



Thoughts on Children



Johann Christoph Blumhardt & Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt

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CHILDREN

Johann Christoph Blumhardt
& *Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt*

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Foreword

It is sometimes said that each child is a thought in the mind of God. But even if we believe this, and approach the children entrusted to us with the reverence that such a belief ought to instill, we may often feel helpless—whether in the face of a two-year-old’s tantrum, or a teenager’s silence.

In this little book, two fathers (themselves a father and son) share their thoughts on the essence of bringing up children. Both lived in Germany in an era when parents and teachers tended to be overly strict, and we live in a time when they tend to be very lenient. All the same, there is plenty in what they say that is timeless.

Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880) studied theology in Tuebingen and became a pastor. He longed to experience the reality of God, and this he did in a very concrete way when he dared to take up an intense two-year battle (1842-44) with the demonic powers that possessed a tormented girl in his congregation at

Moettlingen. As in New Testament times, demons were driven out, and the girl was cured. And all over Germany, Moettlingen became known for the motto that expressed its inhabitants' joy: "Jesus is victor."

In the following months, a movement of repentance and conversion spread far beyond his parish, and many other people were healed of physical illnesses. So many came to him that in 1852 he felt he had to leave Moettlingen, where he had worked with his wife for fourteen years (1838-1852), and move to the large and imposing spa at Bad Boll. As housefather there, he was able to continue his growing work of caring for the thousands that came to him, sick, wounded, and sin-laden souls.

In 1920 A. Albers, a writer for a well-know publishing house, described the father Blumhardt's life in these few telling words:

The atmosphere in which this Swabian pastor lived with unwavering certainty was that of early Christianity and the expectation of the final breaking in of the Kingdom. This is where he drew his strength. In this atmosphere he fought a victorious battle with the demons of Gottliebin Dittus and served and helped the people in Moettlingen and Bad Boll who turned to him day and night. His life was one uninterrupted exercise of the powers of love. Here was a man who had a part in what God was doing, who was an instrument in His hands.

Johann Christoph Blumhardt's son Christoph Friedrich (1842-1919) was raised in this atmosphere of expectation and the reality of the presence of God. He too studied theology at Tuebingen, and then returned to Bad Boll in 1869 to help his father. In 1880 the elder Blumhardt died, and his son carried on his father's pastorate with similar gifts. He followed so truly in his father's footsteps that the witness the gave to Jesus and the Kingdom of God was one and the same.

Christoph Friedrich saw that Christians were turning the Biblical expectation of God's Kingdom on this earth into a waiting for their personal reward in Heaven. He took a sharp stand against this religious egoism and proclaimed God's love for the whole world. He saw that healing for its own sake was another great danger threatening the true surrender to the will of God, and therefore he eventually gave up healing the sick. In a letter he wrote, "Do not look at yourselves and all your suffering. Look at the suffering of God, whose Kingdom has been held up for so long because of the lying spirit of men."

The atmosphere in the household at Bad Boll is described by a guest who visited in 1852, shortly after the father Blumhardt had moved there with his family:

A spirit of freshness and joy blows through this house,

a spirit that gives a vivid impression of what the peace of God is all about, the peace that surpasses all understanding. It pervades everything, practical and spiritual, significant or insignificant. This atmosphere affects the soul as fresh mountain air affects the body.

What a place for children! Here is an anecdote told by this same visitor:

One evening there was a woman at supper with her little four-year-old daughter. She was sitting near Blumhardt, and the child was just behind a pillar. Blumhardt had sent someone to fetch the Bible, as we were waiting for the evening reading to begin. Suddenly, when everything was quiet, Blumhardt's voice was heard: "Peek-a-boo! Peek-a-boo!" and so he had fun with the child for a while. Then he broke off, saying, "So, now be nice and quiet, like a good little girl. We left off at the second half of the second chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians"—which he proceeded to read.⁴

In his biography of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Friedrich Zuendel tells the following story, which also illustrates his great understanding for children and young people:

Now about that difficult age for boys, the "terrible teens" so feared by many educators for its thorns and

thistles. Blumhardt found the right way, especially with boys whose hearts were filled with bitterness and confusion, possibly owing to an excessively strict and pious upbringing.

One such boy complained that he had had to put up with too much religious instruction. On the whole he felt quite happy in the free atmosphere of Blumhardt's house, but he was still capable of playing all sorts of tricks. One day a maid came storming into Blumhardt's room: "Pastor Blumhardt, now he went and stole the eggs from the hen house and put this hymnal there instead!" what did Blumhardt do? He said, "The rascal hiding in the boy's heart is also hiding in yours. And behind your anger, aren't you really enjoying it too? We must overcome the boy's mischief in our own hearts. Just put the hymnal back in the hen house. And don't make anything of it."

He told the others also to put things back as they had found them. For a long time the boy was in suspense, waiting, not without a certain impish glee, for the blowup he was sure would follow. When he realized that nobody was going to take any notice, he gave up his nonsense. The hymnal was probably ruined. But to Blumhardt, a boy was worth more than a song book.

The father Blumhardt had eight children of his own. He wanted them to grow up under the influence of the spirit that ruled in his house. So he taught his boys at home with the help of a tutor until they were fifteen or sixteen

years old. How much time and effort that must have cost him! But he was indeed rewarded when later four of the five children that lived to grow up and marry worked with him at Bad Boll or close to him in a neighboring village. In time he was blessed with many grandchildren—more than twenty living at Bad Boll. His son Christoph Friedrich had eleven children.

Zuendel describes how the father, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, gathered his children and grandchildren each morning about seven o'clock, before breakfast, for prayer and singing:

Blumhardt's big family gathered in a large room for family devotions. It was especially for the children, twenty-four of his own grandchildren as well as other children who had become part of the family. Here Blumhardt was happy. I think he looked upon these children, as his bodyguard, his picked troops, and he believed in their pure, simple trust in God and what God wants to bring. He prayed with them as a child among children—not as one stooping to their level, but straight and simple—a fruit of childlike trust.

When the group of parents and children were gathered, Blumhardt would come in, sit down, ring for silence with his little bell, and say a prayer. Then those gathered would sing "May the Lord, bless us," and toward the end of the song all the children would start wriggling.

As soon as the last note died away, all those big enough to walk would start toddling up to Grandfather. The mothers would follow, carrying their babies, and then came the older children. Blumhardt would put his hand on each child, saying, “May the Lord bless you, Maria,” and so on down the line.

Of course when there was a special reason, for instance if a child was sick or had a birthday, he would say a few words in addition to this short blessing. The meeting would close with another song. All these songs were sung to tunes that Blumhardt had composed, and the tiniest tot would join in lustily, without being the least disturbance.

It was during these years, when Johann Christoph Blumhardt was a grandfather in his seventies, that most of the excerpts in the first part of this book were written. At this time he published a weekly letter for his many friends, and here he took time to answer questions and write down some of his thoughts about children. In these letters he asks parents, teacher, and grown-ups in general to respect a child’s play and innocent joy and not to disturb the child or pester him with grown-up formalities. He even warns us not to offend the angels that accompany a small child. All this he writes with such directness, even bluntness, using down-to-earth Swabian colloquialisms, that it is hard to reproduce his words in English.

