

## EXERCISING CHILDLIKE FAITH

I remember, as a child, how some older people would encourage me to jump off the edge of our front porch into their arms. I would jump and they would catch me. I can remember doing that same exercise with my children. It is a lot easier for a child to do that sort of thing because (usually) a child lives a life that is almost totally dependent upon others. In essence, a child trusts his or her parents (or other adults) for everything. Also, children will believe almost anything. If that were not so, then how could people pull off the Santa Claus deal or the Easter Rabbit tale?

Children also have a different sense of values than adults. We say that little ones don't know the value of a dollar. A child might trade an expensive toy for a cardboard box and be perfectly happy with the swap. Many times children value relationships more than money or materials things. They tend to be forgiving and open and they don't worry about tomorrow.

Jesus used the characteristics of children to teach adults an object lesson regarding faith and the Kingdom of God.

**LUKE 18:15-17** People recognized that Jesus was special. Crowds followed Him, people brought their sick friends to Him, others asked Him to pray for them, and parents would bring their children to Him just so He would touch them. The society in which Jesus lived did not put a lot of value on children. In a lot of areas of the world this is true today. Children are sold or given away and sometimes children are killed by their parents. This barbaric practice happens in China and India even today. It is not surprising the disciples thought that Jesus should be spending His time on more important matters than children.

Jesus saw things quite differently than the disciples. Not only were the children valuable in His sight, they also were capable of teaching adults a valuable lesson regarding how we should approach life and what we should value. To illustrate His point, Jesus called the children to come to Him. Guess what they did. They ran over to Him. They responded to His call. This action was different from the multitude of adults who would not respond to His call. The

instructions that Jesus gave was to allow the children to come to him without any hindrance. We can see in this admonition a responsibility for parents (and other adults) to create the possibility for children to respond to Jesus. Children need to be exposed to the truth of the Word of God. If we take the Bible out of our schools and if parents will not take (or send) their children to where the Bible is taught, then these acts and inactions are hindrances for children to come to Jesus.

The object lesson for adults is that the openness, acceptance, and trust of children are the qualities and characteristics of faith that anyone has to have to receive the Kingdom of God (the rule of God in our lives, His absolute authority) and to enter into the Kingdom and be a part of what God is doing through Jesus Christ.

By way of contrast to how children reacted to Jesus, we are shown how an adult who had been schooled in religious things approached the Kingdom of God.

**LUKE 18:18-21** Unlike children, adults would be very reluctant to jump off a ledge into the arms of others who were waiting to catch them. As adults, we want some assurance and even guarantees before we do something. The ruler (perhaps a synagogue worship leader) was seeking to know what he could do to ensure that he would have eternal life. Apparently, the man recognized Jesus only as a "teacher." Jesus used the flattering words of the man when he called Jesus "Good Master" to make a point. That point was that only God is good. Jesus did not deny being good, but He wanted the man to see that the goodness that was there was because He was God. Jesus' words about there being *none good but God* are a reference to an Old Testament passage from Psalm 14:3 which reads "there is none that doeth good, no not one." In referring to this passage, Jesus has set the stage for the man to draw his own conclusion regarding what was to come next.

Jesus said, "You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, etc." The implication was that if a person kept all the commandments, then he could inherit eternal life. However, the truth of the matter is found in the passage from Psalm to which

Jesus referred and that is "there is none that doeth good, no not one." The man referred to as the "ruler" failed to make the connection between the two and replied, "All these have I kept from my youth up." I would guess that he sincerely believe what he said. In this belief there was no realization of failure and no agreement with the judgement of God that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." In short, there was no humility or no childlikeness.

I think that Jesus realized that it is useless to argue with someone who is convinced of his own goodness. So He took another approach to try to get the man to see his failure.

**LUKE 18:22-23** If you remember, Jesus' reference to the commandments left out the first four and the tenth commandments. The first four commandments relate to our relationship to God and the tenth relates to getting caught up in things or materialism. This man was wealthy and he had allowed wealth to become his idol. The very first commandment tells us to have "no other gods before Me." So the question that Jesus raised was that of "putting away other gods" so that he could follow Jesus Who is God. Remember Jesus said, "follow Me." It is difficult to give up the "gods" we have grown to worship. If we did not trust in them and depend on them, then they would have not been made "gods" in the first place. Therefore, the man was very sad.

**LUKE 18:24-27** It is extremely hard to not depend on things that we can see and touch and hold. If we get sick, one of the first thing we consider is our ability to pay for health care. Do we have the right insurance? If an earthquake happens (such as occurred recently in California), the first thing we think about is our ability to afford to rebuild. Do we have the right insurance? If we need something to wear or eat or whatever, we check our bank account to determine if we can pay for it. We decide on taking a job based on how good the pay is. We are accountable to "the bottom line" in so much of what we do. Our confidence is in our insurance policy, savings account, real estate holdings, and investments. Where is God in all of this?

Putting confidence in riches for a rich man is no different than putting confidence in good work for a religious man. Neither riches nor good works can save. Those who depend on their riches tend to be arrogant rather than

humble. Depending on God and realizing what He has done for us comes from and produces more humility. Such a realization is possible only by the revelation that God gives to us as He lives in us.

**LUKE 18:28-30** We cannot measure material worth and spiritual worth on the same scale. Our successfulness in the Kingdom of God is measured in love, joy and peace rather than in stocks, bonds, and bank accounts. If we cling to it and trust in it, then it is possible for material wealth to prevent us from finding spiritual wealth. For those that do find the rewards of the Kingdom of God, they realize that giving up all the material wealth the world can offer is not too big a price to pay for what God has for those who love Him.