

## Let the Children Come

Mark 10:13-16

January 18-19, 2025

Rev. Brian Bill

After preaching at an evangelistic service, D.L. Moody reported, “*we had two and one-half conversions.*” One of his colleagues inquired, “*I suppose you mean two adults and one child.*” ‘No,’ Mr. Moody replied. “*I mean two children and one adult. The children can give their whole lives to God, but an adult has only half a life left to give.*”

On this Sanctity of Human Life weekend, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every child, from conception on, is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of protection so they can give their whole lives to God. We’ll return to our “Journey to Joy” series in Philippians next weekend. Handouts of the prayer from [Philippians 1](#) are available at the Welcome Center.

Some pastors have chosen, for various reasons, to remain silent on the sanctity of life. I don’t see that as an option. We’re compelled and constrained to communicate God’s heart with conviction and with compassion. [Proverbs 14:25](#) summarizes our role: “***A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.***” I submit that while abortion is, and should be debated politically, discussed emotionally, and described medically, at its primary roots, the protection of the preborn is a decidedly moral matter.

I’ve preached over 30 different Sanctity of Life sermons over the years and have asked the Lord to give me a fresh idea for this weekend and I’m thankful He has done so. As we walk through several passages in the gospels, we’re going to discover this truth: *Because every child matters to Jesus, every child must matter to us.* Incidentally, the word “**children**” is used 511 times in the Bible and 51 times in the gospels alone!

Our own community powerfully demonstrated the truth that every child matters when four-year-old Blessing Aoci went missing early Thursday morning and found nine hours later. The Rock Island Police Department did an incredible job taking the lead on the search, along with other area departments, the State Police, the Sheriff’s Department, the U.S. Marshals, and the FBI. Nancy Grace posted this story as did People magazine! Believers were mobilized to pray and my pastor friend Doug Rowland from Rock Island Bible Church was out most of the day searching for Blessing. In addition, the Quad Cities Missing Person Network,

where I serve as chaplain, was invited to launch their Search and Rescue team. Traditional media and social media did a fantastic job getting her picture out, with thousands upon thousands sharing the information online.

As I thought about why there was such a unified response, and how quickly people were mobilized to get involved, it struck me it's because inherently, everyone knows that children matter and must be protected. Everything possible must be done to make sure every child is safe and secure.

I submit that we must have this same unified response and rapid mobilization to protect all children, including the preborn.

*Because every child matters to Jesus, every child must matter to us.*

**1. The preborn are drawn to Jesus.** When Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist and Mary was pregnant with Jesus, they met and greeted each other. Listen to Luke 1:41, 44: ***“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the **BABY** leaped in her womb...for behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the **BABY** in my womb leaped for joy.”*** A fetus was the first to rejoice at the news of Jesus.

In Luke 2:16, the same word **BABY** denotes Jesus as a newborn: ***“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the **BABY** lying in a manger.”*** The same word is used for both the preborn and the infant because what is in the womb is a **BABY**.

May the wonder of God's work in the womb cause us to worship and leap for joy today!

**2. Jesus affirmed a young boy for giving what he had.** In John 6:1-14, Jesus asked Philip where they could get some bread to feed thousands of hungry people. Philip did some calculating and said it would take most of someone's annual salary to do this. Andrew jumped in and said there was a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish but dismissed the idea that a little boy's lunch could feed everyone. Jesus received the loaves and fish from the young boy and miraculously multiplied it to feed five thousand men. This miracle may not have happened if the young boy had not provided his lunchable to the Lord.

Paul Tripp writes, *“No one in the crowd would have thought that this boy mattered...we will never know which little person God will use, and how.”*

Matthew 14:21 says Jesus not only fed 5,000 men, but He also fed thousands of ***“women and children.”*** According to Matthew 15:38, Jesus fed another crowd on another day, which also included children: ***“Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.”***

**3. Jesus received praise from children.** In Matthew 21:15-16, many children gathered in the temple and sang praise to Jesus: ***“But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant, and they said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”*** The religious leaders were enraged and tried to dismiss the children who were praising Jesus, while Jesus welcomed their worship. Jesus affirms the importance of children’s voices and their ability to praise Him. Even the youngest and most vulnerable deserve opportunities to offer their adoration to Him.

Let’s pause and ponder this. Even infants and nursing babies were praising Jesus! How does a newborn give praise to Him? Their very existence gives Him praise because they were created in the womb to worship Him. Liesl Parks, our nursery coordinator, along with her team of dedicated servants, provide praise songs for our infants every Sunday.

