



Jesus and True Greatness

“The Greatness of Children”

Matthew 18:1-6

Introduction

Today and next week we are going to examine **Matthew 18:1-6**.

In this passage of Scripture Jesus taught His disciples two lessons about “Greatness.”

Lesson One

The Greatness of Children

Lesson Two

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

Scripture

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

2 He called a small child and had him stand among them.

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

4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoever welcomes one child like this in my name welcomes me.

6 “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall away—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea. CSB

Quotes Of The Day

“Children are the living messages we send to a future we will not see.” —Neil Postman

“Every parent should remember— One day our children will follow our example, not our advice.” — Adapted from Charles Kettering

On May 1, 2023 a mother with her four children and two pilots boarded a small Cessna plane. A few moments later the plane crashed into the Amazon Jungle. The tragedy killed the mother and the two pilots. However, all four children survived. The children, ages 1, 4, 9, and 13 were all alone in the Amazon Jungle and faced with significant challenges. The environment was hazardous and life threatening because of dangerous predators, poisonous snakes, swarms of mosquitos, poisonous vegetation and intense rain storms.

Rescuers feared the worst, but footprints, partially eaten wild fruit and other clues soon gave them hope that the children might be alive. Over the next six weeks, **the children battled the severe elements in what Colombia's President Gustavo Petro called "an example of total survival which will remain in history."**

After six weeks of searching for the children in the dense jungle they found them alive.

If there were ever children well-prepared to endure and survive the jungle it was the **Mucutuy family** were the ones. **Huitoto people learn hunting, fishing, and gathering from an early age, and their grandfather told reporters that the eldest children were well acquainted with the jungle.**

After the crash, Lesly, the oldest child, built makeshift shelters from branches held together with her hair ties. She also recovered fariña, a type of cassava flour, from the wreckage of the plane. The children survived on the flour until it ran out and then they ate seeds harvested from plants in the forest. **The four children survived 40 days in the Amazon jungle because they put into practice what their parents taught them about living and surviving in the jungle.** Citation: [Matt Murphy & Daniel Pardo, "How children survived 40 days in Colombian jungle," BBC \(6/12/23\)](#)

The world our children are living in is much like a jungle. There are dangers, storms and situations our children must be prepared for. It is the responsibility of parents, family, along with help from the church, teachers, coaches and others who have influence with children to prepare them for the future they will live in.

Before we look at the Greatness of Children it is necessary to understand two statements Jesus made about children.

Two statements Jesus made about Children:

An word of Encouragement to Welcome Children

“ . . . whoever welcomes one child like this in my name welcomes me.” v.5

The word translated **“welcomes”** comes from the word **“Dechomai”** meaning to receive a gift, to show love, grace and favor.

When we show love, grace and favor to children and others we show love, grace and favor to Jesus Himself.

A word of Warning to those who have Influence with Children

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall away—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.” v.6

Jesus gives a stern warning to anyone who would intentionally cause one of these little children “to fall away.”

The phrases translated **“To cause”** and **“to fall away”** come from the word **“Skandalizo”** meaning to cause someone to sin, to shock through words, attitude, and behavior, to anger with intent.

A person that gives rise to words, attitudes and behavior that would cause a little child to “**fall away**” — to cause someone to sin, to be angry, bitter, or to cause them to not believe the truth about God.

To cause a little one to fall away is a repetitive process of careless and wicked behavior that takes place over an extended period of time.

Jesus said: “. . . it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.”

From the encounter of Jesus and His disciples recorded in **Matthew 18:1-6, Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48** we learn two powerful lessons about Greatness.

Lesson One

The Greatness of Children vv.1-2

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² He called a small child and had him stand among them. CSB

The word translated “**greatest**” in v.1 comes from the Greek word “**Meizon**” meaning greatness as it relates to being superior in: importance, prominence, the highest position, the most recognized, the most outstanding, the most extraordinary.

Jesus used the example of a small child to illustrate true greatness.

The phrase translated “**small child**” comes from the Greek word “**Paidon**” meaning a very young child, **Mark 9:36** says “**Jesus took the child in His arms.**”

Three reasons children are great:

Young children are great because:

1. Children are an example of what a true follower of Christ should look like vv.1b-3

“So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 He called a small child and had him stand among them. 3 **“Truly I tell you,”** he said, “unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” CSB

“Young Children” are loving and kind. Young Children are vulnerable and dependent upon others for everything. Young Children are weak, humble, truthful and trusting. Young children do not have hatred or bias. **Young children are not judgmental and they carry no discrimination toward others for any reason.** Socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity etc.

In a day and time when children were not recognized as precious or valuable Jesus spoke about and stood up for children.