Early in his life the father Blumhardt had been moved by the tenderness of Christ. He wrote to his fiancée, Doris Koellner:

This I want to learn, and I need you to help me. It is this gentleness in Jesus that attracted people to Him; this is what He called people to. At the same time this gentleness becomes an important tool for the pastor in his handling of sinners. I mean, of course, not just the outer gentleness, but the hidden, inner tenderness that enables us to feel and think in a tender way.

Many years later Albers wrote:

Pastoral care, healing of sickness, proclamation of the Word—these were the means by which Blumhardt expressed to people his gentleness of soul. Something never to be forgotten even today by those who experienced it. There was nothing flabby or effeminate about it; it was manly through and through, for it was a fruit of his struggle with the demons of Gottliebin Dittus.

This heart-warming tenderness went out to children and to parents, especially to parents of sick children or to those who had lost a child. He and his wife had also lost two children who lived less than a day and one who died under two years old.

Tenderness and love for children can be strongly felt in the second part of the book, which is made up of extracts from sermons on the subject of children by both father and son Blumhardt.

It is with gratitude for the lives of these two powerful Christian witnesses who fought for the childlike Spirit of the Kingdom of God that we publish this little book.

The Editors
Christmas 1979

I. Advice on Bringing up Children

All excerpts in "Advice on Bringing Up Children" are by Johann Christoph Blumhardt, the father, unless marked CFB (for his son, Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt).

Younger Children

From a letter: When my children have been naughty and disobedient, I make it a rule to get them to ask their father's forgiveness. This is very easy for some, and soon they do it quite on their own; but for the others it cost an inner struggle and often great strictness before they can be persuaded to do it.

Answer: This rule of yours with your children is quite unfitting and wrong, and you could ruin them with this rigid, moralistic treatment. More often than not, so-called naughtiness and disobedience in children is quite unpremeditated, so that they have no inner feeling of something wrong; they cannot understand what all the fuss is about. Adults so easily call something naughty and disobedient even when this is not the case.

Children are often ordered about too much or in haste; they are hardly able to take in what is expected of them. After all, they are also beings who should be respected. So it is not at all right to make such a big crime out of everything and demand that even the father. Who had not been present, should be asked for forgiveness. It is understandable that there is trouble then. But that is by no means all. Many reproaches, then sternness, then scolding, and the children become more and more confused. In the end it leads to great severity and harsh punishment.

Dear mothers, don't do this! This way, all that is childlike and unselfconscious in the children is destroyed, and their endearing ways are taken from them. In regard to anything we ask of little children, it would be a good rule to drop our demands when the children do not respond well because they are not far enough along in their development.

From a letter: My daughter, an adopted child, has been indescribably naughty in the last few weeks—snitching candy, telling lies, being contrary and surprisingly rude to grown-ups, more than ever before. To me the child was not rude but would give no answer at all when I asked her a question. She chews her nails, her face twitches, and her eyes take on a

glassy look; and in the end her whole face sets in a strangely old and hopeless expression. I believe that even if it cost her her life, she would not answer at such moments.

Answer: This child could be on the verge of mental sickness. Sometimes it disappears as the child grows older, if these are only slight demonic attacks such as children often get. At least one could call them that. But mostly these attacks stop later on.

We should be very careful how we treat this. Severity is the worst thing. Best of all in such conditions is to do almost nothing until the child had come to himself, so to speak. This state often comes about because a child had not been left in peace—his soul has not been allowed to breathe freely because someone has been forever occupied with him, especially when several people are helping. Naughtiness comes from that too. Never question a child who is in this state you describe. Even friendliness gets him excited, and every demand on him makes it worse. So please stop asking questions straight-away as soon as no answers come, and do not insist on an answer.

In bringing up children, it should be kept very much in mind that it is good to stop and think as soon as any child does not seem to get on well or makes us uneasy. If

ever we are driven to prayer, it is in cases such as these. You should turn to God, and I too will think of your child in prayer.

* * * * *

As many people have urged me to say more about bringing up children, I will at last do something about it and write a little more. I did not do so until now because I did not know where to begin; and there is so much I would like to say that I would hardly know where to stop. I was also waiting for questions that would lead to a specific theme, and I would still like to ask for questions. But as none have come, I will write as it comes to me at the moment. There is no lack of opportunity for experience in my house as there are numerous grandchildren growing up all around me.

It is particularly important that the merry, contented, and joyful disposition of one-, two-, three-year-olds is not disturbed, and in order not to disturb it, those in charge of them must continually exercise self-denial in the broadest sense. But just in this area the greatest mistakes are made. With countless children things soon go wrong, and then later very wrong, because their happy disposition in early childhood has not been

treated with consideration and reverence. Instead, it has been interfered with again and again in all kinds of seemingly insignificant ways.

Therefore my first request is to refrain from doing anything that tends to make a child unhappy and that tears him away from his thoughts, or at least to consider it carefully; for you could very easily do differently. A child *always* thinks for himself and in his own way. His eyes see all that is around him, and everything occupies his mind and urges him to do things with inner joy and delight, quite innocently. He needs full scope to let his own thoughts work and to notice things for himself. One gets the feeling that angels are around the children, leading and teaching them, and whoever is so clumsy as to disturb a child opposes his angel.

Most of the disturbances a child has to put up with come about because everyone who sees or passes by him has quickly to pick him up and hold him, kiss him, or do something or other with him. One after another may come along and do the same thing. but just at the moment this is not what the child wants, and every child struggles against it, against everyone, even against those he loves most. Then when he struggles, he is held by force and told, "You don't love me." The child becomes more and more unmanageable, instinctively

hits out, and begins to cry. Then he is told, “You are naughty, you are obstinate.”

Now the complaining begins: the child is self-willed, and the clever advice is given that he must be brought up better and his self-will must be broken, otherwise he will become completely spoiled. So it goes, on and on. The one whose feelings have been hurt gives him a smack, and with holy (or rather unholy) zeal the stick is even resorted to and the poor little mite has to feel it. But who is naughty? Who is self-willed?

The result of it all is that the child is robbed of his sunny disposition, and if it continues, he gradually becomes defiant and unbearable. His own personality has not been respected; others have imposed their personality on his. No wonder many other problems arise in bringing him up!

* * * * *

A little more on the same subject, and then we can leave it for a while: We often spoil the happy, cheerful nature of children and their childlike-contentedness by our habit of making them wait. We always have to get everything done, finish every detail, or at least knit one more row, before satisfying a child’s wish or need or

pleasing him. When the children become restless because we don't keep our promises and give the joy of doing what they ask for in all innocence, we call out, "Wait a minute till I've got this finished." The child begs, but one row after another must be knitted, a letter must be read or written, and who knows what else has to be done that puts it off longer. We snap at the child, "Wait a bit! Can't you wait a bit?" The child begs all the more persistently and tearfully, until we say, "Can't you leave me in peace?" You must learn to wait."

