

Growing Down (Maturing into Irresponsibility)

Matthew 19:13-30

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There is a legend of a holy man who lived each moment in joy and wonder. One night, he camped outside of a village and a man came running to him yelling, "Give me the stone! Give me the stone!"

"What stone?" asked the holy man.

"Last night, the Lord told me in a dream that you would give me a precious stone that would make me rich forever."

The holy man rummaged through his bag and pulled out a stone. "The Lord must have meant this one. I found it on the path the other day. You certainly may have it." And he handed it to him with a smile.

The man gazed in wonder. It was a diamond, easily 10 pounds (the largest in the world).

He took the diamond, but all night he tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Early in the morning, he went back to the holy man and said, "Give me the wealth that makes it possible for you to give this diamond away so easily."

Today we begin a two part sermon from Matthew 19:13-30. Four years ago, we preached on the parallel text from Mark, which also appears in Luke. But instead of skipping over this text, I want to preach it again... because

we need to hear it, it's the next text in our Matthew series, and at the end of our service next week, we'll offer our 2005 giving cards.

It's the story of the rich young ruler, and it begins as follows, Matthew 19:13:

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.

It appears that children were very attracted to Jesus.

George McDonald said he "didn't believe in a man's Christianity if children were never found playing around his door."

Jesus blessed the children, but (next line) "the disciples rebuked the people" for bringing the children.

You know, children are irresponsible. The disciples were just beginning to understand Jesus was the Christ. What if one of those rugrats stuck their finger in the Messiah's ear?

The disciples rebuked them.

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such... [same construction as He used earlier in the sermon on the mount] for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Remember, Jesus has just been talking about sex, marriage, and divorce. Before that it was cutting off limbs, church discipline, and forgiveness, yet he intersperses all of this with talk of becoming like children, as if we can only do all these things if we follow as children.

In 18:3, He said, “We must ‘become like children to enter the kingdom.’” In Mark and Luke’s parallel, Jesus says we must “receive the kingdom like a child” to enter it.

I think we need to ask ourselves, “How do children receive things? How do they enter places? And what are they like?” For “of such consists the kingdom of Heaven,” says Jesus.

So, how do little children receive, and enter, and what are they like?

Well, for one, children demand attention, and this must have been one of the reasons the disciples rebuked them. Children actually believe they are God’s gift to the world, if for no other reason than that they exist. That is, they don’t earn their value, they assume it. They think, “Of course you should kiss me, and hug me, and bless me, I’m me, and I’m wonderful. And what’s a Messiah anyway?” Jesus loved that.

On my office wall there’s a beautiful family portrait professionally done by Randy Olson, a Phi Beta Kappa plaque, and a framed stick figure, crayon drawing of me and Elizabeth holding hands at the pyramids.

When my children were little, they’d expect me to hang their stuff everywhere (over the Mona Lisa if I had it) because they were more important.

Little children actually believe they are so valuable that of course someone would die for them. That is, they believe the truth. Do you believe the truth?

I remember as a child, I had no doubt my parents would die for me. I was that valuable, and my parents affirmed that belief.

I’d walk past secretaries, and elders, and other pastors, right into my daddy’s office, the kingdom of the

senior pastor of 1st Presbyterian Church. I'd march right in and sit on his lap.

Jesus said, "You must enter the kingdom like a child." Wow. "Daddy, I'm home! Out of the way, Gabriel. Up, up, up on Your lap, Daddy!"

Children enter boldly. They demand attention NOW!

The present moment.

That moment is where we love, feel, laugh—encounter persons. So Satan tries to catch us in the past with *guilt* or he tries to get us to dwell on the future in *anxiety*.

God wants us to attend chiefly to two things, writes Lewis, "Eternity itself or the moment at which time touches eternity, the present moment." Eternal life now.

The children on Jesus' lap are not thinking, "What good deed have I done to deserve this?" They're not thinking about the past. And they're not thinking, "What will this require of me in the future?" They're thinking, "I like this man with the beard. I know Him." Eternal life *is* knowing Him. Children live in the moment.

