

# **Jesus Loves the Little Children**

**Deuteronomy 6:1-09; Mark 10:13-16**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula at the West  
University Church of Christ, Houston, Texas  
on November 13, 2011**

I remember that during the time I was preaching in Stillwater, OK, the home of Oklahoma State University, that on different occasions Presidents Carter, Ford and Bush came to town to deliver speeches. We took our children out of school so they could go to the stadium and see and hear the presidents. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Neither the children nor I remember much about the speeches, we just remember that we personally saw and heard the presidents. I'm sure that if here in Houston, that if we had the opportunity to see and hear some well-known persons that many of us would want to be there to take some pictures or get an autograph.

Nineteen hundred eighty two years ago a celebrity preacher-teacher-healer named Jesus came to town. Parents came with their little children to meet Jesus and to be blessed by him. The Jews had a custom of rabbis blessing their children, especially on their first birthdays.

I am sure, too, that Jesus was honored by the little children. I know I am blessed by being with our little children here. When they draw pictures of me preaching with a big smile and the voice caption says, "The Bible says. . ." that warms my hearts. When the little children come up to me and grab my pants leg, I am as honored by that as if I had just shaken hands with the president. When I see children eager to go to Bible classes and they recite Bible verses, and act out biblical stories, that thrills me.

Jesus loved for the little children to come to him. However, the Bible says that the disciples were stopping the parents and children from getting close to Jesus. I can imagine Peter saying to them, "Wait a minute. Stop where you are,

Jesus is too busy to be bothered by kids. He's on his way to Jerusalem. You all please get out of the way. You are hindering him." I can hear James chime in, "That's right. Back up everyone. Move aside." John, his brother, speaks up. "What can all these little children do? They are not important. How can they help our cause? No way." Andrew adds, "Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God and issues too big for little kids. They cannot understand what he's talking about. They are just babies, still dependent on their parents. I wish people would understand that. We've got more important things to do."

Jesus overhears and sees what's happening and he's upset. He stops walking and rebukes the disciples, "Stop it. What are you doing? Let these children come to me. The kingdom of God belongs to those who are like little children." Jesus turns to the little children, and says, "Come. Come. Here let me hold you. Did you know that God loves you and I love you, too? I'm so glad to see you. The Lord God bless and keep you. Thank you for coming to see me."

Jesus is showing and teaching us that little children are valuable and important. God loves them and he is so happy when they want to be near him. Jesus is showing and teaching us that little children should and need to be brought to Jesus.

Children are so open to learn and receive God. Eighty per cent of all people converted to faith in Jesus are converted before age 18. Early training is for life. By age ten, ninety per cent of our values are shaped.

In the Bible, children and youth were brought to the Lord and taught about him. For twenty-five years before Isaac was born, God promised Abraham and Sarah that he would build a great nation out of his seed or offspring. Isaac and Rebecca had the baby, Jacob, and when he was grown he had twelve sons that fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. God began to work with the baby Moses when he was still floating in a basket on the Nile River. Eighty years later God used him to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage. Moses taught Israel to teach their children and grandchildren the way of the Lord (Deut. 6:4-6). That's the primary way that the word of God was passed from generation to generation for the next 1,400 years. The young boy Samuel was called by God while serving with the aged Eli in the tabernacle because his mother, Hannah, had dedicated him to the

Lord before he was born or even conceived (I Samuel 1 and 2). Young David was the eighth son born to Jesse and he might have felt neglected by his older brothers and sisters and thought unimportant to his dad. However, alone in the wilderness keeping the family's sheep, David communed with God in his heart. He wrote the famous "shepherd's psalm" based on what he saw in his sheep. God told Joseph and Mary that Mary's child, Jesus, would be the son of God in the flesh and that he would become the savior of the world. Shortly after his birth, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem where he was dedicated to the Lord and blessed by the righteous Anna and the aged Simeon.

The family brings most of us to Jesus. Eighty per cent of all converts are through family and friends. At a very young age, probably most of us attended church with our parents. In my case, my mother and dad, who grew up in church but had never been baptized, took me to church when I was very young. I was baptized at ten and a half years old and began preaching when I was 15 years old. At the conclusion of my first sermon, my twelve-year-old brother was baptized. When I was 16, I baptized my father, mother, and one of my sisters.

It is vital that children know that they are loved and wanted at church. They are not in our way. Their little minds absorb much more than we think they do. Lessons and attitudes learned in childhood shape us all our lives. This is why we need the best materials and classrooms and loving teachers for our children and youth. That is one reason I enjoy the children's participation in our assemblies because it gives them a good opportunity to be a part and for us to rejoice in their learning and presence.

I am so pleased that West U loves children, believes in them and invests time and resources to teach and bless our little ones. Later in our service today, we are going to hear more what West U is doing for our babies, our children and our youth.

You parents are the most important means of teaching God and Christian values to your children. Throughout the Bible, it was the home that was the primary teacher of spiritual education. In the Deuteronomy passage, Moses wrote about "talk about these things with your children" in all the events and circumstances of life. The home is where children spend more time than anywhere

else. It is the place to begin learning about God. The Bible says that from a child Timothy “had known the Scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

It is important to read Bible stories and to pray at home. Bible stories, books, DVDs, CDs, and reading to your children will fill their minds with God’s good thoughts. I remember a 32-year-old woman who told me of her Christian dad who died when she was only nine years old. She said she remembers that her dad always prayed every day before the family left the house. She said, “I remember daddy’s prayers.” The woman had drifted away from God and came to me to find out how to come back to the Lord. Her daddy’s prayers were still influencing her life though he died 23 years before.

