

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus Loves the Little Children

Scripture: Matthew 19:13-15

Code: 2342

And now we come to our study of God's Word. Let's look together at Matthew chapter 19. And this morning we come to one of the most tender, sensitive, lovely portions of all the Scripture. It's our Lord blessing the little children.

I want us to follow along in our Bibles, I'm going to read verses 13, 14 and 15 of Matthew 19.

Then were there brought unto Him little children that He should put His hands on them and pray. And the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Permit little children and forbid them not to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of heaven. And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

"Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." We all sang that if we were raised in Sunday School. We also sang, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." Those kinds of lovely sentiments are not without biblical foundation. And this passage perhaps more than any other single passage gives that biblical foundation, for here we find our Lord blessing little children.

This particular incident is not only recorded in Matthew but it's also recorded in Mark chapter 10 and Luke chapter 18. A significant enough passage to have been given full involvement by all the synoptic writers. It appeared to the disciples that the whole idea of bringing little children to Jesus was rather an intrusion of a trivial nature. But not so, as we shall see.

Parents in this scene wanted Jesus to touch their children, to bless their children, to pray for their children. And I think we would agree that they are not the only parents who wanted to bring their little ones to Jesus. As a parent, that was my desire from the time we had our first one. And I know there are parents throughout all the countries of the world who know the Lord who have the same longing as these parents in a spiritual sense to bring their children to Jesus.

There's a family in our church that had the pleasure of doing this, among many families. Deanne wrote this particular testimony regarding one of their little children by the name of Tanya. I don't normally read something like this but I want to read it to you because it's her own testimony. Listen carefully.

"I sat down on the bed and picked up my crocheting to learn a couple of new stitches before our long flight to Auckland on Monday. The girls had just gone outside to play and I had a few moments to get some details of the trip sorted out in my mind. I had missed my husband very much during the past

three weeks as he went on ahead of us to New Zealand on a preaching itinerary but soon we would be on our way to meet him.

"My plans were interrupted by the loud screeching of tires. I waited to hear the collision but there wasn't any sound of impact. So I figured someone on the boulevard near our home had been very lucky. Within seconds, my ten-year-old came running into the house and shouted upstairs, 'Tanya's been hit by a car.' My body reacted immediately with terror and fright as I raced down the stairs. I could tell as I ran past Sonya that her little heart was in knots.

"Mary, my neighbor, met me on the porch and said, 'Hurry.' 'O my God,' was all I could say. I felt every second was an eternity as I sped toward the people who were there even ahead of me, fear gripped my soul as I imagined what my child was feeling, surely it couldn't have happened. I knelt over Tanya as the off-duty fireman from across the street covered her with a blanket. She was unconscious and the neighbor told me she couldn't feel any pain that her being out was good. I didn't see any blood or any broken bones, if only she would wake up and tell me where it hurt. I didn't dare move Tanya for fear of hurting something and I was told the ambulance was already on the way. All I had to do was wait. What was taking so long?

"I picked up her tennis shoe that had been knocked off and looked at her face. I talked to her but she couldn't hear me, she breathed a heavy sigh and her head turned to the side. I began to cry. I asked the fireman how she was as she...he monitored her pulse and he assured me she was still breathing. Deep inside I told myself, 'She couldn't be badly hurt, she looks all right, if only she'd wake up and tell me how she is.'

"Finally the ambulance arrived, it had been about five or six minutes, the longest I can remember. If only my husband were with me instead of half way around the world. As we backed into the Emergency entrance, the staff was waiting for us at the door. I felt relieved to finally be here. Now everything would be okay. Tanya was in good hands and I would soon know what injuries she sustained.

"They took her into a treatment room and closed the door. I was asked to give some information and sign a slip authorizing the doctors to do what was necessary. I picked up the pen and scrawled my name and the word "mother," but it was hardly legible, I realized I was under severe emotional stress. And all I could do was wait. I sat on a bench and prayed. I sobbed inside and out as I asked God to take of my dear little seven-year-old. I felt confident He was there with me, so I wasn't alone, even for a moment.

"After about a half an hour, a young nurse came over to me and took hold of my hands. I wasn't ready for what she was going to tell me. 'Tanya's condition is very serious. She has brain damage. She isn't breathing on her own.'

"You mean she might die?"

"Yes, she certainly might."

"I was completely numbed with the possibility that Tanya's life might be taken from me. I was mightily thankful that God could work miracles because I was going to ask for a big one. It would be hours before my husband would get here. Would it be all over? Would Tanya be gone? My parents arrived, they were already crying and I hadn't even told them the grisly news yet. The words came pouring out, 'Tanya may die.'

"Soon the doctor came in. He introduced himself as a neurosurgeon and I felt sure Tanya was in capable hands. His assessment of her condition was totally pessimistic. She had sustained a blow to the brain stem, her brain had been shaken like a bowl of jelly, it had been damaged, they didn't know how much but she didn't have much chance of a full recovery. He gave her about five percent chance of coming out of it.

