

*Where we start . . .*

What are the things that you find most endearing about children?  
What qualities or characteristics of children do you most enjoy?

*What we read . . .*

Although (as every parent knows!) there are things about children that can unnerve us and get under our skin, there is something wonderful about “childlikeness.” And that is what Jesus affirms in Mark 10:13-16.

Given the setting for these remarks by Jesus, how do you understand:

Why the children were being brought to Him?

What the children’s desires might have been?

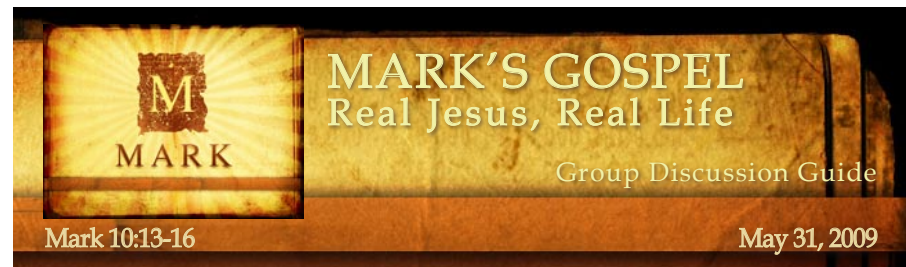
As you reflect on this situation, what aspect(s) of childlikeness do you think Jesus has in view? In what way is He encouraging His hearers to “receive the kingdom like a child”?

Can you think of any reason(s) why the disciples might have wanted to keep the children away from Jesus? What comes to mind?

*Why this matters . . .*

If you were to find yourself in this story, would you most likely be one of those bringing the children, one of the children, or one of the disciples trying to hinder the children from interfering with Jesus’ ministry? Why?

What might have to change in the way you think about what Jesus desires for you to embrace a more childlike approach to kingdom living?



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*Diving in . . .*

Maybe you have heard someone say to you, “Quit acting like a kid! Act your age.” And hearing that, you realize that there is something not appropriate about being “childish.” But have you ever heard someone say, “Start acting like a kid!”? Jesus did. But He wasn’t calling His followers to childishness but childlikeness. That call—and what it means—is what we will be exploring this week.

*Discussing . . .*

As you work through this short passage this week, one of the tensions you will have to wrestle with is the distinction between childishness and childlikeness. Perhaps the opening discussion question can set the stage for that. There are things that are commendable about children; things like their innocence, their simple confidence and trust in others, their delight in life. Obviously, there are other things that often characterize children that are not so commendable; such things characterize childishness.

In reading this text where Jesus invites His followers to respond to the Gospel in a childlike way, keep in mind the broader context of His remarks. Jesus has been talking to His followers about “disciple-life.” And as He has done so, we get to see some of what His followers are struggling with.

When Peter pushes back against the idea that Jesus, their leader, will have to suffer (Mark 8:31-32), he ends up rebuking Jesus. In reply, Jesus tries to help Peter better understand disciple-life by picturing it as “taking up your cross” (8:34-35).

As Jesus continued to lay out before His followers the necessity of His impending death, they still resisted (9:30-32). What contributed to the difficulty they seemed to have in embracing the truth about His death? Perhaps it was their preoccupation with their own greatness (9:33-34). So, Jesus unpacks a bit more of what it really means to follow Him and experience life with Him. The life of a disciple includes pursuing “lastness” and embracing servanthood (9:35-37). And, to picture this life of lastness and servanthood, Jesus models it by embracing a child (9:37), illustrating the serving of even those who can return nothing back for such serving.

Well, the twelve are still struggling with thoughts of greatness as is evident in the concern raised by John (9:38); he wants to hinder someone who is “with us.” But Jesus presses further and not only calls John to not hinder

one simple brother who is seeking (perhaps imperfectly) to live out his faith in Jesus, but calls all His followers to not cause any such humble, fellow followers to stumble.

And then, in the passage we are looking at this week, we find the twelve getting in the way of children coming to receive blessing at Jesus’ hand. And how does Jesus respond? Do not hinder those who come like these children. And why does Jesus say this? Because the *way children come* is really the only way to come to experience life with Jesus. It is the quality of childlikeness that Jesus is affirming.

Neither Jesus nor Mark unpack much for us about this childlikeness, but perhaps we can glean a bit from how Mark has unfolded the account over the past few chapters.

When calling His followers to a cross-bearing life, Jesus is inviting them to “follow the leader.” When He explains about servanthood and pictures it in the embracing of a child, Jesus highlights the simple way children often love each other. (Just watch one child comforting another who is hurt.) When Jesus turns to John’s concern with “they’re not with us,” He is raising the bar to “play well with others.” And in calling His followers to receiving the kingdom as a child, Jesus is underscoring the way children come, with needs and desires, to those who can meet their needs in a simple and dependent way.

Although Jesus uses the “come as a child” language in 10:13-16, there are glimpses of that kind of response to the Gospel and relationship dynamic with Him throughout these chapters.

Neither Jesus nor Mark unpack much for us about why the disciples wanted to hinder the children. Perhaps they are still too caught up with their own sense of self-importance. Maybe they are concerned that children will distract Jesus from what is most important. It’s not entirely clear. But what is clear is that those who are seemingly closest to Jesus are hindering others who would like to simply receive blessing from His hands.

So, as you discuss and explore this section and as you think well about what it means to receive the kingdom in a childlike way, don’t bypass the possibility that we all, at times, might actually hinder others from coming near to Jesus. Are there times we are like the parents, looking for ways to bring others into the experience of Jesus’ blessing? Are there times when we are like the children, in Jesus’ presence for the blessing that brings? Are there times when we are like the disciples, so caught up with how we think “ministry” should happen and so given over to what we think life should be like that we discourage others who have simple hope that Jesus might touch their lives?

These few verses and this simple idea open up some rich reflection on what it means to follow Jesus . . . and what that implies for how we serve others who would also long to experience life with the Savior.