

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO US!



Scripture:

Psalm 128

¹Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways. ²You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. ⁴Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

⁵The LORD bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. ⁶May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Mark 10: 13-16

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO US

It all started with a child didn't it? Well, you could say it all started with God and Mary. But the ministry of Jesus all started with him as a child. The angels announced the child's birth. The shepherds left their fields to see him. The Magi brought gifts. King Herod sent killers. Heaven and angels sang, all because of the child.

Why a child? Have you ever wondered? Why did God choose to come to earth as a child? If God came to show us how to follow the way of love in action, then why didn't God come to earth already grown up and ready to lead the building up of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven?

God loves children. What better way is there to show us that God understands all the struggles we go through in every stage of our lives, but by experiencing them personally as a child who went through all the developmental stages just as each of

us did? God can relate to all we have to go through in life.

The infant God cried out with hunger pains and knew the comfort of suckling at his mother's breast. God even went through the awkward stages of development. He might have had a clumsy stage or even acne! We don't know. But we do know he learned the trade of carpentry as a youngster to help his father, Joseph, in his business.

THE LIFE OF A CHILD IS PRECIOUS

We don't know much about the childhood of Jesus, but we do know that it was important to God to come to earth in the form of a child. God wanted us to know the life of a child is precious.

There's a story about a young soldier in the Union Army who needed to get exemption from the army to help his mother following the loss of his brother and father in the battle of Gettysburg. He decided to go and ask for help from President

Lincoln, but he couldn't get past security at the White House. Dejected, he sat on a bench in the park. A boy noticed he was sad and sat with him. He asked the man what was wrong. The man told him, and the boy said, "I can help you soldier; follow me."

The boy led him up to the White House, through the gates, past security, through the offices, into the Oval Office and right up to the desk of the President. The President peered at the boy and said, "What do you want, Todd?" The little boy replied, "This man needs to talk to you, daddy." The soldier pled his case before President Lincoln, and right then and there he received the help that he desperately needed. And all this happened due to the child-like trust of the President's son.

Children are naturally trusting until they learn to mistrust.

KIDS HAD HARD LIVES

In the days of Jesus, kids had very hard lives. Their birthdays were not celebrated because they were not expected to live long. Many were treated like property and sold as slaves. Sadly this still happens in some countries today where children are sold to serve in wealthier families. The Roman army was ruthless and often they would capture a child to work as a slave if a family didn't pay their taxes. Many children died young due to diseases and malnutrition. If they made it to age ten, then their average life expectancy during the Roman era was about forty years old.

People dismissed the importance of children in the days of Jesus. They did not invest in their development or education like we do today. Yet Jesus knew they were important. In the Old Testament scriptures Proverbs 22: 6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Jesus also remembered that the Prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 54:13, "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children."

JESUS HEALED MANY CHILDREN

Then we see Jesus healing many children during his years of ministry. He didn't just save his healing power for adults. He cured the nobleman's son, healed the widow's son and the ruler's daughter, cured a boy plagued by seizures and he fed five-

thousand with the help of a small boy who shared his fish and loaves,

In Acts 2, Luke writes that Peter taught the disciples that the Holy Spirit was promised by Christ not just to them, but the power of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus to their children and to people in distant lands.

Yet even now in our era, the contribution of children to the world is still devalued. Disabled children are often viewed as less valuable than able bodied kids.

**But every child is precious.
Every child no matter if they can clearly
contribute to society or not
is treasured in the eyes of God.**

A HUGE IMPACT

From working in the hospital as a pediatric nurse and with a husband who is a Pediatrician/researcher, together we have seen many cases where a child's life has had a huge impact on others even if they live just few days or years.

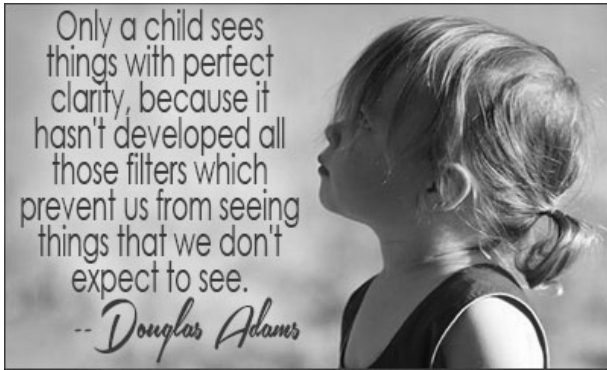
Children can contribute to our spiritual lives in many ways as well when we give them respect and listen to their wisdom. The purity of children's faith is uncluttered by adult skepticism and analytical thinking.