**4. God revealed spiritual truth to children.** In Matthew 11:25, Jesus celebrated how little children can understand and embrace deep spiritual truths: ***“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.”***

**5. Jesus healed an official’s son from disease.** Jesus was drawn to children with disease as we see in John 4:49-50: ***“The official said to him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’”***

**6. Jesus raised two children from the dead.** Of the three people Jesus brought back to life, one was a young son (Luke 7:11-17), and one was a young daughter (Luke 8:40-56). I love how tender Jesus was when He took the young girl by the hand and said, ***“Child, arise.”*** After she sat up, He knew she would be hungry, so he directed them to give her something to eat!

**7. Jesus freed a daughter and a son from a demon.** One day, when Jesus traveled, a Gentile mother fell at His feet and pleaded with Him to cast a demon out of her daughter. Jesus had compassion on her and freed her little daughter from the unclean spirit (Mark 7:24-30). On another occasion, Jesus cast a demon out of a young boy. Again, we see the tenderness of Jesus toward a child when we read, ***“But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.”*** (Mark 9:14-29)

This shows the power of Jesus over disease, death, and the devil, all done on behalf of children!

**8. Jesus longed to gather children together.** When looking over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, we read these tender words from Jesus in Matthew 23:37: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*** The children living in Jerusalem mattered so much to Jesus that He longed to gather them together to protect them.

**9. When Jesus expressed affection for the disciples, He called them children.** Listen to the tenderness and longing of the Lord in Mark 10:24: ***“And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!’”*** Jesus used this same tender word in John 21:5 after the resurrection: ***“Jesus said to them, ‘Children, do you have any fish?’”***

**10. Jesus protected children and had no tolerance for those who hurt or harmed them.** Using a graphic image, Jesus elevated the value of children with these jarring words found in Matthew 18:6: ***“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.”***

**11. Jesus pointed to children as examples of faith.** Mark 9:36-37 says, ***“And He took a child and put him in the midst of them...”*** Luke 9:48 tells us this was a ***“little child,”*** which is the word for infant or toddler. In our culture, we’re drawn to little children but in that culture, young kids were marginalized, ignored and at the bottom of the social ladder.

He didn’t have to go looking for a child because children were always around Him. After directing the child to come into the middle of the crowd, He exhibited

unconditional acceptance and tenderness: *“...and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but Him who sent me.’”*

By holding a little child in His arms, Jesus modeled what it means to **“receive”** one who is forgotten and ignored, much like the preborn today. Notice the word **“receive”** is used four times. To receive means, *“to grant warm hospitality with a welcoming heart to a guest.”* Like Jesus, we must care for the little, the least, and the lost. One way to “receive” a child today is to become a foster parent, to consider adoption, to rescue a frozen embryo through adoption, or to serve with Safe Families, Youth Hope, FCA, Child Evangelism Fellowship, or Pregnancy Resources.

**12. Jesus welcomed, embraced, and blessed children.** Let’s turn to Mark 10:13-16 where we will discover four actions for us to take.

- **Bring your children to Jesus.** Look at verse 13: *“And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them...”* Parents were continuously bringing their kids to Jesus so they could be touched by Him. The tense of the verb shows repetition, meaning this was something that happened all the time. I picture a long line of moms, babies in their arms with toddlers at their feet, nearly on top of one another, as they shuffled closer to where Jesus was sitting. Luke 18:15 adds: *“Now they were bringing even infants to Him...”* Don’t miss this: *parents must bring their children to Jesus because they’re too little to bring themselves.*

The word **“touch”** means *“to connect by exerting influence.”* Parents and grandparents, we must do all we can to bring our children and grandchildren as close to Jesus as possible so they can be touched by Him. One of the ways we partner with parents is through our Child Dedication services. Our next one will be February 15-16.

