

Like A Child

-Introduction

A few years ago, a friend and I were discussing faith. At one point, he sighed and said "Ah, to have a childlike faith again!"

While I share his thoughts that it is a good thing that new Christians have that kind of faith, I think that his statement reveals a misconception which is common in the minds of many of us who have been believers for a number of years: that we "seasoned Christians" cannot have that kind of innocent outlook toward God. The truth is that all believers can shed our hardened spiritual exteriors for an unjaded, wide-eyed, childlike belief in our God and all that He can do.

In fact, this is not only something we can attain, but we are called to attain.

Mark 10:14b (NAS)

"Permit the children to come to Me, . . . for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Matthew 18:3-4

(a parallel passage can be found at Luke 18:17)
"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"

Peaceful scene?

Make no mistake. If, while reading the verse above, you're picturing Jesus sitting on a rock, surrounded by cute kids, talking sweetly about how great life will be when the Roll is called up yonder, think again. Jesus is issuing a command, not just to His audience, but to you and me. This is a tough statement. And it's for our own good. We are called to obey God, and this is part of the package. We are under orders to humble ourselves and be like children.

With this statement, Jesus is letting us know that we are expected to do something that will be against our very nature. "Converted" is a Greek word (Strong's number 4762), which is translated "turn" in most other places it's used. In other words, we have to make a *radical departure* from what seems normal for us. Change paths. This command, like many of God's commands, requires us submit to His will, rather than obey our natural wants and desires.

What does it mean to be like a child?

The example I gave in the introductory paragraph is that mindset of having a childlike faith that God can do anything. When we read passages like Matthew 18, this is the first thing to come to mind. However, a careful reading will reveal that Jesus never defines for us what He means by when He wants us to become like children. We have assumed that this command to become like a child is a call to have a simple faith, but this assumption is unfounded, and is much too restrictive.

Don't get me wrong. Faith is good. Faith is surely one way we can accomplish this goal of becoming like a child. But even more likely is the possibility that we are called to be like children in many other ways. This study focuses on 8 ways that this goal of becoming like a child might be accomplished. While the particular list of 8 is somewhat speculative, each one is substantiated by Scripture. Jesus did not spell out in so many words what He meant by this command to become like a child, but the Word of God, as a whole, works to explain what the Lord has called us to.

What kids are like

I'm a father of three, as well as an uncle and a former school teacher; I've also taught kids in Sunday school. In all of the above roles, I have made many observations about children, and what they're like, what makes them tick, in what ways they are different from adults. No doubt your

experiences with kids, in whatever capacity will lead you to some similar observations. Let's look at some common characteristics of children and see how they can we can apply them.

In what ways are we to be like children?

Let's start by making a list of ways that children are different from adults. Here is a short list of traits that kids have which are typically lost in the transition to adulthood:

Children:

1. are trusting
2. are teachable
3. look to their parents when they hurt
4. are submissive to authority
5. desire to grow up
6. are honest
7. place a high importance on playing
8. love to rest on their parents' shoulders
9. desire to please their father

While most of the traits listed above are self-evident, it's possible that you disagree with one or two right off the bat, particularly #6. But bear with me as we go through these together.

Each item above makes up a section of this devotional. Each section, in turn, has been divided

into 3-4 separate chapters, suitable for daily reading.

Common Thread

As we explore these characteristics in detail, we'll see one common thread: the importance of humility. Let's look at our original passage again: "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"

The truth, as Jesus phrases it, is that you and I need to become like a child. Clearly, humility is a crucial element, a part of the package that we cannot do without if we are to walk in this truth. Humility can be the subject of an entire bible study in itself. Humility is, by definition, the opposite of pride. What Jesus is saying here is that He wants us to set aside our pride and become like a child, and in order to become like a child, we need to humble ourselves.

The Test and Pride Check

Each section contains a Test and a Pride Check. These are not summaries. They are intended to facilitate self-analysis. If they are doing their job,

you will find yourself engaged in a pointed examination of your heart.

Why the Test?

Because the following scenario takes all too often in the lives of modern Christians: We hear a sermon, in which we are taught a biblical truth, we nod our heads in agreement, shake the preacher's hand as we walk out the door, and then fail to walk in what he taught. It's not as if we are being openly rebellious, shaking our fist at what God is teaching us. Rather, it's a simple failure to make the connection between the message and its application in our lives. The Test section will include scenarios similar to those encountered in life, and will also give you a chance to see if your reaction in those scenarios is aligned with Scripture.

Why the Pride Check?

As we read in Matthew 18, Jesus says we must be *humbled* in order to become like children. As we go into detail about these traits, note that the stumbling block which keeps us from our childlike calling for virtually all of these traits is pride. It takes humility to be teachable, to submit to authority, etc. Keep that in mind as we go along.

What's the purpose of this book?

It's hoped that the reader will not only be drawn

closer to God, but to be more like the person God has made him or her to be. We all are His workmanship, and He isn't done with us yet. My hope is that this will be one of many useful tools that He will use in the lives of readers as He shapes them. It has certainly had that effect on me.

It's essential that any teaching designed to draw us to Him be Scripture-based, as opposed to being based on one guy's opinions. My hope is that you won't read this and hear from me, but that you'll hear from Him. To that end, note that each section starts with at least one bible verse. (Actually, there is one exception, but it's based upon a poem that epitomizes all that we have discussed in that section, truths which are in turn based upon bible verses).

This book is divided into 30 studies, each short enough to read in 10-25 minutes. Ideally, one would read this every morning for a month, meditating on that topic for the rest of the day, and allowing God to speak throughout the course of the day.

Does this apply to any one group of believers?

Anyone can benefit from gaining an understanding of these truths about what Jesus wants from us. Men, in particular, have the most pride issues when it comes to becoming like a child in the ways that Jesus would want us to. What is revealed by Scripture in this study is applicable to women as

well, but men need to pay special attention to the Pride Check section at the end of each chapter. This message would make an ideal topic for a men's bible study.

Ready to start?

Section One: Trusting God Like A Child

Day 1

--Total trust

Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding”

Additional reading: Genesis 2:16-17

The smaller a child, the more likely he is to have traits that God intended for all of us. Notice how a baby or toddler allows you, me, or even a stranger to pick them up and carry them. Does the child seem the least bit worried that you might drop him? Of course not. In fact, he usually has no idea whether he is one foot or 6 feet off the ground. He just assumes that since you have him in your arms, everything is going to be alright. He doesn't ask for your credentials, to see if you are qualified to carry him or to be his parent. He trusts you completely.

You have no doubt noticed that as a child makes the transition into adulthood, trust is the first thing to go, and it goes gradually. "That's not fair!!" is one of many exclamations commonly heard as kids get older. Typically, the child is asserting his independence; transferring his trust from you over

to himself. He trusts his own judgment about what is right, and what is fair. This is part of becoming an adult, and to some extent, it is a good thing, but let's look at the spiritual application of this principle of trusting your Heavenly Father.

If there is any one predominant theme that runs throughout the bible, it is the idea that we must trust God. If one were pressed to sum up the central message of all Scripture in just 5 words, it would be "Trust God in all things". Our very salvation depends upon our ability to trust in the price that Jesus paid for our sin. If Adam and Eve had trusted in God's instructions not to eat of the fruit, they would have stayed in the Garden. When God wanted Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses argued with Him, and even asked Him to choose somebody else. But God's message throughout this argument is "It's not you, Moses, it's Me. I'll make it happen." Trust Me. I am in control.

