



FIVE HINDRANCES TO CHILDREN COMING TO JESUS

DISCIPLES OF JESUS SHOULD REMOVE ALL HINDRANCES THAT KEEP CHILDREN FROM COMING TO JESUS

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Luke 18:15–17

To apply this teaching to our situation I would like to spell out five hindrances that we should try to remove from our children at Bethlehem and the children in our neighborhoods. The first one comes from the text. The other four are based on our experience together in the ministry to children at home and in church.

1. PRIDE

The first hindrance to children is something in us adults, namely, *pride*.

In the parable just prior to this event Jesus finished with this sentence: “Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” So it is especially fitting that Luke should follow up that parable with a story about children that ends with the words, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall not enter it.”

HUMILITY AND CHILDLIKENESS

I think these two sentences mean virtually the same thing. “Every one who exalts

himself will be humbled,” is the same as saying, “Every one who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” And “Every one who humbles himself will be exalted,” is the same as saying, “Every one who receives the kingdom of God like a child will enter it.” So the childlikeness in view is humility.

But this story in Luke 18:15–17 has to do not just with adults who should be childlike in the way they receive the kingdom; but also with children who were being brought to Jesus for his touch. So to see all that Jesus wants to teach us here, we need to find out how the children relate to the childlike—or not so childlike—adults.

HUMILITY AND YOUR ABILITY TO MINISTER TO CHILDREN

In verse 15 there were parents bringing their infants to Jesus. The disciples rebuke them. Jesus rejects this rebuke and encourages the parents to bring their children to him. Then, as if to warn the disciples, he says, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child

shall not enter it.” In other words, when Jesus sees a disciple hindering a child from coming to him, he sees someone who is in danger of missing the kingdom because of pride.

If you are receiving the kingdom yourself like a little child, then you will not do anything to hinder little children from coming to Jesus. But if you are trying to enter the kingdom some other way than by receiving it like a child, then you will probably be a hindrance to children. If you are not childlike toward God, children will probably be beneath you and not worth your time.

So there is a very close connection between your own humility and your ability to lead children to Jesus. The great hindrance to effective ministry to children is pride, and the great gift for ministry to children is humility.

But there are many other hindrances that we put in the way of the children as they come to Jesus. Most of these are

in some way or other the result of pride, even though they don't look like it on the surface. Let's mention some of them, and how we might work to remove them.

2. PARENTAL UNBELIEF

After pride I would mention, secondly, the hindrance of *parental unbelief*.

When a child's parents are not believers, the child is at an extraordinary disadvantage. There is no one at home to bring him to Jesus. There are some children in our church and many in our neighborhoods who live in these tragic circumstances.

There are two ways to remove this kind of hindrance. One is to try to reach the child and lead him to Jesus, even if the parents don't want to come along. Many parents are willing to let someone else take their children into the presence of Jesus. If they will let us, we should do it.

But it would be far more effective for the child and beneficial for the parents if we could lead the parents into the presence of Jesus at the same time. If the unbelief of the parents is the chief hindrance to the children, then the best way to remove the hindrance is to seek the conversion of the parents. So you can see how closely related are the ministry to children and the larger ministry of evangelism in our church.

3. THE LACK OF DEEP AND ACCURATE THEOLOGY

A third hindrance that keeps children out of the kingdom or weakens their usefulness in it is *the lack of deep and accurate theology among the parents and teachers*.

It takes as much or more understanding of a biblical doctrine to teach it to children than it does to teach it to adults. If you understand a thing well, you can usually make it plain for ordinary people and children. But if you are fuzzy in your own understanding, you will generally be overly complex in your explanation.

A great hindrance to the salvation and the growth of our children is the weakness of our own grasp of the full range of biblical truth and the unity of the whole counsel of God. I am overwhelmed at what children can absorb and retain when they are repeatedly and systematically and progressively instructed in the great doctrines of the Bible.

The best way to remove this hindrance is to help all the adults of our church get excited about the joy of knowing God and growing in their understanding of his character and ways. Here we need to develop our own little institute of biblical studies perhaps to teach and train as many as are willing in the great truths of Scripture and how to share them.

4. THE LACK OF DISCIPLINED PLANNING

A fourth hindrance to our children is *the lack of disciplined planning especially in us parents*.

What I have in mind is the fact that we often fail to teach our children not just because we lack understanding of what needs to be taught, but because we do not take the time to plan to teach. Periodically we feel guilty that our children are growing up so fast, but then we never sit down for fifteen minutes and plan a strategy to take ten minutes a day to teach them the most important truths in the world.

THE SPECIAL CALLING OF FATHERS

Fathers, it is your duty to teach your children about the glorious truths of justification, sanctification, redemption, regeneration, adoption, salvation, reconciliation, original sin, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, the second coming, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature and importance of the church, the inspiration and authority of the Bible. It is a great hindrance to our children that we do not sit down and plan a systematic presentation of these things to them during family devotions for a few minutes each day.

NOT JUST THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

The way to remove this hindrance is to cultivate a church in which parents do not neglect their duty thinking that it is the responsibility of the church to teach those things. We need to get into the hands of all our parents something like a good old fashioned catechism with questions and answers and texts on all these important issues. Many parents would be eager to spend ten minutes a day teaching their children systematically if they had some help and some good material to use at home. I hope that we can get that into your hands soon.

5. LACK OF SPACE

The importance of the fifth hindrance to our children will depend on your estimate of the value of Sunday School in the overall life of our ministry. The hindrance is *lack of space*.

If the ministry of Sunday School is crucial in the lives of our children (as well as our adults), we are reaching a point at Bethlehem where the lack of space will be a significant hindrance to our children and the children who are yet to come.

DO NOT HINDER THE CHILDREN FROM COMING TO JESUS

So the teaching of the passage is plain: Disciples of Jesus should remove all hindrances that keep children from coming to Jesus. We should remove the hindrance of pride, the hindrance of parental unbelief, the hindrance of the lack of deep and accurate theology among parents and teachers, the hindrance of the lack of disciplined planning among parents, and the hindrance of the lack of space to handle a growing Sunday School.

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