I’m reminded of what happened when a family was driving away from a church after the dedication of their baby. Seeing the older brother crying in the back seat, the mother asked him what was wrong, and he replied, *“The pastor said he wanted us to be brought up in a Christian home...but I want to stay with you guys!”*

As a church family, we are committed to helping parents evangelize and disciple their children in a Christian home. There are many books on

parenting and grandparenting on a table in the south lobby. We also have copies of David Jeremiah's commentary on Philippians called, "*The Joy of Living in Christ.*"

- **Beware of attitudes that hinder children.** In the last part of verse 13, we see how the disciples responded to this interruption: "***...and the disciples rebuked them.***" The word "***rebuke***" literally means, "*to be muzzled.*" It's the same word used by Jesus when He rebuked the wind and the sea in Mark 4. It has the idea of strictly forbidding something with the threat of punishment if the command is not obeyed. The disciples may have said something like this: "*Jesus doesn't have time for your little brats. Stop bothering Him. He has more important things to do.*"

This elitist attitude lights the Lord up in verse 14: "***But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'***" The disciples didn't want Jesus to be bothered by kids, but Jesus was more bothered by the disciples! To be "***indignant***" means "*to be sorely vexed with great anger; to grieve much.*" The idea is to have intense irritation and unrestrained repugnance. Isaiah 22:4 captures the intensity behind it: "***Let me weep bitter tears.***" Children are intended to be a blessing, not a burden.

This week, I gave a message at Youth Hope's Men of Valor and Excellence program. This program matches a Christian man with a third-grade boy from two schools in East Moline. Our aim is to help them learn how to respect others. I spoke on the importance of watching words because they bring life, or they bring death. After demonstrating how our words are like toothpaste which can't be put back in the tube, I asked these young boys what kind of hurtful words have been spoken to them. I was jarred by their answers because it shows how they have been dismissed by others and how these words of death have lodged in their souls.

*You can't do it.*

*I hate you.*

*I wish you would never have lived.*

*I wish you would die.*

*You should suffer.*

*People made fun of me when my grandpa died.*

*I will kill you.*

*Go to H...*

I was encouraged by the words of life they've heard as well.

*We'll be friends forever.*

*You're the best friend in the world.*

*I wish you would live forever.*

*I love you.*

*You are smart.*

*You're my favorite person.*

*I like your shoes.*

Incidentally, a total of 12 Edgewood men of valor are part of this program.

The dismissive attitude of the disciples toward young image-bearers made Jesus extremely sad and excruciatingly mad because they saw children as expendable interruptions. Pastor Chad offers this insight: *"The threat to children in that moment wasn't the Romans, the scribes, the Pharisees, Herod's son, or any outside source...it was those closest to Him."* The disciples thought Jesus needed protection from bothersome children, but these *children needed protection from arrogant adults*. Jesus became indignant that anyone should think children unimportant.

Since we have a limited window of opportunity, we need to give our best efforts to children in the womb and those outside the womb – as parents, as grandparents, and as a church. Here's a startling statistic: *over 80% of those who come to Christ, do so before the age of 18*. According to many studies, most Christian conversions occur between the ages of 4 and 14, often referred to as the "4-14 window."

That's why we invest so much of our resources as a church into our EdgeKids ministry under the servant leadership of Marcy Kongkousonh. That's also why we're proposing a restroom renovation project in our children's area at our annual meeting.

The phrase, ***"let them come"*** is a sharp double command which could be translated, *"Start allowing."* The KJV reads, ***"Suffer the little children to come unto me."*** I like the NASB, ***"Permit the children to come to Me."*** Children by their very nature want to come to Jesus so we must allow them to come.

The phrase, “**do not hinder them**” means, “*to stop restraining*” them. We must make sure they’re allowed to live, to learn, and to love God. Children have high value, whether they are in a womb, or in a room. The kingdom belongs “**to such as these,**” for those who are weak, empty handed, and helpless.

- **Become like children to receive the kingdom of God.** Once again, Jesus uses children to teach adults about spiritual truth in verse 15: “**Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**” *Children are precious in their own right, and they stand for something bigger than themselves.* Jesus is saying that if you want to be saved, you first need to become like a child.
- **Bless children warmly.** Jesus was asked by parents to touch their children, but He did a lot more than that in verse 16: “**And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.**” Don’t miss that Jesus took each child in His arms, showing He cares about each individual image-bearer, every infant, and every embryo. He could have given them a big group hug, but He picked up each child one-by-one, and blessed each one personally, using touch and words.

The word for “**blessed**” is an intensive compound verb which means He “*fervently blessed repeatedly and warmheartedly.*” The verb “*to bless*” literally means, “*to bow the knee.*” We’re called to do the same. This makes me think of Isaiah 40:11: “**He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.**”

When I was in the waiting room to see my dentist this week, I introduced myself to a young mom and her son. After inviting her to church, I summarized this passage, pointing out how children matter to Jesus and how much they wanted to be close to Him. She told me she had never heard this account before, but she really liked it. I hope they come and join us soon.

*Because every child matters to Jesus, every child must matter to us.* One of the ways we live this out as a church is by partnering with the team at Pregnancy Resources.

