

CHILDLIKE FAITH

A relative from Birmingham came down and their daughter walked along one of our paths. It was high above the ground, but she determined to walk along, assured that I would catch her if she fell. Sure enough she jumped and I had to catch her and put her on the ground. There wasn't even a question that I wouldn't catch her!

The point of this talk is that being a Christian should actually be very simple. Just as a child should trust in a parent, how much more can we completely trust God? He is totally faithful, totally true and does everything he says he will do. Where God calls, he provides. He is the author and the finisher of our faith – so God will complete whatever he starts. Our part is to trust him, believe what he says and do what he says! But so often our faith is wavering and not complete.

Luke 18.15-17: “People were also bringing babies (Mark 10 says ‘little children’) to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him (Mark says Jesus was indignant) and said, “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.” (Mark goes on to say that Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them.)

Our faith in Jesus should be like that of a little child. But what does this mean in practice? Well, children believe you if they trust you. They don't need convincing arguments, they just believe and trust. We need that same trust and receptivity to God. It means that we should be completely trusting, innocent and looking to our Father in heaven for our every need, believing in him.

Story – we have 2 dogs: Charlie is a nutcase and if you're sat down on a chair, he will launch himself like a small missile onto your lap. There is no question of whether you want him, if it's convenient or uncomfortable, he's there. He has complete trust in us. The other dog called Toffee is more hesitant. He comes close and tentatively stands on his back legs or waits looking at you to see if you want him.

So often this is our approach to our Christian life, but our goal is complete trust in God.

A child is helpless without the father, and a father should (generally!) be obeyed. So we are helpless without God our Father. Proverbs 3 tells us to acknowledge God in all our ways. This means admitting that we need God. Story – of how I often tell God I need him in all things! Beyond this, we have to obey our perfect Father – anything you haven't obeyed him in?!

1. Childlike, not Childish

Let's start with a clear statement that we know but needs repeating. We should have a childlike faith, not a childish faith. Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for their childish

faith and ways. Childlike is a believing and trusting thing. Childish means we have not grown up. It's time to grow up. God wants adult children, not babies.

1 Corinthians 13:11: When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

If we are childish in our faith, we don't glorify God in the way that we do when our faith is childlike and mature. Then, we shine.

Philippians 2:14-15: "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe."

2. Childlike faith is a challenged faith

Think about it this way – if we want to come to God as our father, we have to come on the basis of being his children. Very often people find it hard to believe God because of broken relationship with Father on earth. But God is a perfect Father and we must come to him as our Father. If we are his children then he must be our Father. Anything we need to deal with?

Matthew 18.1-4: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 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."

The way up is down. As IHOP song says, "If you wanna go up, you've gotta go down." Faith in God is a challenged, disciplining faith. If you've got children you do this for their benefit. God does the same to us for our own benefit. Even closed doors are God's goodness often.

3. A childlike faith is an attractive faith

There should be something in us that attracts people to Jesus. We find here that people were bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. We know from the Talmud that it was the practice of the day to bring babies to the Rabbi to have him bless them, taken probably from Israel touching the heads of Joseph's sons in Genesis 48. However, people were comfortable with Jesus touching their children.

Now anyone who knows me knows I'm no children's worker and putting me in the crèche is probably as bad an idea as putting me in charge of accounting. But as Christians, should there be something in us that means we relate to children?

Story – I once went to help a neighbour with their computer, yep Microsoft causing havoc as usual. Their 3 year-old grand daughter was there. I was just natural with her. But they asked if I worked with children as I was so natural. No way I replied helpfully – I only work with young people! But it was obviously the Holy Spirit in me!

The Bible tells us that we carry around the fragrance of Jesus. 2 Corinthians 2.15 – For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. So we need to be having an impact on those around us, seeing people attracted

to God through our example, our words, life and actions. Maybe it's because we're not standing out enough that God is not moving so visibly in our nation. How do we do this? Every day actions and obedience to what God says.

Story – I met a friend at a local pub. He was married and brought another female friend who had a boyfriend. We got talking about relationships. I'd recently read a book by Gary Chapman talking about the 'Five Love Languages'. I started to talk about how we all receive love in different ways (touch / words / time etc). The girl especially was amazed and said, 'there's something different about you, I don't know what it is.' I replied that it was God in me who was speaking to her. Instead of going home, I went on to have food with them both and talk more.

Do people want to be around us because they know they feel blessed around us? I have a friend who's an old work colleague, who often phones me because she needs to talk and for some reason likes to call me for her 'fix' as she calls it! Are people attracted to God in you?

4. A childlike faith is a faith without hindrance

Interesting how the disciples actually hindered the children and babies coming to Jesus. I'm sure their motivation was right but Jesus told them off.

Often children are at the centre of things.

Matthew 21:15-16: "But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?'"