Often, our lack of trust in God leads us to try to Do Something. God's not Doing Anything, so I guess I will. If Abraham had trusted God when He said that he and his wife Sarah would have children, he would not have tried to Do Something; as it is, he made another woman pregnant with Ishmael, which was never God's intention.

Day 2

--Trusting God by following His commands

Malachi 3:10 "...trust Me in this..."

Additional reading: Exodus 23:10-12

One of the best ways to put our trust into practice is by obeying Him. As an example, consider the topic of giving, and its relationship to our trust in God. If you give a tithe, you're making a statement that you trust God to make your remaining 90% cover 100% of your needs.

Consider His directives to get adequate rest. By choosing to follow God's example and take one day off per week, you are trusting Him that you will get everything done in 6 days that you need to get done. Since we are commanded to give and we are commanded to rest, we need to be able to trust that He will come through for us when we follow His directions for our lives.

In the Exodus passage cited above, we see a command to let the soil take a year off out of every seven. God was telling His people to trust Him that they could get more production out of 6 years' worth of farming than out of 7 years. In the 21st Century, science has taught us why this works, but the Israelites weren't armed with the same set of facts that we are. They had to trust God and follow

His commands, regardless of how illogical they seemed.

There is no greater example of the need to trust God than the message of salvation itself. You cannot be good enough to spend eternity in the presence of God, so you have to trust in the blood of Jesus. God wants us to have a child-like trust in Him, that He will always provide for us, that He will cause all things to work together for the good of those who love Him.

Day 3
--Fear Not

Psalm 56:11 "In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid . . . "

To discuss the topic of trust without mentioning its opposite, fear, would be incomplete, to be sure. It has been said that the Number One command in all of the bible is "Fear Not." Younger children have no fear because they trust.

Notice that in Psalm 56:11, there is a direct correlation between trust and not being afraid. God's word makes it clear that you cannot simultaneously have trust in God and have fear in circumstances. It's like asking me to make you some coffee black, but with cream and sugar in it. You can't have it both ways.

A couple of points about fear:

1. Fear does not come from God

2 Timothy 1:7 "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

2. Fear = bondage

Romans 8:15 "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear...."

Hebrews 2:15 "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

If you get nothing else out of this, get this: If fear is synonymous with bondage, then trust must correlate with freedom. If you have problems with fear, then pray for the freedom to trust God!

Test

Have you ever been out of work, or had some other financial catastrophe (or potential catastrophe)? Did you pray about it? Or did you worry? When you told friends, did you come across in such a way that you were showing how worried you were, or were you brimming with confidence that the Lord would somehow take care of it? Even worse, did you try and Do Something without praying about it first?

Pride Check

The more we trust Him, the less we trust our own strength and understanding. The enemy would have us think that to place our trust wholeheartedly in Him is a sign of weakness. The world thinks this, but here's what the Word of God says:

Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding“

Prayer: *Father, I confess that my failings have been rooted in a lack of trust in You. I trust you to some extent, but I ask you to place in me a total, unconditional confidence in You and Your plans.*

**Section Two: Children know
where to turn when they're
hurting**

Day 4

--Telling Him about our hurts

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me; because of this He has anointed Me to proclaim the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and new sight to the blind, to set at liberty those having been crushed"

When a child suffers a cut, he immediately goes to Mommy or Daddy. He doesn't understand the mechanisms that permit a Band-Aid to protect a cut from infection; he doesn't understand platelets or blood clotting or the importance of stopping the bleeding. He just knows that when he's hurting, his parents will be there for him to make things better.

In December 2000, my father took his own life. As I talked to loved ones over the next few days, leading up to the funeral, everyone I talked to described the same pattern of reactions. At first, shock. This lasted anywhere from a couple of hours to half a day. Then each of us, in our own time, shifted our concern to how this was going to affect my father's wife, his sister, and his mother. All of the people I discussed this with had the same question: How are these ladies going to respond to this painful event?

I would suggest that that is a valid question, not just

for these three women, but for everyone who has ever experienced a painful event. How should you respond to pain?

Not surprisingly, children demonstrate for us the proper response. We need to run, not walk, to our Daddy for healing. He has promised to be there for us. When Jesus announced His ministry, He proclaimed Himself to be a healer. Quoting Isaiah, He said “He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted...”

Day 5

--Seeking His Healing for our hurts

Job 23:3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"

Additional reading: The entire 23rd chapter of Job.

It should not come as a surprise that nowhere in Scripture are we promised that this life will not have pain. However, there are many biblical examples of godly people who went to Him to obtain an end to the pain. If you've been a believer for long enough, you've heard a few sermons about Job. If so, has it ever been pointed out to you that Job sought out God for healing? When Job lost all that he had at once, his wife told him he should just end his life by cursing God, and get it all over with. However, Job's response is one we all can learn from. He told her that he knew that God is a good God, a healer. Job wasn't above becoming childlike and going to his heavenly Daddy to make it better. and he wasn't about to turn away from the One who could heal his hurts. However, it isn't what he said to his wife that should get our attention; rather we should look at what he said to his friend Eliphaz:

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him."

That's what he says in verse 3 of the 23rd chapter, and a few verses later, he is still looking for God:

“I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot see Him; on the left hand, where He works, but I cannot behold Him. He turns to the right, but I do not see Him.”

Once Job finds Him the plan is to tell God of his hurts, hoping to find relief that only God can give:

“I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”

Finally, Job is confident that God will give him the healing he needs:

“I would know the words which He would answer me...surely He would give heed to me. I would be delivered forever from my Judge.”

Job knew that the only thing to do is to find God, the God who had always come through for him, and he was determined to find Him. The book of Job goes on to reveal that Job did, in fact, find God, and he was healed. In fact, his material blessings were restored to him many times over, and he had many more children, and had a long, fulfilling life.

Day 6

--Be Desperate and Bold when we come to Him

Read Mark 5:25-34

Just as we can learn much from Job's response, we can learn equally from another person whose name is not known to us. She had been dealing with hemorrhaging for 12 years, and she heard that Jesus was nearby. She, like many others, had heard of His ability to heal the sick with just a touch, and she went to find Him. When she did find Jesus, the crowd surrounding him was such that the best this woman could do was to touch one corner of His clothing, but it was enough to heal her completely. When Jesus saw her, He told her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." (Mark 5:34)

What do Job and this unnamed woman have in common? They both pursued God in order to get healing. There has to be an effort by us to, as Job said, go find Him.

The good news in all this is that He has made many promises which are attached to our seeking Him out. When we say to Him, "Lord, heal my hurts," He will come through for us.

Make no mistake: the phrase "Time heals all wounds" sounds nice, but has no grounds in reality.

Time doesn't heal wounds. God heals wounds. If time itself did the trick, there would be no explanation for those who are still bitter and devastated over events which occurred many decades ago. God is our Healer, and that's not just a description of His character; it's a promise from His own mouth. The 41st chapter of Isaiah contains perhaps one of the most powerful, and comforting, of these promises:

Isaiah 41:10

“Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your
God.
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right
hand.”

