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## **June 17, 2018 *Jesus & Me* “Jesus Loves the Little Children”**

Some people brought children to Jesus so that he would place his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded them. “Allow the children to come to me,” Jesus said. “Don’t forbid them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children.” Then he blessed the children and went away from there. *Matthew 19:13-15*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

### **Inheritors of God’s kingdom**

#### **MONDAY 6.18.18 Psalm 72:2-4, Psalm 78:4-7**

Psalm 72 was a prayer, a petition to God to realize and restore his divine justice. Essential to God’s plan for justice is protection of the poor and children. Psalm 78 was an instructive song that chronicled God’s redeeming acts in Israel’s history. Scholar Caryn Reeder writes, “When the people keep the law... their children will learn to keep the law as well.” \* The best way to teach children how to love God and love their neighbors is to model love and forgiveness for them. Children are important in God’s kingdom. God offers them special protection, and wants them to inherit God’s loving commandments.

- The appropriate response to God’s grace and love is to share that love with others. Psalm 78 called God’s people (including us) to share it specifically with children. When did someone first teach you about God’s love? How has that experience impacted your life?
- God regularly reminds us to care for and pass on his commandments to children when we witness baptisms. Do you focus on what you promise when you are a congregational witness at baptisms? ([Click here](#) \*\* to see the United Methodist Church’s Baptismal Covenant). In what ways have you lived up to these promises?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you have proved through the history of your people how great your love and patience are for your children. Move us to share your stories with the children around us. Bless your children, for they have inherited your great promises. Amen.

\* Reeder, Caryn. *The Enemy in the Household: Family Violence in Deuteronomy and Beyond*. Baker Academic, 2012, p. 20.

\*\* <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-baptismal-covenant-i>

### **“He blessed the children”**

#### **TUESDAY 6.19.18 Matthew 18:1-5, 19:13-15 Mark 10:13-17, Luke 18:15-16**

When the disciples asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus called a little child to sit among them as his answer. Our world and culture tends to value children more highly than the culture Jesus lived in, but we’d still be unlikely, left to our natural impulses, to answer a “greatest” question as Jesus did. “In ancient society, children were powerless and often overlooked. Ancient speakers and writers typically offered powerful leaders as heroes and models for imitation.” \*

- They offered “powerful leaders as heroes and models for imitation”? After reviewing that evidence, Pastor John Ortberg wrote drily, “Imagine living in a world obsessed with status. (It may not require all that much effort.)” \*\* What social and spiritual downsides can there be of mainly holding up powerful people as models? What do you learn from Jesus’ strikingly counter-cultural way of identifying “the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”?
- We’d never scold people for bringing children to Jesus. But valuing children takes more than cute photos and emotions. “Children are more treasured these days, but caring for children often isn’t valued. Child-care workers are frequently poorly paid and the work is often considered a low-status profession. Parents who leave the workforce to care for children obviously lose income but sometimes even more: a sense of identity, a relationship network, and even a feeling of worth. What if we valued caring for children the way Jesus did?” \*\*\*

**Prayer:** Loving God, you valued children enough to tell your followers to be more like them. Guide me in growing a faith that is trustingly child-like (yet never mindlessly childish). Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 220266-220267). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, pp. 75.

\*\*\* Karen Chakoian, study note on “Childcare” in *The CEB Women’s Bible*. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2016, p. 1241.

## Jesus welcomed children’s loyalty

### WEDNESDAY 6.20.18 Matthew 21:14-16

Isaiah wrote of Israel’s hope that God would send a faithful heir of David’s royal line to rule forever (cf. [1 Kings 9:3-5](#), [Isaiah 9:2-7](#)). [Zechariah 9:9](#), which Matthew cited in [Matthew 21:4-5](#), distinguished a king on a donkey, who came in peace, from the war horses of a conqueror. Why did Jesus quote the Greek translation of the Psalms in Jerusalem? This may explain it: “The Hebrew reads ‘strength’ instead of ‘praise.’ Jewish interpreters frequently chose the textual tradition or translation that best communicated their point. The primary language of the Sadducees was probably Greek (the dominant language of their tomb inscriptions).” \*

- Jesus rode into Jerusalem in a way that signaled a king’s arrival, but one who came in peace. Why did that make “the chief priests and legal experts” angry? “The aristocratic priests belonged to Jerusalem’s wealthy ruling class.... they probably also have political objections.” \*\* Some Israelites profited from the status quo with Rome; others wanted a king like the general David who led Israel to victories in war. But children celebrated a gentle “Son of David” who said to love your enemies. Do you?
- It’s unlikely that the children who shouted that Jesus was the “Son of David” analyzed the theological fine points that title might or might not imply. When the “proper” religious authorities objected both to the shouting and to what it might imply, Jesus said he valued the children’s joy. We say our journey is “to know, love and serve God.” How can you “know God” by thinking clearly and precisely without losing the ability to “love God” through joyful expressions of praise like the children’s that day at the Temple?

