

[Preserving the Childlike Spirit \[1\]](#)

by: [Lee Rufener](#) [2]

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. ~ Matthew 19:13-14

Oh, blessed thought—"for of such is the kingdom of heaven". Children are as natural as the dawning day, as vibrant as a cool breeze, and as wonderful as the first flower of spring. What an adventurous concept to uplift the spirit of a little child as the epitome of Christianity.

The childlike heart is the one attribute that all citizens of God must possess if they ever wish to attain anything in the kingdom of our God. We need not be learned, though knowledge is useful. We need not be gifted, though gifts are imparted by God and He is to be thanked for them. We need not even be prudent, though modern living calls for it. But, of necessity, we must be childlike. On this, Christ takes an unalterable stand. (Matthew 18:3-4)

Wisdom is nearer when we stoop than when we soar. Thus, we observe our Lord stooping to reach the children, and, in the same stroke, rising to the crown of life. I would believe that in every noble and great man there are tokens and traces of a childlike heart. It is the diminutive fool who buries his spiritual life in a napkin. We may insulate ourselves from intervention, harm, loss, inconvenience, and anything else that would disturb our world, but in so doing, we lock our talent in a padded cell and forfeit the happy adventuresome spirit of the little child.

Our kingly Lord preached in the synagogues, healed diseases, raised the dead, rebuked the Pharisees, cast out demons, and our hearts respond with a hearty, "Amen!" But we also light on passages about the lilies, about the sparrow falling, and the raven who toiled not. These pictures paint a scene so fresh, penetrating, and inspiring that we must sit in awe and stare at the Christ conversing with the child on His knee.

In all the conflict that He endured, no scoffing hardened Him. No disappointment soured Him. No pain dulled the keen edge of His love. He loved life and still believed, in spite of Judas Iscariot. He adored his Father, even though that is what led him to Calvary. And that sweet spirit, as of a little child, has been the dew of heaven to the world ever since.

The exhortation, to "let the little children come", encompasses a far broader swath than a mere rebuke to His disciples. It exemplifies that the spirit of the child never died in Jesus and leaves us with the lingering question, "Lord, is it I?"

This spirit can die so slowly and so gradually under the pressures of worldly commerce that we hardly notice how far we have drifted. However, the greatest losses are those we never recognize.

In the battle and in the fray, the seasoned warrior may not notice that amidst his religious

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fervor and spiritual combat, the foundations of his Christianity may have totally eroded away and crumbled to dust. There is no loss more tragic for a soul than the loss of that spirit of the little child.

Perhaps that is why the Lord mentioned, that "...whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). This is as strong of language as there is. To offend a child is a sin of such significant magnitude that there is hardly an equal.

Now we will look at some of the vicious offenders of the child-like spirit.

Anger

Fathers are exhorted to "provoke not your [their] children to anger lest they be[come] discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). As parents, we want our children to grow up and mature into a lifestyle that honors us and God. And so, we provoke them to do so. This is not wrong, as long as it is immersed in grace. When grace is thin and disapproval drapes the environment like a formidable cloud, this discourages the child and anger is the inevitable result.

The wonder of life is lost in the disparagement of the clash. Anger robs the Christian of the wonder of life. What a poor thing life is, when the wonder of it all passes away.

Whenever we exalt our personal understanding, we become angry. When our plans are crossed, our wishes are ignored, and our understanding is breached, anger is the gourd that brings death to the pot (II Kings 4:39-40). "...Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). Children do not, but when adults do, they rise on the morrow to be greeted by the cup of—bitterness...

Bitterness

The joy of childhood is its receptivity. The greatest duty of it is to receive. But we have so overlaid this present with yesterday's sin and with tomorrow's prospects, that we have little heart for today's message.

Bitterness is the hardening of the heart, and it feeds on the offense of yesterday's dust, so that there is no vacancy left for the dew of the morning.

We are to take no fretful thought for the morrow, and neither shall we be anxious for yesterday's pain. We must consider the lilies and be a child again. Life is laden with plenteous mishaps and abuse, and it is much too short to spend our time cataloging each one of them. Those who refuse to let the little children come and exemplify for them the cure of their petty and feverish feuds, will find themselves steeped in—cynicism...

