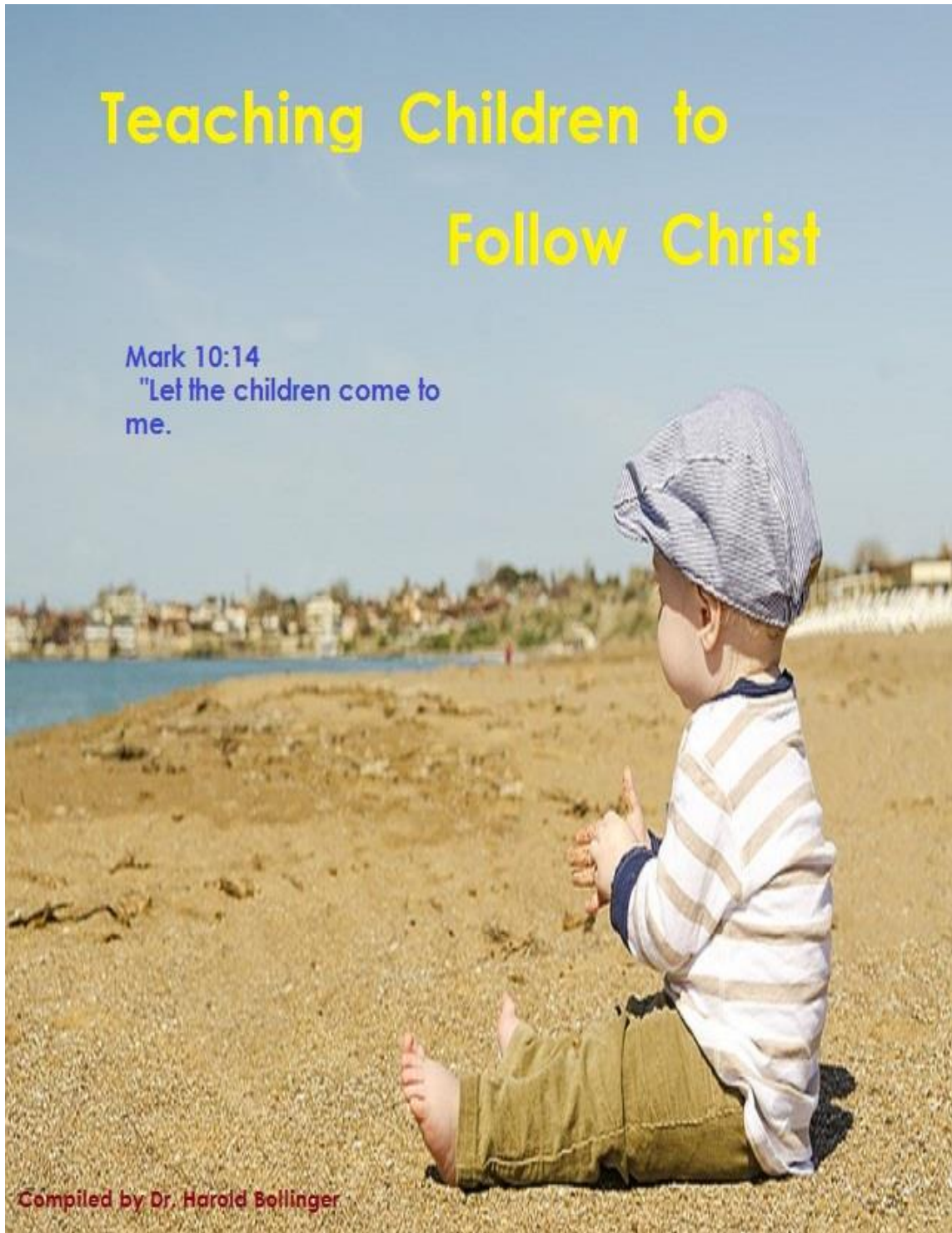


Teaching Children to Follow Christ

Mark 10:14
"Let the children come to
me."



Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger

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Forward

Jesus showed by example how to serve, but he also taught us how to serve. In the Sermon on the Mount he discussed how to serve others. Jesus knew that part of his leadership role as a servant required teaching others how to serve. In this study, we will focus on how we can effectively serve children.

