



BECOMING A CHILD AGAIN A FRESH LOOK

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

I have had to take a more complete look than I have before of what it means to be the child Jesus asks us to be. What is Jesus looking for when he asks us to change and become like children?

I, and probably many of us, enjoy little children, the young ones that don't care how they look to others. They're real, just the way God made them to be. They live and love with everything they have inside—freely. These are some of the reasons that photographing preschoolers has been one of my passions for years.

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Children have an innocence, making it easier for them to be trusting. This is not such a good thing when trying to make one's way in the world as an emotionally mature adult. But spiritually this is the kind of child Jesus calls us to be. Such a child will more easily believe what the Bible tells him. Such a child will welcome Jesus without hesitation. They will not hold back his love for him. They will more easily see Jesus as the example they need to follow when relating to those around them. In their humility they will be more likely to follow Christ's command to love God and their neighbours.

Is this innocence – this eagerness to believe and follow Christ—not the very reason Jesus asks us to be like children? Some of the wonderful words that describe what children have within them are their eagerness, wholeheartedness, honesty, trust, and unpretentiousness. Jesus wants us to have such a spirit.

Children's hearts are wide open. Because of this, many have a natural intimacy with God. Can we learn to be such a child again? The trouble with many adults is that we know God in our heads but are not open enough to experience him in our hearts. Many try to find faith and wisdom from books. But in doing so there's a danger of losing their child-like heart of simplicity. Not that reading is bad, but it's not good to look to books to find a formula for developing faith.

But children have a lot of growing to do. They need to develop maturity. In the way children grow to be emotionally healthy adults, needing their parents, Jesus calls us to grow spiritually dependent on God. He calls us to be children who look to God as we might at one time have looked to earthly parents for guidance, humbly accepting that we are incomplete and inadequate..

How can we grow with God as our Father? How can the child in us become more complete? It's by getting to know him—the way an enthusiastic child might—trying to learn all we can about him. It's by trying to satisfy the hunger we have to be close to the Father we've grown to love. And we will look at the life of his Son Jesus. What does Jesus show us? How can we use him as our example for what God wants us to be.

If we could only remember what it was like to be a child! If we could only recover our child-likeness—that part of us that Jesus would like to see. If we could only recover that passion for him that God once blessed us with!

But the pride that all of us have, in greater or lesser proportions, holds us back from being childlike. Pride keeps us from submitting to the will of God. When we're proud, we force our own will instead of accepting God's leading. We trust ourselves instead of God. We show a lack of humility.

I was ashamed awhile ago when a couple of people close to me pointed out my tendency to be proud. And I had always thought I was quite humble! Amazing how we are blind to the truth about ourselves! I've come to see that the hardest thing is to recognize how proud we are. Some of us even believe we're just fine, but that everyone else must change.

Pride is no small sin. It can lead us to:

- Seek recognition to exalt ourselves. *“Look at what I can do!”*
- Accept no responsibility for wrongdoing. *“It wasn’t my fault.”*
- Speak constantly without listening. *“What I’m talking about is more important.”*
- Be only concerned with ourselves. *“My needs are greater than those others have.”*
- Treat others as less than oneself, causing pain. *“I’m more important than others.”*

Do you have some of the characteristics described in the list above? You may not even know it, but we all do to some extent. How can we avoid pride? The truth is, we will never be able to fully escape temptations to be proud. But we can reduce them. When we catch ourselves thinking prideful thoughts we must focus on Jesus who teaches humility above all.

Pride is often at the root of stigma, causing great hurt to people with mental health issues. (See the Psychology Today source below) The tragedy is that those causing the pain may be good people in other ways but unable to recognize how wrongly they are treating those with certain differences.

Stigma is frequently talked about, but seldom fully understood. The following description may help you understand: It often represents itself covertly and overtly in fear, misunderstanding, judgement, intentional and unintentional mistreatment—and disconnection. It takes a proud person to be this way towards another—to consider the other less than himself. An individual with mental health problems could end up being treated poorly and no longer talked to.

Jesus calls us to live and love with an open heart. In the way he himself modeled, making *“himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,”* (Philippians 2:7), can we “in humility value others above ourselves?”

Jesus calls us to kneel before him, not as who we once were, but as the unpretentious child he has shown we can be. In prayer, can we humble ourselves enough to become his child again? Can we let our pride go, learning to respect those different from ourselves?

The child in me sometimes wonders if Jesus smiled at the people he met during his ministry. The Bible says nothing about that. But he must have when mothers brought their children to him. What joy the children would have brought this man who was so full of love! How could he possibly have welcomed them without smiling?

It makes me think: Jesus must have big smiles for you and me too. We too are children – dearly loved children of God. He wants to connect with us.

Oh to be a child again!

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