

Passages like this (Mark 10: 13—16) allow us to say as a matter of fact that Jesus loved children. He went out of his way to spend time with them. Ever since, His Church has tried to do the same. The Church’s desire to “receive the little ones” has given birth to Christian Day Schools, Christian Preschools, and Christian Sunday Schools, not to mention all kinds of groups and activities. Simply put, a Church that does not serve its children ignores the way Jesus conducted his business, and risks losing its future.

However, Jesus doesn’t point to a child in order to say, “You guys really ought to start a Christian School.” He does it to say, “This child could school you guys. You’ve got to have what this child has.” I don’t think I can overstate how weird this would’ve sounded to the adults of Jesus’ time. And truth be told, even though children enjoy rights and privileges these days that would’ve been unthinkable in the Biblical era, it still sounds pretty weird to us, too. There’s a reason for that. The gospel always sounds strange, because nothing else works the way it does.

Mark tell us what led up to this moment. Jesus’ disciples had been arguing the question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God?” Now, people do this all the time: From greatest baseball player to greatest president; from greatest singer to greatest school—we concern ourselves with who is number one, which is almost always based on high performance. The disciples were doing this with themselves, trying to establish a pecking order of some sort. Worse yet, they were preventing people from bringing children to Jesus, thinking maybe that this was a waste of time, or beneath Jesus somehow. So Jesus became indignant, which sounds very civilized, but means he was angry and annoyed. Why? Because, the gospel was at stake. He says, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

What in the world was Jesus talking about? This is a proclamation of the gospel, this is challenging news but great news, and it all hinges on what Jesus meant by “receiving the kingdom of God like a child.” What is Jesus getting at?

Let’s think for a minute. What would you say is the biggest difference between children and adults?

There are plenty of ways to answer that question, of course. One of the biggest differences between children and adults is control. Control over their lives. Adults have it. Children don’t. As I mentioned before, in the culture of Jesus’ time, children had even less control over their lives than they do now. Roman citizens—fathers of the household, in particular—had the right to execute their children if the situation warranted it.

So what does it mean to “receive the Kingdom of God like a child”? I believe that it means more than just ‘having child-like, unquestioning faith’—though that’s definitely part of

it. I believe that when Jesus says “receive the kingdom like a child” He means “surrender control of your life to God.” Become the child and let God be the Parent. Let Him set the rules. Let Him set your agenda. Let Him guide your steps. And do so willingly, trusting that He has your best interests in mind.

See, what this is, really, is an admission that if I’m going to be in the Kingdom of God, He has to bring me in. There’s no other way to gain entrance. To receive the Kingdom of God like a child is to give up any sense that I deserve it. A child is in no position to throw his weight around and demand to be let in, but he can be brought in by someone who has authority. Do you see the implications? No one earns the kingdom. That doesn’t mean you can’t get in; it means *it is gifted to people*. It’s grace that gives you a place, and once that light bulb goes on, you can’t go back to acting like it works some other way. That’s why Jesus was annoyed with his disciples. They were acting like they were the ones who opened the door to the kingdom. They weren’t. Jesus was. A child wouldn’t even try—the children just wanted to be with Jesus because he was good and lovable. He paid attention to them. They just wanted him. Do you see the difference?

When we talk about surrender, you should know that Jesus isn’t asking anything of you that He hasn’t already done. He surrendered control of His life to His Father, and His Father asked Him to give up His life. This was by no means easy, and the Gospels reveal Jesus’ great distress in Gethsemane, with the cross just hours away. But Jesus went through with it. He submitted to His Father’s will. He endured everything to pay for your sin. He died on that cross to bring you into His kingdom. Now, the kingdom of God can be given to you. You can be with God. You can receive it like a child, because you didn’t do a thing to make it happen. Jesus paid for it all. It is his to give, and he wants to give it to you.

This is where all talk of giving starts. Everything I have is a gift from God, including my status with God. It’s all pure gift, including my standing before God, my place in His kingdom. I’m not a forgiven child of God because I’ve earned it with decent behavior. I’m a forgiven child of God because I’m loved.

I don’t have what I have because it is owed to me. I have what I have because I’m loved. I’m not called as a disciple because I’m qualified to be one. I’m called as a disciple because I’m loved. We fight this all the time, because ‘earning it,’ ‘you owe me,’ and ‘building a resume’ is in our blood. **But it’s not the gospel. It’s not the way God deals with you.**

God’s love for you is not contingent on your being good. And it doesn’t stop when you’re bad. You’re loved without conditions and the proof is in the blood of Jesus. When that love hits bottom, when it finally breaks through, you’ll know it because you start doing things the same way. His way. The way of love and grace.

I don’t give to get something from God; I give because I’ve been given to. I’m moved by God’s love.

I don't serve to earn points; I serve because I've been served by the Ultimate Servant. I've been changed by Him.

In other words, God keeps pouring His love into you, and the effect is you start doing things not from duty, not from obligation, not from guilt, but from thankful, sacrificial love. That switch gets flipped by love, and it makes you a loving person.

And that makes giving a joy and an act of worship, because it's free of the have to—got to—ought to syndrome. Instead it's a sense of 'get to,' 'can't wait to' that is extremely refreshing because you are becoming aligned with the mission Jesus has given his Church. Beginning with the fact that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, he has tasked his Church with making disciples everywhere. And we can't make disciples if we are not disciples first, and how do you know if you are a disciple? Here's the payoff.

A disciple is someone who has received the kingdom of God like a child. It has been given as pure gift and received with great, lifechanging joy. A disciple is a person who has built their life around this gift. It's become your center of gravity. The decisions you make spin off of this center. The way into this life of discipleship is exposure to the Word of God over time. Let's encourage each other to grow in this way. Surrender control. Let God give to you. Let Jesus bless you. And respond in kinds to the needs you see.