God's blessings come in many forms, and Jesus told us we would be blessed when we obey, serve, and follow his example. It's important for kids to understand the biblical promises of rewards. However, it's equally important for them to know that wrong motives will get in the way of God's blessings. Jesus explains the criteria for receiving blessings

As teachers of any type will attest to family support is a huge and critical element in the upbringing of a child.

True, to a certain extent kids will do whatever they will and not all elements can be controlled; however, parents and guardians make such a difference in how children develop and what they learn. The home environment shapes and influences the school and church atmosphere for better or worse.

In some churches, children are isolated from the adults and at times have been treated as inferior to adults.

Never allow this to happen in your place of worship. The importance of children and young people in worship cannot be over emphasized.

Chapter 1



Teaching children to follow God.

Exodus 10:2

You will be able to tell wonderful stories to your children and grandchildren about the marvelous things I am doing among the Egyptians to prove that I am the Lord."

God told Moses that his miraculous experiences with Pharaoh should be retold to his descendants. What stories Moses had to tell! Living out one of the greatest dramas in Biblical history, he witnessed events few people would ever see. It is important to tell our children about God's work in our past and to help them see what he is doing right now. What are the turning points in your life where God intervened? What is God doing for you now? Your stories will form the foundations of your children's belief in God.

Deut. 6:7

Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.

The Hebrews were extremely successful at making religion an integral part of life. The reason for their success was that religious education was life-oriented, not information-oriented.

They used the context of daily life to teach about God. The key to teaching your children to love God is stated simply and clearly in these verses. If you want your children to follow God, you must make God a part of your everyday experiences. You must teach your children diligently to see God in all aspects of life, not just those that are church related.

Deut. 31:10-13

Then Moses gave them this command: "At the end of every seventh year, the Year of Release, during the Festival of Shelters, you must read this law to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the Lord your God at the place he chooses.

Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully obey all the terms of this law.

Do this so that your children who have not known these laws will hear them and will learn to fear the Lord your God. Do this as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy."

The laws were to be read to the whole assembly so that everyone, including the children, could hear them. Every seven years the entire nation would gather together and listen as a priest read the law to them.

There were no books, Bibles, or newsstands to spread God's word, so the people had to rely on word of mouth and an accurate memory. Memorization was an important part of worship because if everyone knew the law, ignorance would be no excuse for breaking it. To fulfill God's purpose and will in our lives, we need the content and substance of his Word in our hearts and minds.

For the Hebrews, this process began in childhood. Teaching our children and new believers should be one of our top priorities. Our finest teachers, best resources, and most careful thought should be directed toward showing young believers how to follow God in all life's situations.

Psalm 22:30-31

Future generations will also serve him.

Our children will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous act will be told to those yet unborn. They will hear about everything he has done.

Unborn generations are depending on our faithfulness today. As we teach our children about the Lord, so they will teach their children and their children's children.

If we fail to tell our children about the Lord, we may well be breaking the chain of God's influence in generations to come.

We must view our children and all the young people we meet as God's future leaders. If we are faithful in opportunities today, we may well be affecting the future.

If we want our children to serve the Lord, they must hear about him from us. It is not enough to rely on the church or those with more knowledge to provide all their Christian education. We must reinforce the lessons of the Bible in our homes.

Psalm 78:5

For he issued his decree to Jacob;
He gave his law to Israel.
He commanded our ancestors
To teach them to their children,

God commanded that the stories of his mighty acts in Israel's history and his laws be passed on from parents to children. This shows the purpose and importance of religious education—to help each generation obey God and set their hope on him. It is important to keep children from repeating the same mistakes as their ancestors. What are you doing to pass on the history of God's work to the next generation?

How children are affected by the sins of their parents.

Exodus 34:7

I show this unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Even so I do not leave sin unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations."

Moses had asked to see God's glory (Exodus 33:18), and this was God's response. What is God's glory? It is his character, his nature, and his way of relating to his creatures.

Notice that God did not give Moses a vision of his power and majesty, but rather of his love. God's glory is revealed in his mercy, grace, compassion, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice.

God's love and mercy are truly wonderful, and we benefit from them. We can respond and give glory to God when our characters resemble his.

Why would sins affect grandchildren and great-grandchildren? This is no arbitrary punishment. Children still suffer for the sins of their parents.

