

**Sermon File # 442**

**Sermon Title: *Jesus and Kids***

**Scripture Text: Luke 18:15-17**

**Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached**

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## ***Jesus and Kids***

### **Introduction:**

By now you're very much aware that today is Children's Day at IBC, having enjoyed together the worship leadership of our children. Open your Bibles with me to Luke 18:15-17. As many of you know, I have been preaching this year from this Third Gospel, and today I'm focusing on the passage that gives us important insight into what Jesus thinks about children.

This is a much-loved story about Jesus' response to his followers' attempts to keep children from being brought to him for a blessing. In this story we learn a lot about what Jesus thinks of children—what he thinks of your kids.

Follow as (a child selected by Nancy Blancato) reads **Luke 18:15-17**.

We live in a time when children are caught between two extremes of permissiveness and abuse. On the one hand there are societies and countries that seek to tightly control the way that parents can discipline and punish their children. While we certainly would endorse the prohibiting of abusive injuring of children, we also lament governmental control that would prohibit parents from using discipline and punishment that is proper and effective. Children without proper discipline will lack the guidance and respect for authority necessary for

normal and healthy development. In fact, in my home country (USA), some children are filing for divorce from their parents. On the other hand, and no doubt just as prevalent as extreme permissiveness, is the problem of parents who neglect and abuse their children.

Our Scripture text has been called Jesus' "Magna Charta" or "Bill of Rights" for children.

Let's note what Jesus says about our children. He says, first of all, that we must...

### ➤ **Help kids**

Our text shows the way Jesus welcomed all people to himself. Luke places this account of Jesus and the children right after Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus showed that he came to reverse the usual order of social acceptance to include those who were usually outcasts and unaccepted by the religious world. Contrary to tradition, Jesus accepts those considered exceptionally sinful and not religious, such as the tax collector. He also accepts those that the culture did not highly value, such as babies and children.

- *Babies and children*

Our text says that "People were also bringing little babies to Jesus...." Our text shows us the value that Jesus places on all human life, including babies. Our Scripture text is paralleled in the other two Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16), but only Luke uses, in addition to the word "children" (teknia) the word "babies" (brephe) in verse 15. Parents were bringing their infants as well as older children to Jesus, just as these Jewish parents traditionally brought their infants and children to the rabbis to receive a blessing. Jesus considers all human life to be of infinite value. We could apply this to say also that Jesus values unborn children and certainly would decry abortion as an act of flagrantly rejecting a human being that God has created, whatever the circumstances of that conception of life may have been.

Considering what we know of the world of Jesus' time, both pagan and religious, this is a remarkable fact.

An ancient manuscript from AD 1 was written by a Roman soldier to his wife who had just given birth:

"If it's a boy, keep and nurture it. If it's a girl, discard it."

Tragically, we see this attitude in parts of the world where social structures and governments encourage abortion and infanticide of babies that do not represent

economic advantage to the parents. What a contrast to this idea, that babies and children can be discarded, with the value that Jesus placed on little children.

We don't know exactly who these people were who brought these children to Jesus. Probably most of them were the parents. Some of these children may have been brought by older siblings and other guardians, but whoever they were, they also recognized the value of their children.

Those of you here this morning who have involved your children in Sunday School, Children's Church and this musical program recognize the value of your child. The fact that you have given some time and money to invest in these activities for your child means that you place value on him/her.

Nothing is more important than for you to recognize the worth of your child, and the great potential of your child for a life of infinite worth, to God and to society.

This Scripture passage says we must, like these people we read about, help our children...

- *Come to Jesus*

These people brought their children to Jesus because they recognized his power to bless them. These parents had seen or at least heard about his power and willingness to include them in his work of love, healing and teaching.

Jesus has an attraction to children, now as he did when he was here on the earth. Children are naturally interested in him. All we need to do is to remove the barriers to their coming to learn about him. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who revealed the Father perfectly. God is perfect love, so it is natural that children would be drawn to Jesus and his love and total acceptance of them.

Our text says that...

- *People were bringing little children to Jesus*

I think it's significant that these little children were brought to Jesus and not sent.

I think it's important that you have brought and not sent your child to this morning's activities. It means you care about your children and want to be involved in their lives.

Like a lot of churches in the US, we had bus ministries in our former churches, whereby we brought children to our Sunday School and Children's Church just like school buses bring children to school. But eventually we determined the need to enlist the parents as well as the children. There is only so much a church can do without the support and involvement of parents.

How do we bring our children to Jesus? It must be done, first and foremost, by...

✓ Personal involvement

No one can take your place in bringing your child to Jesus.

I remember a few years ago, a survey was taken among American teenagers, and by far most teenagers listed as their number one hero their own parents, particularly their fathers. And in many of these cases, the fathers weren't fulfilling their parental role responsibly. It's just the way God made children, to naturally look to their parents, and primarily their fathers. That's one of the reasons divorce is so hard on children, at any age. They feel rejected and abandoned by their number one hero.