Now the child breaks out crying, sobbing, and wailing. And then: "You naughty child, now you'll certainly not get what you want!" The child is snatched up and taken off. The poor little mite can be heard crying all over the house. This often happens in the nursery. There is an everlasting crying and wailing, and why? Oh, this tiresome procrastination in all the things we owe our children! Between the wails come the impatient words, "You naughty child. You willful child! Wait, you'll get a good smack," and if it gets worse you can hear the stick or the rod or a smack. That really is asking for trouble later.

It is especially important not to make the children wait at table. They simply are not able to wait a long time when they are hungry; and to make them wait can

become torture for them. We see this clearly in little children. They get so ravenous that they begin to drool when the mother or the teacher does not hurry. Even older children are often like this, and there is always something unmerciful about making a child wait. Oh, how a child looks forward to something, no matter what, and instead of joy it feels bitter sorrow because of the procrastination of those who have it in their hands to give!

Recently, my dear friend Pastor Wenger from Heinrichsbad visited me. It reminded me of how I was once his father's guest in Bern forty years ago. He was a teacher there and boarded young school children. We had a simple midday meal with them. The father prayed and began to fill the children's plates from the smallest to the oldest. And to me he said, "The children must have their food first because they can't wait." "Oh," I thought at that time already, "that's the right sort of teacher; he puts himself in the children's shoes." Most parents and teachers are in the habit of saying, "Children must wait until the grown-ups are served." I could have kissed Mr. Wenger; his way of doing it warmed my heart right down to my toes.

How much I could still say, but this will be enough for anyone who has open ears.

* * * * *

I wanted to wait a little before writing any more, but in future I will not make any promises about not continuing. I could regret it, and then my friends might take it amiss if I still continue. But I have many small grandchildren around me, and something new keeps on coming to my mind.

Recently I gave our friends this text to learn by heart: “O Lord, help; O Lord, help us to succeed.” (Psalm 118:25) It so happened that I gave it also to my little ones to learn. They went back to their room, and a little girl of two-and a half learned it specially quickly. The next morning, when the children paid me their morning visit in our living room, I asked the child, “Well, can you say your verse?” she put her head to one side in embarrassment and gave no answer. There was no answer to be got because there were other people around also listening. I let her go.

But it struck me how little children hate to perform on demand. Already when they are asked to come forward, it makes them self-conscious. On their own they will do it with childlike joy and delightful unselfconsciousness, but as soon as it is demanded of them, they are self-conscious, shy, and bashful; they will not or actually *cannot*, do anything, for their will is not behind it.

That applies to everything they have learned, not only

to little texts and verses but also to all kinds of tricks such as small children are taught. As soon as they are asked to show what they know or can do, it is all over—they cannot bring it out. If I think about it, there is something precious, yes divine, about this shyness. They cannot be like actors and provide entertainment for grown-ups and create an empty joy with something serious. Besides, their angels in Heaven do not want them to serve the vanity of their parents or come to harm through their own actions.

Yet, dear parents, you do not quite agree, do you? You would be cross if the child did not behave the way you want him to. First you say mildly, “Well, can’t you do it? What? Come on, say it!” Then, “How stupid you are! Go away, I don’t like you.” Or, “You’re being really stubborn now; we must get rid of this obstinacy.”

In short, the child is bound to be self-willed, obstinate, and disobedient. And how often does this happen to the poor child! In this way we spoil the joy we have with our children, by vain trifles. The child has to pay for the whims of others. How easily something precious in the child is trampled upon! How easily we hurt the little ones, who are in the care of the angels, with our clumsy ways! So leave the children in peace about unnecessary things.

This morning one of my little boys was terribly restless, more than ever before. He kept on looking around and there was no stopping him, but he wasn't naughty. What's the matter with you today? I thought. Suddenly I remembered that his father and mother had gone on a journey the day before; then the child's whole behavior was clear to me.

Take note: everything has a reason with little children! So keep your eyes open!

* * * * *

From a letter: My child has not been well for some weeks and has terrible fits of rage, which we can hardly control.

Answer: What you write about your child has touched my heart, and I sincerely intercede for him. When fits of rage occur, you must on no account take severe measures. Be patient and calm and let him work it off; afterwards, take him to a quiet place, and pray with him and bless him. Keep it short and challenging. Apart from that, be on your guard not to act suddenly in taking something away or restraining him, and never take a thing away or restrain him unnecessarily or at an unsuitable moment. Children do not understand this;

they feel unjustly treated, and then something dark comes in. In time things will improve. If you follow this advice, there will be no ill effects in later life.

* * * * *

Whoever adopts children must accept them with all their ingratitude; otherwise it will not go well. To take in children and expect thanks is unnatural and not right. As a rule, it will go badly. Children never show special thanks to those who feed and clothe them, apart from showing love the way children do. They take it quite for granted that we don't let them go hungry or naked, also that we don't do just the minimum for them if they see that we could do a little more. That is theirs by rights. Whoever cares for them.

Many who adopt children, however, think that such children should acknowledge and feel awed at the compassion of these people who really owe them nothing—if that is true at all. You simpletons! That is just what they do not feel, so do not demand it of them. Love them without expecting thanks, even if they cause you a lot of trouble; you have to accept them along with their naughtiness. They will feel that, and they will love you for it, but without words.

Often foster children are given what they need, but

without love, and they are made to feel this even in words. It hurts them deeply and can even give rise to hate in their hearts. I have known of two different girls who were prepared to do anything rather than put up with any more of this false generosity from their foster parents. Foster children do not want to have fewer privileges than the children they live with; they have a sharp eye, and if they see differences, it hurts them terribly. Why is that? They are simply children, and they do not see why one child should have more than another.

So if you want to adopt children, consider whether they would not be more unhappy with you than they would otherwise be, even under miserable conditions. If you do adopt them, adopt them fully so that they feel they can be really children with you and can simply make any childlike demand of you and indulge in any childlike ways. If not, you will receive no thanks either from them or from our dear Father in Heaven.

* * * * *

To a young girl caring for someone else's children: With all my heart I wish you the Lord's blessing on the task you have been given. I will gladly intercede with our Savior that everything may turn out well for you and the

children. By the way, in such a situation it is important not to make too much of the task. Otherwise you will easily make it difficult for yourself and the children and get into unnecessary managing and forcing and anxiety. What more is needed than simply to be with them, without assuming that you have to do something great or extraordinary? If you do these things I have mentioned, and all the small services attached to them, it will be quite enough. The worst thing for children is being ordered about and corrected. Your task is to serve and to love.

* * * * *

To a young woman: One thing I would advise you that is very important! Small children are hindered most in the proper development of their souls by being hugged and played with too much, being interrupted in what they want to do, and passed around from one person to another. Do not disturb the peace and quiet needed at this tender age for healthy, sound development. Remember this!