Consider child abuse or alcoholism, for example. While these sins are obvious, sins like selfishness and greed can be passed along as well.

The dire consequences of sin are not limited to the individual family member. Be careful not to treat sin casually, but repent and turn from it.

The sin may cause you little pain now, but it could sting in a most tender area of your life later—your children and grandchildren.

Chapter 2



Parent-child relationships.

Numbers 30:3-8;

"If a young woman makes a vow to the Lord or a pledge under oath while she is still living at her father's home, and her father hears of the vow or pledge but says nothing, then all her vows and pledges will stand.

But if her father refuses to let her fulfill the vow or pledge on the day he hears of it, then all her vows and pledges will become invalid. The Lord will forgive her because her father would not let her fulfill them.

"Now suppose a young woman takes a vow or makes an impulsive pledge and later marries. If her husband learns of her vow or pledge and raises no objections on the day he hears of it, her vows and pledges will stand.

But if her husband refuses to accept her vow or impulsive pledge on the day he hears of it, he nullifies her commitments, and the Lord will forgive her.

Under Israelite law, parents could overrule their children's vows. This helped young people avoid the consequences of making foolish promises or costly commitments. From this law comes an important principle for both parents and children.

Young people still living at home should seek their parents' help when they make decisions. A parent's experience could save a child from a serious mistake.

Parents, however, should exercise their authority with caution and grace. They should let children learn from their mistakes while protecting them from disaster.

1 Samuel 8:1-3

As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba.

But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice.

As an old man, Samuel appointed his sons to be judges over Israel in his place. But they turned out to be corrupt, much like Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:12). We don't know why Samuel's sons went wrong, but we do know that Eli was held responsible for his own sons' corruption (1 Samuel 2:29-34).

It is impossible to know if Samuel was a bad parent. His children were old enough to be on their own. We must be careful not to blame ourselves for the sins of our children.

On the other hand, parenthood is an awesome responsibility, and nothing is more important than molding and shaping our children's lives. If your grown children are not following God, realize that you can't control them any longer.

Don't blame yourself for something that is no longer your responsibility. But if your children are still in your care, know that what you do and teach can profoundly affect your children and lasts a lifetime.

Ephes. 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise.

And this is the promise: If you honor your father and mother, "you will live a long life, full of blessing."

And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

There is a difference between obeying and honoring. To obey means to do as one is told; to honor means to respect and love. Children are not commanded to disobey God in obeying their parents.

Adult children are not asked to be subservient to domineering parents. Children are to obey while under their parents' care, but the responsibility to honor parents is for life.

If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself at home, in our relationships with those who know us best. Children and parents have a responsibility to each other.

Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding and unfair. Parents should care gently for their children, even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant.

Ideally, of course, Christian parents and Christian children will relate to each other with thoughtfulness and love. This will happen if both parents and children put the others' interests above their own—that is, if they submit to one another.

Some societies honor their elders. They respect their wisdom, defer to their authority, and pay attention to their comfort and happiness. This is how Christians should act. Where elders are respected, long life is a blessing, not a burden to them.

The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate and provoke them to anger or discouragement (see also Col. 3:21).

Parenting is not easy—it takes lots of patience to raise children in a loving, Christ-honoring manner. But frustration and anger should not be causes for discipline. Instead, parents should act in love, treating their children as Jesus treats the people he loves.

This is vital to children's development and to their understanding of what Christ is like.

Children economic advantage in ancient culture

1 Samuel 1:6

But Peninnah made fun of Hannah because the Lord had closed her womb.

Hannah had been unable to conceive children, and in Old Testament times, a childless woman was considered a failure. Her barrenness was a social embarrassment for her husband.

Children were a very important part of the society's economic structure. They were a source of labor for the family, and it was their duty to care for their parents in their old age. If a wife could not bear children she was often obligated, by ancient Middle Eastern custom, to give one of her servant girls to her husband to bear children for her.

Although Elkanah could have left Hannah (a husband was permitted to divorce a barren wife), he remained lovingly devoted to her despite social criticism and his rights under civil law.

Is it ever right for children to disobey parents?

1 Samuel 19:1-2

Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his close friendship with David, told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields.

Is it ever right to disobey your father, as Jonathan did here? It is clearly a principle of Scripture that when a father instructs a son to break God's laws, the son should obey God rather than man.