"We all dropped to our knees in that little room and prayed through tears and grief that God would heal Tanya. We asked God to glorify His name by restoring her to her normal vivacious self.

"The night was a long hard one. I sat holding Tanya's tennis shoe. There was no place to put it so I held on to it all night long. It was good to have something to occupy my hands anyway and every time I spotted a nurse walking our direction, my heart stood still as I waited for her to walk up and say it was all over. But all night long, they just went about their business. Oh how I wish Silas were there to relieve some of the strain I was undergoing. I felt I had to do the feeling for both of us.

"The doctor's reports grew steadily worse and I prayed even more. Finally, about 24 hours after the accident, he gave us another hopeless diagnosis, he said, 'Tanya could remain indefinitely on those machines but would probably never improve. She hadn't regained consciousness and showed no signs of improvement. Her brain had been chan...damaged too badly.'

"I felt my skin grow cold as he completed his report and walked away. I couldn't wait much longer for that miracle. I decided to go and stay with Tanya until Silas returned, no matter how long it was. I asked for a chair and pulled it close to Tanya's side. I began sobbing uncontrollably as I begged aloud for God to return my little girl to me. I kept choking on the tears as I prayed, recited the Lord's prayer and poured out all the tension, fear and emotion building up for more than a day. I uncovered Tanya's foot to touch there, there were black pin marks put there by the doctors. I stroked her forehead and talked to her, hoping she would wake up.

"My brother's father-in-law, a doctor, entered and checked the charts and machines. I kept on crying out to God for that miracle. After about a half an hour, I finally came to the place where I was ready to accept God's will no matter what it was. I asked God to take Tanya if He wanted to, but I still wanted her back and I told Him so.

"Someone came and asked me to return to the waiting area where family and friends were gathered to hear our family doctor give his appraisal of Tanya's chances. I felt I could leave for a couple of minutes and then return to my vigil until Silas arrived. He spoke in much the same language as the neurosurgeon, he said, 'Tanya's brain was gone.' He spoke in such final terms as if the battle were over.

"I interrupted, 'Where is Tanya right now? Is she in the intensive care room or with the Lord?' He repeated his statement about her brain and I asked again, 'Where is Tanya? Is she with the Lord?' I had to know if God had made the decision already. And finally he said, 'Her body is being kept working but Tanya isn't there anymore, she's with the Lord.'

"And I remember what I had just said to the Lord, 'Have Thy will, not mine.' Friends later told me I was radiant as I then replied, 'I shall not forsake my Lord because if I did, I would be saying Tanya's gone forever. I would do as King David in the Old Testament had done when his child was taken, he washed his face, changed his clothes and went about his business, satisfied that God knew best.'

"I returned to the room to say good-bye to Tanya and that I would see her again. There would be no more begging to God to bring her back. It was then I realized she had actually been taken home to heaven the day before in the street. When I saw her heave that sigh and turn her head to the side, that was when she went to be with Jesus. As I stood there with an inner strength that was foreign to me, I remember how Tanya had prayed during her last few months, 'Lord, I want to go and be with You while I'm young.' When I asked her why she prayed like that, she smiled and said, 'Because I want to sit on Jesus' lap when I get there and I don't want to be too big.'

"A new assurance and peace surged through my sorrowful soul and I was refreshed with the joy that we were all in good hands and God hadn't forsaken us for an instant."

Great testimony...great testimony. You see, the reason that family had joy was because they knew where Tanya went. She was gathered into the arms of the Savior because they had brought her to Jesus. And they live even to this day in the exciting anticipation of a reunion with her.

As a parent, I have always lived with a tremendous almost overwhelming desire to bring my children to Jesus, haven't you? I want nothing in life more than that. I take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul, "Bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And it is so hopeful when you have the confidence that you've brought your child to Jesus. If they die, you know where they are. If

they live, you know to whom they belong. I wouldn't be able to survive with joy as a parent if I didn't have that kind of confident hope.

Now today's lesson tells us about some people who brought their children to Jesus. And I want to draw some spiritual implications and applications out of that. But first, let's look at the text itself.

Verse 13 begins with the word "Then." And the word "then" just sort of links things up with the prior passage. We don't really know how long a time there was between these two things. We don't know what the space or the interval was. "Then" is rather vague. But it seems as though we might well conclude that since they were in a house, according to Mark 10, and the Lord was talking to the disciples and He was talking about marriage, it could have been very easy for the conversation to have turned to talk about children. And maybe He was talking about that. Maybe He was talking about family. And out of the crowd that had gathered, no doubt accompanying the disciples now, there came some parents and they brought their children to Jesus.