At my father's

funeral, I read the above verse to my father's loved ones. The difference is, I personalized it for them. I read it this way:

"Do not fear, Theresa, for I am with you;
Do not anxiously look about you, Ray, for I am
your God.
I will strengthen you, Freddie, surely I will help
you,
Surely I will uphold you James, with My righteous

right hand."

When you are hurting, I strongly urge you to read this verse, and personalize it. Even more important, I encourage you to follow the example set by Job and the woman in the 5th chapter of Mark. Go after Him. He will not be hard to find. He will not hide from you. And He will comfort you, uphold you, and heal you.

Day 7

--children are resilient

Psalm 39:13 “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.”

Isaiah 38:16 “O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.”

Recently, my wife became sick, and stayed that way for about 24 hours. Just as she was coming out of it, I started feeling the same way. For most of the next 24 hours, I was unable to do much, except complain. Even though I was able to get up and walk around after a day, I still was weak and didn't eat much for another day or so. I'd say it was 4 or 5 days before I felt 100% again.

Now, fast-forward a few days. Up to now, our kids had not shown any similar symptoms. It was reasonable to assume that the illness had not spread to them. Then, with no warning, my daughter tossed her cookies, right in the middle of the living room. As I performed clean-up duties, I caught a glimpse, in the corner of my eye, of that same daughter, running through the house, laughing and playing with her brothers. Whereas I had wallowed around in misery for more than a day after my episode, she was unfazed, and went on with her life.

This was no isolated incident. More often than not, kids bounce back from troubles with relative ease, compared with adults or even teens. Like other topics we've discussed, there is a spiritual application here. You and I are better off when we refuse to allow troubles to ruin us, or to define us.

This is not to suggest that we are to ignore hurts, or to pretend to ignore them. The verses from Isaiah and Psalms, quoted above tell us to invite God into our hurts, to allow us to recover more quickly, so that our focus is not on our troubles, but is instead on living out the calling He has for us.

Remember that when Jesus told us to take on child-like characteristics, He wasn't saying it so much to shed light on our shortcomings. He was telling us that we should become like a child for our own good. Certainly, the ability to recover from pain and move forward is for our best.

(use examples from eldredge's resurrection section, or the leper scenes in the bible when the word *recover* is searched for.)

Test

When you have been emotionally wounded, have you bottled it up, hoping that time would eventually make the pain go away?

Pride Check

You have no doubt noticed that a child who is hurting has no problem letting the world know about it. There is no ego to get in the way, nothing telling the child that he should keep his hurts to himself. The child doesn't care that others might see him crying. The quickest way to allow the Lord to come in and do His work is to acknowledge our pain. Often, it is a self-centeredness which keeps us from allowing this to happen.

Section Three: Children are teachable

Day 8

-- We must be willing to let God teach us through His written Word

2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”

Have you ever heard it said that it is easier for a young child than an adult to learn a foreign language? Have you ever noticed that you don't absorb knowledge as easily as you used to? Among psychologists, educators, and other experts, the verdict is in, and it's unanimous: Children are more teachable than adults. God equipped children to learn. This makes sense, of course. It's vital for us to be able to learn things while we are growing, as part of preparation for adulthood. But on a spiritual level, we should be able—at any age—to be taught by those whom the Lord has placed in our lives.

Being teachable is difficult for those who have been Christians for a while. In fact, as we learn the Word and establish our beliefs in our hearts, we see this as a good thing. After all, Paul warns us not to let our doctrines change with the wind. But all too often, we misapply this, and hold on to things by refusing

to consider other positions, even when they come from fellow believers. This is especially true when it comes to controversial doctrinal issues, such as creation, end times, etc. We put up a stone wall, thinking that we are doing the right thing, and we don't let God speak to us through others.

It takes humility to be teachable; to acknowledge that someone might know more than you. There is often a clash between our pride and our willingness to learn. In the passage which this entire study is based upon, from Matthew 18, Jesus specifically mentions that we are to humble ourselves to be like children. If we have trouble with this issue of being willing to learn from others, then this goes back to the problem of pride.

In the verse above, Paul tells Timothy (and you and me) that we must be willing to look at the written Word with an openness that will allow us to see where we have been wrong. God doesn't intend to guilt-trip us, but He does want the best for us, and often, that involves exposing those areas of our lives, behavior, and personas which are not pleasing to Him. He does this for two reasons: (a) for our personal spiritual growth; and (b) so that we can be a blessing to others that He places in our lives. We'll spend the next two days on those two ideas.

Day 9

-- We are to be willing to learn His ways in order to advance our spiritual maturity

Psalm 25:4-5 “Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day”

See also: Psalm 25:1-3

David, already shown to be a man after God’s own heart, is acknowledging his incompleteness by asking God to bring him along further as a follower. This is a man who has already been used in mighty ways, in events which could not have occurred without a rock-solid faith in God. I mean, how do you face a giant, armorless, with a few rocks and a sling, any other way? Yet, David says he has a lot to learn about God’s ways.

This would be a profound enough request from most men, but from David, it’s astounding. And if David, of all people, must ask for God’s help, then how much more do I?

The verses above are powerful in themselves, but let’s look at the context. In verse 1, David says “Unto You, Oh Lord, I lift up my soul”. Sounds to me like a man who’s desperate. Then the next two verses talk about being ashamed, about having an

enemy triumph over David. He's calling out to God to ask Him to keep both from happening. How does David expect this to occur? We slide into verses 4 and 5 to find the answer, and it applies to each of us: we allow God to teach us His ways. His paths. And we'll wait all the day, because the wait will be worth it. The man that I will become will be worth it.

Day 10

-- If we learn from Him, we affect others

Exodus 4:12 “And now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.

Exodus 4:15 “And you shall speak to him, and you shall put words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do.”

We are made to be interactive, relational creatures. Let's see how this truism plays out by examining a couple of verses from Exodus. The pair of verses above are best understood in context. Here is the scenario: Moses is at the Burning Bush, arguing with God about why he isn't adequate to confront Pharaoh. One of the many excuses he offers is his poor speaking ability. God responds in verse 12 that He will teach Moses what he needs to know. That is a picture of us being teachable.

But the teaching isn't over. In verse 15, God instructs Moses to take what God has shown him and teach it to Aaron. In other words, one of the reasons that God teaches us is so that we can be a blessing on the lives of other people. In this case, Moses will be used to equip Aaron. In our lives, this principle, which is still true today, can be played out in countless ways.

This principle is even better grasped when we understand that the Hebrew word in both of these verses which is translated teach means “to flow as water”. It brings to mind a picture of something flowing from God, through Moses, to Aaron, and ultimately benefiting millions of Israelites. How many people in your life might you affect if you let God flow through you to them? Imagine the possibilities? But it starts with being willing to be taught.

Recap of Section Three: Teachable

Test

Let’s say you have taken a position on a controversial theological topic, such as whether or not a person can attain salvation and then lose it. This is always a polarizing topic among believers, and most of us have taken sides and are unwilling to entertain the idea that the other side might just be right. Someone wants to present to you another view. Although you may listen, have you decided beforehand that no matter what he says, you are going to come out of this conversation with the same view you had going into it? Is your only goal in this conversation that you would convince the other guy, and swing him over to your way of thinking?