Josh McDowell, nationally known American evangelical youth speaker, writer, and consultant, did research on the three young assailants at Columbine High School in Denver, Colorado, USA. In every case, these young men came from upper middle class families, with both parents in the home, yet each boy was disconnected and alienated from his father.

Not even the church can take your place, then, in bringing your child to Jesus.

And, bringing your child to Jesus takes...

✓ Prayer

The Bible teaches us that the world is full of forces that work against the spiritual wellbeing of children. They live in a world that isn't just a material world, but one that has a definitely dark side. We believe that Satan is out to get our children in his clutches, through not only religious unbelief, but also into the sinister grip of drugs, alcohol, and other addictions and attractions, including gang violence.

Often we as a church observe a parent-child dedication, to allow our parents of babies to commit themselves to pray for their children and prayerfully bring them up in the teaching and discipline of the Lord. In that service the church also commits itself to uphold these parents in prayer for this supernatural task and work of prayer.

As I'm sure you know, the search continues for Madeleine McCann, the four-year-old daughter of Gerry and Kate McCann, of Rothley, Leicestershire, UK. Little Madeleine disappeared from the vacation apartment in Portugal where she was on holiday with her family on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, exactly one month ago. The parents are desperately seeking every means available to find their daughter and are calling on people everywhere to join them in prayer for their daughter's safe return. We should join in this prayer network, but also we must pray for all of our

children, for God to protect them from all the forces of evil that surround us and for Jesus to bring them to himself as his beloved children. Praying for your child's spiritual safety and salvation is one of your most important responsibilities.

Also, to bring your child to Jesus, besides your personal involvement and your and our prayers for your child, there must be biblical...

#### ✓ Precepts

Scripture teaches that the home is to be the primary place for a child's spiritual instruction. This is true in both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) and the New Testament (Ephesians 6:4). Every Christian parent is to fulfill the Great Commission, and this mandate to make and teach disciples most certainly begins in the home (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to teach by word and by example in the home, and then in the church, which is the extended family of God.

It's both interesting and important that Paul cites the example of faith and teaching in the lives of Timothy's mother and grandmother. These Jewish women, who taught Timothy out of the Old Testament scriptures, were laying the groundwork for their son/grandson's conversion to and faith in Christ (2 Timothy 1:5). No doubt Timothy's mother, Eunice, did not have the spiritual support of her Greek husband, but was faithful nevertheless.

God will give extra grace to you single parents who are carrying alone the responsibility of the spiritual development of your children. And God provides the support your children need through the extended family of the church. The church can assist you, but cannot substitute for your involvement in teaching your children.

As John Piper says, parents first need a clear understanding of the teachings of God's word. He notes that if parents themselves fully understand the word, they can make it understood by their children. Then Piper says that parents must give a minimum, even if only ten minutes a day, to teaching a "good, old fashioned catechism" (See [www.soundofgrace.com/piper84/091684e.htm](http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper84/091684e.htm) ).

Children have a natural curiosity and parents need to be ready with understanding and answers that will feed their curious, open and even eager minds with God's truth. The responsibility of you parents is to be *responsive* to your children.

I heard of a young boy who was seated in the living room, next to his father, who was alternately focused on a football game on the television and reading the sports section of the newspaper. The boy was looking through his storybook Bible and asked his father, "Daddy, why did God make the world?" Not looking up from his newspaper the dad muttered, "I don't know, son." A few moments

later the boy asked, “Daddy, why did God send the flood to destroy the world?” Still absorbed by the sports news the dad mumbled, “No idea, son.” Minutes later the boy asked, “Why do people get baptized?” This time the oblivious father turned up the volume of the television and obviously annoyed said, “I don’t know.” Then the boy, realizing the futility of his asking questions of his father asked, “Daddy, am I bothering you?” For the first time the father actually put down his paper and looked at his boy and said, “Of course not, son. You’ll never learn anything if you don’t ask questions.” Then the father quickly resumed his sports reading and watching.

Jesus says you must help our children, but also he says we must not...

### ➤ **Hinder kids**

For some reason, the disciples tried to shoo off these children who had been brought to Jesus. “The disciples shooed them off,” says *The Message* paraphrase of Mark’s version of our text...” Jesus was irate and let them know it: ‘Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me,’” Jesus said (*The Message*, Mark 10:14).

It is impossible to be a spiritually neutral influence in the life of your child. You will either help him/her come to Jesus, or you will be a hindrance. And, Jesus gives severe warning to any who would offend, hinder spiritually, or in other ways cause a “little one” to sin (Matthew 18:6).

