

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:14-15).

As we began our examination of “The Journey of Life” last Sunday, we considered some of the psycho-spiritual dimensions of childhood and how we might best facilitate strong spiritual foundations for the children God entrusts to us. In this column I want to begin by recounting a story that may be apocryphal, yet is frighteningly true at the same time, and then to continue our thinking on a happier note

“I saw him in the church building for the first time on Wednesday. He was in his mid-70s, with thinning hair and a neat brown suit. Many times in the past I had invited him to come. Several other Christian friends had talked to him about the Lord and had tried to share the Good News with him.

“He was a well-respected, honest man with so many of the characteristics a Christian should have; but he had never put on Christ. ‘Have you ever been to a church service in your life?’ I asked him several years ago. We had just finished a pleasant day of visiting and talking. He hesitated. Then, with a bitter smile, he told me of a childhood experience over sixty years ago. . . .

“He was one of many children in a large, impoverished family. His parents had struggled to provide food, with little left for housing and clothing. When he was about ten, some neighbors had invited him to worship with them. The Bible class had been very exciting. He had never heard such songs and stories before. He had never even heard anyone read from the Bible.

“After class was over, the teacher took him aside and said, **‘Son, please don’t come again dressed as you are now. We want to look our best when we come to worship the Lord.’** He stood in his ragged, un-patched overalls, looked at his dirty, bare feet, and said, **‘No, Ma’am, I won’t, ever.’** ‘And I never did,’ he said, abruptly ending our conversation.

“There must have been other factors to have hardened him so, but this experience formed a significant part of the bitterness in his heart. I’m sure that Bible teacher meant well. But what if she had really understood the love of Christ? What if she had studied and accepted the teachings found in the second chapter of James? **What if she had put her arms around that dirty, ragged little boy and said, ‘Son, I am so glad you are here, and I hope you will come every chance you get to hear more about Jesus?’**

“I reflected on the awesome responsibility teachers have to welcome little ones in His name. How far-reaching their influence is! I prayed that I might ever be open to the tenderness of a child’s heart, and that I might never fail to see beyond the appearance and behavior of a child to the eternal possibilities within.

“Yes, I saw him in the church house for the first time Wednesday. And as I looked at that immaculately dressed old gentleman lying in his casket, I thought of the little boy of long ago. I could almost hear him say, ‘No, Ma’am, I won’t, ever.’ **And I wept.**”

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42).

Well, that was sobering, wasn't it? I'm reminded of the words of Jesus' half-brother, James (whose faith in Jesus as God's long-promised Messiah is one of the most telling signs of His resurrection), in response to the question about how the Jewish followers of Jesus should respond to the Gentiles who were professing faith in Him. In the famous and world-altering "Jerusalem Conference," James told the Council, "*It is my judgment that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles [or children] who are turning to God*" (Acts 15:19).

And that brings up the question about how and when children are able to profess their faith in Jesus. Although children become "sinners" quite early and without any necessity for input on our part, at what point do they become responsible before God for that sin?

As I'm sure you know, because Baptists believe that persons aren't "lost" and in need of God's forgiveness until such time as they become able to understand their transgression and to be genuinely repentant for it, Baptists don't baptize babies (which is done to remove "original sin"). I think Jesus implicitly made this point when He warned, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven*" (Matthew 18:10).

The most helpful book I've ever read on the subject of "when can a child believe?" was Eugene Chamberlain's little book by that same title, written some forty years ago.¹ Here are some of the main points made in that book:

General Principles about the Salvation of Children

1. Trying to understand "accountability" is far more important than trying to determine a specific age at which a child may be judged to be lost.
2. The age at which any one child reaches accountability may vary rather widely from the age at which another child reaches accountability.
3. Watering down Bible teachings about conversion so that any child can respond affirmatively to an invitation to accept Christ is a dangerous business.
4. Respect for the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the individual requires one to abandon mechanical approaches to helping children become Christians.
5. In dealing with a child, one must respect his or her capacities, neither overrating nor underrating them.
6. While one cannot expect a child to express her or his inner life in adult language or in terms of adult experiences, there is a point beyond which basic truths cannot be simplified and reduced just to make the "evangelist" feel good about a child's apparent decision (p. 36).

A Child can Really Believe when . . .

. . . the Holy Spirit moves in his heart and mind just as the Holy Spirit moves in the heart and mind of all whom the Spirit brings to repentance and faith.

¹ Eugene Chamberlain, *When Can a Child Believe?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973).

