



"A humble Christian studies his own infirmities and another's excellencies."

—Thomas Watson

31-Oct-25

Turning the Fathers' Hearts to the Children (Part One)

In the church, we are very blessed. We are surrounded by complete families, consisting of fathers, mothers, and numerous children. But that is not the case for most of [the world](#) around us. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2022-2023 roughly 30% of American families with children under 18 are single-parent families. Single mothers parent 80% of these, which means a quarter of U.S. families are fatherless.

Such a condition has effects: Seven in ten juveniles in state institutions come from single-parent homes, and the impact lasts all the way through adulthood. According to 2024 crime data from the FBI, adults who come from single-parent homes are three times as likely to be criminally involved. These are discouraging statistics that can make us weep for the world. But we are not of this world!

In [Matthew 18:1-5](#), Jesus gives us a gentle image with a powerful message:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the [kingdom of heaven](#)?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to

you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."

The disciples' question, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" reflects their worldliness. They are expecting a Messiah who has come to set up His Kingdom—and they want in. Their question implies their desire for status, prominence, and power.

On the other hand, in that culture, children were overlooked as insignificant. Jesus, though, by calling a little child to come to Him, shocks the disciples, challenging their cultural attitudes toward children. But consider for a moment: Was not John the Baptist called to an evil and adulterous generation to turn the hearts of the fathers away from their current focus and toward the children? This prophecy is not mere idle words.

Jesus then states three simple instructions:

1. The goal of conversion is to become like little children. We should study the best of them and seek the ways in which they naturally portray godly characteristics. How? By observing, meditating on it, and imitating their examples.
2. One prominent characteristic of children is self-evident: They are humble. Jesus uses this characteristic to redefine greatness as humility. Children do not generally think they are God's gift to mankind—yet. Jesus has given us one attribute of many He could have listed.
3. He commands us to receive them. What could that mean? Sit down with them, talk to them, listen to their tales and voices, and [love](#) and absorb the innocence they have to offer. Then, do what they do when you are with [Jesus Christ](#). This story should still shock us and underscore the value [God](#) places on those society might overlook.

A childlike attitude is not about immaturity but about trust, openness, and humility. Even the childlike state of innocence is returned to us by Jesus Christ at [baptism](#).

This simile from Jesus Christ is a call for self-examination. To reinforce it, we are given an obvious and concrete reminder before us in great abundance: the children. We have a high ratio of little children among us and should not waste this opportunity to learn from them. Such a study is required for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

In [Ephesians 5:1](#), Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." *The Amplified Bible* expands it as, "Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]."

Here, Paul shows another attribute of children. They are watching and listening, learning and imitating what is going on all around them. As my son recently said, "Little pitchers have big ears." God expects us to be imitators as children are.

Watch a caterpillar as it climbs a grass stalk. It yearns with every step to reach toward the sunlight. Little children are like that. When we were young, we attempted to escape our childhood, climbing up and out of it into adulthood with every step we took. If we are young now, we are probably trying to escape our youth, as we all have a desire to grow up.

Everyone wants to appear as grown-up, virtuous, mature, intellectual, wise, and knowledgeable, and we should abound in these things. God desires nothing more than that we become complete or mature ([Matthew 5:48](#); [Ephesians 4:13-15](#); [Hebrews 5:14](#); [James 1:4](#); etc.).

But we can also overshoot, longing to appear sophisticated, cosmopolitan, glamorous, popular, and renowned. It is at times like this that we should be imitators of God as dear children who do not want to take our Father's place but be like Him.

Another simile of childhood told by Jesus Christ appears in [Matthew 11:16-19](#). This passage expresses a deep emotional appeal, a cry from the children for an audience:

But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying:

We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But [wisdom](#) is justified by her children.

This passage is so full of richness that we should dissect it thoroughly, which we will do in Part Two.

- James C. Stoertz

New Transcripts

[1837B: Our Help](#)

Given by Bill Onisick on 20-Sep-25

[1838-AM: The Paradox of Terror and Rejoicing](#)

Given by Martin G. Collins on 23-Sep-25

[650s: Does God Always Accept Our Worship Of Him?](#)

Given by Clyde Finklea on 07-Feb-04

[651s: Choosing the Field of Battle](#)

Given by David C. Grabbe on 14-Feb-04

[FT25-00: Handwriting on the Wall \(2025\): Brutality](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 06-Oct-25

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Living by Faith and Humility](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

People resist God because of their pride, but pride can be neutralized by humility, a character trait that allows a person to submit to God and have a relationship with Him. John Ritenbaugh provides many examples to reveal that God wants us to evaluate ourselves and recognize our dependence on Him, which draws God's attention and favor.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 31-Oct-25) will be **Lamentations (Part Six; 1989)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday (EST)** and all day Saturday.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

