

Stretching the Heart

The Blessings and Responsibilities of Having a Child

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Let's go back in time to feelings that flow in the minds and hearts of parents upon the arrival of a child.

When my first child arrived, those first few hours immediately became a very sacred time for me. New parts of my heart and emotions were awakened by this miracle of life. After a short period of overwhelming anxieties, God settled my heart by reminding me to Whom my child truly belonged, and also reminding me about Who had the most invested in this new life—and thus the most at stake!

The Power Passages: Mark 10:13-16; Psalm 127:3-5

As the Bible student sees Jesus Christ moving through the pages of the gospels, he typically notices an amazing portrait of peace. Our Lord moves slowly, and He never appears hurried or stressed as He ministers. He exudes gentleness and love. His movements and activities leave in their wake the fragrances of heaven.

The only exceptions to this come on a few, rare occasions when the Lord Jesus gets angry, reminding us that there are times when it is appropriate for righteous anger to flow.

One of those occasions occurs when His disciples try to block some parents who are attempting to bring their very young children into the presence of Jesus the Christ. It is intriguing that, of all the things to bring sparks from our Lord, it was this mistake by his disciples of overlooking the importance of children that triggered this passion. There is much to be learned from this scene in Mark.

1. Our grown up stuff is not as important as we think it is

Tellingly, this confrontation (and, yes, the text indicates it was a confrontation) occurs in a chapter that begins with the Pharisees trying to corner the Lord Jesus into a debate about divorce. Following that brief discussion between Jesus and those who were emerging as His enemies, His disciples have some follow-up questions for their Master. It is as if they wanted to be “right” on the matter, theologically speaking. But judging from what happens next, their hearts may not have been truly concerned about the impact of divorce on men and women, and families, as much as they were concerned about just being “right.”

The reason I think the disciples had it all mixed up is seeing how they behaved when some families approached the Lord Jesus Christ, as described in Mark 10:13. These were moms and dads who were bringing very young children and desiring that their children be touched and blessed by Jesus. Sounds sweet, doesn't it? I know I would have wanted Him to bless my children!

His disciples didn't think it was so sweet. They saw it as a nuisance, something getting in the way of their important, grown up work. The disciples even had the nerve to scold these well-meaning parents. That is when the sparks flew! That is when Jesus let the disciples know that their agenda reflected very mistaken priorities.

2. God gives us kids not only for what we will teach them, but also for what they will teach us.

Our Lord became passionate when He saw the disciples rebuke these children and their parents. The Greek verb used here indicates the Lord Jesus experienced a flash of righteous anger and perhaps even frustration, and He likely raised His voice. Jesus let His disciples know that these approaching children had something to teach them.

As Mark 10:14 plays out, we hear our Lord firmly correct His disciples: "You better allow those children to come to Me, and you better not try to block them." Why? Because this kind of simple faith and trust flowing from the parents (that can also flow from the heart of a child) better illustrates how a human being is to approach a holy God than any adult behavior on display among the disciples in this particular scene. These children were excited about being with Jesus. These disciples were worried about their schedules, their ministry goals, and themselves. The Lord Jesus challenged them to understand this contrast. He challenged them to understand that there is a reason that the Bible calls God "the Father," and the Bible calls the saved person God's "child." And that reason is to emphasize His power, and our need—and to stimulate us to trust!

Sobering statistics tell us that if a young person is not saved by trusting in Jesus Christ has his or her Savior at a young age, the likelihood of the individual ever coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ drops dramatically as the individual advances in age. So, in this passage, the Lord Jesus reminds us that we must be like a trusting little child, and simply believe God's promises regarding eternal life. Adults complicate the offer by overanalyzing and often polluting it with their human efforts. Children understand what the word "gift" really means, and they know how to accept (and eagerly open and enjoy) a gift!

I think of my three children, and the feeling I would have when they would put their little hand in mine when we, for example, cross a busy street. Holding my hand conveys trust, and also that they were putting the responsibility of getting them safely across the street onto their daddy. But, we grow to an age when we no longer stick out our hand to grab dad's hand. Spiritually, may we never get to the point where we fail to grab and hang onto our Father's hand!

There are so many lessons we can learn from the trusting souls of children.

3. Children are a major priority in God's economy

As this scene closes out, the emotions on display in the humanity of our Savior transition back to the gentleness that we normally see in the gospels. Mark 10:16 is one of the “sweetest” verses in the Bible: *“And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.”* I’ve often tried to envision that scene, as the Creator and Savior of the world spent a few moments with each child, picking them up and hugging them! What did He say to them? What did their parents say? What did the children who were old enough to speak say to Jesus (hint from living with a career kindergarten teacher, my wife: there’s no telling what they said!)? Also, I wonder what became of those children whose experience on this day was forever preserved on the sacred pages of scripture. I would guess that the Lord’s blessing propelled them into spiritual life when they became old enough themselves to understand just who it was that they met on this day.

When I had my first child in 1994, I experienced a very sacred time. It felt like my heart was stretching within me, with new emotional chambers opening up. I wanted to cling to my newborn son. I didn’t want anything to happen to him...ever! God calmed me during those hours. He reassured me by letting me know that, as much as I loved my child, He—my child’s heavenly Father—loved him even more. The evidence: God the Father sent His only Son to die on the cross for our sins!

With the births of my second and third children, these same emotions softened my heart for God’s further instruction as to the significance of my children. My mentor spoke into my life, telling me, “John, God is giving you children not just for what you will teach them, but also for what they will teach you.” Again, this is one of the lessons that Jesus is giving us here in Mark 10. No, our children won’t lecture us and provide knowledge that we need, but our children will demonstrate truths that God wants us to understand about our relationship with Him! And our children will help us to experience and deal with emotions that God wants us to understand and to experience, so that we can better understand how He feels about us. This setup is yet another demonstration of our God’s majestic wisdom.

Moms, dads, grandparents, adults...listen up! As was the case in this scene from Luke 10, our society reflects a priority system that does not value children. Consider these painful questions:

- How much time do we actually spend focusing on our children’s emotional and spiritual growth?
- How much do we pay the teachers who spend nearly 200 days per year with our children?
- Why do hourly workers in a daycare receive less compensation than a delivery driver?
- Why do we often entrust the education of our children to godless school systems?
- Let’s go ahead and list another American travesty as well...why is it legal in our country to kill the unborn? It is because we parents are much like the disciples, caught up in our own stuff, our own importance, our own agendas.

Old Testament Bonus for Parents:

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them...” (Psalm 127:3-5a)

This passage sends a strong message from the Word of God about where children should rank in importance. My three children are my heritage of the LORD. They are a huge part of the “*grace of life*” bestowed upon couples (1 Peter 3:7). Their value is priceless, and, since they are in my family, I am wealthier than a multi-billionaire.

Since they are my heritage, and, metaphorically, arrows, they are designed to be shot out and will carry my name and the belief system that I instilled into them on out into the future long after I have gone to be with the Lord.

Children are very, very important in God’s economy.