Story – I remember someone talking of their son who at age 8 had a word of knowledge about a lost toy, saying it was behind the back wheel of a blue car in the car park. Sure enough, when they looked, it was.

We have to be careful not to stop people coming to Jesus. Too often, as the church we have with the best of intentions, managed to push people away from God and the church. Whether it's judgemental attitudes, hate, bad examples, hypocrisy – we need to continually check ourselves, so that we don't actually hinder the kingdom of God, even with the best of intentions. Even saying that we wouldn't invite someone to church or criticise others, could well be a way of hindering the kingdom. 2 stories...

Story – I'm very struck by the story where someone came into a church not knowing what to do and sat down in the middle of the front on the carpet. One of the senior elders proceeded to get up, walk down the aisle and then sit himself down next to the man. What a picture of the grace of God and the church in action.

Story – a friend attended a church where things started getting a bit freaky. Not feeling great about this, he walked out. The leader stopped the service, pointed at them and told them they were sinners and would go to hell if they left the room.

Let's be like the elder who sat down next to the homeless man, not hinder people.

Matthew 18.5-7 – “And 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.”

5. A childlike faith is a blessed faith – blessed to be a blessing

David Pawson tells a story of woman who had a budgie. She always sung hymns so gradually the budgie learned the songs. When people came round, the budgie would sing and people started pushing money in through the cage. After a while the woman saved the money up and would send it for mission to Africa. David Pawson remarked that budgie was doing more for world mission than most Christians – praising God daily and supporting world mission!

It is important to know that we have a Father God wants to be good to his children! Jesus called the children to himself and blessed them. But very often we find it hard to believe that God actually wants to bless us. Hebrews tells us God is a rewarder, Psalm 84 tells us God doesn't withhold good things. Do you have a problem here? Do you need to change?

Luke 11.11-13 – “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Joyce Meyer writes books among many other things – not just to sell them, but to see lives changed. In her eyes, God has blessed her to be a blessing to others...

Story – Ron Rudman was a Jew. As he grew up, he searched for life's meaning in all kinds of ways and religious experiences, but there was always something missing. He rejected Christianity. But one day as an adult, he was in a Barnes & Noble bookstore looking for a book for his wife and knocked over a table of books. He picked them all up, with the last book being “Battlefield of the Mind” by Joyce Meyer. He initially dismissed it but then went back to it and opened it up, reading a line like, “The reason you picked up this book is that God wants a personal relationship with you.” He bought the book, took it home and secretly read it, not wanting his family to know. He then went and bought an Amplified Bible, again hiding it. A couple weeks later he went into his room and found his wife reading an old Bible. Asking her why, she said 2 weeks before she felt called to read it and had been doing so secretly. So they started reading to each other. Quickly the 2 of them and their 2 kids accepted Jesus in their lives. Soon after, Rod prayed God would send someone to open the Bible to his elderly mother. God answered the prayer, sending a pastor's wife within a week of the prayer. His mum, also a Jew, then gave her life to Jesus saying that “we (Jews) missed him (Jesus) – we missed the Messiah”

6. A childlike faith is an outward-focused faith

Mark 9.36-37 – “He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name

welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Jesus called the children to him. Let's call the children into us, as a church... New believers

Story – told by Andy Hawthorne of the [Message Trust in Manchester](#). Girl in Watford with cancer of the spine. All her friends and church were praying for her. She felt God prompted her to buy a Bible and write 'To James B' in the Bible. She did and packed it up and carried it in her bag. She had an appointment with 2 specialists. She met them at the hospital, Mr Patel and Mr Bowerman. In talking, Mr Patel turned to Mr B and called him 'James'. As the girl went into the scan machine, she gave Mr B the bag saying 'I felt I must give you this'. As she came out of the scanner, Mr B said, 'I don't believe it but all the cancer has gone. She replied she wasn't surprised because she was a Christian and her church were praying for her. Mr Patel said he was a Christian and they'd been talking about God all the way down. They'd come from another case up north of a girl who'd had cancer and her church had prayed for her and she'd been healed. Mr B had said to Mr Patel if he found another case he'd have to follow his God. So the girl and Mr Patel led him to Christ then and there!

God is always speaking to us and always speaking to people to draw them to him. But often we don't listen, or don't respond. I remember a teacher asking me why God didn't speak to him. I asked him whether he'd asked God to speak to him and then listened. No, he replied. But God is always speaking and a childlike faith is a faith that has learned to hear the voice of the Father in heaven.

Jesus was happy to call the children to him and it wasn't just as some kids talk, it was something much more profound. Our churches need to be places open to people of different backgrounds and to new Christians, visiting people.

From the Bible, we know that God in essence, disguises himself as a little child. So our reaction to children may give some clue of our reaction to this aspect of God's character... Read story of Derek Prince taking in African daughter, in book 'Power in the Name' p92.

Let's not miss out on hearing, obeying and trusting God and all the good that brings for God and his kingdom, for others and for us.