This principle assumes that the son is old enough to be accountable and to see through any deception. A son's role is to be respectful, helpful, and obedient to his father (Ephes. 6:1-3), but not to follow commands or advice that violate God's laws.

Why David's sin caused his child to die.

2 Samuel 12:14

But you have given the enemies of the Lord great opportunity to despise and blaspheme him, so your child will die."

During this incident, David wrote Psalm 51, giving valuable insight into his character and offering hope for us as well. No matter how miserable guilt makes you feel or how terribly you have sinned, you can pour out your heart to God and seek his forgiveness as David did.

There is forgiveness for us when we sin. David also wrote Psalm 32 to express the joy he felt after he was forgiven.

David confessed and repented of his sin (2 Samuel 12:13), but God's judgment was that his child would die. The consequences of David's sin were irreversible. Sometimes an apology isn't enough.

When God forgives us and restores our relationship with him, he doesn't eliminate all the consequences of our wrongdoing.

We may be tempted to say, "If this is wrong, I can always apologize to God," but we must remember that we may set into motion events with irreversible consequences.

Why did this child have to die? This was not a judgment on the child for being conceived out of wedlock, but a judgment on David for his sin.

David and Bathsheba deserved to die, but God spared their lives and took the child instead. God still had work for David to do in building the kingdom. Perhaps the child's death was a greater punishment for David than his own death would have been.

It is also possible that had the child lived, God's name would have been dishonored among Israel's pagan neighbors. What would they have thought of a God who rewards murder and adultery by giving a king a new heir?

A baby's death is tragic, but despising God brings death to entire nations. While God readily forgave David's sin, he did not negate all its consequences.

Preparing children to fulfill God's call.

1 Chron. 22:7-10

"I wanted to build a Temple to honor the name of the Lord my God," David told him.

"But the Lord said to me, 'You have killed many men in the great battles you have fought. And since you have shed so much blood before me, you will not be the one to build a Temple to honor my name.

But you will have a son who will experience peace and rest. I will give him peace with his enemies in all the surrounding lands. His name will be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel during his reign.

He is the one who will build a Temple to honor my name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

Deut. 31:10-13

Then Moses gave them this command: "At the end of every seventh year, the Year of Release, during the Festival of Shelters, you must read this law to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the Lord your God at the place he chooses.

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To fulfill God's purpose and will in our lives, we need the content and substance of his Word in our hearts and minds. For the Hebrews, this process began in childhood. Teaching our children and new believers should be one of our top priorities.

Our finest teachers, best resources, and most careful thought should be directed toward showing young believers how to follow God in all life's situations.

Chapter 3



Children are a blessing from God.

Psalm 127:3-5

Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like sharp arrows in a warrior's hands. How happy is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

Too often children are seen as liabilities rather than assets. But the Bible calls children “a heritage from the LORD,” a reward. We can learn valuable lessons from their inquisitive minds and trusting spirits. Those who view children as a distraction or nuisance should instead see them as an opportunity to shape the future. We dare not treat children as an inconvenience when God values them so highly.

Discipline of children

1 Kings 1:6

Now his father, King David, had never disciplined him at any time, even by asking, "What are you doing?" Adonijah was a very handsome man and had been born next after Absalom.

God-fearing people like David and Samuel were used by God to lead nations, but nevertheless they had problems in family relationships. God-fearing leaders cannot take for granted the spiritual well-being of their children.

They are used to having others follow their orders, but they cannot expect their children to manufacture faith upon request. Moral and spiritual character takes years to build, and it requires constant attention and patient discipline.

David served God well as a king, but as a parent he often failed both God and his children. Don't let your service to God even in leadership positions take up so much of your time and energy that you neglect your other God-given responsibilities.

Because David had never interfered by opposing or even questioning his son, Adonijah did not know how to work within limits.

The result was that he always wanted his own way, regardless of how it affected others. Adonijah did whatever he wanted and paid no respect to God's wishes. An undisciplined child may look cute to his or her parents, but an undisciplined adult destroys himself and others.

As you set limits for your children, you make it possible for them to develop the self-restraint they will need in order to control themselves later. Discipline your children carefully while they are young, so that they will grow into self-disciplined adults.

Proverbs 13:24

If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don't love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.