He's in a home here. If it was like when He was in homes in Galilee, it no doubt was crammed full of people. And it says in verse 13, "They brought unto Him little children." Mark and Luke use the imperfect tense verb, "they were bringing." They were in the process of bringing. They...the indication is that perhaps some had reached Him and others were still coming. There was a flow of people bringing their little children to Jesus. And while that flow was going on, the disciples were watching. They felt it to be an intrusion. They felt it to be a violation of the important things. They felt it to be a non-priority deal to have these parents filing up to Jesus while He was supposed to be teaching and speaking to those who could understand and depositing in His arms little babies.

It's interesting to note the word "them" at the end of verse 13. Them refers to the ones bringing the babies. No doubt they're own parents. And the "them" is in the masculine form indicating that it was not just mothers, it probably was parents and maybe fathers. And so they're bringing their children. No doubt they had seen a demonstration of the Lord's tenderness toward children. Just back in chapter 18, we saw in verses 2 and following how the Lord had gathered into His lap a little one and used that little one as an illustration of spiritual truth. And we talked then about the attractiveness that the Savior had to children. So no doubt they saw the love in His heart, the tenderness and gentleness of His personality and His character. And when they knew He was the unique prophet of God that He was when He spoke as He spoke, when He did what He did in His healing ministry and His teaching ministry, that they would have longed to bring their children.

You see, it was customary to do that in Jewish society. They had been raised to do that. In the Talmud it said that they were to bring their children to any great teacher of the law, that he might bless them and pray for them. And they had done that. For example, a father would bring his child in infancy to the synagogue and he would pray for his own child. And then he would hand that child to an elder and the elder would...would pray for child and then hand it to the next elder and the little

children would go along the line of elders, each one praying for the child. Why? Because they believed that these men who specially represented God, who specially served God's kingdom, who specially taught God's Word, had a proximity to the heart and soul of God, had a prayer life that had more faith, more power perhaps than some normal folks might have and they longed to have their children prayed for by such.

We still have that with us today as we have parents who desire to bring their babies to be dedicated to Christ, to be prayed for by their pastors and elders. That's a very special thing in the heart of a parent.

I want you to note, if you will, please, the word "little children." There are many words in the New Testament for children. The word here is paidia...paidia. It means little children but it doesn't tell us how little. But if we were to compare the other passages and go to Mark, we would find that he uses the term brephos. And so, whereas Matthew just generally says little children, Mark tells us how little, brephos, and that word means a suckling, a nursing baby, an infant. They were bringing in their arms their infants. And we know they must have been infants by our Lord's response because the Bible says in Mark that He took them in His arms and blessed them. They were bringing babies to Jesus. They wanted Him to pray for them with His unique divine power, with His unique proximity to God, they felt, they wanted His prayers on the behalf of their little ones.

Alfred Edersheim, who has done such a great service in helping us to understand the culture of the New Testament, writes, "We can understand how when one who so spake and wrought rested in the house, Jewish parents should have brought their little children and some of their babies to Him, that He might touch and put His hands on them and pray. What power of holiness must these parents have believed to be in His touch of prayer? What life to be in and to come from Him? What gentleness and tenderness must His love have been when they dared so to bring these little ones to Him?"

Sometimes Jesus was fearful. Sometimes He was very threatening. But sometimes He was very tender and even children found comfort in His arms. The word brephos which is used in Luke 18:15 for the babies here, I think it's Luke 18:15 rather than the Mark passage, but the word brephos is also used--and I think most interestingly--in Luke 1 of a fetus. When Mary visited Elizabeth, you remember, and the babe leaped in her womb? That's brephos, so it's speaking about infancy, even prior to birth. It's the same word used in 1 Peter 2:2 where it says "As babes desire the pure milk of the Word, like a nursing baby desires milk, so you should desire the Word." It's the word of infancy. So these are babies and they are brought to Jesus.

Now when we think about Jesus loving little children, I want to just add a footnote at this point. Jesus was not shallowly sentimental about children. He knew they were sinners. He knew they were born of the flesh and that which is born of the flesh is what? Flesh, John 3:6. He knew that what David said

was true in Psalm 51:5, "In sin did my mother conceive me." There was a sin principle operative from conception on. So there was no shallow sentimentalism about children. There was no idea that children are righteous or holy or pure or innocent or undefiled.

And if you have a question about that, all you have to do is remember the Matthew 11 passage where Jesus remarked about the little children playing in the marketplace and they were playing wedding and funeral because that's what they saw their parents do, so when they played, they played wedding and funeral. And they were calling to each other when they were playing wedding and they were saying, "Come and play," and some kids wouldn't do it. Then they'd play funeral and call and some kids wouldn't come. And so, the Lord says you see them in the marketplace and they say we have piped but you have not danced, we have mourned but you are not sorrowful. In other words, there are peevish, stubborn kind of bratty little kids that won't get on with it and be good sports. So the Lord uses them as an illustration of the peevish stubborn attitudes of Israel. No matter what the tune is, no matter what the game is, they won't play either. So the Lord is not shallowly sentimental about children, He doesn't make them into some kind of perfection that isn't true of them, but He does acknowledge in this particular passage that they have a special place in His heart.