* * * * *

Even the disciples of Jesus became angry when the children were brought to Him. If so many children come, they thought, little ones and big ones, unfortunate things may happen. A piece of furniture may get broken and things may get dirty. When children are in the living room, things wear out because children are so active and don't have much feeling for our knickknacks and handsome furniture. They want to handle things and play: they want to shout and make a rumpus; they want to be children. That bothers the ladies and gentlemen, the clever people with culture and good breeding, people who have laid down rules of behavior. (*CBF*)

On recently tidying up my countless letters, I suddenly saw yours—unopened! I cannot understand how that came about. I can only think that it must have been mislaid before it was opened.

Your description of the child's illness has touched my heart. How can I resist a childlike plea! I love to pray for children, for we have the word of the Lord asking us to bring them to Him. I know many wonderful things that happen especially to children. Certainly, it looks as if some of them are chosen to be born among the martyrs of mankind for many seem to be born only to suffer. That, however, has special significance for God's Kingdom. Such

children are, as a rule, lovable, obedient, happy, loving Jesus and gladly trusting in Him. There is nothing that warms the heart more than seeing such a child.

I do not know how it is with the dear little girl you tell about, who loves Jesus so much. Perhaps she may improve or even recover. But it seems to me that her sickness has already taken deep roots. Meanwhile we will keep turning to our Lord. He will surely answer our prayer in some way, if only that the child feels His loving presence. I would advise you especially not to let all the possibilities of medical skill be exhausted on the poor child. I hesitate to say much about this; but it is certain that the simplest treatment is always the best in such cases of unexplained sickness.

Greet the dear child and her parents too from me and tell her that a faraway friend is praying for her and that through his prayer many children have been helped. He asks her to be patient and to go on loving Jesus even if she has to suffer for some time, and he sends her these two little verses for a keepsake.

* * * * *

Comfort for a mother whose child has died: Of this much I am certain, that a child such as this one who was

called to Eternity could not be held back. Even as I was beginning to pray for him, I had a slight feeling that you would have to sacrifice this child.

Usually children whose spirits reach upwards so clearly are not for this world. Parents should consider it a blessing that these children are with our Savior, for I am convinced they can serve as angels. They are fighting souls with a task in Eternity. Who can tell how far-reaching this is, what a help it might be to their families?

Let that be enough. Never say that our Lord should rather have taken this or that child. The Lord was not simply wanting any child from you—He wanted that particular child. For the others, as for all of us, there remains the fight here on earth, certainly a different and much harder fight.

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Jesus is still in Capernaum, in the intimate circle of His disciples, telling them more about what they should take to heart. The child He had placed in their midst may still have been there, because He talks about *these* children: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10)

To our Lord, despising the little ones means not being eager and willing to lead them to Jesus and ensure that they are His. It is easy for us to look down on the little ones—and the young people—and not be willing to pull ourselves together and help them and further them in faith. Some people act as though it were not worthwhile to concern themselves with the little ones in spiritual matters, thinking they will not remember or understand or appreciate it. It is part of despising the little ones if we trust too little in their understanding and their sensitivity in matters of the spirit. Yet we could easily observe that the opposite is true. Children, especially in their personal relationship with Jesus, are even more receptive, yes, more understanding than adults. For many adults are used to listening superficially, while little ones do not miss the smallest or most insignificant thing.

It is clear that we have to come down a bit from the high horse of reason on which we enjoy sitting. We have to be simple and take time to think how to make things understandable to the little ones. We have to become children again, and some find that too hard. Now much we have to learn to deny ourselves for the little ones! Yet there is nothing more rewarding than making an effort for children; they are often remarkably open to higher things, if we only knew how to reach them. Of

course, what we do for children and what they gain from it remains mostly unnoticed; and many people are only interested in making an impression in the world with whatever they do.

Our Lord tells us something that should encourage us to give ourselves as much as possible for the little ones. He says, "Their angels always behold the face of the my Father who is in heaven." Our heavenly Father always gives these angels to the children to watch over them. The children are not left alone, not abandoned, even when people do not take much notice of them. Children have something individually precious in the eyes of God. But apart from that, the more the parents and relatives commend their children to God's care, the more certain and far-reaching is the protection granted by our Father in Heaven. If parents were more constant and faithful in this, they could prevent many things that happen to their little ones simply because they do not commend them often enough to God's protection or give them enough personal care.

When the Savior speaks of "their angels in heaven," we should not think of the special guardian angel given to each child. We tend to elaborate the idea of guardian angels almost to the point of idolatry, as though angels were the children's gods. Yet the angels only carry out God's will; they are not allowed to do the least thing on

their own. Therefore, when we think of the angels of our Father, we must think of the heavenly Father himself, and we would do well to think of our Lord more than of the angels. Yet the thought of angels does help us to believe in the heavenly care and protection given us and the children.

Our text says that the angels sent to protect the little ones “always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” That means that they are constantly giving an account to our Father about those in their care: how they are, how they are treated, who is good to them and takes care of them; who disdains and despises them, does not care about them, or even provokes and ill treats them. Our Father in Heaven will at least take note, if we may say so, of all these things. so we can see that He looks on us according to the way we treat children.

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The angels come straightaway to anyone who seeks Jesus the Crucified and really means it, like the women on Easter morning. To them, the atmosphere of angels became quite natural, and everything that took place then was as though it had to be just that way. That is the best, when the angels above are a natural part of our lives. Children often have this feeling, but older people do not, or very seldom.

Older Children

Someone asked me in a letter why it so often happens that the respect due to parents is not forthcoming from adolescent and grown-up children, whether the fault is in the parents or the children.

When I am asked such questions, I can only talk to those who ask me, not to those about whom the question is raised; so those who have the question must put up with it if I talk mostly about *their* mistakes and failings. And so I am pointing out to my questioner several of the mistakes that are often made. But the young nosey parkers need not hear about that. However, they should realize how hard it is to keep together with them on the right track.

Many parents demand too much submission from adolescent or grown-up children, they put a certain pressure on them even in trifling matters, as if they were still small children. They are intolerant toward

them and do not respect enough the special wishes they might have; even small daily wishes are not respected. Parents correct, punish, and find fault far too much, censure too strongly for accidents and carelessness, so that there is never a friendly conversation and never an atmosphere of friendliness; strictness and disapproval is all the young people feel from their parents.

Such parents are constantly after their children and give them no independence. They do not show them enough trust and continually accuse them of lack of love, respect, and obedience. So the children have no joy in life, and it even happens that their greatest longing is to get away from home because their own personality, sad, melancholy, obstinate, and contrary, and then there are scenes that wreck everything. And so they seem to lose the respect they owe their parents.

Now I have written so much about this subject because in writing I am thinking of many people, not just the one who asked the question. But perhaps a little of what I wrote can be of help to her. Children, in short, must *honor* and *respect* their parents; but parents also should gradually learn to honor and respect their children.

But take note, you children—I have not been speaking to you. You don't need to hear and see any of this. If *you* ask me, I know what I will tell you.

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You complain that when your children were little it was so easy to tell them about Jesus and lead them to Him, but now that they are growing up you do not find the way to their hearts. Even reading the Bible together is difficult, let alone talking about what has been read.