Young children are great because:

2. Children are Created by God and Designed for His Purpose

Psalm 139:13-18 “For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. 15 My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began. 17 God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is! 18 If I counted them, they would outnumber the grains of sand;” CSB

Isaiah 44:2 “This is the word of the LORD your Maker, the one who formed you from the womb:” CSB

Jeremiah 1:5 “I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born.” CSB

Young children are great because:

3. Children are the future

Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.” CSB

Children are not children for long— They grow up . . .

We only have a short season to raise and prepare our children for the future God has for them.

There will come a time when we must let our children go.

Erma Bombeck shared an illustration regarding the reality of letting our children grow up into adulthood:

The task of raising kids is rather like trying to fly a kite on a day when the wind doesn't blow. Mom and Dad run down the road pulling the cute little device at the end of a string. It bounces along the ground and shows no inclination of getting off the ground.

Eventually and with much effort they manage to lift it 15 feet in the air, but great danger suddenly looms. The kite dives toward electrical lines and twirls near trees. It is a scary moment. Will they ever get it safely on its way? Then, unexpectedly, a gust of wind catches the kite, and it sails upward. Mom and Dad feed out line as rapidly as they can.

The kite begins pulling the string, making it difficult to hold on. Inevitably, they reach the end of their line. What should they do now? The kite is demanding more freedom. It wants to go higher. Dad stands on his tiptoes and raises his hand to accommodate the tug. The line is now grasped tenuously between his index finger and thumb, held upward toward the sky. Then the moment of release comes. The string slips through his fingers, and the kite soars majestically into God's beautiful sky.

Mom and Dad stand gazing at their precious "baby" who is now gleaming in the sun, a mere pinpoint of color on the horizon. They are proud of

what they've done—but sad to realize their job is finished. It was a labor of love. But where did the years go? Citation: James Dobson, Focus on the Family, from <http://www.uexpress.com/ups/advice/do/> (9-26-99)

Letting our children go means loving them, showing grace to them but giving them room to make mistakes, room to grow, room to learn, room to become competent and the space to own their faith.

Five steps we can take to lead our children to the future God has for them:

Step One

Pray for our Children

I John 5:14-15 “This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.” CSB

What does praying for our children really look like?

It looks like Louie and Jeannette.

Louie and Jeanette, a couple in their 80s, had a son, Louis. Their son had been severely mentally challenged his entire life. As Christian parents, **Louie and Jeanette were concerned about their son's spiritual development and prayed for him often.** But their son rarely spoke and when he did speak it was an occasional word or short phrase. The words and phrases never seemed to have purpose or make sense. There was no way to know if Louis understood anything about Christ. About the time Louis was 50 years old, an amazing thing happened. The family was together on a car ride when, all of a sudden, without warning or prompting, Louis began to speak. He said, "You know Mom, you know Dad, Jesus was born, Jesus died to save us from our sins. Jesus rose again, yes he did." Those were the only complete sentences they ever heard from their son. Louie and Jeanette were greatly touched by hearing those words from their son. Louis had been in church all of his life and on that day it became evident that he had heard and understood the truth about Jesus. His statement about Jesus was all the assurance they needed, inspire of his

severe mental challenges, Louis trusted Jesus. **God can reach any heart and any mind with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Never underestimate His ability, nor His determination to do so.** Citation: *Dr. Warren Anderson; story used by permission of the family (July 2005)*

Four steps we can take to lead our children to the future God has for them:

Step Two

Recognize the Greatness in our Children

Isaiah 43:7 “Everyone who bears my name is created for my glory. I have formed them; indeed, I have made them.” CSB

Jochebed, the mother of Moses saw that her child was a “**goodly child**” KJV and was destined to accomplish God’ purpose with his life.

Because we are “**Born Beautiful**” God has purpose and plans for our life!

God knows the potential of every child, He is calling us as parents, as a church, and anyone who has direct influence with children— to recognize their gifts and train them to be the best and most Godly version of themselves!

Four steps we can take to lead our children to the future God has for them:

Step Three

Teach our Children

Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” CSB

**“We teach what we know; we reproduce what we are.”
— Robert Schmidgall**

Preparing our children for the future means:

We Teach our children:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 “Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.,
5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.” CSB

We teach our children:

To Pray

To live with Christ like Character—Humility, honesty, integrity, respect for others, patience, kindness and generosity.

Character is important because character is the foundation of who we are as a person.

We teach our children:

To Serve Christ by serving others

To identify, develop and utilize their gifts for God’s glory

Manners

Work ethic

Step Four

Discipline our children

Proverbs 23:13-14 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. 14 Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death. NIV

“**Discipline**” comes from the Hebrew word “**Musar**” meaning to teach children the rules of conduct that lead to Godly behavior.