So, here come the parents in the progress of bringing their babies to Jesus. And it says at the end of verse 13, "The disciples rebuked them." Mark emphasizes the...again, the imperfect tense or the continuing nature of the rebuking, it is a very strong word, the substantive form of this word has been used for the term "punishment...punishment." I mean, the disciples were really going after them, threatening them. "Look, you can't be interrupting the Lord by bringing up these babies, it's very disturbing when we're trying to teach. We're trying to get on with things. We can't have this kind of triviality." And so, He opposes...they oppose, I should say, this process.

Now at this point, it simply says in verse 14, "Jesus said, Permit..." and so forth. What it doesn't tell us is what Mark tells us in chapter 10 verse 14, that Jesus was angry with the disciples. He uses the word indignant in the Authorized. He was furious with them. Only two or three times He really got mad at them. Frustrated with them a lot, disappointed a lot, but really angry, just a few times. This is one of them. And the only time that particular word of indignation is used of Jesus in reference to them. But He was very angry with them for trying to stop these parents from bringing their children.

And it is expressed as to why He was angry with them if you just think about the scene. I think He was angry with them for these reasons. Reason number one, He loved babies. He loved them. And He knew they were a creation of God, a creation of His. And He felt a tender affection for them. And He felt a sympathy for them for the world in which they were born. And it seemed, of course, that the disciples were utterly deficient in such an attitude.

Secondly, I think He is angry with them because He also loved adults and He knew full well that if you say no to people's children, you're going to have a touch time getting their attention. Politicians

learned that long ago. I mean, He knew the first and foremost way to a parent's heart was through their baby and He wanted to demonstrate the genuineness of His tender love and care for the little ones.

Thirdly, I think He was angry with them because no one is outside the care and plan and love of God, not even a baby. No one is outside the concern of God, not a baby. No one ever coming to Jesus Christ intrudes on Him.

Fourthly, I think He was angry because children provided Him a tremendous picture, a tremendous illustration, a tremendous analogy for salvation. And He took advantage of it every time He could.

Fifthly, I think He was angry with them because He needed to set them straight about something. And that something was this, you don't ever say who can or cannot come to Christ. That's not within your prerogative. If you follow the life of Christ, you will find that He refused some people they brought and He sought some people they rejected. And it is a lesson of who's in charge, again. And so, He really was eliminating their misunderstanding, their lack of concern for little ones.

So, He says this to them in verse 14, "Permit little children and forbid them not to come unto Me." Interesting that He uses two verbs and there's a reason. The first one is in the aorist tense, point action, permit right now this moment, let them come. And then "forbid them not" is present tense. And what He's saying is right now let these come and from now on don't ever make it a practice to stop them from coming. So He takes care of the present and the future. And by the way, He doesn't rebuke the parents at all so it indicates to me that their motive was pure. They weren't coming for some magical rite, they weren't coming for some magical ceremony. They weren't trying to get something like Simon Magus did that they could market somewhere. They came because their hearts were right and they wanted this man of God to pray over their children that their children might grow up to be what the Talmud said, "Famous in the law, faithful in their marriage and known by their good works." And so He says, "For now, you permit them to come and for future, don't ever forbid them to come."

And I believe that's a principle of ministry that God has used in His church throughout the years of the church. God has seemed to give the heart of His people a heart for children. We have that heart here. We praise God for what He's doing with little ones...from the nursery right on up, the Christian school. All the things that we do with children are done because we believe that Jesus wants the little children to come to Him. And when they come to Him, they come so readily and they come so eagerly.

One writer said, "As the flower in the garden stretches toward the light of the sun, so there is in the child a mysterious inclination toward the eternal light. Have you ever noticed this mysterious thing," he writes, "that when you tell the smallest child about God, it never asks with strangeness and wonder, 'What or who is God? I have never seen Him.' But listens with shining face to the words as

though they soft loving sounds from the land of home. Or when you teach a child to fold its little hands in prayer that it does this as though it were a matter of course, as though there were opening for it that world of which it had been dreaming with longing and anticipation. Or tell them these little ones the stories of the Savior, show them the pictures with scenes and personages of the Bible, how their pure eyes shine, how their little hearts beat."