## **Interview with Beth Bill**

**1. Please tell us about your role at PR. What does a typical day look like for you?**

*I have served as a staff nurse for almost 8 years. I work in both our Davenport and Moline centers and also on the medical mobile van except in the winter. There are 5 staff nurses, and we have a variety of nursing tasks. The majority of our time, though, is devoted to giving limited obstetric ultrasounds for the purpose of confirming a viable pregnancy. Many of our patients who walk through our doors are very upset and conflicted about their pregnancy. Often women share with us that they feel trapped, they are afraid and cannot see their way forward with a pregnancy.*

*Although Pregnancy Resources makes it clear that we do not refer for or provide abortion, many women who are considering an abortion still come to us. Our aim during their ultrasound is to provide a safe place for them to learn how far along they are and give as much information as possible about their options and extend hope. Our ministry has found that many who think they want an abortion, don't really know what abortion is. We nurses have the opportunity to give medically accurate information about abortion, answer their questions and caution women of the possible trauma and complications of abortion.*

*The beautiful part of this hard work is that it is ministry. Sometimes in the privacy of a patient room, we hear life stories that are terribly painful, stories of being abandoned, treated poorly, unhealthy relationships, being threatened and the list goes on. But there is a common thread in their stories...many women don't have hope or know Jesus. It is humbling and an honor to point women to Jesus and to pray for them and with them. It is an unexplainable joy to witness Jesus break through a life.*

**2. Can you explain what it is like for you to see the image of a baby on an ultrasound?**

*Hospitals began to use ultrasound technology for pregnancy in the early 1970s. I think it is incredible that for thousands of years, women had no way of "seeing" what was happening with their pregnancy. And here we are at this point in history using the technology of sound waves to image a baby in utero. So, to answer your question, "what is it like for me to scan" the word that comes to mind is "wonder." Within a few moments of beginning a scan, I can see a fetus with a heartbeat. With each scan, I'm searching for the flicker of a fetal heart. I'm*

*searching for evidence of life. Honestly, each time I see that heart beating it's a moment of worship. Here's a video of a number of ultrasounds our nurses have taken (we have permission to show these).*

### **Play Video of Ultrasounds**

*Psalm 139 tells us that God knits us together in our mother's womb and we are fearfully and wonderfully made. At just about the time that a woman wonders if she's pregnant, the baby's heart has already been beating for a few days. In fact, we can capture a heartrate as early as 5 weeks and 5 days. And these early gestational babies are less than 1 cm...smaller than a piece of rice, yet their heart is beating.*

*Nurses get to be front and center of seeing fetal development when we scan. At 6 weeks the brain and spinal cord are forming, at 7 weeks the baby is making its own blood, at 8 weeks we can see the baby starting to wiggle and move. It's one of the most unusual joys to see what has been un-see-able for most of history. To me, it is a miraculous wonder to see a life on the screen and beyond humbling to think that my human eyes are the first to see this new life.*

### **3. Please share a story of an ultrasound changing someone's mind.**

*This past year, of the women who came to our centers who were either undecided or considering abortion, 80% changed their mind after seeing their baby on ultrasound and decided to carry. That shows the power of ultrasound. The other nurses and I have had a number of experiences during a scan to witness an abortion vulnerable woman look at the screen, at her baby and its heartbeat. It's as if we can see a change happening, a bond forming with her unborn child.*

*For example, this past year, a hero came through our doors. Her story was awful and unthinkable. She was seriously considering an abortion but listened very carefully to the information given during her ultrasound. I lost contact with her until one month before her baby was due when she called our center. She said she needed to talk. After visiting for a while, she told me how she had decided not to abort and instead to carry her baby. She then put her hands on her 8-month pregnant belly and said, "I think I saved a life." Choked up and with tears streaming down my face I said yes, my friend, you saved a life. And now this hero is the mother of a sweet baby boy.*

### **4. What's it like when a woman chooses to terminate?**

*The words here are grief and sorrow. Just a few weeks ago, during an ultrasound, a woman saw her baby and heartbeat. Her response to seeing the baby was “it’s so cute but it’s also sad.” Sad, because even after her ultrasound, after a thorough discussion and watching an educational video about her options and trying to point her to hope, she was convinced that she had no choice except to terminate. After she left, I returned to the ultrasound room where the image of her baby was still up on the screen. I looked at the screen and said out loud, “I’m sorry baby that you most likely won’t get a chance to live here on earth.” I prayed for this baby and for the mother that had just left our building.*