**Prayer:** Lord, Jesus, help me learn and understand all I can about your saving life, death and resurrection while retaining the capacity to simply cry with joy, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 220544-220546). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 220539-220542). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## **Jesus assumed children would be treated generously**

### **THURSDAY 6.21.18 Matthew 7:9-11, Luke 11:11-13**

Both Matthew and Luke reported these comments right after telling about Jesus teaching his disciples what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” (Pastor Hamilton is planning a six-sermon series on “The Jesus Prayer” in August and September.) “Jesus invites his followers to depend on God’s provision and faithfulness. In doing so, he makes use of a well-known way of talking about God: ‘If you..., then how much more God?’” \*

- Jesus’ “If you..., then how much more God?” phrasing here assumed that of course a parent would respond to a child’s needs with every effort to give the best possible gifts. There are sad exceptions, but they are so rare that when they happen, they often make headlines. Did your treatment by your parents or other adults help you trust in God’s faithful love, or did your experiences make it harder for you to believe Jesus’ words? Have you learned to trust that God is more reliable than even the best human parents?
- When we compare Matthew’s wording with Luke’s, we find an insight into “answered prayer.” Matthew had Jesus saying God gives “good things” to those who ask. Luke said, more specifically, that we can depend on God giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask. But many times we’re not specifically asking for the Holy Spirit. What things are you praying for today? If God answers by giving you the Holy Spirit’s presence, will you thank God for that or be upset that you didn’t receive the other thing(s) you asked for?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you came to teach us (and to show us in action) what God is like. Embed in my heart your picture of a God in whose presence and caring I can have childlike trust. Amen.

\* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 25:15 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 17-18 NT.

## **A painful contrast to Jesus’ view of children**

### **FRIDAY 6.22.18 Matthew 2:16-18**

We might think Herod was exceptionally wicked. Well, he was—but his attitude toward children was quite typical of his time. “In the Roman Empire, some babies grew up to be women, who were generally shut off from education and public life. Some grew up to be slaves, who were needed for their labor but regarded as inferior to those who were free. Many babies did not grow up at all. In the ancient world, unwanted children were often simply left to die, a practice called ‘exposure.’” \*

- Matthew noted a fateful reversal that shaped much of Jesus’ life and ministry: “Jewish people considered abandoning or killing babies a pagan practice, conspicuously practiced by evil kings such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The most widely known example, however, was Pharaoh in the OT (Ex 1:16, 22). In [Matthew’s] narrative, the pagan Magi worship the true king, whereas the Jewish ruler acts like a pagan one.” \*\* How can you keep your life open to God’s leading, as the magi did, and not closed off by envy and fear like Herod’s?
- Herod didn’t know which child, if any, the wise men found, so he sent troops to kill all boys two and under in Bethlehem and “all the surrounding territory.” (Some scholars estimate that perhaps 20 male infants were killed.) But he missed Jesus, who would grow up to call people to a new kind of kingdom where self-sacrificing love replaced brute force. How is Jesus’ love setting you free, day-to-day, from the dark side of human ideas of power?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Herod looked powerful; you looked harmless, yet he was afraid of you. Help me grasp the vast power that was hidden from heedless human eyes in your quiet birth and life of selfless love. Amen.

\* John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, pp. 28.

\*\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 218876-218879). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## **Jesus' kingdom is for young and old alike**

### **SATURDAY 6.23.18 Joel 2:28, Acts 2:14-18**

We often talk about God calling Abraham or Moses when they were elderly. It's certainly true that God relates to age differently than our youth-obsessed culture. But the prophet Joel, quoted by the apostle Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, made it clear that God called people of all ages to important kingdom work. "Many Jewish people, especially among the educated and the elite, believed that prophets no longer existed in their day in the same manner that they did in the past.... Peter, however, cites the prophetic promise that all God's people would be empowered by the prophetic Spirit to hear from God." \*

- So where do you fall on the age spectrum? Do you still, at least at times, think of yourself as a child? As a young person? As an adult? Do you, maybe a bit regretfully, acknowledge having reached middle age? Does the dreaded word "old" nudge at the edges of your consciousness? Or has the calendar, and maybe a health issue or two, firmly planted you in the "senior" category? No matter what your answer(s), are you ever tempted to respond to God's call with "I'm too young," "I'm too busy" or "I'm too old"? Spend as much time as you need to in prayer, until "I will pour out my spirit upon everyone" is a divine promise that includes you wherever you are in life's trajectory.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you know I live in an age-conscious world that tells me to do whatever I can to look as young as I can, yet often scorns students' views on issues as "too young." Fill me with your Spirit, equipping me to serve you every day the rest of my life. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Love is one of the many fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. This week, discover verses on love in Scripture and find Bible stories about God's love. Share God's love with one another and your community through your word and actions. Remember growing love doesn't have to be practiced in big, fancy ways. Find small, yet meaningful ways to share God's love with others. When we are open to God growing us through the Holy Spirit, everyday acts will help produce love! Pray daily, asking God to grow love in your heart and lives!

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 247907-247909). Zondervan. Kindle Edition (emphasis supplied).

### **Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer Prayers for Peace & Comfort:**

- Ryan Aldis and family on the death of his grandmother Kathryn Aldis, 6/12
- Craig Pardue and family on the death of his mother Trish Pardue, 6/9
- Ashley Kelly and family on the death of her grandmother Geraldine Payne, 6/7
- Donna Ackerman and family on the death of her mother Metzell J. "Met" Schroll, 6/6
- Becky Dobbs and family on the death of her mother Patricia A. "Pat" Horn, 6/6
- Dick and Kit Sailors and family on the death of their daughter Mindy Sailors William, 6/4