

Like a Child

8 March 2024



Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Mark 10:15 (ESV)

This verse is one of the most quoted in discipling conversations, corporate prayer, and preaching in the life of the church. The simplicity of what Jesus was teaching speaks for itself.

The Bible teaches that God is a good and gracious Father, and He does not want anything to hinder the work of His written Word and His life-giving Spirit in bringing human beings to repentance and faith in Jesus (Mark 1:15, ESV), so that we can be born again as sons and daughter of God (John 3:3-8, ESV); becoming His children (1 John 3:1, ESV).

Despite this verse being so often referred to, I believe there is more to it than at first seems apparent. If we dig a bit, there's some treasure here.

Receiving Like a Child

What is clear from the simply stunning news in Mark 10:15 is that the Kingdom of God is received, not achieved.

Like a child who excitedly receives the gift of their first doll, bicycle or basketball, the Kingdom of God is likewise to be joyfully received by all who will repent and believe.

Unlike a little boy or girl who drops hints about which present they want, or does chores in order to

please their parents so that they will get into their 'good books', the Bible teaches us that our sin has disqualified us from achieving salvation by declaring us dead in our sin, and so the offer is there to become like a child and joyfully receive the offer of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, resulting in us coming alive in Him by faith, all because of His mercy and grace towards us in Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-9, ESV).

So let's be childlike in the sense that we are receivers of salvation.

Growing Like a Child

The New Testament places a heavy emphasis on growth and maturity in our spiritual lives. In some ways, we are not to remain as children but to grow up into adulthood.

'When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways'. (1 Corinthians 13:11, ESV)

But I don't believe this emphasis is at odds with Jesus' words to us in Mark 10:15. That's because children are not just eager receivers (read: every time there is something sugary to be consumed) but also expert growers.

As a father, I've been amazed at and captivated by our children's capacity for growth, and how questioning, listening, asking, adventuring, failing, doing and succeeding are woven into their make-up. This hit home several years ago when I took my then-four-year-old daughter with me to the gym one day. As we pulled into the gym parking lot, out popped one of those questions from the back seat that never ceases to amaze.

'Dad, who made God?'

We had been speaking about Noah and God because we had just seen a rainbow, but what a great question for anyone to ask! These sorts of questions are typical of children discovering how the world works. That question was a doorway, an entry point, into a journey of discovering and exploring the answer together as she began to experience and understand who Jesus is, what He has done for her, and the life He is inviting her to enjoy in Him.

An Invitation

I see great value in reading Mark 10:15 as an invitation into a lifetime journey of childlike growth and discovery of God's eternal Kingdom.

Children Are Trusting

God wants us, likewise, to be people of faith (Hebrews 11:6). People who take Him at His word and believe what He says about life and godly living (2 Peter 1:3).

Children Are Passionate and Emotional

So was Jesus! Let's be more like Him in passionately pursuing God's Kingdom purposes while

encountering His love that heals our emotions and sets us free to live, not just exist, along the way.

Children Are Always Asking

Always! And in prayer, so should we – persistently asking the Father for His will to be done in and through our lives (Luke 18:1-8). Asking that He would use us as ambassadors of the Kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:20), bringing the reconciling ministry of Jesus to our neighbourhoods and nations.

Children Are Always Learning

Likewise, the life of a disciple is a life of learning to submit one's entire life to Jesus' lordship (Mark 12:28-34). Learning about who God is and what He is like. Learning what pleases Him and what doesn't. In many ways, to cease to learn is to cease to live.

Children Love Stories

They cherish having stories read and told to them, and, boy, do they love telling stories. God knows this and wants us to become like children in the sense that we understand that our lives are now caught up in His Great Story, and that we are now telling His story to others together with Him and, in the process, writing it. How incredible is that?

Children Are Dreamers

Danny MacAskill is one of my son's mountain biking heroes. You can see the wonder on his face as he watches YouTube videos of his hero, and then hits the streets, dreaming of replicating what he now believes is possible.

As T.E. Lawrence famously said, let's be "dreamers of the day", dreaming with God to advance His kingdom with childlike faith.

'All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.' (T. E. Lawrence)

When Jesus said in Mark 10:14-15 that the Kingdom of God is to be received like a child, I believe He was offering an invitation into so much more than we initially thought! Let's receive His Kingdom like children, and then enter into it, growing up in our faith, like children exploring and discovering the world: God's world.