And how do children receive things? Well, they receive everything as a gift (that's the only way).

Because every child is completely poor.

Children can't own a house or a car or a bank account.

Legally they are dirt poor. My children are dirt poor, technically.

Yet they live in a wonderful house, ride in a fine SUV, and eat wonderful food. None of which they've purchased—*they're poor but rich.*

You can be dirt poor and watch the sunset, hug a child, and visit Rocky Mountain National Park.

You own none of these things—*dirt poor and yet rich.*

Children are poor, and everything is gift, gift, gift.

And children are legally powerless. Two year olds can't sue their parents. My children are powerless... and yet no one has more power over me than them. They end up getting all my stuff.

"Blessed are the meek [powerless]
for they shall *inherit the earth.*"

"Blessed are the poor
for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven.*"

"Blessed are the poor in spirit
of such is the *kingdom of heaven.*"

Poor, powerless, and ignorant.

Jonathon knocked over a mannequin in a department store one day when he was about three, and he started screaming at the top of his lungs, "I killed her! I killed her! I killed her!" You see, my point is... children are stupid, and they know it.

That is, they're humble.

Therefore, they must receive things by grace, a gift.
They can't buy them, can't acquire them by power, and
can't comprehend them with their mind.

Everything comes by grace—it's all gift.
So they live in wonder.

They can stand at the toilet for hours flushing the
handle in absolute awe. For a little child, a 10 pound bag of
mud is easily as wonderful as a 10 pound diamond (in fact,
you can do more with the mud).

It's not until they learn that anyone can own mud, but few
can own diamonds, that they want diamonds more.
Yet the more diamonds we own, the more they begin to
look like mud.

When Coleman was three, the first thing I'd ask him
in the morning when he'd come down the stairs was,
"Coleman, what did you dream about?" Every morning it
was the same thing, "Stars, rainbows, and school buses."

You see, school buses were just as wonderful as
rainbows and stars. They were all incomprehensible.
Mysteries that came through grace. As we get older, we
begin to not only comprehend internal combustion engines
in school buses, but also visible spectrum of light in
rainbows, and the hydrogen fusion reaction in stars. We
comprehend stars, but maybe that's only illusion. We
comprehend stars but don't *know* stars.

Maybe the talking star in Narnia was right...

"Burning gas?!"

That's not what a star *is*;
just what a star *is made of!*"

“Carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen?!
 That’s not what a person *is*;
 just what they’re *made of*!”

If you comprehend a person,
 perhaps you can’t know a person.
 You’ve dissected them and killed them.

You can comprehend dirt (carbon, oxygen, nitrogen).

You can only *know* a person—the breath, the spirit.

Children don’t comprehend people.
 They *know* people.

Do you comprehend Jesus? Or know Jesus?

Well, the day Coleman came down the stairs and I said, “Coleman, what did you dream of?” and he said, “I didn’t dream of anything.” And I could tell that he was feeling grown up... that day my heart sank. Because he’s my last, and I won’t get to see the world through children’s eyes again until we adopt or have grandkids or I volunteer in the nursery.

Ravi Zacharias wrote:

While traveling to Chicago by train, I sat behind a man and his young son. The boy seemed intrigued by the passing scenery and described to his father everything that he saw. He talked about some children at play in a school yard. He mentioned the rocks in a small stream and described the sunlight’s reflection on the water. When we stopped for a freight train to cross our track, the boy

tried to guess what each car might be hauling. As we neared the city he expressed excitement over the waves of Lake Michigan and told about the many boats in dry dock. At the end of the trip I leaned forward and said to the father, “How refreshing to enjoy the world through the eyes of a child!” He smiled and replied, “Yes, it is. Especially if it is the only way you can see it.” He was blind.

Jesus came preaching that “the kingdom is at hand.”
 Maybe He meant it—it’s just that we’re blind.
 And we need the eyes of a child to receive it and enter it
 (the kingdom of light and life—living persons).

