

Like Children

David Flatt

Jesus frequently commanded disciples to become like children. For example, Jesus was once asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom?” In response, Jesus called for a child to be brought to Him. Once a child was brought before the crowd, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:3-6).

As an adult and parent, this instruction is puzzling. We teach our children with the goal of them becoming responsible, independent adults. We train them to become mature in their thinking. We look forward to the day when our children can take care of themselves. Likewise, Jesus wants us to become strong and mature. Why, then, would Jesus command us to become like children?

While there are many reasons to rear children in the direction of maturity, there are also qualities they possess as children that are absolutely pure. We will consider some of the exemplary traits of children.

1). Children have no pride. Children act without ego. They have little to no regard for how others perceive them. This is why they have parents! Adults are just the opposite. Selfish ambition may cause us to act harshly toward others. Or, pride may cause us to worry about how others perceive us. Self-image and status are important to us. The issue of greatness in the kingdom constantly surfaced among Jesus’ disciples. Jesus redefines greatness.

If we want to become part of God’s kingdom, we must seek to remove our pride. Jesus did not act in self-interest but in the best interest of others. Jesus’ kingdom is about self-giving love and service, not self-promotion: “...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45).

Children best illustrate humility. They have no status. They depend on their parents for everything. Their parents teach them to serve and obey. As adults, we must learn such humility. The apostle Paul wrote, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3-5).

2). Children imitate their parents. As parents, this is a frightening reality! Children imitate what they see in us. They are a reflection of us. They mimic our mannerisms and speech. Little boys want to be like their daddies and little girls want to be like their mommas. Of course,

Jesus wants us to imitate the Father. Trying to be like God is overwhelming. He is divine and we are human. Yet, being like Him is made possible through the example of Jesus. The self-giving love of Jesus shows us how to be like God: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1-2)

Jesus was not just like God. Jesus was God. Jesus displayed all the qualities of our good God for us to follow His steps. The apostle Peter wrote, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Like little children, we must imitate the example of Jesus to become like our heavenly Father.

3). Children are trusting. Children are deeply trusting of their parents. Children believe what their parents tell them. They find security in the care of their parents. Of course, Jesus labored to persuade people to believe who He was and trust what He taught. Jesus’ character was impeccable. His message was intended for our good. Therefore, He was trustworthy.

Faith is the only path to the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “...You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (John 8:23-24). The childlike belief Jesus commands is such that trusts His teaching and promises.

4). Children receive protection. Children need the protection of their parents. They are entirely dependent on the care and security of their parents. Jesus issued a warning to anyone who would cause one of His children to sin. There is no hope for someone who harms a child of God. Jesus promises to protect and avenge His Father’s children.

The protection of our Father is one reason to trust Him. The apostle Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Tim. 1:12). Paul entrusted his soul to the protection of God. No matter what he endured in life, God would justly avenge Paul’s soul.

Conclusion

As adult disciples, we must seek to recapture a childlike heart. The kingdom of God has no room for pride, ego, and pretense. We must diminish our ego with humility. We must never lose sight of the fact that without Jesus, we are nothing.

Instead of imitating the values of worldliness, we must seek to be like Jesus. This requires we look away from the world and fix our eyes on Jesus. Once our eyes are set on Jesus, we can begin to follow in the footsteps of faith. Jesus will safely lead us home.