

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Matthew 18:1-14**
“**Lessons to Learn from Children**”

It might be easy for adults to "brush off" children as not very important; but God values them very much. In this passage, we will see a few things we need to learn about children and God's love for them.

1: Their humility (v1-4). The first thing we can learn from children is that they have a certain humility about them that adults usually lose (Matthew 11:25). The question from the **disciples** is still on the minds of many today: **Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?** "Who is the best musician in the church?" "Who has been the most faithful member?" "Who should sit in first chair in the orchestra? I should, right?" I heard a pastor tell the story of a preacher who asked his wife, "How many great preachers do you think there are in the world?" She replied, "One less than you think there are!" **(v2)** When Jesus responds by **calling** this **little child**, who was perhaps starry-eyed with excitement at being allowed to be in Jesus' inner circle—the chance of a lifetime!—the disciples may have thought of this kid as someone of no consequence, no formal theological training, and not much knowledge.

(v3) Sadly, I believe that most of those who are fighting over rank in the church **shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven**; they haven't even **been converted**. A little child doesn't think of himself as a "big shot," at least not as much as adults do (they are often scared to sing or play in front of people). They consider it a privilege just to participate ("Can I get the mail today...please?"). They don't yet have that haughty attitude that they're God's gift to mankind; they are often receptive to constructive criticism (Ecclesiastes 4:13). How many people think they're going to waltz into heaven into some prominent role, when in fact they're not even saved? **(v4)** To be truly greatest, you must **humble** yourself "as this

little child". Maybe one way we could look at it is this: Isn't the chance to to to heaven—*at all*—the **greatest** thing ever? Shouldn't it make us feel like the most blessed person on earth? I imagine it must come off as extremely ungrateful to God when we wonder whether we will outrank this or that Christian up there.

2: Their Defender (v5-10). The second thing we can learn about children is that they have a mighty Defender. A proud person likes to **receive** important people—pastors, influential deacons, famous traveling evangelists—but he doesn't much have time for the little guy, much less **one such little child in Jesus' name**. Yet by ignoring the "inconsequential" child, or any real Christian who is often brushed aside, they are passing up the opportunity to **receive Jesus Christ** Himself. How do you treat those who can't do anything for you (Luke 14:12-14)? How do you treat a sweet older Christian who has a child-like humble spirit? Or an insecure little Christian child who cannot help you in any way? Do you trample on them? Then you are trampling on Jesus.

(v6) Jesus gives a very stern warning to "**whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me**". God is especially angry at those who molest children. And our country right now is in dreadful trouble with all the official LGBT indoctrination in our public schools. Our school system is intentionally—and proudly—trying to raise children to be perverted, mixed up, and wicked. When those who try to turn children's hearts against Jesus see the judgment prepared for them (unless they repent), they would immediately rather choose being **drowned in the depth of the sea with a millstone hanged about their neck**, if they had a choice.

(v7) It's as though Jesus has just seen the "rap sheet" of the world and says, **Woe unto the world because of offenses!** Judgment day is not going to be pleasant, based on all the terrible things done on earth. The backlog in God's court must be absolutely massive. Place billions of sinners on a single planet, and **it must needs be that offenses come**. But you can't use that as an excuse to sin yourself (**woe to that man**). People think, "That store is so

stupid for not having security cameras! They're just begging someone to break in"; or, "If I don't steal it, someone else will; and better that I get the money than someone else, right?"; or, "If you live in a wolf's world, it doesn't do you any good to be a rabbit"; yet such attitudes are evil. We can never use the wickedness of the world to justify our own sin. Jesus will judge each person individually.

(v8) With this fearful judgment hanging over the world, what are they to do? They should be willing to do absolutely *anything* to avoid it! How sad it is that many people don't get saved because they want to hang on to their sin! If your **hand**, which controls what you do and how you act, or your **foot**, which controls where you go—if one of them had an infection that would kill you, wouldn't you amputate it to save your life? How much more if it were trying to drag you into hell? No one can deny that **it is better** to lose a hand or foot and go to **life** in heaven, than to be intact physically and end up in the **everlasting fire** of hell. **(v9)** The same is true with the **eye** (what you see on the internet or in movies). Some people shrug off the offer of salvation and say that they don't care about what happens to their soul, or that they'll "take their chances." Really? They would be terrified at the prospect of cutting off a hand or foot or plucking out just one eye, a (relatively) small part of their entire being. How much worse hell will be! The manner in which a person reacts to Jesus' challenge here can reveal how serious they actually are about their eternity.

(v10) It may be easy for someone who is haughty to **despise one of these little ones**. Could it be that the disciples were upset because Jesus had, in a large sense, honored this little child above them? Perhaps; but **Take heed**; they have **their angels** watching over them (as also do all childlike Christians) which are **always beholding the face** of God—probably giving Him reports, receiving orders, etc. A single angel can cause trained military personnel to drop as dead (Matthew 28:4).

3: Their value (v11-14). Third, children have great value to Jesus. Those who teach little children to commit wickedness are fighting against Jesus' purpose in **saving** them. **(v12)**

Often, **How** we **think** about spiritual things is surprisingly stupid, and so Jesus helps us by giving a parable. To God, one **sheep gone astray** is worth a weary trip **into the mountains**, perhaps through cold and rain and sleepless nights; and unsaved people are worth the sleep we sometimes can lose while worrying and praying for them. **(v13)** The phrase "**if so be that he find it**" implies uncertainty, meaning that God puts effort into saving everyone, even for those who do *not* get saved (because they do not call to Him as a lost lamb needing to be rescued). But if the shepherd does find it, what a party of **rejoicing**! Maybe he jumps up and down, yells and hollers, or throws a party. Do we really expect him to go around and shout like that for each of the other 99 never needing rescue? No; and likewise, Pharisees who "never needed" to repent (or so they think) don't make God excited; His mission is saving sinners (Luke 5:32). If the sweet, unadulterated excitement of a genuine new convert from a terrible lifestyle makes you jealous because you think you're so much better than they are, then maybe that's because you've never been "lost" and then rescued. The excitement of real salvation and a radically changed life can be intimidating to those who consider themselves superior to others, never really needing such salvation. **(v14)** No good shepherd *wants* one of his little lambs to perish; and likewise, **our Father which is in heaven** doesn't want a single person (**one of these little ones**, cf. Ezekiel 18:32) to go to hell. We should have "shepherd's excitement" at rescuing others (Zephaniah 3:17).

Conclusion. In conclusion, we can learn several things from children; (1) They have a humility that oftentimes adults lose; (2) They have a mighty Defender; and, (3) They are so valuable. If you are saved, then you, too, are a "little child" at heart and in God's sight (cf. I John 2:1; 3:18). In the kingdom of heaven, for humble souls, being called a "little child" is really a great compliment!