It is not easy for a loving parent to discipline a child, but it is necessary. The greatest responsibility that God gives parents is the nurture and guidance of their children. Lack of discipline puts parents' love in question because it shows a lack of concern for the character development of their children.

Disciplining children averts long-range disaster. Without correction, children grow up with no clear understanding of right and wrong and with little direction to their lives.

Don't be afraid to discipline your children. It is an act of love. Remember, however, that your efforts cannot make your children wise; they can only encourage your children to seek God's wisdom above all else!

Avoid complaining in front of children

2 Chron. 10:14

And followed the counsel of his younger advisers. He told the people, "My father was harsh on you, but I'll be even harsher! My father used whips on you, but I'll use scorpions!"

After Solomon's death, the northern tribes revolt, and we read little more about them in 2 Chronicles. The remainder of 2 Chronicles recounts the alternating periods of apostasy and reform in Judah.

In the end, Judah would not turn from its sin, and the tragic result was a 70-year captivity in Babylon. Sin in our lives will also lead to judgment

and devastation. Although God's judgment may seem slow, it is nevertheless certain.

The crowning of an Israelite king would normally have taken place in Jerusalem, the capital city. But Rehoboam saw that there was the possibility of trouble in the north; so to maintain his hold on the country, he chose Shechem, a city about 35 miles north of Jerusalem. Shechem was an ancient site for making covenants (Joshua 24:1).

Importance of obeying God at an early age

2 Kings 22:1-2

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath.

He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn aside from doing what was right.

Pray for the children

Job 1:5

When these celebrations ended—and sometimes they lasted several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular practice.

It is not known for sure, but Job probably lived during the days of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) before God gave his written law or appointed priests to be religious leaders.

During Job's day, the father was the family's religious leader. Because there were no priests to instruct him in God's laws, Job acted as the priest and offered sacrifices to God to ask for forgiveness for sins he and his family had committed.

This demonstrated that Job did not consider himself sinless. Job did this out of conviction and love for God, not just because it was his role as head of the house. Do you carry out your spiritual duties because they are expected, or spontaneously from a heart of devotion?

Job showed deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his children. Fearful that they might have sinned unknowingly, he offered sacrifices for them.

Parents today can show the same concern by praying for their children. This means "sacrificing" some time each day to ask God to forgive them, to help them grow, to protect them, and to help them please him.

Chapter 4



Encouraging children to follow wisdom.

Proverbs 4:3-4

For I, too, was once my father's son, tenderly loved by my mother as an only child.

My father told me, "Take my words to heart. Follow my instructions and you will live.

One of the greatest responsibilities of parents is to encourage their children to become wise. Here Solomon tells how his father, David, encouraged him to seek wisdom when he was young ("tender") (see 1 Kings 2:1-9 and 1 Chron. 28-29 for David's charge to his son).

This encouragement may have prompted Solomon to ask God for a discerning heart above everything else (1 Kings 3:9). Wisdom can be passed on from parents to children, from generation to generation.

Ultimately, of course, all wisdom comes from God; parents can only urge their children to turn to him.

If your parents never taught you in this way, God's Word can function as a loving and compassionate mother or father to you. You can learn from the Scriptures and then create a legacy of wisdom as you teach your own children.

Teaching children to make their own choices.

Proverbs 22:6

Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.

“In the way he should go” is literally, “according to his [the child's] way.” It is natural to want to bring up all our children alike or train them the same way.

This verse implies that parents should discern the individuality and special strengths that God has given each one.

While we should not condone or excuse self-will, each child has natural inclinations that parents can develop. By talking to teachers, other parents, and grandparents, we can better discern and develop the individual capabilities of each child.

Many parents want to make all the choices for their child, but this hurts him or her in the long run. When parents teach a child how to make decisions, they don't have to watch every step he or she takes.

They know their children will remain on the right path because they have made the choice themselves. Train your children to choose the right way.

Teaching children life's lessons you've learned.

Joel 1:3

Tell your children about it in the years to come. Pass the awful story down from generation to generation.

God urged parents to pass their history down to their children, telling over and over the important lessons they learned. One of the greatest gifts you can give younger people is your life's story to help them repeat your successes and avoid your mistakes.

Hard for parents to let their children go.

Luke 2:48

His parents didn't know what to think. "Son!" his mother said to him. "Why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."