The coming of babies to Jesus, the coming of children to Jesus, very important. Why? End of verse 14, "For of such...for of such is the Kingdom of heaven." Very important statement. "Of such," not two-tone in the Greek, not of these. He's not saying these children are in the Kingdom of heaven, these children belong to the Kingdom of heaven, but *toiouton*, of such as these. And He goes beyond those little children to embrace all in that category and saying these are the kind who have a place in the Kingdom, babies like these babies. He's not isolating out the elect babies from the non-elect babies. And would you notice, there's no baptism here of babies. And would you notice there's no indication of the faith of the parents, there's no parental covenant here. He just says babies such as these, in this category, prior to the time when they can understand and respond to Christ, prior to the time when they can exercise their own faith, prior to what I like to call the decision time, these little ones belong to the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of heaven is the sphere of God's rule in Christ through grace. And He says these have a place. And I believe He is including all babies, all those who as the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:12, he said, "When I was a child, I thought as a child, I spoke as a child. Now I've become a man, I put away childish things," Paul told us there two different times in life, there's a time when you can't understand and you can't speak and then there's a time when you do understand. And when you're in the time when you don't understand, like a little baby, that's the time God has placed you in special care under His sovereign rule as the King. It says nothing about the faith of their parents, nothing about any rite or ritual or baptism, nothing about them being elect or non-elect, He just says those who are like these belong in My Kingdom. And I believe grace is extended to them.

That's why I believe with all my heart that if a baby dies before it can reach the time of decision and make the decision itself, I believe if that baby dies, that baby goes into the presence of Jesus Christ because they are uniquely in the care of the King. Now I don't know how God dispenses that grace to them other than by a sovereign act on His own part. I do know that it is dispensable to them by virtue of the death of Jesus Christ for their sin. It is applied to them by the sovereignty of God in their behalf because they cannot choose on their own. And I think that's one reason why the mortality rate is so high in non-Christian countries because I think the Lord is taking those little ones to be with Him before they can grow up in a culture that makes it so difficult for them ever to believe.

My wife and I sat last night down and we watched a program on television on abused and battered children. Some of you may have seen it. It was very important, I think, to take note of that. It showed a little fella, his face lingers in my mind, named Gene Jones, just an adorable little guy, and he had

been murdered by his father at the age of three. His father had placed a knee in his stomach and crushed all his organs and then battered his head and he was gone. And, you know, my stomach was just in a knot and there was just terrible anxiety in my mind and then a flood of peace came to think of the fact that that little fella is in the arms of Jesus Christ.

And then they discussed another little two-year-old whose father killed him by banging his head on the bathtub. And ones that were cut up with knives. And it went on and on like that and I just kept saying, "Thank You, Lord...Thank You, Lord, that they're with You, that You gather the little lambs in Your bosom as the prophet said."

And I think that's the wonderful confidence that our Lord has here. I don't think that the Lord could have said what He said so comprehensively when He said, "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven" if He had been dealing with some kind of elect or non-elect deal, or some parental covenant thing or some rite or ritual deal. I think the only way He could say that they belong in the Kingdom of heaven is in fact because that is true.

Now, just to be theological for a moment, I don't think that means necessarily that all little babies are saved. I just think they're under special protection and if they die at that moment, they're redeemed. If they were all saved, then when they got to be old enough, they'd lose their salvation and I'd have theological problems with that. So I just believe they're all under special protection and if in fact they die, the Lord gathers them to Himself. It's a wonderful confidence. It's what was in the heart of David in 2 Samuel 12:23, I think, when he said, his son, his infant son died, he said, "He cannot come to me but I shall go to him." And surely David knew that he was talking about death, but I also think he was talking about the fact that in death he would see again that son he loved. And I'm sure in David's heart, he had the confidence that he would see God and so that son had to be in God's presence.

Well, babies are sinners, no question about it. That's cause they're produced by sinners. And we have to understand that. And yet God has a special place for them. That's a great confidence. But you know something? It's a tremendous, tremendous responsibility because if you have in your arms a little baby that belongs to the Kingdom, it would seem to me that your task as a parent is to make sure that when that little life comes to the point of decision, the decision it makes takes it fully into God's Kingdom. What a responsibility. What a responsibility to make sure that little life given to you under the care of the King is returned to the King after your stewardship is completed.

Mark tells us in chapter 10 in the parallel passage, that after Jesus said that, verse 16, "He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them." And by the way, the word for "blessed" is a compound word, we think of eulogeo, eulogy, the word "to bless", this has kata added to the front of it, He blessed them intensely, He prayed fervently over these little ones. He prayed passionately over them. He prayed, I'm sure, that God would make them strong in the law, faithful in their marriage, abundant in good works, that God would return them to Himself when they reached the age of

decision. That in the years to come their parents would fulfill their responsibility to lead them back to the One from whom they came. And He must have smiled on the littlest subjects of His sovereign Lordship as He prayed.

But He isn't finished. Luke tells us He added one more note as He had those little children in His arms. He said this, "Verily I say unto you," Luke 18:17, "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God, like a little child shall in no way enter it." He couldn't resist that. I mean, it seemed like every time He got a baby in His arms, He gave that little word, that it isn't just babies like this who are under the care of the Kingdom, but anybody, whoever comes into the Kingdom in adult life comes when they come like a little baby. So the Kingdom is populated, folks, by just two kinds of folks--those who are babies and those who come in like babies.