Children live in wonder. For them the world is still alive, as if they are a breath from some place else, and they don’t yet know the world has died.

When Jon was little, we’d have to stop and talk to all the VW Bugs in the parking lot at the grocery store...

“Hello, Herbie, how are you today?
 I’m fine. You are a nice Herbie.”

I’m standing there, looking around... doesn’t matter if Herbie doesn’t talk back or Dad says, “It’s a car.” It’s not just that he saw the movie, The Love Bug. It’s that he expects the whole world to be personal.

Maybe he is a breath from God,
 and he still remembered life.

There is so much life in a little child.

Madeleine L'Engle wrote that we forget that we are more than we know, diminished by the dirty devices of this world. She says that's why studies show that creativity plummets between the ages of five and seven. But every little child is creative. Every little child sings and dances.

Coleman is our youngest. He *still* can't stop singing and dancing. Sometimes I rebuke him, "Coleman, stop it, just stop it! Have a little respect for the dead. Not everyone is so flippin' happy!"

Every little child sings and dances (even if they're lame).

Every little child dances, sings, and every little child is an artist, and each one a happy exhibitionist, giving themselves away.

"Hear my song!"

"See my dance!"

"Mr. Jesus, look at the picture I made you!"

And the disciples rebuke the children, "You're off key! Act nice in church!"

Mark records that at the disciples' rebuke, Jesus grew *indignant, furious*, saying, "Let them come! Let them come!"

You know, He's on the way to Jerusalem to be crucified, but for a few moments that day, He was surrounded by home—children—for "of such consists the kingdom of Heaven."

Well, each child sings, dances, and draws until we send them to school where they are required to in order to

get a grade, according to law. They compete and learn law, the knowledge of good and evil. They realize they're naked, and so they begin to hide. So instead of exhibiting themselves, they exhibit the fig leaves they wear. That's when little kids start going from cute to obnoxious.

They're learning pretense, but *little* children are
unpretentious.

Years ago, at a restaurant in California, I excused myself to use the restroom. I had walked across the dining room to the men's room door, when I heard two year old Elizabeth yelling, "Daddy, Daddy!" I turned as she stood on her chair and yelled, "Daddy, Daddy, don't forget to wipe!"

That's *unpretentious*.

Why be ashamed of such a newly acquired and valuable skill?

Little children are unpretentious. They don't know how to act. They know how to *play*, but adults know how to act.

Adults are so good at it, they can "give away all they have and deliver their body to be burned," and do it without an ounce of love, fooling even themselves. They can "whitewash tombs," fooling even themselves—but not God.

Children don't know how to act (fingers in the nose of the Messiah...), and He seems to like that...

Guys breaking through roofs while He's preaching...

Tax collectors in trees...

Prostitutes weeping at His feet...

Children are dependent, incapable, don't know how to act. They have nothing to give but their naked selves. So children are irresponsible.

Surely now we're getting at the heart of the disciples rebuke... irresponsibility.

You know, over the years, we disciples have even come up with this idea we call the "age of responsibility;" The age at which a child is able to respond to Jesus.

Capable of comprehending Jesus, and so...
Capable of doing a good deed for Jesus,
which we then call, "faith."

It's at that age that in many churches children are first allowed to be baptized and take communion.

If they come for baptism before that age, responsible disciples rebuke 'em.

It's a rather strange concept when baptism symbolizes salvation, and salvation happens when we're dead...

incapable of one good response
for "no one is good but God."

And it's doubly strange when Jesus says (regarding children and infants),

"of such as these is the kingdom of heaven."

"Let them come. Let them come."

"Let the parents bring their children."

Now I know I am just scratching the surface of an immense theological debate regarding infant baptism, but I sure wouldn't want to stand in anyone's way of bringing

kids to Jesus because I don't want Jesus getting all indignant on me.

Well, whatever the case, it's clear Jesus saves, and He saves *irresponsible children*. My question is:

“Does He ever save anyone else?”