Mary had to let go of her child and let him become a man, God's Son, the Messiah.

Fearful that she hadn't been careful enough with this God-given child, she searched frantically for him. But she was looking for a boy, not the young man who was in the temple astounding the religious leaders with his questions.

It is hard to let go of people or projects we have nurtured. It is both sweet and painful to see our children as adults, our students as teachers, our subordinates as managers, our inspirations as institutions.

But when the time comes to step back and let go, we must do so in spite of the hurt. Then our proteges can exercise their wings, take flight, and soar to the heights God intended for them.

Jesus welcomed the children.

Mark 9:36-37

Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,

"Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes my Father who sent me."

Jesus taught the disciples to welcome children. This was a new approach in a society where children were usually treated as second-class citizens.

It is important not only to treat children well, but also to teach them about Jesus. Children's ministries should never be regarded as less important than those for adults.

Having faith like a child.

Mark 10:14

But when Jesus saw what was happening, he was very displeased with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Jesus was often criticized for spending too much time with the wrong people—children, tax collectors, and sinners (Matthew 9:11; Luke 15:1-2; Luke 19:7).

Some, including the disciples, thought Jesus should be spending more time with important leaders and the devout, because this was the way to improve his position and avoid criticism. But Jesus didn't need to improve his position. He was God, and he wanted to speak to those who needed him most.

Adults are not as trusting as little children. To feel secure, all children need is a loving look and gentle touch from someone who cares. Complete intellectual understanding is not one of their requirements.

They believe us if they trust us. Jesus said that people should believe in him with this kind of childlike faith. We should not have to understand all the mysteries of the universe; it should be enough to know that God loves us and provides forgiveness for our sin.

This doesn't mean that we should be childish or immature, but we should trust God with a child's simplicity and receptivity.

Being childlike versus childish.

Matthew 18:1-4

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Which of us is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a small child over to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

From Mark's Gospel we learn that Jesus precipitated this conversation by asking the disciples what they had been discussing among themselves earlier (Mark 9:33-34).

Jesus used a child to help his self-centered disciples get the point. We are not to be *childish* (like the disciples, arguing over petty issues), but rather *childlike*, with humble and sincere hearts. Are you being childlike or childish?

The disciples had become so preoccupied with the organization of Jesus' earthly kingdom that they had lost sight of its divine purpose. Instead of seeking a place of service, they sought positions of advantage.

It is easy to lose our eternal perspective and compete for promotions or status in the church. It is difficult to identify with "children"—weak and dependent people with no status or influence.

Chapter 5



Our responsibility to instruct children in faith

Matthew 18:6

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who trust in me to lose faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck.

Children are trusting by nature. They trust adults, and through that trust their capacity to trust God grows. God holds parents and other adults who influence young children accountable for how they affect these little ones' ability to trust. Jesus warned that anyone who turns little children away from faith will receive severe punishment.

Matthew 18:7

"How terrible it will be for anyone who causes others to sin. Temptation to do wrong is inevitable, but how terrible it will be for the person who does the tempting.

Jesus warned the disciples about two ways to cause “little ones” to sin: tempting them (Matthew 18:7-9) and neglecting or demeaning them (Matthew 18:10-14).

As leaders, we are to help young people or new believers avoid anything or anyone that could cause them to stumble in their faith and lead them to sin. We must never take lightly the spiritual education and protection of the young in age and in the faith.

Matthew 18:14

In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.

Just as a shepherd is concerned enough about one lost sheep to go search the hills for it, so God is concerned about every human being he has created (he is “not wanting anyone to perish,” 2 Peter 3:9).

You come in contact with children who need Christ at home, at school, in church, and in the neighborhood. Steer them toward Christ by your example, your words, and your acts of kindness

2 Tim. 3:15

They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.

Timothy was one of the first second-generation Christians: he became a Christian not because an evangelist preached a powerful sermon, but because his mother and grandmother taught him the Holy Scriptures when he was a small child (2 Tim. 1:5). A parent's work is vitally important. At home and in church, we should realize that teaching small children is both an opportunity and a responsibility. Jesus wanted little children to come to him (Matthew 19:13-15). Like Timothy's mother

and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, do your part in leading children to Christ.

For Timothy, the “holy Scriptures” was the Old Testament—Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament is important because it points to Jesus Christ. At the same time, faith in Christ makes the whole Bible intelligible.

