

Let the Little Children Come to Me

Children Are the Handiwork of God

Scripture: Matthew 19:13-15

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Children, Abortion, Life

Matthew 19:13-15 (ESV) ¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.

Introduction

All three Synoptic gospel authors record this event.¹ At first, we may be tempted to conclude that this is a rather insignificant moment in the storyline of the gospel. But, being led by the Holy Spirit, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all thought that what happened in this moment was worthy of writing down for subsequent generations to know.



There is therefore something here revealed about Jesus and his disciples that we ought to pay attention to. This passage reveals two very different attitudes towards children. The attitude the disciples have about children is very different from that of the attitude of Jesus toward children. This passage gives us an opportunity to reflect upon our own attitudes toward children.

The Annoyance of the Disciples

First, we see the attitude of the disciples toward children.

Matthew 19:13 (ESV) Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people,

¹ Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

Children were brought to him. Those who were bringing these children to Jesus are no doubt the parents and maybe grandparents or other family members who love and are concerned about these children. Luke tells us that there were *infants* being brought to him as well (Lk 18:15). These doing the bringing are those who are responsible for the care and wellbeing of these children and infants. They perceive that some good could come to their children by bringing them near Jesus.

That he might lay his hands on them and pray. These children are brought near to Jesus for two reasons, to have Jesus “*lay hands on them*” and to “*pray*” for them. The “*laying on of hands*” in the OT is always found in a context of conferring a blessing² or some anointing with God’s favor for leadership³ or some specific task. In the NT it is most often found in context of healing.⁴ In this context, it seems that the parents desire for Jesus to “*touch them*”⁵ as a means of transferring the goodness possessed by Jesus onto these children. They also want him to *pray* for them. The assumption is a prayer of *blessing*⁶ over them. These who care for and are responsible for these children love them and are doing for them that which would bring God’s goodness and blessing into their lives. The background to this is likely the Jewish custom of bringing children on the evening of the Day of Atonement to the elders⁷ and scribes⁸ for them to bless and pray for them.

The disciples rebuked the people. The parents desire spiritual blessing for their children, but the disciples do not. The *rebuke* of the disciples against these loving parents show their annoyance. The word ‘rebuke’ (*ἐπιτιμάω epitimaō*) means, “to express strong disapproval;”⁹ “to admonish or warn forcefully.”¹⁰ This is quite a strong word. This not describing a quiet shushing away of these parents, but rather a stern and forceful warning to leave.

Generally speaking, children in Jewish society were considered among the lowest in social standing.¹¹ Jewish culture did not highly value children. This belief is manifested in the behavior of the disciples. They were **annoyed** at these parents and grandparents. Perhaps they were annoyed at the delay this may have caused in their progress to Jerusalem. Perhaps they

² See Genesis 48:14-15, 20 where Jacob conferred a blessing upon Joseph and his grandchildren.

³ Numbers 27:18, 23; Deuteronomy 34:9.

⁴ Matthew 9:18; Mark 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25; Luke 4:40; Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8.

⁵ Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15.

⁶ Mark 10:16.

⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 287.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 486.

⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 435.

¹⁰ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

¹¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 274.

viewed Jesus as much too busy or too important to be bothered by these little annoying people. Perhaps the children were noisy and a bit unruly. This was all a bit too troublesome to manage for the disciples. This event filled with children was inconvenient and needed to be done away with. Thus, the *disciples*, plural, rebuked the people. This 'rebuke' did not come only from one grumpy disciple who was annoyed, but rather it was a plural group of them who wanted these children and parents out of their hair.

Cultural View of Children

Our culture is not all that different from theirs, is it? How many of us likely heard when we were young, "Children to be seen, but not heard." Our culture continues to hold a very low view of children. *We have a culturally low view of children because we have culturally high few of the adult self.* One of the ways this low view of children is seen is in the declining birthrate. Fewer children are being born, both in the US around the world.

Low Global View of Children

A 2020 **BBC article** reported that global decline in total fertility rates is "jaw-dropping."¹² The decline is so severe that if present trends continue, then within the next 75 years 23 nations will see their total population cut in half.

Low American View of Children

Americans also have a low view of children. Why is this the case? Why are women having fewer children? There are many reasons for this, but a 2018 New York Times article revealed that there are some troubling reasons for this decline. It is more and more common for a younger generation to view children as too expensive, too inconvenient, and too limiting to personal freedom.

