

If only we could be children again, joyous and innocent. This week we're going to talk about what it means to walk with God with the faith of a child and how we might reclaim that innocence and joy we once knew.

## OPENING PRAYER

### MATTHEW 18:1-20

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

<sup>10</sup> "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

<sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

<sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Jesus said, **Matthew 18:3-4: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** How old was the child Jesus called forward? Five or six? When we think about greatness, we don't ordinarily have such a picture in mind, do we? But Jesus did.

Do you remember what it was like to be a child? I do. Every day was an adventure, whether it was exploring the woods, building a fort with my friends, inventing a

spaceship with Legos, playing soccer until it was pitch dark outside, or celebrating a friend's birthday. I remember my excitement for what Santa Claus might bring me. I remember my enthusiasm for the first day of kindergarten. I remember so many things to be excited for, to enjoy, to find fun in.

A child knows that the purpose of life is to have fun, and he's bound and determined to explore just how many ways he can make that happen. He's filled with expectation, and he's thankful for what he receives. Expectation and thankfulness: these are the things that shape a child's life in Christ.

When a child knows God, he has no doubt that God will take care of him. He depends on, relies on God for everything. He loves and appreciates God. No questions asked. Have you ever listened to a child pray? They pray with absolute sincerity. Before they fall asleep after they say their prayers they think about what God might do in their lives the next day with a sense of anticipation.

But life gets in our way of having faith like a child:

- When we experience a loss, and we say things like, "If there was a God, this wouldn't have happened!" as if God was responsible for our misery.
- When we have a problem, we're impatient with God and we want him to fix our lives NOW!
- When we get involved in unhealthy relationships, we blame God for that too even though we knew better.
- And when we make unhealthy lifestyle choices because we certainly know best how to run our own lives, we wonder why God seems so far away.

Have you ever realized you forgot to pray before you began your day, that it was the last thing on your list of things to do? Let us be like children and share with God our every need.

Have you ever found yourself asking God to bless your plans after you'd already made them? Let us be like children, seeking him out before we begin our plans.

Have you ever found yourself fraught with so much worry you laid awake at night only to remember to pray the next morning? Let us be like children in our walk with God, casting all our worries before his throne that we may sleep peacefully.

Have you ever felt like God did not answer your prayers because of sin? Brothers and sisters in Christ, God does not have a sliding scale measuring your performance. He does not reward you because of what you have done. God's love for you is rooted in who he is. and God is love, and his greatest act of love was the gift of life he gave to us all in his son Jesus, Jesus who died for our sins once for all, Jesus who rose from the grave on the third day once for all.

Young children always know that they are their parents' favorite. He could have a dozen brothers and sisters, but he knows he's the favorite. You should think about God's love for you in the same way. You are his favorite. That's how big his heart is.

But to have a child-like faith does not mean we should be childish or foolish. Jesus said, **Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."** So be wise and wary of the things of this world just as a child is, but don't be "worldly."

I picture my four year old self sitting by a creek in the woods. The water gurgles over the rocks. I'm mesmerized by the whirl of the water. I see a tadpole, which I put in a jar with some water. The sun peeks through the tree branches, creating funny shadows which play across the rocks and water. I say to myself, "I hope this never changes." And I hear myself praying: "Jesus, I hope my tadpole is as happy as I am. Amen."

Friends in Christ, keep it simple. Jesus loves you more than the tadpole, and he promises to take care of you like a dear father cares for his dear children.

This week may you be like a child in your walk with God, filled with joyous expectations of the great things he will do in your life.

This week may you be filled with a sense of thankfulness for everything the Lord's already done.

And this week may you have the chance to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.