The key here is not that you are convinced one way or another, but that you are willing to be taught, that your heart is in a place where you admit that you don't know everything. Typically, newer Christians have little problem in this area. It's us "seasoned" believers who have become so set in our viewpoints that we are not willing to be taught. Ultimately, God is more concerned with the state of your heart than which side you take on disputed theological topics. Is your heart open enough that you will allow Him to set you straight if needed?

Pride Check

To allow God to use others to teach us means we have to admit we don't know everything. If we are afraid to let go of theological positions that we have staked ourselves to, we need to ask ourselves what our motives are. Is it because we are sure of what Scripture says about the topic, or is it because we aren't willing to listen to something that might conflict with what has been entrenched in us?

Think about how difficult it must have been for the first Christians who had been practicing Judaism. Think about the Apostles. Think about Saul/Paul. His pride had made him so unteachable that God had to go to great lengths to get his attention, just so he would listen to the truth of the Gospel.

Is saying this the same as saying that we should take

everything we believe away from the solid rock and place it onto sand? Absolutely not. I am saying that if there is a doctrine we are holding onto, we should ask ourselves what our reasoning is, and what our motives are.

Section Four: Children submit to authority

--Day 11

--We are to submit to those in authority

James 4:7 “Therefore submit yourselves to God.”

We adults love freedom. We come up with songs with names like “Philadelphia Freedom” and “Sweet Freedom”. We Americans associate that word into everything patriotic. But even beyond patriotism, we tend to place a high value on personal independence. We love the idea of freedom to do whatever we want based on our own ideas of what’s right.

Independence, obviously, is a good thing. But like many other good ideas, the Enemy can take it and twist its meaning, leading to misunderstanding and then to misapplication in our lives. For many of us, one way this manifests itself is difficulty in submitting to those who have authority over you.

Weakness in this area won’t necessarily result in an “if it feels good, do it” philosophy. It is more likely to simply make it harder to accept the idea that your boss or your pastor (or someone else) has ideas that you should listen to. Especially ideas which would cause a change in your behavior or the way you

think about things. If this is the case for you, then you might have a problem with submission.

As a general rule, those who have a problem with the “teachable” trait, the subject of in Section 3, often have a problem with this one. But that’s OK. God never tells us to do something that we cannot do without Him equipping us.

Now, let’s go back to our comparison to children. Kids generally have no problem submitting, not only to persons in authority, but to rules. Just for fun, play a game, perhaps checkers, with a child and try skirting around the rules. Usually, he or she will argue with you about how “you’re not supposed to do that.” Kids go through a stage, beginning around 2 or 3, where the rules are everything. For several years after that, they have a sense of order in the world, and an understanding that their place in it is one of submission to authority.

Wait a minute, you say. Everyone who has been around a 10-year-old knows that this isn’t true. You may point out that kids this age tend to begin to believe they are above this parental authority thing. But that is precisely my point. At an age where kids are becoming adults, one of the first things to go is that respect for authority. This is an excellent example of why Jesus said to put aside our pride and return to these childlike qualities.

In fact, this idea of submission goes back to the verse which started this study, where Jesus associated humility with becoming like a child. In the verse from James, quoted above, we are commanded to submit ourselves to God. The previous verse provides a clue how this is to be accomplished: “God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble”

Does it take humility to submit to authority? You bet it does! It's hard enough submitting to God, but for many of us, it's an even bigger leap to have the same attitude of submission when it comes to authorities God has placed in our lives. Our boss at work. Our spiritual leaders. Stop signs. Our political leaders. Let's take the next few days to explore some of these.

Day 12

--Submit to legal authority

1 Peter 2:13 “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake . . . “

This is one of those truths that most Christians know, but tend to ignore when it’s convenient to do so. I confess that when it comes to driving, I have some work to do in this area. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that going a few miles over the speed limit, or not coming to a complete stop at a stop sign, with not harm anyone. But even if that’s true (and it sometimes isn’t), it misses the point.

The real problem is that when we decide which legal authorities we are going to obey, we are encouraging lawlessness. Practicing this a number of times will actually change our mindset, and it is my opinion that this affects society as a whole.

Of course, following the road rules is only one example. There are others. For instance, an adult who says something derogatory about police officers in front of an impressionable child is encouraging a lack of respect for authority in that kid.

Other examples include badmouthing our President, Congress, or other leaders, cheating on taxes, lying

on insurance claims, and copying software or music. The list is a very long one.

When we Christians look at the degradation of society, we often wonder what went wrong. I think it starts with a lack of respect for legal authority. We pass this down to our kids, and it gets a little stronger with each generation. Besides the affect on kids, it hurts our Christian witness. This is another example of the Word issuing a command, not to restrict our freedom, but for our own good.

I don't want to leave this on a negative note. The fact is that this is an excellent way for us to reverse the trend. We can set examples for those in our lives, especially kids and unbelievers, by doing the correct thing in all of the examples cited above.

Day 13

--Submit to your boss's authority

1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, be submissive to your masters . . . “

Today’s topic bears a resemblance to that of the previous day: respecting legal authority. Like that subject, we have verses which specifically tell us how to engage authorities.

Submission to one’s authority on the job is a broad subject. It’s not just a matter of doing what the boss tells you to do. It’s also a matter of following all rules (how many reading this use the Internet for personal use during the workday when their company policies explicitly prohibit it?) It’s a matter of being on time. It’s a matter of knowing that even when we are sure that the boss’s orders seem misdirected, that he knows the big picture better than we do.

A final aspect of this principle is simply to work hard. Let’s look at **Psalm 128**:

v. 1-2 Blessed is everyone who fears Jehovah, who walks in His ways. For you shall surely eat the **labor** of your hands; you shall be happy, and all is well with you.

v.3-4 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine by the sides of your house; your sons shall be like olive

plants around your table. Behold! So shall the man be blessed who fears Jehovah.

v.5 Jehovah shall bless you out of Zion; and you shall see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

I highlighted the word “labor” in verse 2 because it’s important to know what that words means. The Hebrew word there (Strong’s 3018) means toil, and comes from another word which means to be exhausted.

Now, notice how this hard work in v.;2 is connected to so many other good things in the other verses. To work hard is to be blessed. To walk in God’s ways. It will make you happy. It will have a positive effect on your family. All these results come from hard work, and hard work is what we owe our employers.

Day 14

--Submit to your spiritual authorities

1 Peter 5:5 “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

1 Peter 5:5 tells newer Christians to “submit yourself to your elders” and then expands that command with an exhortation for all believers: “Yes, all of you be submissive to one another.” This is the central message here.

I serve as a lay leader in my church. On a few occasions, I have been asked by the pastors to do something I didn't want to do. It might be to follow a particular curriculum for a few weeks in my home group, or some other thing. But as long as they're not engaging in heretical teaching, I do what I am asked. Why? Because I have chosen to trust that they are hearing from God, and that they have a vision, an understanding of the Big Picture, that I don't know about.

To be truly submissive is to admit that we don't know everything. Children usually understand this.

Recap of Section Four: Submission to Authority

Test

Are you resentful toward the police officer as he hands you a ticket?