It is also important to serve God at home and to teach our children to serve God by serving others. Some families take on a ministry to preparing and serving food to the needy, of working in the food bank or the inner city ministry, or of purchasing, wrapping and sending Christmas gifts to the homes for abandoned or needy children and families. Some parents teach their children about money by having them divide every amount the children get into three piles: Money to save, money to share, and money to spend. Some have family mission projects where they collect coins and bills in large juice containers. Then they give these funds to missions or other good works.

Jesus shows us and teaches us that little children are important. Children need the best beginning. As Christian parents we want to do all we can to bring our children to the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

In the past 14 months we have had five children born into our families here at West U. We rejoice in every child born because that is God’s vote that the world should continue and that is another precious one to be loved, received, accepted and dedicated to the Lord.

To give our blessing, to show our support for the parents, and to encourage Bible stories and Bible reading among our families, our elders are now going to introduce these five babies and their parents, present them with baby’s first Bible stories, then pray especially for these little lives. At this time, Jim Taylor will

introduce the families, Ralph Arnold will present the Bible books, and Kelly Rushing will lead a prayer for these babies and their families.

---

### **Presentation of Bibles and Prayer for babies**

---

Thank you, families, and elders. We love and appreciate you.

Now, this is just the beginning of what West U does for our babies. Kerry and Malinda Lackey are working with our Baby Department. They are planning the classes and securing the teachers for these babies. They are now going to tell us what we do with these little ones to help them learn about our Lord.

---

### **Kerry Lackey speaks**

---

Thank you so much, Kerry and Melinda. We appreciate you and all the good things you are doing for our littlest ones.

The children then will move up into our children's programs and classes. You might wonder what they do then. What is West U doing to love, teach and support our children for God? Brad and Alicia Hinrichs work with our children. They are going to tell us now how we serve our children.

---

### **Brad speaks**

---

Thank you so very much, Brad and Alicia, and all those who work with them and help them. Our children are dear and precious to us and to God.

One of our big programs is Leadership Training for Christ (LTC). Ryan and Christy McDonald head up this good work. Ryan will now tell us about LTC.

---

### **Ryan speaks**

---

As the children get older, they move into our youth department. These are the youngsters seventh grade through senior high school. Jay Roberts work with this age group. Jay is going to tell us what West U is doing to help teach and train our youth for God.

---

## **Jay speaks**

---

Thank you, Jay; we are so pleased that you are working with our youth. Young people, we love and appreciate you.

I want to encourage all of us to pray for our children, youth and their leaders and teachers. Let's always be willing to add whatever we need here to make our spiritual education as good as or better than the education they receive in school during the week. God's little ones and God's people deserve the very best. Let's continue to support our children and youth in every way that we can. May God be blessed and praised through what we do here in his name.

In our text today Jesus says that the kingdom of God belongs to “**such** as these,” and that the kingdom of God is received “**like** a little child.” Little children are not citizens of God's spiritual kingdom yet. They have no need to be because they are not sinners who can repent and be born again of water and spirit. They are “safe” and do not need to be “saved.” When children recognize personal sin, understand the gospel, and can accept responsibility, then they can be baptized on the basis of their faith and repentance. There is no infant baptism in the New Testament. There are examples of parents dedicating their children to God as Hannah did with Samuel and Joseph and Mary did with Jesus.

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Jesus is not telling us to be childish, but to be childlike. The Bible rebukes childish behavior such as boasting, fussing, wrangling and disputing. In verse 15, Jesus explains what he means by being childlike. He says, “Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Little children are totally dependent on their parents for everything. Parents feed their children, burp them, change them, clothe them, carry them, house them, and protect them and the babies won't even remember it. Nothing in nature is as helpless as a new baby. No one can survive childhood without a total dependence on others. As children grow older, from six to twelve years old, they are still dependent on their parents. They

receive life, nourishment, sustenance, protection, love, security, and self-esteem from their parents. Jesus is drawing this lesson: Those in the kingdom are as dependent on God as children are on their parents.

We enter the kingdom like a little child. We totally depend on God. Everything that we need is supplied by our heavenly father.

The proud and the arrogant cannot be saved. To be saved, we must humble ourselves before God and confess our sins and our need of God. God wants helpless commitment to him; not self-sufficiency.

This attitude of dependence on God carries over into our relationships with one another. We are not to pride ourselves on social rank or recognition but to humbly serve one another. Jesus was not a people-pleasing politician who catered to the rich, the famous and the powerful. Jesus loved all people. He had some friends like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea among the religious leaders and some wealthy women among the well-to-do. Most of his friends, however, were those folks that were poorer and without human rank and worldly prestige.

We need to love and care for one another equally. Our love for and importance of one another is not based on whether that person wears a business suit, drives a luxury car or lives in a rich neighborhood. Love for God's people knows no racial, ethnic, education, or socio-economic boundaries.

Today, do you have a childlike heart of trust and dependence on God? Then you are a candidate to enter the kingdom of God. Come this morning and confess your faith in Jesus and be born again through being baptized into Jesus Christ. Whosoever will may come while we stand and sing.

-cwarpula@westchurch.com