

# GRACE FOR LITTLE ONES

*(Mark 10.13-16)*

## **Introduction**

Children come out with amazing things sometimes. One of the things we never did, but wish we had done, is to write down in a notebook all the funny things our children said when they were small. There were so many cute words and expressions they invented! Some of them we do remember though and they've become part of our family vocabulary.

Someone asked a class of seven year-olds recently to write prayers and here are some examples that I thought were quite good:

*Dear God, thank you for the baby brother but what I asked for is a puppy.*

*Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like that, or was it an accident?*

*Dear God, I read the Bible. What does "begat" mean? No one will tell me.*

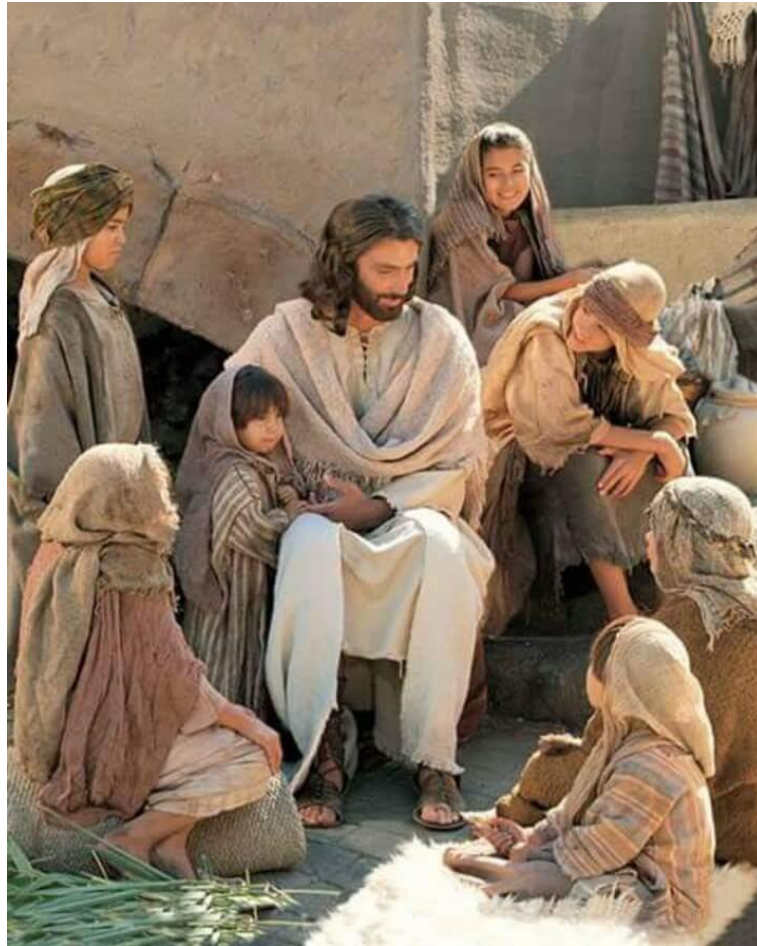
## **Let Them Come to Me**

In Mark chapter 10, there's the account of Jesus meeting some children. In those days and in that culture, children were not valued at all. Until they had their Bar Mizvah at the age of about 12 they were to be seen and not heard.

In the literature of that time what you find is that that people didn't take children seriously. They were written off as silly, easily-led, unstable, naive and immature. No self-respecting rabbi would waste his time with them.

But such was Jesus' charisma, that people brought their children to him in the hope that he would at least bless them before sending them away. This is the one who healed the sick, who cast out darkness from

tormented souls, who lifted the mood of the oppressed, who gave hope to the crushed. Everyone wanted to be near him and just see him or be around him.



So it says “people were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them but the disciples rebuked them.”

These are the bouncers on the door. “Get these kids away from here. What do you think this is, Santa’s Grotto? Get lost, Jesus hasn’t got time for the likes of you.” That’s what they were saying.

They thought Jesus should only associate with the rich, with celebrities, with the great and the good – not the riffraff and certainly not with hyperactive kids.

But the Bible says that when Jesus saw that they were shooing the kids away, “he was indignant.” It annoyed him. It wound him up. It

exasperated him. When he saw what was going on he said, "No! The children stay. Let them come. Don't you dare stop them."

Jesus is once again smashing the conventions of his day to pieces. He's saying to his minders, "What do you think you're doing, sending the kids away? You think that Christianity is only for sophisticated grown-ups. You've got it wrong. Bring them here. I want to see them and I want them to see me because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like this."

Here's the point: "Some people think that children cannot grasp anything spiritual until they become adults. It's the exact opposite. Adults will never grasp anything spiritual until we become like children."

Our ideas are wrong headed. We think if it's simple and straightforward it can't be right. Jesus doesn't agree with that at all.

No wonder the religious elite couldn't stand him. And no wonder the Bible says that ordinary people heard him gladly. Children loved him.

What was it about little ones that Jesus said was so important to imitate? Was he talking about their simple trust? Was he saying we should be innocent like them?