. . . her motives for professing faith in Christ are free from external pressures such as the desires of her parents or the adventures of her friends.

. . . he is able to relate his own actions to God.

. . . she can accept for herself the basic truths of the gospel.

. . . his attitude toward the claims of Christ peaks in a genuine desire to live in a way to please God from this day forward (p. 80).

May God help us to become such a birthing center!

Dave

Postscript:

You may remember that we have made a commitment as a congregation to increase our giving to missionary causes by at least 1.5% a year until we're tithing our budget to missions (10%). It will probably take us several years to reach this goal.

One way we can reach that goal pretty easily would be for each of us who is not tithing at this point to increase the percentage of our giving by the same 1.5% per year until we reach ten percent. Would you be willing to undertake such a challenge? I can promise that you won't regret it!

WEEKLY INCOME	BEYOND A TITHE		TITHE	UPPER RANGE GIVING			MIDDLE RANGE GIVING			LOWER RANGE GIVING		
	15%	12%	10%	9%	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	3%	2%	1%
\$200	\$30	\$24	\$20	\$18	\$16	\$14	\$12	\$10	\$8	\$6	\$4	\$2
\$300	\$45	\$36	\$30	\$27	\$24	\$21	\$18	\$15	\$12	\$9	\$6	\$3
\$400	\$60	\$48	\$40	\$36	\$32	\$28	\$24	\$20	\$16	\$12	\$8	\$4
\$500	\$75	\$60	\$50	\$45	\$40	\$35	\$30	\$25	\$20	\$15	\$10	\$5
\$600	\$90	\$72	\$60	\$54	\$48	\$42	\$36	\$30	\$24	\$18	\$12	\$6
\$700	\$105	\$84	\$70	\$63	\$56	\$49	\$42	\$35	\$28	\$21	\$14	\$7
\$800	\$120	\$96	\$80	\$72	\$64	\$56	\$48	\$40	\$32	\$24	\$16	\$8
\$900	\$135	\$108	\$90	\$81	\$72	\$63	\$54	\$45	\$36	\$27	\$18	\$9
\$1,000	\$150	\$120	\$100	\$90	\$80	\$70	\$60	\$50	\$40	\$30	\$20	\$10
\$1,100	\$165	\$132	\$110	\$99	\$88	\$77	\$66	\$55	\$44	\$33	\$22	\$11
\$2,000	\$300	\$240	\$200	\$180	\$160	\$140	\$120	\$100	\$80	\$60	\$40	\$20
\$3,000	\$450	\$360	\$300	\$270	\$240	\$210	\$180	\$150	\$120	\$90	\$60	\$30

1. Find out where YOU are on the chart (your weekly income/giving).
2. Move one block to the left to determine what GROW ONE% would be for you.

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The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week nine: The Proof is in the Pudding

*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).*

“The secret of the Christian life is not that it is a changed life but an exchanged life. It is not that we simply take on a few new sets of moral standards and attempt to change our attitudes and our activities. Instead, at the moment of conversion, we give God our old life, He puts it away, and He comes to live in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. God’s promise to us is that He will abide there, never to leave us, filling us and empowering us for service.

“Paul made a contrast here between being ‘drunk with wine’ and being ‘filled with the Spirit.’ The former causes one to be out of control; the other enables one to be in control. One is counterproductive; the other is productive. One makes one powerless; the other empowers. One often brings sorrow; the other brings joy.

“The admonition of our verse is a mandate, the command to ‘be filled with the Spirit.’ God does not leave this as an option for the believer. Think of how every verb has a number, a tense, a voice, and a mood. When this command to ‘be filled’ is broken down, it is of interest to note that the number is plural. The tense is present; that is, continuous action is involved here. The voice is passive, which means the subject doesn’t act; it is acted upon by some outside force. The mood is imperative. It is a command. Thus, properly translated, the Bible is saying, **‘All of us must always be being filled with the Holy Spirit.’**

“How can we know that we are being filled with God’s Spirit? Better still, how will others know? Some contend it is in the reception and use of certain gifts of the Spirit. However, Scripture teaches quite the opposite in the very context of this command. As the old adage says, ‘The proof is in the pudding.’ The three verses following reveal to us the evidence by which we can know that Ephesians 5:18 is fulfilled in our lives. Yes, the proof is in the pudding.”

THERE IS INWARD EVIDENCE

“sing and make music from your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

THERE IS UPWARD EVIDENCE

“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything” (Ephesians 5:20).

THERE IS OUTWARD EVIDENCE

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).