The **Times** did a survey of 1,858 men and women between ages 20 and 45 and asked them why they were choosing not to have children. The top answers were "wanting more leisure time and personal freedom; not having a partner; not being able to afford"¹³ them.

One 26 year-old woman in the article responded that rather than have children, she'd prefer to travel, focus on her career, and play with her cats.

There is nothing wrong with traveling God's wonderful world, focusing on career is not an unwise decision, and cats... well... I wish I had something positive to say about cats, but this article reveals that among many young Americans embracing the self-sacrifice required to be a parent is not something they are unwilling to do.

¹² Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-53409521> accessed 18 January 2025.

¹³ Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html> accessed 18 January 2025.

We may like to think that idolatry is word confined to the ancient world of worshipping carved stones and tall wooden poles, but our cultural idolatry is simply seen in the mirror. We've been taught, and we've bought the lie that we ought to worship ourselves.

The High View of Self

Our secular culture has for so long preached the highest praise of self-exaltation and self-expression as a means of person satisfaction and fulfillment. According to this message the primary means of self-fulfillment is freedom of sexual expression. This message comes at us from every possible venue, from toothpaste commercials to TV sitcoms. It is taught in some form in almost every public school curriculum and in every corner of academia. Some would have this message taught to kindergartners.

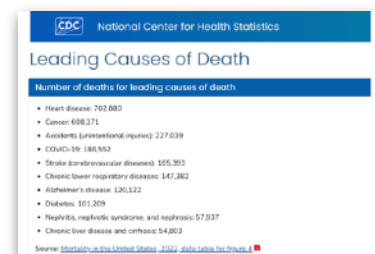
This message includes the belief that anything that inhibits the freedom of sexual expression can and ought to be quickly and easily terminated. This includes the lives of unwanted little children, or as the proponents of this message might say, "the unwanted products of conception."

By embracing the doctrine of what Carl Trueman has called autonomous expressive individualism¹⁴, we have convinced ourselves that child sacrifice is to be preferred over the annoyance, inconvenience, and expense of bringing an unwanted children into the world. The majority of young Americans have believed the lie that it is ok to sacrifice their children in order to achieve their own individual view of self-fulfillment. If children stand in the way of their individual definition of self-expression and personal satisfaction, then it is ok to sacrifice their children.

Thus, we find ourselves in an almost unimaginable position where the word 'abortion' is not defined as "the intentional taking of the life of an unborn child in the womb," but rather it is defined as "healthcare." Under such a cultural worldview, we then have to face the fact that the leading cause of death in this country is not heart disease, cancer, accidents, or stroke, but rather abortion.

Leading Causes of Death in 2022 (CDC¹⁵)

1. Heart disease: 702,880
2. Cancer: 608,371
3. Accidents: 227,039
4. COVID-19: 186,552



For some reason, abortion did not make the list. However,

¹⁴ See <https://www.crossway.org/articles/whats-fueling-the-sexual-revolution/> accessed 18 January 2025.

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/leading-causes-of-death.htm> accessed 18 January 2025.

according to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2023 the total loss of life due to abortion was "1,026,700, the highest number in over a decade and the first time there have been over a million abortions provided in the U.S. health care system since 2012."¹⁶

We are killing our unborn children at a rate higher than we have in a decade. That means that every single day in the US about 2,813 unborn children have their lives intentionally taken while in the womb. We closed down the whole country to stop loss of life from COVID-19, but the doors to abortion providers are open wide every day.

All of this reveals that we as a nation and as a culture do not have a high view of little children. We view children as an inconvenience, an annoyance, an overburdensome expense, as an infringement upon our self-expression and personal freedom. But how should we view children? As Christians, we must look to Jesus. We must consider how he viewed children and then bring our views into alignment and agreement with his.

The Acceptance of Jesus

Notice the attitude of Jesus toward children.

Matthew 19:14 (ESV) but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Let the little children come to me. Jesus accepts these little children. He is very clear. He commands that the children be **allowed to come** to him and that **no hindrance** prevent them from coming to him. Jesus is not annoyed with the presence of children. He welcomes them into his presence. Jesus accepts gladly the little people into his path, his presence, his personal space. Jesus is not too busy for children. Children are not unworthy of his time, his touch, or his prayer. Unlike his disciples, he gladly receives children into his schedule and his calendar. Jesus has room in his day for these little children to be brought to him. He is ok with setting his own schedule aside in order to be with children. He is not bothered by touching children, laying his hands on them, or praying for them. He has time to "**take them in his arms**" (Mk 10:16). He has time to pray for them. Jesus has time for children. They are not annoying or inconvenient. They are happily received by Jesus.