Cynicism

There is an exquisite purity about the faith of children. Cynicism is the adult expression of unbelief. It is a desperate attempt to salvage our fleeting dignity and thwart off the inner feeling of disparagement that is slowly gnawing away at us like a cancer.

Ishmael lived for fourteen years as the favored and first-born son of the mighty Abram. At one time, he was even believed by his father to be the child of promise. But, as time progressed, and the birth of Isaac was celebrated, the pent-up anger, resentment, and bitterness began to erode the child-like spirit within him.

Perhaps it was the spiteful feelings which his mother had harbored toward her mistress that had been unwisely passed along to him and corroded his character. And thus, we find the unfortunate dilemma of a distraught youth spewing forth mockery and cynicism toward his brother.

Nobody enjoys being displaced, but each demotion in life must be received in faith, believing that God has an eternal good at the heart of it all. Better it is to trust than to be trusted. Better to walk by faith than by sight. For if the spirit of the child dies out, we forfeit our only avenue to life and our path becomes the slow journey to—death...

Death

Children love life. They can take a sordid afternoon and, with a little imagination, turn it into a carnival. They can sit in a cardboard box and sail around the world, then back again in time for supper. Their inquisitively curious minds are on a constant and far-reaching voyage in search of a new adventure. From sunrise to sunset they are on a continuous quest to learn and explore the mysteries of life.

The childlike Christian, experiences life in a similar fashion. He has his world, just as the children do—in Christ, old things have all passed away from him. Within that new creation where the Savior reigns, and which each unconverted heart has never seen, there is a deep settled peace, that brings contentment and fullness of joy, and which isolates the heart from the world around.

But it is not so with the offended. This soul must be busy in other men's matters, whether it be the evils of the government officials or mental surmisings within the local church. The affairs of others are all a personal offense to him, and, by responding in this manner, he embraces the death of the childlike spirit.

Where Age and Innocence Meet

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God..." (Luke 2:25-28)

No more beautiful scene could hardly be imagined than this meeting of age and infancy in the temple, that day, so many years ago. As we read the story of Jesus, we find Him surrounded on all sides by hypocrisy. Until we begin to wonder if there was any true religion left in them who haunted those sacred courts.

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But here the curtain is briefly drawn aside, and we get a glimpse of an elderly Jewish man and woman. Oh, the surprise, as we find them living holy lives, separated from the world, all the while longing for the advent of the Messiah. Who they were, no one knows; what they were, everyone knows. These were two faithful believers, who had kept the faith in spite of the soul-damning temptations around them.

God's house had been transformed into a den of thieves, but these faithful souls resisted the urge to be angry, bitter, and cynical. They fought the waves of death through a childlike spirit, and prevailed.

Perseverance

Age need not deter our hope. Those days were very dark days for Israel. John the Baptist had yet to sound his trumpet and everything seemed hopeless for the Jews. Some of the noblest of them had, no doubt, taken refuge in despair. But this brave soul waited for the consolation of Israel, and we know now that his waiting was not in vain. If his hope had only been in temporal conditions, it would have withered long ago.

The noise, smell, and chaos created from the buying and selling of animals in the temple would be enough to discourage or anger many devout believers. But being rooted in childlike faith and in fellowship with God, we behold its fruition for Simeon. He overcame the hell around him by clinging to the hope before him. He set his focus on the fullness of God rather than the fallacy of man. [emphasis added]

Prayer

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

Prayer is a living expression of faith. As a young widow, Anna was no stranger to pain, and she learned through the struggle to commit her needs to God in prayer.

We pray not for the things we have, but for the things we have not. We pray when life's circumstances batter our ship and we feel like we are perishing. We pray when we have no other recourse. We pray out of duty because we believe that God inhabits the prayers of the saints. It is prayer that brings us time and time again to the posture of a child. Like barren Hannah of old we rise from our knees and our stale countenance is sad no more.

Praise

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thanks likewise unto the Lord." We can hardly fathom the power that is unleashed when we praise. When we notice the good that God has bestowed upon us and give thanks for all things, the clouds disperse. A new day dawns about us, though our outward circumstances may change very little.

This was the case of this honorable duo who had successfully preserved the childlike spirit in a dying and cancerous nation. Herein, lies the freedom from personal depravity and the escalation of the first love that our parched and thirsty land is in such desperate need of today. The pure in heart shall see God and when they shall see him, so shall they praise him.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 1:21)

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