That is,

anyone that is response-*able*?

For we were all saved when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, *incapable* of one good response.

Children know they are irresponsible.

They know they're dependent and incapable.

They know they're naked even if they're not yet very ashamed;

They know.

They are irresponsible.

But if you think you've reached an age of response-ability and capability, well then (it seems) your thinking makes you too old to enter the kingdom, for you must receive the kingdom *like a child*.

And now, all at once, my sermon has gone from “Precious Moments” cute to insulting...

It's the insult of the cross.

The insult of the Gospel.

You have absolutely nothing to boast about.

Little children must receive everything by grace. They can't comprehend stuff, buy stuff, or earn stuff—it's all gift.

They receive
 everything
 by grace
 through faith...

Faith in a person.

Faith is trust, *not knowledge*.
 Trust in a person.

Children can't depend on themselves; they must
trust, depend on another. And so little children value
 relationships more than knowledge.

They value relationships over things.

They are born not knowing the value of things.
 (A bag of mud is as good as a bag of diamonds.)
 However, they *are* born knowing the value of
 relationships.
 They value presence, touch, and time.

Their security is relationships—
 knowing persons not things.

I remember as a child when I'd get picked on and
 my world would crumble, I'd think, "If I can only get to my
 daddy's lap, everything would be okay." No matter what
 state I was in, shamed, confused, guilty, "Just as I am
 without one plea..." and his touch, his presence, his
 blessing, it would make everything okay.

My security was in the relationship.
 My direction was in the relationship.

Children navigate by relationship,
 as if "the Way" is not a map, but a person.

Several years ago, having landed at DIA after a trip to the Dominican Republic with the church and my father, my little daughter, Becky, met me at the gate and exclaimed, “Oh, Daddy, I knew you wouldn’t get lost because you were with *your* Daddy.”

That’s how Becky navigated back then, “Where’s my Daddy? I’ll do what my Father is doing.”

And even if she couldn’t comprehend my word, she always knew my voice.

Your heavenly Father is omnipresent.
And He is omnipotent.
He is all powerful,
And He will not “leave you nor forsake you.”
He is always responsible and always capable.

You *cannot* comprehend Him, yet He died that you would trust Him and know His voice.

A relationship: It’s how children navigate.

It’s how they learn.
They don’t calculate;
they imitate.
They follow.

Elizabeth, when she was little, used to sit and eat fiery hot salsa with me. Tears would be running down her cheek, and I’d say, “Honey, you don’t have to eat it.” (It’s not a responsibility, not a duty.) And Elizabeth would say, “I like salsa, like you, Daddy.”

They follow even when it hurts.

If I could summarize my study of children...

Children trust.

They are born to trust.

And that's what makes them vulnerable to great pain!

But Jesus said you must receive the kingdom like a child, "of such consists the kingdom."

You know who I want in my kingdom? In my house? My children. It's like Brennan Manning said, "Ruthless trust ravishes the heart of the Father."

Now please, don't think I'm preaching that children are perfect. That sappy, Precious Moments, "innocence of children" crap makes me sick. I believe children are born sinners. They inherited sin from their great grandparents, Adam and Eve.

But what is that sin they're born with? I think it's this:

They don't want to be children.

They want to be grown up.

I mean they lust after the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

That is, they long to justify themselves and cover themselves.

Every child is born with the desire to be God

and not themselves

Call it pride.

They don't want to be created good;

they want to create themselves good.

They don't want to receive everything by grace;

but earn it and deserve it.

They don't want to live in wonder...
You must become small to enter Wonderland...
 but every child wants to be big.

They want to grow up, not down...
 grow old, not young.
 They want to exalt themselves,
 not humble themselves.

So they don't want wonder,
 but conquest and acquisition.
 They don't want honesty,
 but image, respect, and fig leaves.
 They don't want dependence,
 but independence.
 Not faithful obedience,
 but independent responsibility.
 They don't want to be irresponsible,
 but responsible for everything.

