



Text: Matt. 18:1-6 (Mk. 9:33-37)
Series: "Jesus & ..."
Title: Jesus & A Child with a Great Attitude
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This morning I want to talk to you about **five attitude adjustments** that the Lord has been making in my life as he teaches me what it means to be His child, but first, let me tell you **a short story** with a crucial perspective and let me share **a vital truth** with profound consequences.

Here's **the story with a key perspective.**

The children worked long and hard on their own little cardboard shack. It was to be a special spot - a clubhouse - where they could meet in solemn assembly or just laugh, play games and fool around. As they thought long and hard about their rules, they came up with three rather perceptive ones:

Rule #1 - Nobody acts big
Rule #2 - Nobody acts small
Rule #3 - Everybody acts medium

(Leslie B. Flynn, Stories for the Heart, p.63)

What a great attitude: "Everybody acts medium." Everybody counts!

Summer is just about over and school has started again. After two months of summer holidays we drivers need to remember to slow for school crossings again. For two months the streets have been full of children doing what kids do during those lazy days of summer holidays.

Do you remember what summers were like when you were a kid? Free time to go swimming with your friends, or camping with your family, or go off to summer camp with you buddies. There was plenty of unstructured time just to be free to do whatever you wanted to do?

But it doesn't take long to realize that we really can't turn the clock backwards. We can't go back to those carefree days of childhood. I've travelled pretty far from the world of children, and so have most of you.

But Jesus challenges us this morning, in some way, to do just that - to turn back the clock in our lives. Let me read the key text again...

"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3



Now of course, Jesus isn't endorsing childish behaviour. He isn't condoning arguing, or fighting, or whining, or pouting or name-calling, things we typically associate with childish behaviour. In fact, by calling them to become child-like, Jesus was actually rebuking childish behaviour. Let me explain.

Matthew tells us that Jesus' teaching about becoming like children came in response to a question that the disciples had asked of him. They asked Jesus...

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Matthew 18:1

This all sounds very mature and adult. It's a good question. It's a valid question. But what the Gospel writer Mark tells us in his account of this teaching is that this mature, valid question actually had a childish beginning. Mark tells us that as the disciples were walking along the road to Capernaum, they had been talking amongst themselves. In fact they had been verbally sparring among themselves. Mark tells us...

“...they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.” Mark 9:34

They weren't comparing Jesus with other spiritual figures. They were talking about which of them was the greatest in God's kingdom! How childish! This isn't even “my father can beat your father” stuff. This is “I'm smarter, better, more spiritual, more ... well, you name it ... than you are” stuff. This is the kind of childish behaviour that Jesus is rebuking when he invites to us to become childlike.

Jesus isn't denying the need to become mature in our faith. We need to "grow up" into Christ. The Bible makes it clear that we can't eat spiritual baby-food all our lives - we need to grow in our understanding of the faith and how we live it out.

And Jesus isn't recommending that we avoid mature responsibility and leadership and just "play around and have fun" like “Peter Pan with a Bible.” The Apostle Paul was concerned about the spiritual immaturity of the church in the city of Corinth. He said that their root problem was that they lacked "fathers" in the faith - in other words, because there were too many childish Christians in Corinth and not enough childlike “fathers” in the faith. Listen to what Paul wrote...

“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my



**ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.” 1 Corinthians
4:14-17**

Notice the interplay between “child” and “father.” Paul asks the Corinthians, his “beloved children,” to imitate his role as a spiritual father. He points them to Timothy as an example of fatherly spiritual maturity but he refers to Timothy as “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.”

You see, even though we need to grow in our faith, we need to retain some of the positive qualities of childhood because we will always remain God’s children. Jesus says to us that in our growing in spiritual maturity we are to “become like children.” That’s a perspective we need to maintain – **we will forever be God’s children!**

And now for **the vital truth with profound consequences.**

This morning I want to speak to five positive spiritual qualities of childhood but before I do, I want to focus for a moment on a vital truth in Jesus’ teaching to us. It’s found in one word...

“turn” Matthew 18:3

Jesus said, “turn and become like children....” Jesus is calling people to make a major course correction in their lives. This little word implies much more than a simple little fix. It’s not just “straighten up your attitude.”