Just as a parent is either nourishing or depriving a child of physical food and nourishment, so we either nourish or deprive a child of essential spiritual food. Just as a parent needs to understand basic nutrition to properly feed a child, so we must face up to possible misunderstanding. We hear a lot about our poor health practices of eating junk food, and failing to eat nutritious food.

If spiritual food were recognized as valuable by society, social services would be on the case of a lot of parents, who continue to neglect the spiritual needs of their children.

We hinder children from coming to Jesus when we are guilty of...

- *Misunderstanding their needs*

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and that means children (Luke 19:10). In fact, Jesus said that children possessed characteristics that are essential to anyone’s entering the Kingdom of God (verse 17 of our text).

*The Message* translates our text, saying, “Jesus called them (the children) back. ‘Let these children alone. Don’t get between them and me. These children are

the kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in.”

Children can be exemplary in their ability to completely trust and believe the impossible, which is what faith is all about. Never underestimate your child's capacity to comprehend the Good News about Jesus.

Children who can understand when they have done wrong understand what sin is. They can realize they have sinned against God and deserve to be punished for their sin. They can understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for their sins. They can understand that Jesus arose from the grave and is in heaven with God the Father, and is going to come back to earth some day.

Children can experience the awareness of sin and guilt, and can turn to God by trusting in Jesus. They can believe Jesus will come into their lives and save and forgive them, and they can decide to follow him as their Lord, as the most important person in their lives. At some point in their lives, they reach what is called “the age of accountability,” that stage of development when the child becomes morally responsible and culpable. At this point, whatever the age, they become responsible for accepting Jesus and following him.

No child should be discouraged, whatever the age, from believing in Jesus and praying to trust him as Lord and Savior. Yet the parents should exercise good judgment in guiding the child in the matter of a public commitment, which I think is to be done through believer's baptism. (Some of you, from Pedo-Baptist traditions, will apply this to the practice of confirmation.) Baptism and public profession of faith should be an important affirmation of personal faith in Christ and a once-for-all commitment to Jesus as Lord that is a genuine benchmark in one's life. The child or youth should be able to own that experience as his or her own and not as something coerced by zealous parents or as a rite that simply allows the child the privilege of partaking in Communion.

I was helped to see the wisdom of counseling baptism for those who have reached at least early adolescence by a Romanian pastor friend back in the mid-80's. He noted that in his country at that time to be baptized was to be stigmatized by an unbelieving and even hostile culture. To publicly declare oneself a believer through baptism means that the believer is willing to bear the full consequences and responsibilities of following Jesus as Lord. I know of too many adults who later dismissed their childhood baptism as a meaningless ritual. And because we do not believe in baptismal regeneration we should encourage the faith of children and teach the importance of growing in maturity and understanding before giving the public testimony of baptism.

Jesus teaches us in our text that children are examples to us and that the requisite for entering the kingdom is child-likeness, which probably means a

readiness to believe and trust and an inability to bargain or argue with God. We need to understand both their needs and their capacity to trust Jesus.

We also hinder children from coming to Jesus when we are guilty of...

- *Neglecting their needs*

I saw a statistic several years ago that should alarm parents of young, impressionable children. It is said that American fathers on average spend 37 seconds a day with their sons (Dr. Armand Nicholi of Harvard Medical School). The average amount of time spent in front of television is 4 to 5 hours per day, and Douglas Groothuis reports that many spend much more (in his article, "How the Bombarding Images of TV Culture Undermine the Power of Words," in the Jan.-Feb. issue of *Modern Reformation*).

Groothuis also relates how the medium of television promotes image over reality, and erodes the power to reason by its constant bombardment of unsubstantiated and reality-distorting images. As writer Barry Sanders notes, when young men live in the world of TV, video games, and movie images, even the worst violence becomes the appropriate outlet for pent-up anger.

A report issued this week says that there is more sex and violence on TV than ever before, even after studies have shown the influence of irresponsible media on children's behavior.

It's very obvious that the world out there is not neglecting your kids. The world of entertainment, for example, is paying attention to your kids. The world of commerce, whether legally or through substances such as illegal drugs, is out to get your kids.

Have you heard of the death metal band, Slayer? Your kids may know about them, and have heard the lyrics about torturing women to death and then having sex with their dead bodies (*World Magazine*, February 10, 2001, p. 14. See [www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com)). "In 1995, three teenage boys decided to follow the steps given in a Slayer song to sacrifice a virgin to Satan, in the hopes that it would bring fame to their own rock group, which they named Hatred. They lured a 14-year-old girl into the woods, where they acted out the Slayer song step by step, strangling her, mutilating her, and then, after she was dead, raping her."

*World Magazine* goes on to report "The three boys confessed—how they stayed up several nights in a row taking drugs and listening to Slayer planning the crime—and they have been put away for 25 years to life."

