and help you.

It also means having a teachable spirit. Young babies and kids learn at a phenomenal rate - way faster than adults do. They are greedy for information. Many kids around the age of 2 have the 'why' stage. This is when they wander round and keep asking 'why' until their parents and everyone else goes mad!

What characteristics is God looking for in your life?

1. _____
2. _____

Note that God is not looking for spiritual babies. Jesus doesn't want you to remain drinking milk, but want you to get into deep, spiritual food through a life of prayer, discipline, holiness and being open to God's Spirit. The characteristics God is looking for aren't the ways children behave but their innocence, simplicity, trust, love, desire to learn etc.

How can you humble yourself?

1. _____
2. _____

Humbling yourself means putting others first, recognising your place next to almighty God. Humbling means not seeking stuff for self but being selfless. In the place of humility, God will lift you up, God hates pride.

Us and children

If you're an adult, a parent, a carer, sunday school teacher, youth worker, peer leader then you have a big responsibility with children - and I'd add young people / teenagers too. Jesus points us towards being like a child in our faith for God. But God also warns us that caring for these guys brings great responsibility. There is a clear warning from Jesus not to damage the faith of these little ones.

Time Out - Is there anything now in the quiet that you need to say sorry to God about? Have you harmed a child's faith by harsh words. Ask God to bring anything to mind and ask for forgiveness.

Cutting Out Sin

In verses 8 and 9 we see Jesus give several examples of cutting out stuff - your foot, eye, hands.. Better these be cut off than cause a young one to sin - or to sin at all.

Can you summarise this? I mean, we are all sinful but we don't see churches full of one-eyed, one-legged people..

To me, this means cutting stuff out of your life, especially where you know it's going to harm you. So if you're a lad and you see a fit girl, don't let your mind fantasize about her, stop. If you are up late, turn the TV off. If you're a girl, don't let magazines dictate to you what you should look like. For both, don't let friends and TV etc. sway you to thinking you have to go round having sex. Cut it out. Get away from friends who make you tempted to smoke or do drugs. Honestly, take it from someone who knows.. it's not worth it plus you'll spend and waste a load of money!

The price he paid

You may have heard people say that if only you had been born, Jesus would have died on the cross, just for you. Want evidence? Look at verses 12 to 14. Summarise these verses in your own words..

You see, all these verses talk about children. But you and me are children of God, whether we are children in age or not. The old man who hands out books in your church is a child of God, I'm a child of God, your 8 year-old sister is a child of God. So these words apply to you. When you see that, it makes what we're saying more appropriate to your life.

A Prayer

Spend time together in the group discussing any of these issues as time allows, and as they come up. Then spend time in prayer around all the issues. Let God speak and minister to you by his Spirit. Let him transform and change you.

Going Deeper

Jesus says that children have angels in heaven who are always with his Father in heaven. Are these the 'guardian angels' we hear about? Why does Jesus say they are always in heaven with his Father? Where is the spiritual battle taking place? Does this shake your interpretation of where angels are and how they operate?

I'm only asking cos it's got me thinking.. !