Pride Check

Do you have a problem acknowledging your boss's role in determining the direction of your department or company? Do you think he has bad ideas because he has no idea what it's like to work in the trenches like you do? Do you think you could do better?

Section Five: Children have a desire to grow up

Day 15

--As a newborn babe wants his milk, so should we desire the Word of God

1 Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby . . ."

Of all the ways that children spend their time, one of the most enjoyable to watch is when they put themselves in grown-up roles. Little girls dress up like a Princess or a mommy or a doctor. Boys pretend to be a policeman or fireman or astronaut. Kids play "school" where one of them gets to be the teacher. While kids recognize that they are kids, there is something inside them wants to be like their parents, older siblings, or other "big people" in their lives.

Like the other traits of children we have looked at so far, this is an ideal example for you and me. As Christians, we should never stop growing, and we should never stop desiring to grow.

Sadly, some Christians never grow spiritually. Why is this? Take a look at the verse from 1 Peter, quoted above.

Many believers don't aspire to have spiritual maturity because they don't really have the desire for the Word. Or in most cases, they do have some desire for it, but it's not a strong desire.

Peter says here to desire it as a newborn desires milk. Have you ever seen a hungry baby at mealtime? They are quite voracious, and have no worries about how their hunger looks to others. There's no room for embarrassment here. A baby has unbridled enthusiasm for his source of milk, and he isn't afraid to let others see his desire in action. Peter doesn't stop at saying we are to desire the Word. He says we are to desire it *as a newborn desires his milk*.

This verse also says to desire the "pure milk of the Word". In fact, a more literal interpretation of the Hebrew in this portion of the verse says that we are to desire the rational, reasonable, unadulterated Word of God.

Day 16
--Growing in Him

Yesterday, we introduced the idea of wanting to grow, and started with the verse in 1 Peter about desiring the Word. Our growth doesn't happen without it. Now, let's look into growth itself.

2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-15 "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"

Those verses speak so well for themselves that I will offer little commentary here. Spiritual growth is

valuable for many reasons, including the ones listed above. We need to grow in grace, and in knowledge of Jesus. He gave various gifts to individual believers, to help us grow. For our edification and for unity among us. So we won't be open to lies and false doctrine. So we can be more like Jesus.

Day 17

--Growing and maturing means applying what we have learned to our lives

Hebrews 5:14 (NAS) “But solid food is for the mature, who because of **practice** have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

See also Mark 4:24

Good soil: Mark 4:1-23; 2 Thess 3:4

It has been said that play is the work of children. That is, they don't usually do any actual work. Well, studying and training can be hard work, but they aren't productive for anyone other than themselves. This is a good thing, of course. As an adult, he will apply what he learned the first two decades of his life.

It is, in fact, very possible for a Christian to fail to do this on a spiritual level.

Recap of Section Five: Desire to Grow

Test

Are you satisfied with your spiritual growth? Do you think you're just fine spiritually, and have no room for improvement? Or do you yearn to be more

spiritually mature? Are you pursuing spiritual growth by meditating on God's Word?

Pride Check

To desire to grow is to admit that we have some growing up to do. To be satisfied with our level of holiness indicates that we see no need for improvement.

The best indicator that our pride is a problem in this area is if we compare ourselves to other, weaker Christians:

Luke 18:10-11,13

“Two men went up into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer’ . . . But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’”

Section Six: Children are honest

Day 18

--Speaking truth to one another

Ephesians 4:25 “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another”

It was tempting to title this section “Children are brutally honest” or “Children are honest no matter who gets hurt”. I want to clarify what I mean by “honest.” I don’t that, when confronted, they admit they snuck a cookie out of the jar. Clearly, kids learn early on how to tell lies.

No, when I say “honest,” I mean that kids have no problem telling you how they see things. They don’t worry about holding back in order to make sure you don’t stop liking them. Just the other day, my son asked the neighbor (a bachelor), who lives in his house with him. When the man replied that he lives alone, Jacob asked “Then why do you have two cars?” (It helps to know that one of man’s vehicles is a Corvette). The point is that my son saw something that didn’t gel with what he thought was how things ought to be, and he wasn’t afraid to mention it. The ability of children to tell it like it is has become the foundation for many funny stories shared among parents. Kids simply say what they

feel, tell it exactly as they see it. This can be embarrassing for the parents sometimes, but generally speaking, such honesty is refreshing.

One of my favorite “I Love Lucy” episodes is about a bet that Lucy makes with Fred, Ethyl, and Ricky. She tells them that for 24 hours, she will go without telling a single lie. It proves to be a much more difficult task than she could have imagined. She had to fight against every natural instinct in her being. The most difficult lies to avoid were when she had to tell one friend she hated her furniture and another that she disliked her hat. You’d never hear a child put on such pomposity, but we adults do it on a regular basis, in the name of courtesy.

Of course, I’m not advocating that we begin being rude to people by criticizing their tastes. Certainly, Scripture doesn’t say such a thing. So where, then, is the spiritual application?

As Christians, we are called to hold each other accountable, not for our taste in furniture, but for our faithfulness to His commands. No, wait. Even that sounds legalistic and self-righteous. God never instructs us to be busybodies, or to run others’ lives for them. But we can be used by God to speak to our fellow believers. It takes a certain amount of boldness, as it often entails telling each other what we don’t want to hear. Conversely, we need to be

open to hearing what is said to us in the name of accountability.

In the verse from Ephesians, quoted above, we are given this command, but note that a reason is given. It's not just some arbitrary rule thrown at us to make Christian life less fun. It's for our protection. It's because we are all members of each other. When one person is affected by his own behavior, others are affected, too.

What society tells us and what God's Word tells us are often diametrically opposed to one another. Society tells us that we should leave these friends up to their own convictions, that's it's none of our business, that we should not judge them. "Live and let live."

But here's what the bible says:

Proverbs 24:24-25 "Whoever says to the guilty, "you are innocent"—peoples will curse him and nations denounce him. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them."

Why doesn't this occur more often than it does? What is holding us back from carrying out this command? Clearly, it's the fear of man. How will that person react when I tell him that he has an area of his life that needs to change?

Another reason is the truth which is contained in the “beam in your eye” verse. You know the one. Jesus tells us not to judge others, and before we point out the speck in our brother’s eye, we should remove the beam in our own eye. But we know that the Holy Spirit wrote this Ephesians verse as well as the one quoted by Jesus, and the Spirit never will conflict with Himself.

The fact is, we should never let fear of man control our response to a biblical command. And the “beam in your eye” passage ends with this:

Matthew 7:5 “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

In other words, it is possible to be in a place spiritually where we can be honest with another member of the Body, and we should be ready to do so. But part of being ready is by yielding our own lives to Him first.

Day 19

--Confessing to one another

James 5:16a “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another...”

If there's a verse that is almost guaranteed to turn off a new Christian, it's the one I quoted above. You mean I have to tell my sins to others? What about my privacy? Do I have to give that up to be a Christian?