I don't think he meant that they were innocent. They're not.

When my brother was about one and I was three, I once decided, in the middle of the night to try something out. I crept into the kitchen, filled a jug with water, went back into the bedroom and tipped the lot all over him as he slept. I have no idea why I did that. I can only say that it seemed a good idea at the time.

Anyway, he shrieked and pulled himself up on the bars of his cot, blinking water out of his little brown eyes. Then I heard my mum and dad's footsteps so I hid under the cot. They came in to the bedroom, saw the jug, noticed my feet sticking out from under the cot and pulled me out. "What is all this?" they said. I looked at my drenched little brother.

And I looked at them. And all I could think of saying was “he must have wet himself.”

I could talk about the time I tipped a pack of sugar out of the window to trick my dad into thinking it was snowing, or the time I brought a dead mouse into the kitchen after my mum had buried it in the garden, or when I put a drawing pin on my sister’s chair... children aren’t as innocent as all that!

So what did Jesus mean when he said “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”? I think there are three things that you will find in every child. And without these three things you can’t get into the kingdom of God.

### **1. An Open Mind**

Firstly, every child has an open mind. Children have big imaginations. If my dad had told me he could fly I would have believed him. Children have open minds, and although they accept things that are not true, they’re ready to receive things that *are* true. That’s why they have amazing faith.

When our daughter Anna was about 3, she was buckled up in the back of our old Citroen 2CV one damp, misty morning. I tried several times to start the car, but to no avail. I must have tried for about 10 minutes but it wouldn’t start. I got out and looked under the bonnet – nothing obvious.

I tried again, failed again, and sighed, feeling helpless. Then, from the back seat, a little voice squeaked “Come on Jesus, start the car!”

I felt sad that Anna’s simple faith would be shattered by our useless, unreliable old banger stubbornly refusing to start yet again. But resigned to the inevitable disappointment, I put the key back in the ignition. I turned the key. It started perfectly.

As we get older, we close our minds, we shut off our imagination, we argue and say, "I can't believe that." But children's minds are open to believe.

## **2. An Open Hand**

Now, I have a bar of chocolate here. And it's free to anyone who comes up here and asks me for it...

Secondly, every child has an open hand. I mean by that that they are ready to ask and willing to receive. The Bible says, "God gives good gifts to those who ask." If I want to receive anything from God, I have to take it, open handed like a child.

I find that the older we get the more reluctant we become to hold out our hand and ask for a free gift. We feel awkward, we want to give something back for it. We even refuse assistance when we know we need it. "Oh, I'll be all right!" Children don't think that way.

No child I know will ever say, "Thanks for the offer but I won't take those sweets, I don't need your charity." Children are willing to take what you offer them and that is a must in the kingdom of heaven.

## **3. An Open Heart**

And thirdly, every child has an open heart. If you love children, they will love you in return.

When you show love to an adult, you sometimes get the response "So what's the agenda? What's he after? What's the catch?" Life changes us and as we get older, the heart closes up. We get used to people letting us down so we learn to stop trusting them. We become cynical and wonder if people are trying to use us. Children don't think that way. They have open hearts.

Here's a true story - a man was flying from Atlanta to Dallas and it just so happened that in the seat next to him was a little girl with Down's Syndrome. After a while she turned to him and said "Do you smoke?"

He was a little uncomfortable, but he told her that he didn't. She said, "Good, because smoking will make you die." (Children tell you the truth in ways that adults don't)! She nudged him, pointed to the guy across the aisle and said, "Ask him if he smokes." And so, good-naturedly, he did, and the man said that he didn't smoke either.

Then she said, "Mister, do you love Jesus?" He smiled and said, "Well, yes, I do." The little girl smiled and said, "Good, everyone should love Jesus."

Then she nudged him once again and said, "Ask him if he loves Jesus. Ask him!"

He thought "Oh no," but he swallowed hard and turned to the guy again and said, "Now she wants to know if you love Jesus."

His expression became serious. He said, "You know, in all honesty, I can't say that I do. I've wanted to be a person of faith all my life, but I haven't ever taken that step. And now I've come to a time in my life when I know I should."

And so Milton Cunningham, a preacher on his way to Dallas, led that businessman to faith in Christ on that airplane all thanks to one little girl's open heart and readiness to ask that simple question "Do you love Jesus?"

## **Ending**

As I end, I want to make it possible for anyone here who wants to open their mind, their hand and their heart to God – to do so. Remember Jesus said, "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of heaven like a child will never enter it."

Please don't feel under any pressure to do anything you don't feel ready for. But there may be somebody here who says "Well, I want to go ahead right now."

I'm going to finish with a simple prayer.

Heavenly Father, I am sorry for the things that I have done wrong in my life (maybe there's something in particular that your conscience brings to mind). I now turn from everything I know is not right in my life. Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I can be forgiven and start all over again. Thank you for the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift like a child. Please come into my life to be with me forever. Thank You. Amen.