*Our leadership always reminds the staff that we give as much information as possible in a safe, loving, non-judgmental appointment. Ultimately it is her decision. We do our best and pray even more, but we cannot control or manipulate women. As followers of Christ, there are always “But God” moments. In 2024, 40 women who had an abortion scheduled, cancelled it and they kept their pregnancy. 40!*

## **5. What are some things that many of us might not know?**

*\*Brian was years ahead of me in the world of life-affirming ministry. He was involved as a college student way before I ever gave any thought to this whole crisis. I’m actually late to the game.*

- a. **Services and locations:** PR has 3 brick and mortar locations; in Davenport, Moline and East Moline at the Mission plus our mobile medical van that goes out March through November. We offer a wide variety of free services to any person who walks through our doors. We give pregnancy tests and ultrasounds. We offer pregnancy and parenting classes in English and Spanish and soon to be given in French for our clients who are refugees from west Africa. We have a store, called Bella’s Boutique, at each of our centers with baby clothing, maternity clothing and even baby equipment. Parents can earn a new car seat, earn diapers and come in for free formula. We offer pregnancy support, Bible studies, support groups for single moms, miscarriage follow up care, after abortion care (SLIDE) and coaching and classes for dads as part of our ministry to men.*
- b. **Abortions through medication:** Something you may not know about abortion is the stark rise in the use of abortion pills formerly referred to as RU486. In fact, 63% of abortions are pill abortions. Abortion pills are*

*readily available from providers or online. What this means is that abortions are done at home, not at an abortion provider office. Women are experiencing the days long process of pill abortion at home. It seems that not many people are aware of the possibility of risky complications and dangers of pill abortions, that sometimes necessitate getting help at an emergency room. There is more information that I could share one on one after the service. If you have any questions, please feel free to find me or Pam or Kathy who will be at the table in the lobby.*

- c. ***Prayer and financial support:*** *As I already mentioned, everything at PR is free and that is because of the bedrock support of our community these 35 years of ministry. PR is supported by 1646 individuals and by 66 churches. As a staff member and on behalf of the patients cared for through the years, thank you Edgewood for your ongoing support and for your extreme generosity. For example, Edgewood gave significant financial help in purchasing the medical van in 2017 and is always generous with things like the Baby Bottle Project.*

*This is a small ministry but there is a huge army of Jesus-loving people who pray, volunteer and support. Way to go Edgewood for living on mission all over the QC! At PR, we have 30 Edgewood volunteers and 2 staff members. In fact, a group of Edgewood women came in this week on a very cold morning to organize and fold a mountain of clothes. If you'd like to volunteer, (SLIDE) here's the information of the upcoming trainings.*

- d. ***Abortion Pill Reversal:*** *Something else that is relatively new is abortion pill reversal. You may have heard the mainstream news harshly criticize the reversal protocol as being baseless and not scientific. But let me share that according to Heartbeat international that approximately 4,500 babies have been born globally after their mother had started the abortion pill protocol. (SLIDE)*

- e. ***Enemy:*** *Our world is broken and sees things in a completely backwards and upside-down way. Jesus said in Luke 18:16 that the kingdom of God belongs to children. I firmly believe it is the scheme of the evil one to convince people that an unborn child is a problem to be gotten rid of. As we learned today since every child matters to Jesus, every child must matter to us. He is their Creator. It is a lie from Satan to think that a newly created life has no value or worth. This is all backwards, upside-down, wrong and*

*unthinkable. People that are considering abortion are not our foe. The enemy is clearly Satan and has been since the Garden of Eden.*

*f. **Hope:** We see it every day all around us, that there are a lot of lonely, hopeless people, trying to make sense of life. Layer on top of that an unplanned pregnancy. These hurting people walk in our doors looking for help. In some ways, they are just like you and me in that our lives all started in exactly the same way. One day when each of us was about 5 ½ weeks gestation our hearts started to beat and flicker. He knit us together inside our mother's womb. (SLIDE).*

*Each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. Therefore, each man and woman who walk into our centers matter to God, they are made in His image. And just maybe their unplanned pregnancy is the very thing that will turn them to Jesus. This is our hope and our hope is in Jesus; that a baby's life would be saved and also the lives of the parents as well. God is awesome and He is always at work and answering prayer in this spiritual battle.*

**Closing Prayer:**

**Closing Song:** "Let the Children Come" (Pastor Chad)

**New Member:** Audrey Ellis (10:45)