And what does He mean by that? We went into that in Matthew 18:3 in detail, I'll just remind you. He means the simplicity, the openness, the honesty, the lack of pretention, the lack of hypocrisy, the dependency, the weakness, the simplicity, the humility that casts oneself in utter humility and dependence on the strong arms of the Lord. His Kingdom is filled with those who are babies and those who came as babies, who knew in themselves they had no resource. And so the "of such" broadens and I agree with John Calvin who said, "The passage broadens to give Kingdom citizenship to both children and those who are like them," end quote.

So, they brought their babies to Jesus, desiring that He would bless them and pray for them. And it tells us, doesn't it, in verse 15, He did it. He laid His hands on them. Mark adds He prayed for them, blessed them and then He departed from there.

Little children are so responsive. If you do your work with little children as Proverbs 22:6 says, you'll return them to the Lord. When I was in seminary, there was a man in our seminary, he came my last year by the name of Paul Pillai from India. He was with us this week in our staff meeting. I had some fellowship with him. Paul came from India to go to seminary. He was a Hindu all his life. His whole family were Hindus. He was saved. He wanted to go to north India, most of the Christians, the two-and-a-half percent that are Roman Catholic - Protestant, quote/unquote "Christians" in India are in the south, in the north it's dominantly Hindu and Moslem and the Moslems there are more vocal and more narrow minded and wild then they are in Iran, if you can imagine that. And he wanted to reach north India. And he wanted to develop a strategy to do that.

So, he went back and basically started a Bible college by the name of Grace College. And they now have about, I think, ninety or a hundred young men in the college. It's a four-year program and if you want to be in the college, you have to give evidence that God has called you into the pastorate, that God has called you into the ministry. They take no students who aren't going right out into the ministry. And if you can demonstrate that and commit your life to that, they'll take you as a student for four years free, no tuition, no room, no board, nothing. Just folks, Christians friends here and over in

India are supporting that school and they're training these men.

At the end of that four-year period, they take you and put you in a village and you become the pastor in a dominantly Hindu village. And they help you get started by taking two tents into town. They set up one tent to live in, the team that goes in, and they set up another tent to have meetings in and they stay six months. And for six months, they evangelize the Hindus and the Moslems of those cities. And by the time the six months is over, they've got a little group of Christians gathered together and then they take a young man and put him in there and he becomes the shepherd of the little flock. And they have planted 98 of those flocks...98 little villages and cities with their men.

And it isn't easy. He shared with tears, got all choked up, how that one night there was a man giving a testimony, he had been saved out of the Moslem sect and the Moslems became so irate at the testimony that they...he was sitting on the platform next to the man giving the testimony, that they stormed the platform and plunged knives in him and killed him. And he died. And he said just before he died, he said, "You...you may kill me but you cannot take the life of God from me." And they killed him.

And he talked about the fact that they threw him on the ground on another occasion and they kicked him and pummeled his body and he felt that he would be dead. And all of a sudden, all these people who had attacked him in the middle of this meeting, the crowd ran when the attacked started, and then all the attackers ran. And he opened his eyes and no one was there.

Later one, one of those who had attacked him became a Christian. And he asked the man, he said, "When you were trying to kill us and we believed you would kill us, why did you run?"

"Oh," he said, "because a group of very strong men from another village came and drove us away." And Paul said they went to all the villages surrounding to find out who those people were and they never could find any who did that. And he believes it was the angels of God who protected him.

But that's how it is when you try to start a church in a Hindu village. And so, this is his vision and he's sending these men out and he was sharing with me, as we talked about later, that there was a real problem because it's so hard to win the Hindus to Christ and there's so many villages that need to be reached, how are you going to have enough pastors to send out? And it struck him that the way to do it was to get them when they're children because children are so responsive.

So, they built a children's home and they're now enlarging it to handle 500 of them. Now they've got 81 of these little boys mostly, they pick them up orphans and strays and kids living in the streets, and he said, "Oh yes," he said, "All 81 have given their lives to Jesus Christ." And he said, "All 81 are learning the Word of God and we teach them and love them. And then we send them to the regular schools so they'll learn their culture. They come right back and we teach them the Word of God." And

you see, as they grow up in our school and our home, you see, they just go right into the Bible college and right out into the pastorate. It's a great strategy, folks. It's a lot easier to get them then, isn't it? All 81 know the Lord. And wait till they get 500. You see, children are brought to Jesus and their hearts seem to open. We need to be busy bringing children to Christ.

What about your children? I want to draw our thinking to an end. I want to just give you five words, key words, in regard to how you bring your children to Jesus and sort of draw some spiritual conclusions from this passage. Five words that you can just kind of jot down somewhere and I think they'll help you. First one is "remember...remember." In other words, in bringing your children to Jesus, you want to remember first of all that God created your child...God creates children. Every child is a direct work of His creative hand. Psalm 139:13, "Thou hast possessed my inward parts, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb, I will praise Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Thy works." God made that child.