Why? Why is Jesus so eager to be interrupted by little children?

Children Are the Handiwork of God

Because children are the handiwork of God. Jesus welcomes infants and children because every child, every single little human being is the unique creation and divine handiwork of God the Father.

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/03/19/1238293143/abortion-data-how-many-us-2023> accessed 18 January 2025.

Every human life begins with the breath of God. When God made mankind upon the earth, it was his own life-giving breath breathed within that brought the newly formed body to life.

...the LORD God **formed** the man of dust from the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Genesis 2:7 (ESV)

God's divine breath breathed into Adam did not end with Adam, but was subsequently transferred to all his children; to every human being. Hundreds of years later, Job affirms that it is the breath of God in every human being that is the source of life.

But it is the spirit in man, the **breath** of the Almighty...

Job 32:8 (ESV)

Every baby breathes because of the personal, life-giving work of the divine hands of God.

God is involved in the formation of every human being. Every single baby has upon him or her the divine fingerprints of God Almighty, who is the Creator of all things.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." **Genesis 4:1 (ESV)**

Eve conceived a son "*with the help of the LORD.*" She did not conceive by mere human action alone. God was there, helping her conceive and giving life through the natural process of human copulation. Wherever human life is found, there God is at work.

Job understands this. Job knows that he was individually created by the divine work of the unseen hands of God. In his suffering he says to God,

"Do you... despise the **work of your hands**...?"

Your **hands fashioned** and **made** me...

Remember that you have **made** me...

You clothed me with skin and flesh,

and **knit** me together with bones and sinews.

You have granted me life and steadfast love,

And your care has preserved my spirit.

Job 10:7-12 (ESV)

There is no doubt in Job's mind of who his Maker is. His Maker is the creator God.

Job goes on to declare that God is not only the Maker of himself, but of all men, both rich and poor. Speaking of his servant, he wrote,

Did not he who **made** me in the womb **make** him?
And did not one **fashion** us in the womb?
Job 31:15 (ESV)

Job teaches us that same God "*who made me in the womb,*" is the same God who "*fashioned*" his servant in the womb also. There is "One" God who "makes" and "fashions" all people while they are in the womb.

Moses, in his frustration with the disobedience of the nation of Israel asks them to consider against whom they are rebelling,

"Do you thus repay the LORD,
you foolish and senseless people?
Is not he your father, who **created** you,
who **made** you and established you?"
Deuteronomy 32:6 (ESV)

It is foolish to rebel against the Father who created you and the God who made you.

Isaiah warns against this same foolishness.

"Woe to him who strives with him who **formed** him...
Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you **making**?'
Isaiah 45:9 (ESV)

We must know that God is the Maker of all persons and it is unwise to oppose his work.

The wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, affirmed the truth that God is the Maker of all men, no matter their social status in life.

The rich and the poor meet together;
the LORD is the **Maker** of them all.
Proverbs 22:2 (ESV)

God taught Jacob that He was to be worshiped because Jacob's children were the work of God's hands.

For when he sees his children,
the **work of my hands**, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
Isaiah 29:23 (ESV)

When Jacob “*sees his children*,” what he is actually seeing is “*the work of my hands*,” that is, he is seeing the work of God’s hands. Not his own hands. Jacob may not know this if God hadn’t revealed this truth to him. Parents, when you look at your children, you are actually looking at the work of God’s hands.

All people are the work of God’s hands, whether they be good or bad, Jew or Gentile,

“Blessed be Egypt my people,
and Assyria the *work of my hands*,
and Israel my inheritance.”
Isaiah 19:25 (ESV)

All people are the work of God’s hands. God is uniquely and individually at work in the formation and creation of every human being in the womb.

Thus says the LORD who *made* you,
who *formed* you from the womb and will help you:
“Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.”
Isaiah 44:2 (ESV)

God the Father is speaking these words to the whole nation of Israel. It is the LORD who made each one of them. It was He who “*formed you in the womb*.” *The pregnant womb of a mother is the secret workshop of God.*

God does not want us to forget this truth.