Because then, they're
 dependent on nothing and
 vulnerable to nothing
 for they don't have to trust anyone.
 They can trust only themselves.
 So only their life matters,
 so everything else dies.

That is, they are born lusting after death and Hell
 (whether they know it or not).

Just watch: In this world, children are usually the
 most happy... blessed.

“Blessed, happy are the poor in spirit, of them is the kingdom.”

“Blessed, happy are the meek, the powerless, they will inherit the earth.”

Poor, powerless children are most happy of all people, on average, and yet, each of us *hates* being the child.

We lust for Hell, that is Hades, that is the outer darkness, surrounded by death. That is, each of us are born with an evil longing to be lord of all... a lust to become rich young rulers.

Verse 14:

But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” And He laid His hands on them and departed from there. Now behold, one came [Luke records that he was a ruler] and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good [deed] thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. [If no one is good, but God, how could anyone do a good deed except God?] But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ [Remember that Jesus expounded on those things on the sermon on the mount.] ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The

young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth What do I still lack?" [It's at this point Mark records Jesus looking on the young man with love... The rich young ruler, thinking he's fulfilled the law, but he's blind and alone, imprisoned in death. Jesus tells him he lacks one thing.] *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* [Follow me, that's the one thing he lacks, but his riches and ruling have trapped him in his own Hell.] *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions* [Ktema: property, lands, estates].

In Luke and Mark the word is Chrema, also translated "matters, affairs, business." He was rich and responsible.

He wanted to follow but felt too darn responsible.

He needed to become a child, but he was addicted to being grown up.

He wanted to trust Jesus, but was addicted to himself and his wealth, Hell.

The rich young ruler was probably a paragon of what we call virtue. Ready to give a huge gift, if Jesus only asked. But to give all was to give his *ability* to do good deeds...

for he would no longer be rich
 and no longer rule.
 He'd be meek and poor
 with nothing to offer,
 except his naked self,
 (like the day he was
 born... again).

You know, usually when we preach on The Rich Young Ruler, we just appeal to people's rich young rulerness saying, "Come on, be responsible; make a difference; God needs your help and good deeds. Be a good rich young ruler, help make others rich young rulers, too."

Well, Jesus doesn't need the guy's money (He can get money out of fish's mouths). Jesus isn't raising money, and He isn't asking so He can be a rich young ruler, too—that's what we do.

Jesus doesn't *need* this man's money.

Jesus *wants* this man's heart.

So He's not asking him to be responsible.

He's asking him to become a child.

Next verse:

*Then Jesus said to His disciples,
 "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a
 rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
 And again I say to you, it is easier for a
 camel to go through the eye of a needle than
 for a rich man to enter the kingdom of
 God." When His disciples heard it, they
 were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then
 can be saved?"*

Well, Jesus just told them... children.

Soon He will hang on the cross crying, “Abba, Daddy,
 Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit.”
 He gave it all up in child-like trust of His Father who
 wants to give all His riches to us, the poor.
 His greatest treasure is His ability to give away 10 pound
 diamonds so easily.

It’s called love.

It’s only in believing God’s love, in Jesus, that we can
 offer everything to the Father in love, in return.

But Jesus is the richest, youngest ruler, become perfect
 child.

Living each moment in wonder, blessed, happy...

Receiving everything as gift...

Honest, without pretense...

And on the cross, even poor, powerless, ignorant (“My
 God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He didn’t
 know.), and naked.

Poor, powerless, ignorant, and naked,

but *faithful* unto death.

Death: incapable and unable to respond.

We mean different things by “responsibility,” but
 even in life Jesus did say,

Truly, truly I say to you, the son can do
 nothing of His own accord [incapable] but
 only what He sees the Father doing [that’s
 how He navigates]; for whatever He does,
 the son does likewise. (John 5:19)

That is, the Son trusts and follows.

In short, He trusted His Abba, followed Him all the way to death (even death on a cross). He is the heart of God and love of God poured out, and He is the love of God returning and ravishing the Father with trust.