Of course, the answer is an emphatic NO. The Christian life isn't about everyone keeping tabs on each other. Sadly, too many of us don't get this, and our inability to really get the meaning of James 5:16 is a major reason why. The verse, when quoted like I quoted it above, has been used to do much harm in Christian relationships over the years. That's because it's out of context. Look at the rest of the verse:

James 5:16b “that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Now, look at the verses just before v. 16:

James 5:14 “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

James 5:15 “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

Ah, now it makes sense. We are to open ourselves up to those Christians that God has placed in our lives, for healing, for forgiveness. So they will pray for us. See, the Lord works in the light, and Satan works in the dark. When we share our struggles with another follower of Jesus, our sin is no longer hidden. The enemy's shenanigans are now exposed. The confessor and confessee can now join forces and pray for deliverance and restoration. It all starts with openness and honesty.

This passage does not say that we are to completely open about every detail of our lives to all people. Honesty does not equal recklessness. In my experience, I have found it most effective to find one or two persons of the same sex to discuss my struggles with. Perhaps God will lead you to carry out the truth contained in this verse in a different manner. But once we see others Christians as our teammates, or as fellow soldiers who will fight in prayer alongside us, we will be in a position to attain what God was after when He used James to write this passage.

Recap of Section Six: Honest

Test

Try imagining these 3 scenarios: (1) Suppose you go into a grocery store and walk onto an aisle, and you run into a friend who is a Christian. You catch him telling someone else an off-color joke. (2) Suppose another Christian friend who owns his own plumbing business comes over to fix your sink, and then he asks you to pay him cash so he doesn't have to report it on his taxes. (3) A Christian relative asks to borrow some software from you so that he will not have to buy it himself. He plans to install it on his computer, then return the disk to you. In these scenarios, what do you do?

Pride Check

Honesty between Christians works 2 ways. Are you willing to identify a Christian friend who will hold you accountable? You should give him permission up front to ask tough questions, and along with that permission should come a promise that you will not refuse to answer the questions, and that you will always give honest answers.

Section Seven—Children play

Day 20

--Children Know the Importance of Playing

Ecclesiastes 3:13 “...every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.”

The passage above is but one of many which tell us that it is not a sin to simply enjoy something. In fact, it's a gift of God. Too often, passages calling for us to die to ourselves give us the mistaken impression that we are not to enjoy life. It's easy to get caught up in the mindset that we are to work hard to support our families, work hard at home to take care of our responsibilities, and use up whatever time is left in various ministries. This view is in direct opposition to what we can learn from children.

Kids understand that even though playing may seem fruitless, it's a necessary part of life. But how do we define “play?”

The definition of playing isn't so much being involved in a game, or pretending to be an astronaut; it is simply the act of enjoying where you are, and releasing all cares. For kids, it applies when you are intensely vying for a victory in a sport, or

laughing for no reason.

Perhaps you're familiar with a song called "Waves of Mercy". We sing it at my church from time to time. It contains the following line in the chorus:

"La, la, la, la, la, la. La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la"
For the first few years after the introduction of this tune, when we came around to this line, I clammed up. "That's not worshipping God!" I'd say to myself. But then, one day, our worship leader asked us to close our eyes while singing this part of the song, and imagine ourselves as kids playing in God's presence. It was then that I got it. Now, when that song is sung, I sing that line. But it took a while; I had to get over my pride. I had to get over the idea that I somehow would look ridiculous if I sang that one line that was so, so childish.

Does this mean we shouldn't work? Not at all. In the verse from Ecclesiastes which is quoted above, notice that work is still required. (See also Isaiah 65:22—"My elect will long enjoy the work of their hands.") What God gives us to enjoy is a result of the work that we have done. The enjoyment and the work are intertwined. Any attempts to have one without the other is not in our best interest.

Day 21

--Children Play in the Rain

Ecclesiastes 2:25 “For who can eat, or who can enjoy, apart from Me?”

Yesterday, we talked about the enjoyment that comes when we play. Unfortunately, it’s easy for adults to forget how to play. We are never commanded by God to stop playing. The only one stopping us is us. In fact, God has told us to take time out every week and rest. For the Israelites under the Mosaic Law, it was referred to as the Sabbath. Note that this is not a matter of whether or not we are under the Law. The need for a day of rest out every seven goes all the way back to Creation.

The fact is that God made us in such a way that we need time to not be so serious, to not think about work, to not be stressed; to rest, to play. By “rest” I don’t mean sitting around doing nothing. I mean freeing yourself from those things in life which only bring stress, and do not bring any enjoyment. (Another way to look at “rest” is to be still and be willing to let the Lord hold you. This is covered in the next chapter)

If we are to use the willingness of children to play as a model for us, it stands to reason that we look at the conditions in which they are willing to play.

Much to the chagrin of my mother, I was one of the 99% of kids who didn't mind playing in the rain.

Rain has often been used as a metaphor for trouble in our lives. Certainly, biblical accounts involving real rain have been used to illustrate spiritual principles.

Look at Luke 8:24, which starts out: "and they came to Him and woke Him up, saying . . ."

When Jesus was sleeping on the boat, a storm came, and the apostles woke Him out of fear. They knew when they feared something, they should run to Him. This seems like a sound response, doesn't it? There is nothing wrong to looking to God when times get tough. And in fact, He came through for them. When they woke Him, He calmed the sea, just as they hoped he would.

However, what He did next surprised them: He chastised them for lack of faith. The problem wasn't that they woke him up, but that they were afraid. Fear is not of God. Fear of circumstances means we are focused on the circumstances instead of Him. It means that, deep down, we have a belief that the storms are bigger than what He can handle.

A better reaction would have been to look at this storm as an opportunity for God to be glorified. If they would have had that mindset, and then gone to

Jesus to wake Him, He would not have admonished them. He never complained that they woke Him up; He complained that they had no faith.

What does this have to do with characteristics of kids? To “play in the rain” is to rest in Him despite tough circumstances. Let’s be clear here: It doesn’t mean we have to laugh and tell jokes while a loved one is dying of cancer. It does mean that we are to release our burdens to Him, and not let life situations keep our mind off of Him. We can always, always have the joy of the Lord in our lives. There is never a time which forms an acceptable exception to this rule. We only need to see this, and walk in it.

The verse from Ecclesiastes, quoted above, says that we cannot “enjoy” apart from Him. Ah, but then that means that we can enjoy when we are not apart from Him.

Day 22

--Children Live in the Moment

Luke 8:43-46 “And a woman ... came behind Him and touched the border of His garment... And Jesus said, Who touched Me? And all having denied, Peter and those with Him said, Master, the crowd presses and jostles You, and You say, Who touched Me? And Jesus said, Someone has touched Me, for I know that power has gone out of Me.”

The above passage, while powerful, may not seem at first to belong in this section about playing. But let us develop this for a bit. Jesus was in a crowd, where countless people hoping for His touch were pressing in on Him. Yet when this woman got within an arm’s length of Him, and touched not Jesus, but a corner of His clothing, He knew it. How?

I don’t think this is an example of omnipotence. The context doesn’t support such an idea. Jesus asked who touched Him, and had to look around until the woman ‘fessed up.

The reason Jesus reacted in this way is a demonstration of the fact that He was focused on the here and now. He was always in tune with all

that was going on around Him **now**. When someone touched His garment and tapped into His healing power, He sensed it. This isn't something that only Jesus is capable of. You and I are better off when we can learn the discipline of living in the moment.