Secondly, God gave that child to you as a "gift." Psalm 127:3, "Children are an heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward." God made that child and God gave that child to you as a gift.

And then that child is to be a "blessing" to you. Psalm 127:4, "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of one's youth, happy--or blessed--is the man who hath his quiver full of them." Children are to be a blessing to you. God made them, God gave them to you to bless you.

Fourth point under remember is, remember this, if God made them and God gave them and God gave them to be a blessing, then God wants them "returned" to Him for His use. And that is why Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he's old he won't depart from it." That's why Ephesians 6:4 very clearly says, "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Because the task that you have is to give your children back to God, that's your stewardship. So remember, where they came from, and to where they are to return.

Secondly, "teach"...that's the second key word..."teach." We are called, I believe, by God to teach. Children have limited knowledge, they have limited reasoning power, they have limited discretion and they need to be taught. You remember how it was said of Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:15, that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures that were taught to thee by thy mother and thy grandmother? You see, that's women...you talk about the role of a woman, my dear ladies, you have the role right there. Lois and Eunice while Timothy's father and grandfather are out earning a living, they're in there feeding that little life with all the divine truth they can possibly pump in. That's the role of a woman in the godly home, to feed that little life the truth of God. And then the father comes along, as the Proverbs tell us and teaches his son the wisdom of God as well.

Go back to the Pentateuch, I'm thinking of Deuteronomy 6 for a minute. Let me give you just a look at a pattern that you need to understand if you're going to effectively teach children. We must remember

whose they are, where they came from and where they're to return and we must teach them...we must teach them. And here is how. I believe God gave this to Moses in the very beginning with His people because it's so basic, it hasn't changed, the principles are here. Verse 4, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." In other words, if you're going to teach your children, it all begins with you worshiping the right God in the right way. No idols. You cannot teach them unless you commit yourself to the true religion.

Secondly, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, with all thy might, these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart." What does that mean? That means internalize what you believe about God. Not only have the right theology, but the right heart. You've got to commit to your children not only truth but truth in an uncompromising heart of conviction, truth in a pure heart, truth in a holy life so that you see God in everything. You love Him with your heart, your mind, your soul, your power, everything. If you're going to teach your children, you've got to have the right God and the right faith and it's got to come right out of your heart. It has to be internal with you, not just external.

And then verse 7, I love this, "Teach them diligently unto thy children and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up." What does that say? That simply says that you have to teach from life situations. You have the right faith in God, you've internalized it, your heart is filled with love, your passion is toward God, you love Him with your heart, mind and strength and now out of every vicissitude, every trial, every struggle, every moment of life, you teach the truth of God....when you stand up, sit down, walk in the way, lie down, every time you've got an opportunity. It isn't enough to sit down with your kids and read them a Bible story and then go on and live a worldly life the rest of the day. You've got to draw God into every analogy, into every aspect of life. They have to see the Lord in everything. All of life becomes a blackboard in which you teach the truth of God. And it's unending, unceasing, constant. Teach it diligently all the time, sitting down, walking, lying down, rising up so that it's the flow of life.

It's much more and people say, "Well, you know, we have a time each day when we read our children a story or we..." That's wonderful and that's good and that is important to teach them. But it's more important that you teach them in the flow of life responses, that you set up the right convictions for them, that you set up the right standards for them, that you set up the right objectives spiritually for them and that everything in life speaks to those things.

And there's another thing you need to do. Verse 8, "You shall bind them for a sign on thine hand and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them on the posts of thy house and on thy gates." You know what means? Give them a lot of reminders. So you have Bible verses hanging around your house? Do you have little plaques that remind them of great scriptural truths hanging in their rooms? Do you have Bibles all around? Do you read them stories? Do you sing songs with them that put truth in their mind and as they remember the tune they recycle the truth?

These are just little reminders. In a children's life, a children's world ought to be just filled with these reminders of divine things.

Don't you remember as a little kid the picture that you had in your room, maybe, that showed the Savior? Or don't you remember a little plaque on your wall? All those little reminders are just ways of reinforcing and there are many ways to do that.

Finally, not only make sure you have no idols and internalize your faith so that it's a heart faith and teach from life, provide reminders, but finally, watch out for the world. Verse 10 says, "When the Lord...God's brought you into a land in which He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, a great and goodly cities which you build not, houses full of good things which you filled not, wells digged which you digged not, vineyards and olive trees which you planted not." In other words, when the Lord unloads all the goodies on you and you've got it all and you didn't have to work for it, it all came to you graciously by God, then beware, lest you forget the Lord. You warn your children that when they get out into the prosperity and in the world that they not forget God. So you've got to warn them about the world, you've got to watch out for the world. The world will encroach on all the good things you've taught them and then little by little it will eat away at that. So you watch and you warn.