My father loved me. So he used to brag about me. I think he had a favorite story, and it usually embarrassed me, because I'm a rich young ruler (or at least, a rich middle aged ruler). You know, the rich young ruler was really old, even though he was young. That's the tragedy.

But Dad used to tell about one day when I was a child, there was a horrific thunderstorm in Littleton. My dad had run out to put sandbags in front of the house. Lightning was crashing all around. I was standing with my mother in the front room watching, when a huge bolt hit right next to my father I yelled, "I'm gonna go out there with Daddy!" and ran for the door.

My mom grabbed me, saying, "No, you're not. You could get struck by lightning out there. You could get killed."

And I said, "If Daddy's gonna die, I'm gonna go die with him!"

My dad loved to tell that story, and it embarrassed me because I'd think, "Oh, Dad, that's silly. I was just being a child."

But I was thinking about that day and my child-like heart, and, you know, if I'd have had a 10 pound diamond, I would've dropped it in a second just to go be with my dad. I mean, I really was ready to give up absolutely everything and follow my daddy all the way to death.

This is the incredible thing: It wasn't because I felt responsible, like it was a duty, and I certainly wasn't a brave child. It was simply because I wanted to be with my dad.

Following him was my life, even in death.
But not following him was worse than death.

And so I've thought, "That's silly, Dad. I was just being a child." So it wasn't to my credit... Exactly. It was to his.
He owned my heart with his love.
So I ravished his heart in return,
nothing to boast about, I was just being a child.

And so God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. And on the night that He was betrayed, He took bread, and He broke it saying, "This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, after supper, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine," said Jesus, "until I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." And He came preaching the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And so, may the eyes of your heart be enlightened, and may you come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, and dip it in the cup. May you come to the table and receive the love of the Father in Christ Jesus, our Lord, so that you may *ravish* the heart of the Father in return with trust. Or think of it this way, come to the table and ingest the life of the perfect child into you that He might ravish His Father through you, His body.

Come to the table, rich young ruler, and surrender all you have and are. Receive and enter... as a child... become a child.

[The worship band plays “Forever Young” by Rod Stewart with a few lyric changes.]

That was the benediction, so turn to the person next to you and say, “May you stay forever young.”

Wait, you can’t leave yet. That was the benediction, but there’s a postlude. The postlude is this... We’re Americans. Sorry about that. But that’s a good thing, too. So I mean, “sorry,” but also, “congratulations.” But with being Americans there are certain temptations that we face. We’re rich young rulers; we just need to be honest about that. And so you need to give your money. You need to give your money, not because God needs your money. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills; He can get money out of the mouths of fish, if He needs to. He doesn’t *need* your money. You need to give your money, and not because the church needs your money. Technically, your money is the church’s money, but not because the church needs your money in the way you think the church needs your money. I mean, if we don’t get enough for the budget, some of us staff will probably go, we’ll close down some ministries, maybe sell this building... Maybe it will be the end of the institution of Lookout Mountain Community Church, but, I tell you what, it will not be the end of the church of Jesus Christ. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

And now, I don’t think that’s about to happen. I’m just saying that because that’s not what we’re supposed to give out of... out of that fear, and out of that guilt, and out of that worry that, “Oh, my gosh, God needs our help.” But you need to give. You need to give, kind of like an alcoholic needs to get up sometimes in the middle of the

night and dump all the booze down the drain. That's why you need to give.

So, I don't even know, in that sense, if it matters that much, necessarily, where you give it. You know, booze, according to scripture, according to the Old Testament, God created wine as a gift. It's not that the wine is bad; it's just that there comes a point where the wine is drinking you instead of you drinking the wine. And you understand that, uh, money, possessions, lands, responsibilities... well, they're like that.

And so you need to give in order to surrender. You need to give in order to become like a child. We'll talk more about that next week. Let me also say that I hope that you give here, if this is your church. If this isn't your church, blow this off. Okay? But you need to give somewhere. I hope you give here because where your treasure is, there is your heart, also. And I hope your heart is with the place where you worship, with us as we worship together. And I hope that your heart is with the place where you give yourself away to the world.