Assessing your attitude toward children

Matthew 18:10

"Beware that you don't despise a single one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.

Our concern for children must match God's treatment of them. Certain angels are assigned to watch over children, and they have direct access to God.

These words ring out sharply in cultures where children are taken lightly, ignored, or aborted. If their angels have constant access to God, the least we can do is to allow children to approach us easily in spite of our far too busy schedules.

Children have the kind of attitude needed to approach God.

Matthew 19:13-15

Some children were brought to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples told them not to bother him. [14] But Jesus said,

"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." And he put his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.

The disciples must have forgotten what Jesus had said about children (Matthew 18:4-6). Jesus wanted little children to come because he loves them and because they have the kind of attitude needed to approach God.

He didn't mean that heaven is only for children, but that people need childlike attitudes of trust in God. The receptiveness of little children was a great contrast to the stubbornness of the religious leaders who let their education and sophistication stand in the way of the simple faith needed to believe in Jesus.

God's will for children versus parents' will for them.

Matthew 20:20

Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor.

The mother of James and John came to Jesus and "kneeling down, asked a favor of him." She gave Jesus worship, but her real motive was to get something from him.

Too often this happens in our churches and in our lives. We play religious games, expecting God to give us something in return. True worship, however, adores and praises Christ for who he is and for what he has done.

The mother of James and John asked Jesus to give her sons special positions in his kingdom. Parents naturally want to see their children

promoted and honored, but this desire is dangerous if it causes them to lose sight of God's specific will for their children.

God may have different work in mind—not as glamorous, but just as important. Thus parents' desires for their children's advancement must be held in check as they pray that God's will be done in their children's lives.

According to Matthew 27:56, the mother of James and John was at the cross when Jesus was crucified. Some have suggested that she was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A close family relationship could have prompted her to make this request for her sons.

Chapter 6



Importance of the children to God

Acts 23:16-22

And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on the name of the Lord.'

"One day after I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple, and I fell into a trance. I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't believe you when you give them your testimony about me.'

“‘But Lord,' I argued, 'they certainly know that I imprisoned and beat those in every synagogue who believed on you. And when your witness Stephen was killed, I was standing there agreeing. I kept the coats they laid aside as they stoned him.'

"But the Lord said to me, 'Leave Jerusalem, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!' "

The crowd listened until Paul came to that word; then with one voice they shouted, "Away with such a fellow! Kill him! He isn't fit to live!"

This is the only Biblical reference to Paul's family. Some scholars believe that Paul's family had disowned Paul when he became a Christian. Paul wrote of having suffered the loss of everything for Christ (Phil. 3:8).

Paul's nephew was able to see Paul, even though Paul was in protective custody, because Roman prisoners were accessible to their relatives and friends who could bring them food and other amenities.

It is easy to overlook children, assuming that they aren't old enough to do much for the Lord. But a young boy played an important part in protecting Paul's life. God can use anyone, of any age, who is willing to yield to him.

Jesus made it clear that children are important (Matthew 18:2-6). Give children the importance God gives them.

Purpose of parental discipline

Ephes. 6:4

And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself at home, in our relationships with those who know us best. Children and parents have a responsibility to each other.

Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding and unfair. Parents should care gently for their children, even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant. Ideally, of course, Christian parents and Christian children will relate to each other with thoughtfulness and love.

This will happen if both parents and children put the others' interests above their own—that is, if they submit to one another.

Some societies honor their elders. They respect their wisdom, defer to their authority, and pay attention to their comfort and happiness. This is how Christians should act. Where elders are respected, long life is a blessing, not a burden to them.

The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate and provoke them to anger or discouragement (see also Col. 3:21).

Parenting is not easy—it takes lots of patience to raise children in a loving, Christ-honoring manner. But frustration and anger should not be causes for discipline.

Instead, parents should act in love, treating their children as Jesus treats the people he loves. This is vital to children's development and to their understanding of what Christ is like.

Believers are God's children.

1 John 3:1

See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don't know God, so they don't understand that we are his children.

As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us his children. We are his children *now*, not just sometime in the distant future. Knowing that we are his children should encourage us to live as Jesus did. For other references about being part of God's family, see Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-27; Galatians 4:6-7.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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