Kids tend to have a pure faith and a natural awe and wonder for the world.

Here are a few quotes that explain the ability for children to be pure in their faith in God.



“The child must know that he is a miracle, that since the beginning of the world there hasn’t been, and until the end of the world there will not be, another child like him.” – Pablo Casals



WHY?

So why did the disciples want to stop the children coming to Jesus? Were they trying to protect his time and space so he would have energy for them? We don’t have an explanation for why Jesus’ disciples turn the children away, except that they tell them “not to bother him.” Perhaps they think Jesus’ message is too important for children, a serious message for serious people, too precious to be wasted on parents bringing babies to the rabbi as some kind of religious ritual for happiness and prosperity.

But they miss the point that Jesus’ message is for all. It’s not just for the childlike, it’s for children: children who, in Jesus’ society, were not given value or status, children who were largely ignored as unimportant until they came of age as adults.

In the upside-down values of Jesus’ Kingdom, the gospel is good news first for the poor, for the ignored, for the disenfranchised. As Jesus welcomes children he gives them status, he notices them, he tells them the greatest honor of all, the Kingdom, is theirs.

He said, “The proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored.”

At its simplest level, this story tells us that Jesus loves and welcomes and blesses children, and so should we. If the gospel is good news at all, it must be good news for the poor. And wherever there is poverty, children are the most vulnerable, the most

abused, and the most at risk of becoming conscripted child soldiers and child-slaves. It’s a tragic fact that about one third of the world’s children live in extreme poverty. Thirty-thousand children will die in (and from) poverty today, just like yesterday, and just like tomorrow. One child dies every three seconds, largely from preventable causes, rooted in poverty.

A HERO

I have a few heroes that I look up to. One of my heroes, who was a poet peacemaker, died at age thirteen. President Carter gave the eulogy at his funeral. He said, “Rose and I have known kings and queens. We’ve known presidents and prime ministers. But the most extraordinary person whom I have ever known in my life was Mattie Stepanek.”

Not every child can temporarily overcome the troubles caused by muscular dystrophy the way Mattie did. But when a child does, it teaches the rest of us that faith in God which empowers an optimistic attitude towards suffering makes a huge difference for overcoming challenges.

The congregation was shown a short video about this amazing child who embodied Christ in his little disabled body.

Jesus said, “Do not hinder them; let the little children come to me.” We have much to learn from all kinds of children about faith, hope, and love. Let us always listen and cherish the children because such as these belong to the kingdom of God. Amen



Benediction: Mattie Stepanek wrote a poem to address the shock he felt from the 9/11 tragedies. Let us listen to Mattie's voice reminding us to make peace, not war.

FOR OUR WORLD

We need to stop.
Just stop.
Stop for a moment...
Before anybody
Says or does anything
That may hurt anyone else.
We need to be silent.
Just silent.
Silent for a moment...
Before we forever lose
The blessing of songs
That grow in our hearts.
We need to notice.
Just notice.
Notice for a moment...
Before the future slips away
Into ashes and dust of humility.
Stop, be silent, and notice...
In so many ways, we are the same.
Our differences are unique treasures.
We have, we are, a mosaic of gifts
To nurture, to offer, to accept.
We need to be.
Just be.
Be for a moment...
Kind and gentle, innocent and trusting,
Like children and lambs,
Never judging or vengeful
Like the judging and vengeful.
And now, let us pray,
Differently, yet together,
Before there is no earth, no life,
No change for peace.

*Mattie J. T. Stepanek
September 11, 2001
www.mattieonline.com*

*[Hope Through Heartsongs (Hyperion, 2002)]
[Just Peace: A Message of Hope (AMP, 2006)]*



And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forever more. Amen



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