I read about a counselor that said this:

Advice for Married Couples

If you're struggling with your marriage,
[and we are kind of like a marriage] the two
of you, go find something else to love and
love it together.

We're called to love this world together, and so it's great to give money to missions or whatever, but you give money here, and we're able to love together. It's kind of like a double whammy. I don't think this next year that we have any more staff to hire; I don't think we have any more buildings to build or buy. We've still got room at the other

services in case you feel crowded at this one. We're doing okay there, but we have some remarkable doors, I believe that are being opened to us in the city and around the world. And I think God calls us to walk, I think... I don't know all this stuff; you're stewards, you're gonna have to figure this all out... but I think God calls us to walk through those doors. And we get to do it together. We get to love the world together. And so what I'm asking you to do is, this week, take that giving card that's in your bulletin, sit down and just spend some time praying and saying, "God, how much do You want me to give to You?"

Answer: "All things."

Okay, you already know the answer to that one. But be more specific, "How much do you want me to give to the institutional ministries of Lookout Mountain Community Church." Just offer yourselves to Him.

It may be that for some of you, He'll say, "A little bit less because I want you to spend a little bit more on Aunt Mildred in the retirement home." I think that's a possibility. Okay?

Maybe He'll say, "No, I really want you to give more, and I'm going to bless you through your giving. Not because you'll get a Cadillac, but because I'm going to set your heart free."

But I want you to pray about it, and then next week we'll come back together, and at the end of the service, we'll offer those cards and seek to thrill the heart of our Father... ravish His heart with trust and faith and hope and love in return.

And so, in Jesus' name, believe the gospel. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:1-3

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

Luke 18:17 and Mark 10:15

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” [Literally, of such is the kingdom of heaven.]

Matthew 19:13-14

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [Literally, of such is the kingdom of heaven.] Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:3-5

Somewhere George MacDonald says that he does not believe in a man's Christianity if the children are never to be found playing around his door.

William Barclay

The soul is healed by being with children.

Fyodor Dostoyevski

The more one needs God the more perfect he is. To need God is nothing to be ashamed of but is perfection itself. It is the saddest thing in the world if a human being goes through life without discovering that he needs God! For what is a human being after all? Is he just one more ornament in the vast array of creation? And what is his power? What is the highest he is able to will? Well, we do not want to defraud the highest of its price, but we cannot conceal the fact that the highest is realized only when a person is fully convinced that he himself is capable of nothing, nothing at all... Someone who is conscious that he is capable of nothing has every day and every moment the precious opportunity to experience that God lives. If he does not experience it often enough, he knows very well why that is. It is because his understanding is faulty and he believes that he himself is, after all, capable of something.

Soren Kierkegaard

I cannot keep count of the number of people in whom religion, the love of God and the desire to serve him, or even a quite secular ideal of perfection, lead only to a life of sterility, sadness, and anxiety. The fear of sinning has killed all their spontaneity. The subtle analysis of their conscience has taken the place of that childlike simplicity of heart that Christ demands. All joy has been replaced by the pursuit of duty.

Paul Tournier

Finley Eversole, in The Politics of Creativity, writes, "In our society, at the age of five, 90 percent of the population measures 'high creativity.' By the age of seven, the figure has dropped to 10 percent. And the percentage of adults with high creativity is only two percent! Our creativity is destroyed not through the use of outside force, but through

criticism, innuendo,” by the dirty devices of this world. So we are diminished, and we forget that we are more than we know. The child is aware of unlimited potential...

Madeleine L'Engle

We all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. This is proved by the fact that when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales; we only need tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales because they find them romantic.

G. K. Chesterton

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 3:1-3

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

Ephesians 5:1

Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland.

G. K. Chesterton

But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And he laid his hands on them and went away. And behold, one came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed

must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first."

Matthew 19:14-30

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look

not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:3-8