Attorneys of these boys' parents say that the company that produces Slayer's recordings, Sony and other companies have developed "sophisticated strategies to sell death metal music to adolescent boys." The report says these companies

don't care about the influence these rock groups have on young people. "All they care about is money." As Gene Edward Veith says, these marketers of such trash don't care how this music gets inside the heads of young people. In most cases, the effects won't be as extreme as with these teenage boys, but the influence will nevertheless get inside of people and be a part of the gradual erosion of moral character.

The world of marketing and entertainment is paying attention to your kids, so you'd better too.

The truth of the matter is, the world out there doesn't care about the moral and spiritual health of your child. So, if you don't, who will care? Who has been given the primary responsibility of the total wellbeing of your child?

Remember years ago the secular *Atlantic Monthly* reported that Dan Quail was right when he spoke out against the television program *Murphy Brown*? This was a popular show that mocked traditional values. The *Atlantic* decided after all that it was important for a child to have a father in the home.

We have heard the campaign slogan, "Every child deserves an education," and "no child should ever be left behind." That is true. But also every child deserves to know about Jesus and to have a spiritual education as well.

If you parents failed to feed, cloth and protect your children, you would be prosecuted and maybe even lose custody of your children. If you failed to care for their medical and dental needs, and neglected their education, they would suffer and you would be in trouble. Are your children's spiritual and moral needs less important?

I have heard parents say they weren't going to force their children to go to church but rather are leaving those matters up to their children. These same parents, however, feel compelled to require them to attend school and go to the dentist and doctor. They are teaching improperly what is important by their neglect of what is most important.

And, you are teaching not only by your misunderstanding and neglect but also by your...

- *Giving a negative example*

I remember an American Cancer Society ad on TV some time ago, showing a small boy following his daddy, and imitating his every movement as they sat under a tree to fish off a lakeside bank. The father lit a cigarette and thoughtlessly placed the pack of cigarettes between his son and himself. The boy reached down, and began to remove a cigarette from the pack. I hope it was

an effective ad. And fathers and mothers need to be aware of how your example affects your children in many areas of their lives.

Are you aware of areas of your life and example that might keep your child from coming to Jesus?

The first chapters of the Bible have two contrasting examples of fathers on their children. In Genesis 7, we read that Noah, who had walked with God and lived as a consistent example before his family as well as his society, brought all his children with him into the ark, saving them from the flood. In Genesis 19, however, another father was not so successful. Lot, who had compromised with the world and had not been consistent in his spiritual life, tried to rescue his family from the coming destruction of Sodom. When he urged his sons-in-law to flee from God's coming judgment, they thought he was joking!

If you lead a poor example before your family, they won't take you seriously when you decide it's time to take spiritual leadership in your home.

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus has some important things to tell us this morning about our children. He says we are either helping or we are hindering kids from coming to Jesus. You can't sit on the fence in this one.

To hinder, by neglect, indifference, or negative example, is to face God's judgment. You see, he loves your kids more than you do. He loved them and gave himself for them. He also warns us against doing anything that would hinder them or cause them to stumble, keeping them from Jesus.

Are you willing today to turn from anything that would shoo your kids away from Jesus? Are you willing to attend to their greatest need, their need to know about Jesus as their Savior? Are you willing to help them become disciples of Jesus?

Do you have them actively involved with the church in our excellent Sunday School and Children's Church? Will you have them involved in our summer Vacation Bible School? But the church can never substitute for your role in the spiritual development of your child. You must do all you can, by prayer, leadership, teaching and example, to help your child grow into a God-honoring, Christ-following child of God. Are you willing to commit to continue to meet their entire spiritual needs, and to become the kind of example they should follow?

As a church family we are to give expression to Kingdom-of-God relationships that transcend the earthly realm. We are to be family to one another and are to give full support to one another in the producing of godly offspring. That means that we are to be supportive of single parents, who face huge challenges in the

rearing of their children. God is a father to the fatherless through those in the church family who can serve as role models to young boys, for example, who lack having a father figure in the home. Also, there may be couples here, who for some reason of circumstances or choice, remain childless. I encourage you today to hear God's calling to you to produce spiritual offspring, as you support parents with children by being extended spiritual family. There are also ministry opportunities within and beyond the local church where you can make a difference in the life of a child.

I pray that today, on Children's Day, we will have a new resolve to help children come to Jesus.

**Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What are some of the challenges you see that face Christian parenting in this culture?
2. What are some moral and spiritual dangers facing children?
3. How would you describe Jesus' attitude toward children?
4. What are some of the ways that parents and others can, even unwittingly, keep children from coming to Jesus?
5. What are ways that parents can (and should) help their children come to faith in Jesus?
6. How can (and should) the church assist parents in bringing their children to faith?
7. What opportunities can you think of that give us an opportunity to minister to children, both inside and outside the church?

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