

Become Like Children to Enter Heaven



Christopher News Notes

“Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” —Matthew 18:3

WITH THIS STATEMENT, JESUS IS USING AN EXAMPLE WE CAN ALL UNDERSTAND. We know what it’s like to be a child because we have all been children. What we have to do is remember that state of childhood and then change our ways to become like we were then: childlike, but not childish.

To an audience of adults, this must have been a little shocking.

Surely, childhood was a state of insignificance and utter dependency on others, a stage of life that one should be glad to be far away from. But this is exactly the point that Jesus is trying to show His followers. When we trust God with our whole hearts, when we love without reservation, forgive easily, and recognize our dependence on God, we can become like children again.

What Can We Learn from Children?

Anyone who's spent time with children will know that they're quick to laugh, see the silly side of things, and always looking to play. They can have bad moods and strong tempers, but like a summer storm those clouds pass quickly and are just as quickly forgotten. They long to be loved, cared for, and protected. They'll appeal to parents for food when they're hungry, justice when a toy is unfairly taken, or comfort when they are injured. They're not afraid to show their need, their appreciation, or their kindness. Children wear their hearts on their sleeves, showing the world what is within them, without guile or pretense.

What is Childlike Faith?

Much is written about childlike faith, the ability to have complete trust and confidence in God as our father, the same as a child would for his or her own father. But how can we learn to trust so completely? Many times, hurts and betrayals erode our faith in our fellow man. Seeing the capacity for selfish or immoral behavior in humans, and even in ourselves, can easily lead us to be wary of the intentions and actions of others. This skepticism grows as we mature, but by moving away from a childlike acceptance and trust in others, we lose our connection with that sense of complete trust—a connection that rightly belongs with God.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, often called the Little Flower, was known posthumously for her deep faith and trust in God. In fact, Pope Pius XII pointed to her embrace of the faith and the way in which she did it: "It is the Gospel itself, it is the heart of the Gospel that she rediscovered; but with what grace and freshness: 'If you do not become like children, you

Heaven is for Real

Colton Burpo was three years old when a near-death experience, due to a ruptured appendix, tested his family's faith. Coming back from the experience was something even more shocking. Colton spoke about going to heaven while on the operating table and seeing Jesus face-to-face. His story is told in the best-selling book and popular movie, *Heaven is for Real*.

In it, Colton's description of heaven is infused with a childlike faith, describing everyone he met there as young. Colton told his parents that the angels sang to him, and that he sat on Jesus' lap, surrounded by winged angels. Colton described everyone he saw in heaven, including family members who had passed away before he met them, and shared details about Jesus, Mary, John the Baptist, and even his unborn sister, who had "died in his mommy's tummy." His earnest faith shone through in the book, and his message for everybody was the fundamental Gospel message: that Jesus truly loves us.

shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,'" he said.

St. Thérèse focused her "little way" on humility, and on recognizing how much she needed God every day. In doing this, she cried out often to God—as a child does for her parent—when she needed help. By focusing on her smallness, she grew closer to God. She wrote, "It is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father...to be disquieted about nothing, and not to be set on gaining our living," that is, "the eternal life of heaven."

We can choose, with full love and knowledge, to turn towards God by recognizing how much we need Him, and how dependent we are upon Him. Rather than running away from our dependence, we can embrace it. A child knows that he is utterly dependent upon his parents, but still sleeps soundly at night, knowing he'll be fed, cared for, and loved, no matter what happens.

William Newton—Infant of Prague

Writing for the website *Aleteia*, William Newton shared a story of how the Infant of Prague and a childlike faith helped him through a particularly difficult time. Newton was struggling at work and looking to find a new job as his employer had changed, and they no longer saw eye to eye. He had placed a small statue of the Infant of Prague on his desk at work—a gift from a friend—and

looked at it frequently. The image depicts Christ as a small child, dressed in rich royal vestments, and is a much beloved devotion for the people of the Czech Republic.

Newton wrote: "I had already begun the process of searching and interviewing for a new position, when I got word one Friday morning that the big boss wanted to meet with me. I remember looking over at the tiny figure of the Infant of Prague on my desk and praying very briefly, 'Okay, Baby Jesus. If there's any way that you could give me a soft landing, I'd really appreciate it.' An hour later I was unemployed."

Newton goes on to say that rather than feeling overwhelmed or anxious, he was strangely calm and convinced that everything was going to turn out OK. After going out to lunch with a friend, he received an email from a company asking him to come in for a job interview on Monday. At the interview, he was hired on the spot.

He reflected, "Even though I found myself in an undeniably adult situation, I sought a childlike solution to my problem. When children fall down, they bounce back up again fairly quickly, and are off running about and playing again soon afterwards. In my case, I didn't ask the Christ Child to stop my fall from happening. Instead, I asked Him for that childlike grace of a speedy recovery after a fall, which is exactly what happened."

Newton also reflects on the grace he was given in that trial, to look at his life without negativity—much like a child would: “Children don’t spend a lot of time wringing their hands over bad things that happened to them. Instead, they are very much in the here and now, and when they think about the future, they usually do so with some excitement. After turning matters over to the Infant of Prague, I found it almost astonishingly easy to walk away from the past, appreciate the present, and look forward to whatever was going to happen in the future.”

Jesus Loves the Little Children

A big-budget production that is faithful to the Gospels and brings in the best of modern entertainment might seem like a Hollywood story from years past. But Dallas Jenkins’ crowdfunded series *The Chosen* was released on Youtube in 2019, to much acclaim. The show follows Jesus and the calling of the disciples, with the third episode being devoted to Jesus teaching children.

We see a young child, Abigail, first discover Jesus’ camp in the woods. Curious, she visits Him, then brings her friends—and soon more friends. The children learn that Jesus is kind, intelligent, and good-natured. He teaches them prayers and songs, and instructs them on lessons of God. They work on small craft projects, side by side. In the series, these children are portrayed as some of His first disciples and students.

Jesus loves the children’s openness. They ask questions freely, without wondering if the questions are polite or rude. Jesus always answers them truthfully and uses His answers as a way to begin teaching them. Many of the famous quotes and lessons of the Gospels are paraphrased in these discussions with the children. He says, “I hope that my next students ask the same questions you do, and listen to the answers. But I suspect they do not have the same understanding you do.”

Jesus praises their faith, and after revealing Himself as the anointed one of God to them, says, “I am telling you this, because even though you are children and the elders in your life have lived longer, many times adults need the faith of children. And if you hold on to this faith really tightly, someday soon you will understand all of what I am saying to you.” This third episode of the series is a thumbnail sketch of Jesus’ earthly ministry—and it is fully revealed to the children first.

Our Spiritual Inheritance as Children of God

Made in the image and likeness of God, we have a glorious lineage. We are children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, and siblings to one another. Through this heavenly family, each person has a unique connection with the divine.

God loves us dearly, each person, and made us to know and love Him. That’s why the image of children is more than just a useful metaphor to make a point; it’s how we actually must become to be welcomed into the Kingdom. That’s why one of the most powerful parables in the Gospels, the story of the Prodigal Son, involves a father, two sons, defiance, regret, recognition of need, and a graced homecoming. Only by remembering and embracing the lessons of childhood can we take our proper place in God’s kingdom, the place we were made to occupy, as beloved children of the Creator.



**“It’s better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness.”**

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*“Do not forget: anyone who does not realize that
he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest
truth about himself.”* —St. Josemaria Escrivá