

Matthew 19:13-15

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Little children are brought to Jesus, but the disciples turn them away. Jesus calls them back and says to let them come. He tells the disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to them and He lays hands upon them before leaving.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17.

After the Pharisees' tested *Jesus* about acceptable grounds for divorce, and the disciples commented about marriage and *Jesus's* teaching about eunuchs (Matthew 19:10-12), *some children were brought to Him. The children* were young, under the supervision of their parents or caretakers. Infants and toddlers were among the ones *being brought to Him*. Luke described these *children* as babies (Luke 18:15). The reason these *children were brought to Jesus* was so that *He might lay His hands on them and pray* a blessing over them (Mark 10:16).

The disciples rebuked those who were bringing *the children*. *The disciples* viewed their coming either as a disruption to *Jesus's* kingdom work, or an inconvenience or interference to their private or political agendas. But *Jesus* did not.

Mark reports that when *Jesus* saw what *the disciples* were doing *He* became indignant (Mark 10:14). *Jesus* had recently told His disciples how precious *children* are to God. *He* told *them* "unless you become like *children* you will not enter *the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 18:3). *He* said, "whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me" (Matthew 18:5). And *He* warned it would be better to have a premature death via a millstone tied around your neck and hurled to the bottom of the sea than to hinder even one of these *children* from God's *kingdom* and face the consequences for God for having done so (Matthew 18:6). *Jesus* also noted the high priority God places on children by noting that they are given guardian angels:

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 18:10)

Jesus was indignant because the *disciples* were doing the opposite of what *He* had taught them. They were expected to welcome and receive *children* into *the kingdom*. But instead, *His disciples* were despising *them*, and turning *them* away.

As *Jesus* saw this happening *He* called, for *the children* to come back (Luke 18:16) and scolded *His disciples*. "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me," *He* told *them*. *Jesus* did not despise *children*. *He* valued *them*. *He* wanted *the children* to come to *Him*. And *He* did not want anyone stopping *them* from coming to *Him*.

And then *Jesus* explained again to *His disciples* why *the children* should be allowed to come to *Him* with a most remarkable statement:

“For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these young children.”

It is worth pausing and reflecting upon what Jesus just said. Consider how *Jesus* had describing that *children belong* and have a special place *in His kingdom*. It is one thing to allow *children* into *the kingdom*. But it is quite another to say *the kingdom belongs to such as these children*. This is much more radical and paradigm shifting. What can Jesus mean by it?

Children are dependent and often all too aware of their neediness. Anyone who has spent an hour with a toddler knows that *children* can be blunt and relentless beggars without any regard for social etiquette. They are entirely dependent upon someone else to tend to their needs. And *children* have no shame in making their requests and demands known.

Children and their neediness are an earthly depiction of what it means to be poor in spirit.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3)

Perhaps this is why *Jesus* then said, “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive *the kingdom* of God like a child will not enter it at all” (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17).

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are poor and dependent in spirit, like *children*; people who are humble and recognize their utter neediness upon their Father in *heaven* to provide everything for them from their daily bread to their spiritual needs (Matthew 6:11-13). Those who assume a child’s perspective to her father, in their relationship toward God inherit *His kingdom*. It *belongs to them*. We must enter our Father’s *kingdom* as needy *children* or not at all. This is stated plainly in this passage from the previous chapter:

“whoever humbles himself as a child, he is the greatest in *the kingdom*.”
(Matthew 18:4)

Children will also believe whatever they are told. They are trusting, sometimes to their own detriment. *The kingdom of heaven belongs to* those who walk by faith, trusting that God’s ways are for our best, even through difficult trials.

Children are not only a picture of what it is like to live in God’s kingdom, the way we treat children affects our ability to enter *His kingdom*. Serving *children* in *Jesus*’s name is entering *the kingdom*. Despising *children* and ignoring *them* is missing *the kingdom*. When Jesus speaks of entering the kingdom, He is speaking of living in and gaining the benefits of His spiritual kingdom, by walking in its spiritual ways.

God will treat us in a similar manner to how we treat *children* (Matthew 18:5). If we ignore and despise *them*, we will not be given opportunities we might have had to serve in His kingdom. But if we humble ourselves and take time and interest to listen to *them* and serve their needs in *Jesus*’s name, God will elevate us in His kingdom, by leading us to serve others in His name. This is an application of the principles Jesus set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, where He taught:

- We will be judged by God based on how we judge other people (Matthew 7:1-2).
- Our fellowship and intimacy with God will depend on whether we forgive others, and have fellowship with them (Matthew 6:12,14).
- We choose between having rewards in this life, or having rewards from God, based on who we choose to do things to please (Matthew 6:2-4).

Serving *children* with patient love is a very tangible way to practice the mercy principle. The mercy principle teaches that the measure of mercy God gives us is the same measure of mercy that we extend to those who offend us (Matthew 5:7; 5:45-48; 6:12; 6:14-15; 7:1-2; 7:12; 18:21-35). The patience and pains we take to meet *children's* needs is a form of mercy and grace. And the more patient and gracious we are toward meeting their needs, the more patient and gracious God will be toward us. This is what *Jesus* meant when *He* said, “whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me” (Matthew 18:5).

The idea seems to be that as we choose an attitude or perspective that reflects true reality about who we are, and who God is, the more we open ourselves up to be blessed by God. Of course choosing this attitude puts us at enmity with the world.

Children are precious in God's eyes. If for no other reason, *children* should also be precious to us.

After calling the children back to Him, scolding His disciples for turning them away, and teaching that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children, Jesus laid His hands on the children. Mark says, “He took them in His arms and began blessing them” (Mark 10:16). It is not difficult to imagine *Jesus* smiling as *He* held and prayed over these little ones.

Then *Jesus departed from there. He* was headed toward Jerusalem (Mark 10:32).

Biblical Text

¹³ Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” ¹⁵ After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.