There's a third word, that's the word "model." That's the word "model." You want to remember, you want to teach, you want to model. And here's the key, you have to set the pattern. You have to set the example. Here was a man like Eli who was the high priest, 1 Samuel 2. He was the high priest. I mean, he was the guy who had the teaching position. He was the guy who represented the people before God. He was God's number one man in the land but his sons were wretched, vile, terrible in every sense of life. They took a wrong portion of meat in 1 Samuel 2:15 and 16, they weren't supposed to take it, it was to be offered and divided between the priests, the offerer and God. And they took a portion that wasn't theirs. That was only the beginning. They wound up having fornication relationships on the steps temple. They were wretched. But Eli went to them and all he said was, "You shouldn't do that." And he had no clout and he had no power because his own life was characterized by doing the very same sin and a compromiser can't pass convictions on to anybody. You will never get your children to live the kind of life you're not willing to live except by the overruling, overpowering grace of God.

Here was Eli in a posture of total compromise, trying to tell his sons to do something. You can't speak of the sins of your children with any power at all when there are sins in your own life that your children are very much aware of.

You know, David sinned so grossly, David sinned so grossly and then just before he died he gave Solomon a big speech and he said, "O Solomon, you know, obey all the commandments of God, O Solomon," he pleaded with Solomon to do that. And Solomon went right out and was worse than David. He multiplied wives...just an unbelievable numbers, wives and concubines numbering in the

hundreds. And he became a man of despair, devastating his life and his son, Rehoboam, was a total disaster, not even a bright light any way, the kingdom was shattered into two pieces and Rehoboam lost the kingdom because he had no fatherly example at all. And the Bible says he listened to his own generation. And if they're not getting it from the parents, they're going to get it from the peers and that's disastrous. You've got to set the model.

Hezekiah, the great king, compromised by bringing the king of Babylon to see the royal jewels and in his compromise, his son picked up the compromise, of course, and Manasseh who was his son totally abandoned God's law, created a whole world of wickedness and his son was even worse.

Joshua...Joshua came to a crossroads and he said to the people, he said you have a choice, choose you this day whom you will serve. He said you can choose Jehovah or the gods of the Ammonites and it says that when he gave them a choice, the next generation knew about the Lord and the next generation knew not the Lord. You don't even give them a choice. You don't even give them a choice in that sense. You have to pass on a high standard of holiness. And believe me, folks, you cannot just beat your kids into obedience while you're compromising yourself.

Tom Cohen in an article in Eternity magazine said this, I think it's very important. "Parents must be aware of the personal value of truth for their own sakes and not just for the sakes of their children. We cannot simply make a child believe in a truth because it's good for them. Their perceptive spirits will sense when we are doing something to engineer or manipulate a certain response. Instead it is the authenticity of parental commitment to truth apart from the lives of the children that brings freedom to share or pass on that truth to them. In other words, a mature motive for passing on truth is that as a parent I hold that truth to have value for my life, independent of my children and their response to it," end quote.

So remember: teach, model...fourthly, love...I don't need to say much about that. Love your children...love them. What does that mean? That means weep with them, laugh with them, hurt with them, rejoice with them, sacrifice for them, protect them. Don't provoke and exasperate them. Be unselfish, serve them, provide their needs, give them gifts, show them affection, give them pleasure, give them discipline. Love them in all those ways.

There's a final word...it's the word "trust." When you've done all that, trust God...that if you bring up a child in the way he should go, when he's old he...what?...he won't depart. And you'll make a lot of mistakes, we all do. But if you've done your best in the power of the Spirit of God, trust God that He which hath begun a good work will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ. And that trust translates into prayer...it translates into prayer. Pray for your children.

What happens if your baby dies? What happens if any baby dies? I believe the teaching of this passage is that that baby is cared for in the Kingdom, goes into the presence of Christ.

What if your child dies when they're old enough to make a decision? Then if they have chosen to believe in Jesus Christ, they go to be with Him. If they have not, they don't...they don't. Now that ought to be a severe enough reality to awaken us to the responsibility. Are you bringing your children up to know Jesus Christ?

Thank You, Father, for this passage and this moment in the life of our Savior given to us by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Thank You that You have a special place in Your Kingdom for the babies, the little ones. O God, we want to give them back to You not to lose them to the Kingdom. And so, teach us to remember, teach, model, love, trust. And may we spend ourselves as parents returning our children to you. And, Lord, where they have strayed and we do not see them coming, give us a greater zeal and prayer, greater hope, a greater commitment to reach out to them that they may know You. And, Father, help us to raise up a godly seed, a pure generation who can set right what is in our world is so wrong. Bless every mom and dad, every child, every young person, that we all may fulfill Your will. Thank You for Your great grace and Your forgiveness where we fail.

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