“Remember these things, O Jacob,
and Israel, for you are my servant;
I *formed* you; you are my servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
Isaiah 44:21 (ESV)

God never forgets those whom he forms. He knows and loves each and every person whom he fashions in the womb.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,
who *formed* you from the womb:
“I am the LORD, who *made* all things...”
Isaiah 44:24 (ESV)

How should we respond to this truth? The prophet Isaiah helps us.

But now, O LORD, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Isaiah 64:8 (ESV)

Each one of us should accept the fact that God the Father is one who made us, formed us, and fashioned our unique personality while we were yet in our mother's womb.

This does not mean that we are born untouched by or outside of the curse of the Fall. We are all born "east of Eden." We are all born under the Curse of Adam. God has uniquely shaped us, yes, but sin has also uniquely corrupted us. Though we each are created in the image of God, yet we are also each born under the corrupt influence of the image of Adam. Yes, God uniquely made my personality, but sin has uniquely twisted some aspects of my personality. This is way we each need to individually be redeemed by God.

My daughter told me that my 7 month old granddaughter has just now figured out how to fake an injury in order to get attention. This may be cute, but it's root is deception. Every human being needs redemption.

God is a personal God and he personally made us. Every human being—no matter how small—is the result of the of the divine handiwork of God. God speaks personally to Jeremiah about this.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)

God formed Jeremiah with a purpose in his mind. God shaped him to be a "prophet to the nations." God has a purpose for each of his children whom he creates. Paul agrees with this.

... he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...
Galatians 1:15-16 (ESV)

God had a plan for Paul before he was ever born. God formed Paul for a purpose. God called Paul to himself by his grace and he revealed to him who Jesus truly is. When Paul experienced the grace of God and understood the purpose of Jesus, he then went to the Gentiles to preach this great Gospel. What is the gospel that Paul preached? It is that great sinners can be saved.

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is

trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **1 Timothy 1:13-16 (ESV)**

Permit me to put this into my own words,

I used to be a terribly wicked sinner. I did horrible things. But God was gracious to me because I didn't know what I was doing. I was deceived and I had no faith. But God poured his grace over me in overflowing love and gave me the faith to see Jesus in truth and to believe in him as God's Messiah. The saying you've heard is true, "Jesus came to save sinners," and I was the most sinful sinner of all. And because he saved me, as awful as I was, so he can see you. He saved me so that I would be an example to all the sinful sinners, that Jesus can forgive and save you too.

It doesn't matter if you have had an abortion before, or even if you've had more than one, or if you forced your girlfriend to get an abortion, whatever your sin, you can be forgiven. Jesus is the perfect Savior. His grace is overflowing, his mercy is abundant, and his love is incomprehensible. Believe this.

If you come to Jesus in faith, he will forgive you, he will receive you, and he will welcome you. If "religious" people rebuke you, then know that Jesus will receive you. Like he received the little children, so he will receive you, if you will go him in faith. Jesus receives all who come to him for a blessing and a prayer, whether they be little people or big people. If you need Jesus to touch you, then know that he will.

Conclusion

Parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, bring the children in your life to Jesus.

What's your attitude toward children? Is it more like that of the disciples or that of Jesus?

Children are not biological accidents. They are the divine workmanship of God. They are not burdens to be borne, but rather souls to be shaped to love and worship the Lord Jesus.

Christian, we must get our attitude toward children from Jesus and from the word of God. And we must help others embrace this attitude as well.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the attitude toward children of those who were bringing children to Jesus?
2. What does this passage reveal about the disciples? What is their attitude toward children?
3. What does this passage reveal about Jesus? What is his attitude toward children? How does Jesus' attitude differ from that of the disciples?
4. How would you describe our culture's attitude about children? What societal indicators would you look to to defend your description?
5. Why do you think the disciples were annoyed with and rebuked those bringing children to Jesus?
6. If a coworker or family member asked you what the Bible says about abortion, how would you respond?
7. If someone asked you what you think about abortion, what would you say? What Biblical texts inform your answer?
8. Has your attitude changed in any way as a result of considering this passage? If so, explain how.

Here is one resource that I recommend from Crossway that you may find helpful if you want to dig deeper into this topic.