All this is quite natural. Grown-up children need more than little children, and mothers do not always know how to go beyond the help they gave their little ones and meet the spiritual needs of grow-up children. So everything is familiar and boring to the latter because the words do not speak to their age range and nothing is offered to help them go deeper.

Because of this it is better simply to keep a Christian atmosphere among them than to use many words. Rather give up reading the Bible together, apart from what is part of the daily routine of the home, because for older children it becomes an unpleasant compulsion that destroys more than it helps. Altogether, mothers must stop treating older children as the objects of continual preaching. They should begin to treat them as people who can preach to themselves, and such trust will be most likely to win them. If not, then something is missing.

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From a letter: In your leaflet of April 8, 1876, there is an article about the relationship between parents and their grown-up children. May I ask you to say something now for the instruction of us children?

Answer: It is nice that you ask, because I would not have liked to say anything without being asked. Actually I do not have much more to say than what you can find out for yourselves from the article; you can read everything between the lines. Pick up the article, and let me go through it with you.

First and foremost, you must remember that it is never in any circumstances right to refuse your parents the respect due to them, least of all because you believe they are not treating you right. They should never get the feeling that your respect for them is dwindling.

When parents find it difficult to keep on the right track with their grown-up children, it is just because the children are so quick to think they have a right to complain and let their parents feel that they are dissatisfied, and therefore they behave in an improper way. When parents have to be quiet in front of grumbling children, things are not going in the right direction in God's eyes. If parents demand submission, be submissive, and if you do that gladly, your parents will be more lenient toward you. If you feel you have too

little say, there is perhaps a reason for it—perhaps you put your word in too often. If your wishes are not granted often enough, you probably have too many; and sometimes you also pursue your wishes on your own more than you should. Sometimes children have also something high and mighty about them, and in their parents' house that won't do. Parents are after all master in their own house.

Further, be more courteous and more punctual so that you do not need to be corrected or punished or admonished so often. Rather, learn to do everything properly and promptly and accurately.

When children grow older, they often do not want to learn anything anymore or be told anything, because they think they know it all; yet how good this would be for them. In particular they feel far above the housemaids and domestics. A modest, undemanding attitude to servants is the nicest one that can be found in children. When servants sigh and groan about children, or still worse, give notice because of them, that is really bad.

We would often like to give you your independence, if you could bear it. You want more trust shown you—then you must let it be tested beforehand. Aren't you sometimes a bit too dreamy and moody, so that you do not respond when your parents complain about you? You ought to improve in that. Altogether, it should

never happen that you are peevish, obstinate, headstrong, or contrary toward your parents. And when there are scenes, I am inclined to think that the fault lies mostly with the children. Where is your self-denial, compassion, modesty, and humility?

Some children can hardly be torn away from reading novels, and when they do leave their books, they set about their work with grumbling and with a bad grace. When children complain a lot that they don't count enough, how is it if their parents don't count?

But forgive me, dear children, especially you who are asking the questions. Quite without noticing it, I started to talk about rude and naughty children. But wait a minute! Are you not all at times a bit rude and naughty? Do not forget your Savior, who wants so very much to love you! Do not forget His words and ways. If He loves you, so will your parents, and you will love them! May He remain your all your life long. Savior, be Thou our help!

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How can we help the Savoir on earth to build up God's Kingdom? Where is he Savior? The only answer I know to this question is: In your heart! If He is not in your heart, He is nowhere.

It is an illusion to think you are bringing a child to the Savior by rushing him to Church and having him baptized if afterwards you bring him up in your filth at home. Millions of children are baptized and then grow up into the human or fleshly ways of their parents instead of in the ways of Jesus. Or if you think our children will come to Jesus by being taught Bible texts and having Bible lessons in school, you are wrong again.

You cannot bring your children to Christ if you have Him only in your Bible or in your private rituals and not in your heart. “Let the children come to me”—not to your pious customs, your Christian traditions, but “to *me*.” We keep trying to achieve things by means of rules. Because the Spirit is missing, we try to do things mechanically. But it does not work, and then there is the usual complaint about how bad young people are. While children are small, we keep them under our thumb and force them to accept all kinds of ideas. But as they grow up they go their own way regardless. *You* can never keep a hold on your child, but the Savior can keep a hold on him. You cannot force anything by your intellect; the only way you can accomplish anything is by living in repentance and brokenness about yourself, so that the Savior can grow to be something in you. All children, big and little, want to come to Jesus; if you try to drag your child into the Kingdom of Heaven by means of

outward piety, he will run out of your pious house faster than children from other homes, where they are likely to stay and be decent and well-behaved.

The only way, then, is to use the sword against your own hearts. Don't accuse your children when they go wrong—accuse yourselves! Be hard on yourselves; wield the sword against you own hearts, for it is our fault when our children do not turn out well. The “old Adam” in us has to give way and no longer have a way. Christ alone must count, and then our children will have something to hold on to. Then it will make no difference what the schools are like or what the Churches are like. If we know the children are in His hands, not ours, we can cheerfully let them go. Any child in any city, if he is in the Savior's hands, is more protected than he would be in his own home if the Savior is not allowed in there. God is stronger than the whole world, and Jesus is Victor. He holds everyone and everything firmly in His hands. But we older ones, too, have to become children and not want to be anything great. For even if we were so religious that the whole world talked about us, we still wouldn't get into God's Kingdom unless we became children. We have to be *children*, that is simply a fact; it is the unshakable law of the Kingdom if Heaven. (CFB)

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The goal of education is always to produce masterminds. That, so to speak, is the cloven hoof in our education. Masterminds are constantly being produced. Anyone who goes to college thinks he can dominate others who have not had a college education. If someone is put into office, he thinks he can dominate others because of his position. This runs through everything. A man even gets the idea that simply because he has money and property and worldly advantages, he can dominate others. (CFB)

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We need to know how to obey God in *our* time. That is basic, and I thank my father for teaching us that from childhood on. Let me boast a little and tell you that as far as the Kingdom of God was concerned, my father was outstanding in all of Europe. His passing, like his life, was little noticed; the pious theologians looked down on him. But wait a bit, and you will see him shine from Heaven. He knew how to obey, and he helped those who held faithfully to him to become free and find an intimate understanding of God's work in the world. And so we feel quite at home in all that God does and is and wants in our time.

But in order to find that understanding, we need to be

taught wisely. We as children were taught like this; not about the Church, the congregation, or the community, but *only and exclusively about the Kingdom of God*. Already when I was only three or four years old, my father used to call us into his study and show us his big maps, and say, “You must conquer the world; God’s Kingdom has to come into the whole world.” He saw beyond the parsonage, beyond Moettlingen and Bad Boll—out into the world. (CFB)

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II. Jesus and Children

The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple (CFB)

This Sunday I want to address the children in a special way, using Luke 2:41-52. So it is delightful that we have a story of Jesus as a child. The child Jesus comes into our midst today with His completely childlike nature and speaks to us as to children. He had already learned a great deal in His twelve years.