Discipline is a part of the process that helps parents raise children that honor God!

“Punish” comes from the Hebrew word “Nakah” meaning to strike or to inflict penalties as punishment for sinful behavior.

Pediatricians and psychologists are finding today's parents are too permissive. They are reluctant to set limits for their children. And this benign parental neglect is harming kids from the ages of nine months to adolescence. Karen Stabiner writes in the New York Times: "It seems that the parents of today's parents, those strict disciplinarians of the 1950s and early '60s, may have been right all along: father and mother did know best." Nancy Samalin, a parent educator in New York City, sees both single- and two-parent families as overwhelmed. She says, "Parents want their children to love them, and it's harder to say no than yes, especially if you've been working all day and you're tired." Telling a child no is essential to raising healthy kids, according to Linda Rubinowitz, psychologist at the Family Institute at Northwestern University in Chicago. "It gives the child a sense that you really understand what's going on. And it gives the child a way to deal with a problem in a social context. You can tell them, 'Say your mom and dad won't let you do it, and grumble if you want.' That's face saving for the child."

Revetta Bowers heads the Centre for Early Education in Los Angeles. She says schools are replacing parents. "Schools now make rules, which in many instances are the only rules that are not open to arbitration or negotiation. What children really need is guidance and love and support. We expect them to act more and more like adults, while we act more and more like children. Then, when we're ready to act like parents, they bristle at the retaking of authority." Citation: *Karen Stabiner, "The Problem with Kids Today? Today's Parents, Some Say," New York Times (6-25-00).*

Seven Rules of Effective Discipline for Children

1. **Commitment** to the principle of Discipline

Proverbs 23:13-14 “Don’t withhold discipline from a youth; if you punish him with a rod, he will not die. 14 Punish him with a rod,

and you will rescue his life from Sheol.” CSB

The rod was used as an instrument of correction not abuse.

Rods were used by shepherds, to keep predators away and keep the sheep on the right path and from being tangled in bushes. Rods were not used to abuse or mistreat the sheep through beating.

2. **Communication**— This is why we practice Discipline— We love you and want the best for you.

3. **Clarity**— This is why you are being disciplined.

4. **Consistency**— lack of consistency in discipline leads to confusion, frustration and anger.

5. **Discipline in Love not Anger**— We can say the best things in love and the worst things in anger.

A child will never be physically abused or mistreated in love.

6. **Discipline that is appropriate for the misbehavior**

7. **Words of love, grace, forgiveness, encouragement and affirmation**

Remember this—

Sometimes the worst and lowest moments of our lives lead us to the greatest and most significant moments of our lives. The same principle applies to our children and grandchildren . . . be patient God is always working to raise up the next generation!

Four steps we can take to lead our children to the future God has for them:

Step Four

Protect our Children

Exodus 2:3-7 teaches us we have the responsibility to Protect our Children from the World that wants to exploit and destroy them

But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. ⁴ Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him. ⁵ Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile while her servant girls walked along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds, sent her slave girl, took it, ⁶ opened it, and saw him, the child—and there he was, a little boy, crying. She felt sorry for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys." ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Should I go and call a Hebrew woman who is nursing to nurse the boy for you?" CSB

Jochebed the mother of Moses was not going to let the rules and norms of the day destroy her son!

During the time Moses was born there was a command from Pharaoh the leader of Egypt— **Exodus 1:22** "You must throw every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile, but let every daughter live." CSB

One of the greatest needs our children have is to be PROTECTED so they can live a fulfilled, deeply satisfying, God honoring life without significant emotional, mental, spiritual or physical baggage!

Parents: DO NOT CAVE TO THE CULTURE WE LIVE IN— WE MUST RAISE OUR CHILDREN TO CREATE A NEW AND BETTER ONE!

The greatest need for our children is not be happy all the time— we create self-centered humans who believe the world exists to make them happy all the time.

The greatest need for our children is not have everything they want— we create greedy and selfish humans who think the world exists to give them every thing they want.

**Do you want lessons for parenting on what and what not to do?
Spend an hour at the toy section in Walmart?**

The greatest need for our children is not be the best, the greatest, the most gifted or admired.

In the days we are living in— we are not being forced to throw our baby boys into the Nile river, however, the world is coming after our children to confuse them, to distort their view of reality, and to conform them to the culture of a troubled and broken world.

Conclusion

Five Steps we can take to Prepare our children for the future they will live in

- 1. Pray with and for our children**
- 2. Recognize the greatness of children**
- 3. Teach our Children**
- 4. Discipline our Children**
- 5. Protect our Children**