This little word is a major word for what the Bible calls repentance. Jesus is telling us to “turn” our lives toward God. When he calls us to adopt a child-like attitude in our relationship with him, he isn’t calling us to a spiritual exercise in self-effort. This word “turn” is often translated as “convert.” It refers to a deliberate turning to God in faith and trust. The child-like attitude adjustments we need to make can only be made when we turn to God

"Unless you turn" Jesus said to them. One writer said that the word creates a picture of someone travelling down a road and then turning to go back the way they came. J.B. Phillips, in his translation, captures the sense this way: **"Believe me, Jesus said, unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven."** The essence of rebellion against God is our choice to live life our way, rather than God’s way. The prophet Isaiah diagnosed our problem by comparing us with sheep. He wrote...

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

Living as children of God begins with turning back to him. It begins with calling on God for forgiveness for our rebellion against him. It begins by recognizing that



Jesus Christ took God's punishment for our "iniquity" upon himself at the cross. Being a child of God begins with turning to Jesus Christ, God's Son, and calling on him to enter our lives, take control of our lives and change our lives from the inside out. If we want to live as children of God, we need to call on Jesus, God's Son, to make us children of the Father and to teach us, as humble children, what it means to be part of God's eternal family. The Apostle John declares to us...

"But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13

Change can be difficult, even frightening. But we need to remember a key spiritual principle:

Whatever God asks us to do he will give us the strength to do it.

It is never too late to change because nothing is impossible with God. Perhaps, the thought that "I'm too set in my ways, I can't change" is the first attitude that Jesus wants to change in our lives.

Our prayer should be the one that the prophet Jeremiah prayed:

**"turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God."
Jeremiah 31:18 (KJV)**

In other words: "Lord, give me the strength. I will change, because you are the Lord and nothing is impossible with you!" When we turn to God, God will transform us! That's **the ongoing consequence of the truth of turning to God.**

With this in mind, let's look at five childlike attitudes we need to develop if we want to live as God's children. All five of these areas of change are ones that the Lord has been dealing with me on and so I share these as a fellow traveler on the return road to being a child of God.

Attitude adjustment #1

We need to turn from childish self-importance toward child-like humility

The disciples had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest. Can you imagine what they must have said to one another:

I'm more spiritual than you are!

I have more profound insight than you do!

I'm more important to God's work than you are!

And the real kicker: Jesus likes me better!



Jesus rebuked them: **“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:4**

Children know they are not the "powerful and mighty," size alone tells them that fact. Corrie Ten Boom was a woman who modeled child-like humility, despite her world-wide fame through her books and films. Together with her family, Corrie hid Dutch Jews from the Nazis during the Second World War but was caught and imprisoned in a concentration camp along with the very people she had sought to protect. After the war, her story of courage under persecution and her forgiveness for her persecutors gave her a platform for sharing the Gospel of Christ around the world.

She was once asked if it was difficult for her to remain humble. She replied: "When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of the donkey that any of that was for him?" Corrie went on, "If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in His glory, I give him all the praise and the honour."

Despite how "big" we become we need to keep this perspective in mind:

He is the Creator ... I am the creation.

He is the Master ... I am the servant.

He is the Father ... I am the child.

Attitude Adjustment #2

We need to turn from childish doubt toward child-like faith. (Matt. 18:6)

Jesus draws the attention of his disciples to the children that surrounded him. He referred to them as **“these little ones who believe in me....” Matthew 18:6**

Trust is an endearing characteristic of children. A number of years ago I was helping with a summer DVBS program and I had the privilege of sitting with the kids as the teachers shared the Gospel with them. You could sense the children were responding to the stories about Jesus. They believed them. To them, Jesus was very real and very alive. I'm sure that those who worked in our summer ministry program this past summer would tell you the same thing. Children readily put their trust in God and His Word. That simple trust is something to which those of us who are older need to return.

Gladys Aylward was a simple woman who did wonderful things for God in China in the 1930s and '40s. You may have seen the movie, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman, which portrayed her story. As a parlor maid in England, she lacked the educational requirements for missionary service and so she was rejected by mission societies. But she was convinced that God had called her to serve Him in China and so she saved her money to buy her own



passage by land to China through Siberia and Japan, eventually settled in the remote city of Yuncheng. There she adopted the novel strategy of running an inn for mule drivers where she told Bible stories during the meals. She also opened an orphanage. When the Japanese invaded China during the Second World War, she led more than 100 orphans over the mountains to safety in Free China.

During that trip over the mountains, Gladys, a woman of great courage, was gripped by despair she had never known. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13 year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

"But I am not Moses," Gladys cried in despair.

"Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but the Lord is still God!"

That gave Gladys the confidence to press on and she and the orphans made it through!

We need to keep that simple child-like trust in God and His Word. There's a song that contains this line: "God said it, and I believe it, and that settles it for me." Say it with me!

"God said it, and I believe it, and that settles it for me."

Regardless of how much I learn, I want my trust to remain simple and child-like.

Attitude Adjustment #3

We need to turn from childish self-reliance toward child-like dependence

On Nov. 20, 1988, the Los Angeles Times reported a story about a woman trapped in her car dangling from a freeway. Apparently the woman had fallen asleep and her car had plunged through the guardrail and was left hanging by its left rear wheel. A passing motorist stopped, grabbed some ropes, tied the ropes to the back of the car and hung on until the fire units arrived. The fire men extended a ladder from below to help stabilize the car while the firefighters above hooked on chains to a tow truck to haul the vehicle up. It took about 2 1/2 hours to finally bring the woman to safety, involving about 25 people in all.

"It was kind of funny," LA County Fire Capt. Ross Marshall recalled later, "She kept saying, 'I'll do it myself.'" There are times when self-reliance goes too far!

A number of years ago, before we moved to Olds, our family drove from Alberta back to Ontario for our holidays. We couldn't afford the trip on our own and our parents provided us with financial assistance. Over the years, there have been several times when we've been financially assisted by our families.



Although I'm an adult with a family of my own, I'll always be my father's son! Now that our children are moving away from home, Ruth and I have the privilege of helping them the way our parents helped us. They'll always be our children and we'll always have great joy in helping them.

We need to remember that our heavenly Father loves it when we turn to him for help! Although he wants us to mature in our faith, we will always remain his children and we'll always need his help. We simply can't do it ourselves. Jesus tells his children,...

“apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

Attitude Adjustment #4

We need to turn from childish apathy toward child-like curiosity.

Children ask questions! They're always learning. But somewhere along the way, we adults seem to stop asking questions. Have you ever had the experience of being in a conversation where people are talking about something you don't understand and they assume that you do. Do you ask them to explain it OR Do you let them assume that you do understand it?

Why are we reluctant to ask? I think it's because as adults we think we're supposed to know the answers. It's part of being "grown up." But the tragedy is that without asking questions, we'll never learn anything new.

I'm told that most adults stop learning new words at about age twelve. Something in our curiosity seems to die at about age 12 or 13. Being "adult" seems to mean: "you know what you need to know." A few years before I moved to Olds, I took up learning the guitar. While I took my guitar lessons, my daughter Cathryn was taking keyboard lessons. The music studio where we studied had a number of teachers but what was remarkable to me was that the place was full of kids! There weren't any other adults taking lessons.

Our curiosity about God needs to be encouraged. If we want to know God better we need to ask him questions:

- What does this passage of the Bible mean?
- Why do You do things this way?
- How can I get to know You better?
- What do You want me to do?
- What are You really like?

Without child-like curiosity and questions there can be no growth in our relationship with our Father.



Finally,

Attitude Adjustment #5

We need to turn from childish complexity toward child-like simplicity.

We adults tend to make things more and more complex but Jesus tells us that if we want to grow in our relationship with our heavenly Father, we've got to simplify things.

Karl Barth, one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, was once asked by a theology student what, in his opinion, was the most profound theological truth. Barth, the great Swiss German thinker, responded with the words of a song we sang just a few minutes ago. According to this learned man, the most profound theological truth was this...

**"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so."**

A simple children's hymn - it's the heart of everything! What's the truth I need to know? Jesus loves me. How do I know it? The Bible tells me. And because: "God said it, I believe it and that settles it for me. "

Bow in prayer with me.

Do you want to change and become like a little child? Let's ask God to turn us back towards him. The New Testament scholar, William Hendriksen, offers this poem as a prayer of transformation. As I read it, I invite you to pray it.

**"Make me, O Lord, a child again, so tender, frail and small.
In self possessing nothing, and in Thee possessing all.**

**O Saviour, make me small once more, that downward I may grow,
And in this heart of mine restore the faith of long ago.**

**With Thee may I be crucified, no longer I that lives
O Saviour, crush my sinful pride by grace which pardon gives.**

**Make me, O Lord, a child again, obedient to Thy call,
In self possessing nothing, and in Thee possessing all."**

(Dutch poem, "Te worden als een kindeke," translated by William Hendriksen)

Amen.