In Israel there was the good custom of going to Jerusalem each year for the Festival. There in the East, mothers even took their tiny babies along. That was a long, long journey, on camels or donkeys, or on foot. People had to spend nights out in the open, and it always took four or five days to travel from Nazareth to Jerusalem. So you can imagine how much the children looked forward to that. They all journeyed with a holy purpose. The memory of what God had done for the people of Israel lived in them. And this memory was

revived in the Temple at Jerusalem. For days beforehand, families would talk together about the Temple, about the sacrifice, and about the history of Israel from Abraham on. And that was that they lived in: God among His people.

So it was that the twelve-year-old Jesus also went to the Temple with His parents, surely with great joy.

He came into the great tumult of the Festival. It is estimated that about one million people came there for the Festival from all over the place—from Galilee, Samaria, Judea. There they gathered and rejoiced in their God, remembering the history of Israel, in which God had revealed Himself so wonderfully. And in the bustle of the Festival, the boy—Jesus—got lost. He was like a lost lamb. So already as a child He felt what it meant not to know where to look for help

The older people were very busy. Naturally in a city like that, with so many sights to see and so many opportunities to buy things, one little boy was easily forgotten. There was no one to concern himself with the boy, and before His parents realized it, they had lost sight of Him. Their fellow travelers were not aware of Him either. And all at once the boy noticed that He was lost. In that milling crowd of people in Jerusalem with its narrow streets, its big shops and markets, He was completely alone. What was He to do now?

Deep down He recalled that He was a child of God; and a child of God cannot get lost. As He wandered through the streets, unable to find His parents, He must have thought, “Where do I belong?” And then it dawned on Him: I belong to God! He quickly found the place where people went to speak about His Father in Heaven. And He went into the Temple.

There were always certain men in the Temple who taught the people. And that is where this twelve-year-old boy went, timidly perhaps, until He came to where the teachers were sitting, ready to give instruction to anyone who came. Soon the boy was good friends with the old Rabbis. At first they looked at Him in surprise, for they seldom met a boy of His age who had such a thirst for knowledge about God. But Jesus was coming into “His Father’s business.”

At first His parents did not worry, and continued on their homeward journey. At the first stopping place they looked and looked; but the boy was nowhere to be found. It is about a four-hour journey from Jerusalem to that first stopping place. It has a gushing spring, and the land is fertile.

Here His parents turned around to go back, and now they were looking for the boy with a great deal of anxiety. His mother naturally felt a great responsibility for this firstborn Son of hers. She still remembered all those

words that she had heard at the time of His birth. And most likely we have Mary to thank for the fact that we still have this wonderful story today. Luke, who tells us this story, says expressly that he inquired everywhere for stories about Jesus; he is certain to have gone to see the mother of Jesus and heard from her the stories we love so much. So we should be very grateful to Mary; she kept it all in her heart.

And now her faithful heart heard another special word when she found her Son in the Temple at last. She heard Him say the words that went out into all the world like a trumpet blast and still move our hearts today: "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business? Has it not been said from my birth on that I belong to Him who made Heaven and earth and holds them in His hand? This is where I have to be: in the dwelling place of this great God, my Father."

So the twelve-year-old boy becomes a Teacher among us. he teaches you children, and He teaches all of us. when we feel lonely, when we are forlorn, we know where to go. Wherever there is a real interest in God and in what He has done and still wants to do, there is our Father's House, God's House. That will never come to an end; and if we seek Jesus, we will know where to go. We will find the Lord Jesus where the Father of all men has built Himself a House, a House with living

hearts that care about Him. Never, never will God forsake the earth. Somehow, somewhere, we can always find our Father's House.

So my dear children, this is what we want the Savior to teach us. Keep His words in your hearts! Keep God's deeds in your hearts! Believe like children! You can feel just like the twelve-year-old Jesus. Whenever things are hard for you on earth, remember in your heart: "I belong where my Father's House is."

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The Savior and Children (JCB)

Some people came to Him bringing little children for Him to touch. The disciples scolded them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant and told them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them; of the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them. (Mk 10:13-16, loosely)

Today we are reminded of Jesus’ attitude to little children, how He looked at them and felt drawn to them. We might say that just because He was once a child Himself, He had a special feeling for children; and because He remained a child and kept His childlike spirit, He had the deepest love, tenderness, and affection for them. It is a fact even nowadays that a person who

has stopped being a child himself cannot stand children; he sends them away and has no use for them. But if even a trace of childlikeness is left in a man's heart, he feels attracted to children, he caresses and hugs them—in a word, he is happy in their company.

Now we have heard this story that is told about Jesus as the Friend of little children. He always had serious things to talk about and to do; He was occupied with the needy, the unhappy, the sick, and the poor, and to all of them He was a genuine Friend and wonderful Savior. Babies, too, are needy in their dependence on other people; they cannot speak for themselves or do anything for themselves. Children are helpless creatures—the smaller, the more helpless. So we can take it for granted that Jesus would not have had a distant manner with them or have said, as some do, “I can't speak to these children, they are much too young! They should go to their nursemaids. What is the use of taking time for them? I need grown-ups who can understand me and whose hearts I can reach.” He could never have thought like that.

Mark tells us here that people *brought little children to Him*. These must have been mothers who wanted the best for their children; who were happy only when their children were happy, mothers who had already experienced the Savior and had been moved by Him,

who must have felt in their hearts something of the blessing and well-being that came from the words they heard Him speak. Their hearts must have been filled with happiness, and so when these mothers looked at their little ones, they thought, "Why should they be less fortunate than I? should they be thought less of than I? if only they were as fortunate as I am! If only they had received the blessing I have and had a Savior like mine!" these mothers were not happy at the thought that their children should be less close to Jesus than they themselves, of less important in His eyes. There is a natural longing, laid by God in every mother's heart, to bring children to Jesus so that the little ones may receive from Him the same blessing their mothers received.

And now? What was to be done with such little ones? Of course Jesus could not talk to them; they would not have understood Him. He could speak words of encouragement to them; there was nothing He could not do with them. But their mothers knew very well what the Savior could do: He could *touch* them! The one thing we can do with little children is to lead them by the hand, caress them, bless them, or take them in our arms and rock them gently—that is all we can do.

The mothers had seen with their own eyes how when He touched the sick, they were healed; when He touched the eyes of the blind, they received sight; when

He laid His fingers on the tip of a dumb man's tongue, the man was able to speak; when He placed His fingers in the ears of a deaf man, the man was able to hear. They may have heard of the woman who said to herself, "If only I could touch the hem of His garment, I would get well." She did and was healed. No wonder the mothers thought it would not be in vain if the Lord Jesus were to lay His hands on their children. It would go right through their whole bodies, and a wonderful power from God would come upon them to awaken something in their hearts to lay in them a seed of divine strength and of God's Spirit in Jesus. And this seed would protect each of these little ones and would keep him safe in the midst of this world's temptations, right to the end of his life.

Was is right of these mothers to think as they did? Why, of course it was! They were quite right! I would be glad if the Savior had touched my children. I am sure that a child upon whom the Savior's hand once lay could never be lost, for a divine seed remains in that child. I am sure the Lord would have marked that child to be His own forever.

