

Bible Stories for Adults

The Faith of Children

Matthew 18:1-14

Opening

- Gathering: How can the faith of children serve as a good model for our faith?
- Today's Focus: Jesus uses the example of trusting children to show how to live as God's children.
- Key Verses: *Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 18:3
- Whoever welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me welcomes the one who sent Me.* Luke 9:48

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Highs and Lows (*Matthew 17*)

- What significant event of Jesus' ministry preceded these stories?
Luke 9:29-31 = Transfiguration - Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah about coming events
- How did the disciples react to this event?
Matthew 17:4-8 = They were amazed, then terrified by its magnitude
- How were the disciples quickly brought back to earth from this spiritual mountaintop experience?
Matthew 17:14-18 = Disciples were unable to drive demon out of boy
- Why were the disciples unable to help the boy while Jesus was away?
Matthew 17:19-20 = *Because you have so little faith*
- But they had cast out demons before. Why was this one so resistant?
Mark 9:28-29 = Lack of prayer indicated they forgot that their power came from Jesus
- What lesson did Jesus teach next that would lift their spirits?
Matthew 17:24-27 = They were sons of the kingdom

The Disciples Argue (*Mark 9:33-35*)

- How did the disciples react to this spiritual roller-coaster?
Luke 9:46 = They argued over who was the greatest
- How did Jesus deal with their argument?
Mark 9:33-34 = He asked what they had been arguing about - no answer
- How did Jesus show them that He already knew?
Mark 9:35 = Sat them down and explained that to be first, you must be last

The Object Lesson (*Matthew 18:2, 5, 10*)

- What object lesson did Jesus add to strengthen His point? = Women and children had no value
Luke 9:47-48 = He used a child to show they must serve even the least
- Was Jesus serious in saying that welcoming a child welcomes Him?
Matthew 18:10 = Figuratively and literally, God's angels are with them
- Does God really send out "guardian angels" to protect His children?
Psalm 34:7 = *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him*
- Was Jesus' point that we should specifically serve children?
Matthew 25:34-40 = Children were used as example of serving the least of His

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A Warning (*Matthew 18:6-7*)

What warning did Jesus add to His instruction to welcome God's children?

Matthew 18:6 = Don't do anything to cause a little one to sin

The Greek used for millstone (*mulos onikos*) refers to one turned by a donkey

Typically 3-4 ft in diameter, hundreds of pounds

Depths of the sea should be *far out in the open sea* - Jews feared the sea and drowning

Revelation 21:1 = There would be no more sea in heaven

With so many other people in the world, does God really care if one of His children turns away?

Matthew 18:12-14 = Yes, He sent Jesus to bring in His lost sheep

Is this word of warning strong enough to keep people from leading others into sin?

Matthew 18:7 = No, such things will happen, just make sure you aren't a cause

The Fires of Gehenna (*Matthew 18:8-9*)

How careful should we be to not cause anyone to sin?

Matthew 18:8-9 = If a part of our body leads us to sin, better to get rid of it

Why does this teaching sound so familiar?

Matthew 5:27-30 = Jesus said the same about adultery in His Sermon on the Mount

Hell in Greek is *Gehenna* = *Ge* (valley) of *Hinnom*

Gehenna was the valley of Hinnom, a valley on south side of Jerusalem

How did Gehenna get its reputation for being the fires of hell?

2 Chronicles 28:1-3 = Ahaz, worst king of Judah, sacrificed his sons in Gehenna fire

What did Josiah, the reforming king of Judah, do about the sacrifices in Gehenna?

2 Kings 23:10 = He destroyed the Topheth, where the fires were made

What prediction did Jeremiah make that was obviously true by Jesus' time?

Jeremiah 7:30-32 = People would refer to the place as the Valley of Slaughter

Body Parts (*1 Corinthians 5:1-13*)

What other body parts could Jesus be telling us to keep pure?

1 Corinthians 12:27 = The body of Christ, the church - we are all parts

Would Jesus really tell us to cut off a sinful church member and send them to hell?

1 Corinthians 5:4-7 = Yes, don't let the yeast of sin destroy the whole body (cancer)

Are we to stay away from everyone in this world who is openly sinful?

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 = No, but *expel the wicked man from among you*

(See also Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7) = OT laws to purge the evil

Wouldn't it be easier and better to just let people stay members?

1 Corinthians 12:26 = No, all other parts will suffer if one part is diseased

What process did Jesus give on how to handle members of the Body caught up in sin?

Matthew 18:15-17 = Approach him, then take 2-3 witnesses, then church, then expel

Little Ones (*1 Corinthians 3:1-2*)

If Jesus was referring to His body, the church, what would He have meant by "little ones"?