So what's the harm in not living in the moment?

The alternative to living in the moment is to allow our thoughts to drift away from the present place and time. In its extreme form, such a drift is what the enemy uses to cause us to fantasize, leading to sins such as lust, coveting, and discontentment. A man starts imagining himself with that young woman in that photograph he saw on a website. A woman gets caught up in a romance novel. A man buys a lottery ticket and immediately starts daydreaming about what he's going to do with the winnings. A woman worries about something bad that probably won't happen, but she indulges in imagining the worst-case scenario anyway.

All of these situations, and many more, are designed to lead us away from being aware of all that is going on with us where we are right now.

Where's the parallel with kids? Simply put, a child understands, especially when playing, to channel all

his senses, energies, and efforts into what is going on around him at the present time. He doesn't worry about anything that might happen tomorrow. He doesn't indulge in fantasies, wishing he could sin in one way or another. He has plenty going on now to keep him occupied. Perhaps it was this thought that Jesus had in mind when He said:

Matthew 6:25-26 “Do not be anxious for your life...Behold the birds of the air; for they sow not, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not much better than they are?”

Day 23

**--Big Mud Puddles and Sunny Yellow
Dandelions--Author Unknown**

Today, I have no bible verse to study. Instead, I offer this poem to meditate on:

=====

When I look at a patch of dandelions, I see a bunch of weeds that are going to take over my yard.

My kids see flowers for Mom and blowing white fluff you can wish on.

When I look at an old drunk and he smiles at me, I see a smelly, dirty person who probably wants money and I look away.

My kids see someone smiling at them and they smile back.

When I hear music I love, I know I can't carry a tune and don't have much rhythm so I sit self-consciously and listen.

My kids feel the beat and move to it. They sing out the words. If they don't know them, they make up their own.

When I feel wind on my face, I brace myself against it. I feel it messing up my hair and pulling me back when I walk.

My kids close their eyes, spread their arms and fly with it, until they fall to the ground laughing.

When I pray, I say thee and thou and grant me this, give me that.

My kids say, "Hi God! Thanks for my toys and my friends. Please keep the bad dreams away tonight. Sorry, I don't want to go to Heaven yet. I would miss my Mommy and Daddy."

When I see a mud puddle I step around it. I see muddy shoes and dirty carpets.

My kids sit in it. They see dams to build, rivers to cross, and worms to play with.

I wonder if we are given kids to teach or to learn from? No wonder God loves the little children!

Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.

I wish you Big Mud Puddles and Sunny Yellow Dandelions!!!

Recap of Section Seven: Play

Test

When catastrophe strikes, do you immediately look to your circumstances, and let fear take over? Or do you confidently go before Him, and pray that He would get the glory for calming the storm?

Pride Check

Are you too embarrassed to raise your hands up to God (as a child who wants to be scooped up by an adult)? Do you see some Christians dancing before the Lord, and feel awkward just being around them?

Section Eight—Children Express Love and Intimacy with Their Father

Day 24

**--Children place their head on their dad's
shoulder**

Matthew 23:37 " . . . How often I wanted to gather
your children together, the way a hen gathers her
chicks under her wings . . . "

Exo 33:14 And he said, My presence shall go with
thee, and I will give thee rest.

As I write this, I have three kids age 5 and under. Since about the time they first turned a year or so old, I have loved the fact that my kids have gotten old enough to snuggle with me while I'm standing. There is a particular posture I am speaking of. Try and picture it with me: a kid is being held by his mother or father. His head rests on her shoulder, and everything is right with the world, as far as he is concerned. Most likely, you have seen a child in the same position, being held by his mom or dad. If you have kids, it is hard to imagine that you haven't

held your child the same way. The head is on one shoulder, and the arms are around the parent. One arm is over one of the adult's shoulders. The toddler is both embracing his mom, and resting on her.

I am too old to remember being in the same position as a child, but I am sure I found myself there many times. It seems obvious that the child likes the way it feels; he feels both secure and loved at the same time. As a parent, I can attest to the fact that it is a great feeling for the adult for the same reason. It's a great thing to experience as a dad, and there will come a time when it won't happen anymore, and I will miss it.

On a spiritual level, God wants us to rest on His shoulders as much as you want your kids to do the same. Just as God desires for us to do so, you and I have a need to embrace Him in this way; we need to do this every bit as much as He needs us to do it.

Day 25

--Calling out to Daddy

Romans 8:15 "...you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father!"

The name "Abba" seems a bit strange the first time you read it. One assumes that it must be some obscure Hebrew word that doesn't mean much. If anything, it brings to mind thoughts of a 70's Swedish pop group. (If I have just ensured that "Dancing Queen" stays in your head the rest of the day, then I'd consider that a bonus ☺).

Seriously, it's very easy to just ignore the word, and look for some meaning in the verse, while seeing the word "Abba" as merely a speedbump keeping us from getting whatever Paul wants to say to us. However, this is a case where taking the time to learn the meaning of "Abba" will pay off. The word plays a vital importance in conveying the depth in this passage.

"Abba" isn't translated into an English word for us because there isn't an English equivalent. It's a term of endearment. The closest thing we have is the word "Daddy". Surely, it's not lost on any English-speaking person the difference between addressing

one's father as "Father" and addressing Him as "Daddy". There's a world of difference.

It goes without saying that there is nothing wrong with viewing God as our Father, and this view is backed up by many such references in Scripture. But equally important in our relationship with Him is one of a child to a Daddy.

There are only three occurrences of "Abba" in the King James translation. The most familiar, in Romans 8:15, mentions that, as adopted children, we can cry out to Him as Abba. This idea is repeated in Galatians 4:6.

However, it is the first use, in Mark 14:36, which adds a dimension that we rarely hear preached:

Mark 14:34 "And He said to them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful to death. Stay here and watch."

v.35 "And He went forward a little and fell on the ground. And He prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him."

v.36 "And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible to You. Take away this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will."

In this case, we see Jesus Himself referring to the Father by this name. He was looking to His Daddy to rescue Him. In this day and age, we (especially

Americans Christians) are not taught that crying out to God is a powerful thing, producing great changes in us, as well as gaining answers to prayer.

When was the last time you truly cried out to God? Unfortunately, for most of us, the answer is “ the last time I was truly desperate.” Perhaps the Romans and Galatians passages which use this term could be an encouragement to us to cry out to Him before we reach such a point.

Test

When you are overwhelmed by life, do you try and fix everything yourself, or do you allow Him to take the yoke off your shoulders?

Pride check

Our society values and rewards independence. The most successful Americans seem to be those who work long hours, take huge risks, and by doing so, expose themselves to all kind of attacks and lies of the enemy. By openly admitting that we need to be dependent on God, not independent, we may lower our stature in the eyes of the world, but we put ourselves in a position to be all that God has called us to be.

Section Nine: Children desire to please their Father

Day 26

--Children get their validation only from their Father

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray...so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward.”

Matthew 6:6 “But you... pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.”

About the time I became a parent, I read a book which conveyed what to me was a revolutionary concept: my kids would look to me to validate them. Specifically, according to the book, my sons would want me to tell them that I think they have what it takes, and my daughter would want to hear from me that she is pretty.