Maybe the parents of some of those children were worried about them because they were *sick* or *naughty*. We know how often children are ill, how sickly some of them are as they grow up, how much they cry, how many

hidden ailments and pains they have to suffer. They cry a lot and cannot say what is wrong, and the parents cannot find our either. In many a home there is great sorrow. Nothing is more painful than to hear a child crying day and night and not know how to help him. Among those brought to Jesus there may have been children who suffered terribly, perhaps from some obvious ailment. Their parents figured that if grown-ups could recover their health, couldn't the same happen to these poor little mites? They are driven to say, "Have pity in them; if Thou canst do anything, help our dear children." Surely it will not have been in vain that He touched them.

How well and happy those children must have felt as the Lord Jesus laid His hands on them, and how delighted and joyful their mothers must have been as they took them home, knowing that from then on they need not worry so much about their children but could rejoice in them.

But there are other children, children who are obstinate, quarrelsome, irritable, disagreeable, naughty, disobedient, angry, or malicious from an early age on. That too is terrible for their parents. And it can happen that no punishment helps, that is, if they are old enough to be punished; on the contrary, it gets worse and worse. The more they are punished, the more obstinate, sulky, and resistant they become. That kind of thing happens many times. Often the cause is a lack of wisdom and understanding on the

part of parents. They fuss over their children, irritate them in all kinds of ways, expect more of them than their tender nature can respond to, demand too much, are too quick and too severe with the stick, and are apt to come down hard on a child for things of which he is as innocent as a lamb. Parents who are impatient with their children will slap them whatever they do. Then the children start to cry and end up by becoming unbearable, or should we say, cross and unhappy. In this unhappy atmosphere, these children are being thoughtlessly pulled to pieces and harmed to the point of not knowing anymore where they are. They become deeply unhappy because of the heartlessness of grown-ups. Parents are not even the worst. Teachers and nursemaids often go much too far; they plague and harass the children, particularly when they are alone with them, and the result is a child as young as two or three who looks as though he is going to turn into a demon.

Then some people are so unwise as to force children to pray. The child has to listen to words repeated to him for fifteen minutes, for half an hour, and he gets bored. But woe to him if he says, "I don't want to pray." He does not mean to be irreverent; he simply cannot do it; he can't stand it. Still, some parents drive their children almost to distraction with praying. Such things make for behavior that is twisted, violent, and disobedient,

and this in turn makes these poor, foolish parents suffer. In those cases there is need for great wisdom and enlightenment, and that has often been the help.

There are times, too, when a child is as though possessed by an evil spirit or at least as though an evil spirit were working in him and making him stubborn and resistant. He cannot help being furious; he cannot help being disobedient, insufferable, and quarrelsome. He screams and throws a tantrum. When a child is in such a state that he holds his breath and you think he is going to suffocate, he cannot help it. It is not hard to see that something is wrong with this child, and the worst we can do is to use the stick. When this happens, we have to be gentle and submit to the Lord, raise our eyes to Him and plead, "Lord, have mercy and help Thou!"

You see, children like these were probably also brought to the Savior. Then the Devil had to back out, the powers of darkness had to yield; the children felt good and became free, and all of a sudden they were quite different, all of a sudden their troubles had vanished. Surely that is what many mothers experienced with their little ones when they brought them to the Savior. It was this kind of concern that drove them to bring Him their children, and it surely was not in vain. From that moment on the driven power of God's blessing will have worked in the children, instead of the dark

powers. All these things the mothers expected from a touch of the Savior's hands upon their little ones.

But now the question is, How will they get to the Lord? For He was always surrounded by people, there was always a crowd around Him. Weeping grown-ups, not just weeping children but people in all kinds of trouble, pressed around Him, people whose hearts were heavy. And on top of that the mothers came along with their screaming children! Oh, you dear mothers! The disciples saw them coming and *scolded* them: "What are you doing here with your children? Why don't you keep them at home! Who had time for your children? Look at all these people pushing, and now you come and bother the Lord!"—however they may have said it, politely or rudely, they simply told them to go away. Now we all know that there are heartless people, people who have no feeling for a child when they see him. So let us not think too harshly of the disciples. But they must have been unkind, else it would not be said that the Lord was indignant. And we want to take it to heart and be very careful not to treat little children, who in a special way belong to the Lord Jesus, in a cold, unfeeling way or look down on them. Besides, there is nothing more hurting for a mother than to feel that her child is despised; that pierces her heart like a knife. The little ones do not feel it quite like their parents; but the parents feel deeply

hurt. Nothing is more crushing for a mother's heart than to know that her children are despised, abused, or pushed aside. A mother has no greater treasure on earth than her children; she would give up all she has, her home, money, fields, everything, for the sake of her children. She would leap into fire a hundred times to snatch her child from the flames. That is why it hurts her so much to be insulted on account of her child. *The Lord also felt the pain in His heart*; in this case He felt it more keenly than the mothers, who were in a sense used to seeing children treated that way. But the Lord Jesus felt the pain we cause Him even now, over and over again, by being cold and hardhearted toward children. Many a man thinks at the end of his life of all his sins—all except those committed against children in a way that was not fatherly or motherly but tyrannical and even devilish, it is important to remember that such things are not so quickly blotted out in the Book of our sins.

At times I am in a quandary when, in talks or letters, I hear of people whose consciences are struck because they have sinned against children in such a way that the sting of sin was awakened in those children. A man may be unable to find peace, because he feels he taught a child something that might cause the child's damnation: he misled him, corrupted him, and introduced him to sin. It is a struggle for the man's conscience to find

peace, and I myself often find it hard to know how to comfort him. I am convinced, however, and have experienced, that our merciful Savior does miracles in people in that kind of need if they truly repent. I did not want to ignore this aspect, since we are talking about children today.

We grown-ups may well say, Oh, that we could become children again! For no one who is not a child can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. *“Whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”* (Mark 10:15, free) Try as we may to become children again, we seem to be incapable of it; we are too far from it. And who is farthest from being a child? The independent person. When a child no longer needs father or mother, he has stopped being a child; when a child has no need of a friend, a helper, a guardian, he is no longer a child. In other words, when we no longer listen to anyone, no longer accept anything, are no longer able to make friends with another, when we have no need of a Savior and think we can walk into Heaven on our own two feet; when we become independent and no longer want to obey anyone, when we have lost our flexibility, our submission to older people, our modesty, our warmth of heart—then we are children no longer. A child is one who needs his parents; whoever does not want father or mother anymore is not a child. We should at all times have the attitude of needing a father and a mother.

And now to close: “*And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them*” (Mark 10:16, RSV) What a great moment! Powers from on High, powers from God, overflowed and streamed down upon these children.

May all of us and each one we meet, especially children, be given the Spirit and power from above, so that we may have eternal life! Amen.

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*Let the Children Come to Me:
Thoughts on Mark 10:13-16 (CFB)*

Dear friends, if your heart longs for God's Kingdom, the sight of a little child will do you good. It will do you good for God's sake, that is. Not because a child is such a cute little thing, as people say, or something nice to play with, an entertainment, but because he is something God can use, something precious to God, a jewel on earth.