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 = *Infants in Christ*, Baby Christians

What example did Paul give to the early Christians of a topic that could cause *little ones* to sin?

1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-9 = New Christians could have trouble eating meat offered to idols

How could exercising your God-given freedom be a stumbling block and lead others to sin?

1 Corinthians 8:10-13 = Baby Christians don't yet fully understand these freedoms

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Freedoms Around Little Ones (*Romans 14*)

Should we then keep baby Christians and each other from using these freedoms?

Romans 14:1-6 = No, everyone should do or abstain as he sees right – to the Lord

So we should then feel free to exercise our freedoms openly?

Romans 14:13-16 = No, it is better to act in love and not set up a stumbling block

What is the important thing to remember through this confusing discussion?

Romans 14:17-19 = Don't worry about the details, but about building each other up

So should we drink beer or wine around our Baptist friends, or not?

Romans 14:20-22 = No, because it may cause them to stumble

What should we do about freedoms we aren't so sure about?

Romans 14:23 = Don't do them

One More Key Lesson (*Matthew 18:1-4*)

What lesson did this story begin with that covers all of the rest of the lessons we've discussed?

Matthew 18:1-3 = We must *change and become like little children*

Was Jesus telling us to change from being so serious and become more childish?

1 Corinthians 14:20 = More childlike, not childish - ignorant of sin

What did Paul mean that we should be adults in our thinking?

Ephesians 4:13-15 = Grow in spiritual knowledge, attain the full maturity of Christ

So in what way are we to become more like children?

Matthew 18:4 = Humble, dependent, trusting

Humility (*Philippians 2:1-11*)

Humility - *When you know you have it, you've lost it.*

Humility thinks of others, not of self.

True humility is not thinking meanly of oneself; it is simply not thinking of oneself at all.

How did Paul define humility?

Romans 12:3 = Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought

How did Peter describe humility?

1 Peter 5:5-6 (James 4:6-10) = Submit to one another and to God, He will lift you

Where can we find an even better example of humility than a child?

Philippians 2:3-11 = Jesus - *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit... (v3)*

Jesus Teaches in Humility (*Mark 9:30-32*)

What was Jesus getting ready to do that further taught this lesson on humility?

Matthew 17:22-23 = Going to Jerusalem to suffer and die for all

What priority did Jesus and His disciples have for this last trip to Jerusalem?

Mark 9:30-31a = Teach deep topics to the disciples to mature from childishness

How ready were the disciples to receive and understand this mature "solid food"?

Mark 9:31b-32 = Couldn't even understand direct explanations, afraid to ask

How much time was the group able to get to be by themselves for this training?

Mark 10:1 = Little, crowds everywhere they went

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Top Priority Lessons Only (*Mark 10:13-16*)

How did the disciples handle these interruptions to Jesus' limited important lessons?

Mark 10:13 = They rebuked the mothers who interfered with babies for Jesus to touch

Mothers often brought their babies to be blessed by a rabbi

How did Jesus feel about the disciples protecting their limited and valuable time together?

Mark 10:14 = He was indignant (upset) with them – reminded them of earlier lesson

What did He mean that *the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*?

Mark 10:15 = We must receive the kingdom as a little child to enter it

What did Jesus then do about the babies?

Mark 10:16 = He took them in His arms and blessed them

Dependence (*1 Corinthians 12:3*)

How is a child-like dependence critical for receiving the kingdom of God?

1 Corinthians 12:3 = *No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit*

How did Martin Luther state this in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength

believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him;

but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel,

enlightened me with His gifts;

sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

How does the Spirit call us by the Gospel? = *We have the mind of Christ*

1 Corinthians 2:10-16 = He reveals God's wisdom in ways others can't understand

Can't we receive the kingdom by being as good as we can? Do we have to be dependent?

Ephesians 2:8-9 = Saved only as a gift of God, not by works

Children greatly trust their parents to take care of them. Who are we to trust?

John 14:1 = Trust in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I ever done anything that led someone to sin?
(*Matthew 18:6-7; 6:13; 23:3; 1 Kings 12:26-33; Romans 13:9-13; 14:20-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31-33*)
2. What human desires continue to lead me into temptation and sin?
(*Matthew 18:8-9; 5:27-30; Romans 7:15-25; 8:5-9; Galatians 5:16-25; 6:7-8; 1 Peter 2:11*)
3. What stumbling blocks to faith have I placed before others?
(*Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-13; 10:23-33*)
4. What man-made rules have I placed as stumbling blocks before myself?
(*Matthew 23:13; Mark 7:1-13; Acts 10; Colossians 2:8*)
5. How well do I follow Jesus' example of humility?
(*Matthew 18:4; John 13:1-17; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Galatians 6:12-14; Philippians 2:3-11; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Peter 5:5-6; James 4:6-10*)