To my great surprise, this assertion turned out to be true. I am hearing variations of these very questions from my kids. Of course, they want their mother's approval in lots of ways, also, but there is something about getting their dad to validate them,

and it's powerful. Once this truth is realized, it becomes apparent everywhere, especially in movies.

A sad correlation to this truth is that when this need is not fulfilled by the father, the child is left trying to fill this need in all the wrong ways. The easiest example is the number of studies that have shown that girls with absent (either physically or emotionally) fathers are more likely to become promiscuous as teens.

The point is that our father is the only one who can give us the validation that we need, and attempts to find a substitute for our father can yield disastrous results.

Now, translate this truth to our heavenly Father. We are to live our lives to please Him, but most of us try too hard to please other people instead.

In the 6th chapter of Matthew, Jesus describes three behaviors that should become habits for Christians: fasting, praying, and giving. And for each of these, He specifically warns us to not try to do so in such a way as to try and get approval from others. When you fast, do it in secret. When you give, do it secretly. And when you pray, as in the example in the verses above, do it in secret.

Notice these verses are very clear about a few things:

1. we are not to try to do these things to be seen by other people
2. anyone who does so has received all the reward—or validation—they're ever going to get
3. If we do it in such a way as to concentrate on pleasing our Father, He will reward us.

Notice that it doesn't say that rewards are a bad thing, or that we are not to seek them. We just need to try and seek them from the only rightful source—our Father.

Day 27

--Children Learn to Recognize Their Father's Voice

1 Samuel 3:10 And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

"I thought I'd hear You shout
But then I figured out
That all along You were whispering to me"
--Third Day— "Still Listening"

The other day, I went to pick up my son from his Sunday school class. When church ends, it's my role to round up the kids from their respective classes. Of course, there are countless other parents doing the same at the same time. There's a crowd of parents at the door, and there's another door to another class right next to us, with its own line of parents ready to pick up their kids. Inside each classroom, there is a variety of noises from kids, toys, and adult helpers. Despite all of these competing noises, when I spoke to the Sunday School teacher as I got to the door, my son immediately stopped what he was doing, and look toward the door and exclaimed, with a big smile: "Daddy!" He heard one voice out of many other sounds, and responded.

My son's response described above is not at all unlike our Heavenly Father wants from us. My son heard me because he knows me, and the more we get to know God, the more we will get tuned into His voice, and hear when He speaks to us.

In the story of young Samuel, we see a young man who heard the voice of God calling him. It's true that he didn't know at first it was God, but the important thing is that he heard it. Eli apparently did not hear God; only Samuel did. We see elsewhere that Eli had some failings, no doubt a result of the fact that his intimacy with God isn't what it should have been. But Samuel heard the voice, and he eventually figured out whose voice it was. His life became a living testimony of what it can be like to go through life knowing God intimately, and it all started with hearing God calling him.

There are many Scriptural examples of this truth. I offer a few here. Meditate on them, and tomorrow, we'll look into responding to His voice.

John 5:25 "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

John 5:28 "...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice"

John 10:3 "The sheep hear His voice, and He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

John 10:16 “I have other sheep... they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd.”

John 18:37 “Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice”

Acts 22:14 “God... appointed you to know His will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from His mouth;”

Day 28

--Responding to His voice

In the story I related about my son in yesterday's study, we saw a reaction that God hopes we will have when we hear His voice: Delight. He delights in us, and hopes that we delight in Him.

Beyond simply delighting, Scripture describes several other hoped-for reactions when we recognize He is speaking. Instead of offering a lot of comment, I am going to let the verses speak for themselves:

When we hear His voice, we:

Rejoice:

John 3:29 "The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice..."

Follow Him:

John 10:4 "the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice."

John 10:27 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Allow Him in:

Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the

door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Listen with a soft (receptive, open) heart:

Hebrews 3:15 "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

Know that something great is going to happen:

Revelation 1:10 "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet"

Day 29

--Recognizing when a voice is not His

John 10:5 "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers"

This is not really the place to delve into the terribly difficult subject of child abductions. I read the newspaper daily, and I see stories of this occurring regularly, and it's painful. But I bring it up to point out the occasionally, an account will come out about an attempted abduction that goes wrong because the child refused to get into a car.

As difficult as this topic is, it offers an appropriate analogy for our spiritual life. There is an enemy out there, and like an abductor, he wants to do us harm. One of his tactics is to draw us into a dangerous situation by disguising his voice. This is not a new tactic at all. In fact, it was used on Adam and Eve the very first time that any humans sinned.

As we read yesterday, getting to know Him allow us to know His voice, to understand when He is speaking to us, or calling us. This is important for our spiritual growth, but it also comes in handy in helping us to know when someone other than God is whispering temptations in our direction.

But temptation isn't the only incentive for us to run from any voice that isn't of God. It's not just about sin. Sometimes, we can hear voices that cause us to doubt God. The story of Job provides us with an excellent example of this. The fact is, the friends of Job offered what appeared to be very reasonable advice. However, it was anything but. Thankfully, Job's relationship with God was solid enough that, for the most part, he recognized the fallacies that were being spoken to him:

Job 23:3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"

We brought up this verse in Day 6, but it's worth mentioning again. While people are encouraging Job to kill himself to get out of his misery, he realized that the voices he was hearing were not speaking God's truth. In one of the most remarkable verses I have ever read, Job declares his intention to seek God, because that's the only voice he cares to hear. No other voice will do.

Day 30

--His delight over you

The first 29 days of this study concentrated on what we should do to try and be more like a child, as Jesus said we should be. Let's close this thing with wonderful news: your heavenly Father delights in you as any father delights in his child, only exponentially more so.

Read these verses, and soak in them:

Zephaniah 3:17

CEV—"The LORD your God wins victory after victory and is always with you. He celebrates and sings because of you, and he will refresh your life with his love."

KJV—"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing."

Psalm 139:17-18 "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand"

Isaiah 62:3 "You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God."

Isaiah 62:4 “Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; ...for the LORD delighteth in thee”

Isaiah 62:5 “so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

Isaiah 65:19 “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people”

Song of Solomon 4:9 “Thou hast ravished My heart”

Zechariah 2:8 “For thus said the LORD of hosts, ...he who touches you touches the apple of His eye”

One of the saddest things about the presentation of the Gospel in many cases is that it's presented as fire insurance. Accept Jesus, and you won't have to go to hell. While it's true that where we spend eternity is of immense importance, the truth is that there is so much more contained in the truth of God's love for us.

He delights in you! He sings over us! He thinks about us all the time, and when He does, He smiles! You're like a jewel to Him. You're the apple of His eye!

This is exactly the way a good father sees his children, but even the best father cannot compare to God. How much more are you the apple of His eye!

Here, perhaps, is the most important way to be as a child. Walk in this truth, and you will do anything for Him. As John Eldredge says, you'll be dangerous for His Kingdom."

Knowing this makes it easy to understand why this is the very characteristic of children that believers have the most trouble with. Simply put, it's the target of most attacks against us. Once we realize who we are in His eyes, that we are so much more than filthy sinners who obtained free fire insurance. We are the apple of His eye. He delights in us. He sings over us. He rejoices over us. We are His children. Above all else, we are His children. Learn this. Teach this. Walk in this.