This Sunday [January 9, 1910] is called Children's Sunday. It should mean something to the children and bring them close to our hearts, and make us glad and thankful that we, too, can be little children. It places the children in God's Kingdom, even the smallest ones, whom we hardly consider at all and treat almost like playthings. We hug them and kiss them but still think they have nothing to say. Yet in God's Kingdom it is quite different; the Kingdom blossoms again and again

in little children. When we have many, many children around us, we can say, “This is the Kingdom of God.” It is from them that the Father in Heaven creates the strength He needs on earth to reach men’s hearts, which are smothered under the rubble of their earthly existence to a point where the child in them is no longer visible. Our Father in Heaven needs children. And you children who are here again today and are back at school, remember that you belong to the Kingdom of God. Just exactly the part of you that is still completely childlike, that has not yet been educated and formed, that came straight from the hand of God—that is the part that belongs to the Kingdom of God. Thinking of the Savior when He says, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for such belongs the Kingdom of God,” I want to tell all you children to remember that Jesus gave you the first right to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or to feel that you are in the Kingdom.

We can sense the Kingdom of Heaven, a childlike heart can feel it, for it is all around us. In every sunbeam that shines on us, in every little wild flower, in everything that lives and moves on earth, there is something of the kingdom of God. There is something of beauty that can touch our hearts and teach us in a way that we can hardly learn from men’s words. There is something real of the Kingdom of Heaven already on our earth, and our

task is to learn to see this. And the children, though they often do not know where their happiness comes from again and again—their new courage, new confidence, and new joy—they can always think, “This comes to me from the Kingdom of Heaven.” The Kingdom of Heaven is all around us. and each time we have to look into it, we should bring with us the Kingdom of Heaven that surrounds us and affects us so much. Everything that comes to us from this heavenly Kingdom speaks to us for good, to give comfort and make us joyful.

What Jesus is saying is: “Why don’t you let the little children come to me? What sort of image have you made of man? Who created man? Look at a little child—is he not holy? Look at the heart and mind of a child. Do they not come from God? Let the children come to me—they are the way God made them. Let them come; this is where God wants to begin His new Kingdom.”

Jesus is among His people: He sees the little children, and He also see the child in the older, grown-up people. There still is a child in each of us. If you let a child be a child, he is happy. If a person can be a child again, he is happy. A child is subject to his Father, not to any other person. If we want to let people be children, if we do what Jesus says we should, then we have to think of them as being under the Father and nobody else. A

preacher can let the children gather around him if he likes, but he must not take the place of the Father; he must know that they are under God. The disciples of Jesus are not allowed to rule; they must never command, otherwise they would destroy these little ones. It is an offense to the child in children if anyone but God rules. That is the way the Kingdom of God is formed.

It is our joy to see any child. If we love the Kingdom of God and *seek* it on earth as the Savior did, where can we find something that will serve God for His Kingdom? Seeing a little child then makes you think, “Yes, *there* is something that could be used!” Even if the child is sick or has something outwardly unpleasant about him, this does not put us off if we think of God and His Kingdom, for even in his pain a child can serve God. Woe to anyone who gets angry because a child cries in pain. He has forgotten God and forgotten that children belong in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We can serve God by noticing children, protecting them, and caring for them for His sake. We can serve God by bearing them on our hearts, asking our Father in Heaven to send His angels to protect these precious pieces of gold that can still serve Him in this evil world, to keep them for His Kingdom and not let them be lost. Whenever we see a child, we should look into ourselves in search of the child within us grown-ups that maybe

still lingers there. We can bring out his child in us again and strip off all that has covered him up so he can come before God's countenance again—this poor crippled child that could not be used for God's Kingdom in his sinfulness and deformity and godlessness because he had so much that was human mixed up in him.

It is refreshing for Jesus when people who are healthy and normal and are not driven by a particular need come to help toward God's Kingdom. These are the *mothers!* A mother, a real mother with a little child, thinks day and night about the welfare of the little one in her arms. A mother knows what dangers the child will have to encounter as he grows up. She does not let the father reassure her when he makes light of things and says that the children have to find their own way.

A mother worries, for she carries the burden, and she often sees much deeper than the father just where the child is in danger. Apart from this she has the outward care too. A small child is often sick, and it is the mother who has to sit at the bedside in tears and nurse him. A mother feels the child's pain, and every cry is like a sword piercing her heart, but she has to bear it. Her husband can go off to work and say, "I can't stand all this crying." But the mother has to stay—there she sits!

The burden she carries is a God-given one, for it is

often works in the mother's heart in such a way that she finds the right way with children faster than other people, faster than the father or brothers and sisters or the teachers. A mother turns to God with her child sooner than others do. Others, as for instance in schools or institutions, reach for a stick or use detention. But a mother is much more likely to think: This child needs God's help.

It is as if this God-given burden quietly teaches the motherly heart to do a true service to God. So when there mothers bring their little children, the Savior's heart leaps for joy. In this world that gives Him so much trouble, that is like a refreshing drink to Him. For little children seem like people who can be used in the kingdom of Heaven just as they are. A dear little child could be taken straight to Heaven. And yet we want them to live. It almost seems a pity; it makes you wish that God's Kingdom would come soon so that the little children could go right in and wouldn't have to turn into misshapen old people.

In the world of men there are many depressing things that people have contrived for themselves and that affect their thoughts. They have even allowed these things to enter their hearts and become the source of all kinds of evil that puts a heavy burden on children whom God

created. Then many children, even very small children, have to suffer. It is not easy to grow up in this world.

When a little child comes into the world and is allowed to grow for a time, it is as though we are surrounded by the pure air of Heaven; we feel that something is really born of God. I feel it is a witness to our Father in Heaven that our children, even those born of quite sinful parents, look at us so gaily, in such a pure and happy way; when their eyes meet ours, we feel as if an angel from Heaven were looking at us—oh, so pure, so holy, and so joyful, even in the poorest circumstances, even where all kinds of evil rule. When such a little child looks at us, it is like a light in darkness.

But there is also a struggle going on in such a child, and it moves us when we see him suffering and looking at us pleadingly with innocent eyes as if to say, “Can’t you help me?” many a mother’s heart has nearly been broken to see the pleading eyes of her little child and not be able to help him. This happens right in front of our eyes. There is a fight against the evil of the world, and nowhere is this fight seen more clearly than in children.

The Savior loves to have children brought to Him. Even though He sees in them disease and the roots of various evils, still, if they were taken into Heaven just as they are, they would not give the angels much trouble

and would soon be fit for Heaven and an encouraging sight for the Savior.

What then should we wish for our children? What should we wish for them and do for them as we see them grow up, whether ailing or healthy, when we have to introduce them to the difficulties of life, when we have to accustom them early to hard work? How can we help them when we have to see them going into the harsh, coarse, rude atmosphere that meets them on the streets and everywhere? My dear friends, if we want to be of any help, we must become children ourselves and meet our children as children, and remember that these little ones belong to Jesus.

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