



Foster Care Ministry

Jesus Loves the Children... So Should We!

Text: Selected Scriptures

Foster Care Sunday

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Introduction

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.”¹ Yes, God loves children... and so should we! That may seem to be so obvious that we don’t need to say it. Just look around and listen here today! Just look at the commitment and ministries with children. Last week was Foster Family Week. As you know by now, fostering is our focus today. Thank you, Kansas, for bringing us some information and challenges. Now we look to what Scripture has to say about children and how that ties in with fostering.

We are going to survey some of what the Bible tells us about children, focusing on those who do not have adequate protection, care and guidance and who need it from others such as foster families. Not every family, not every Christian family is called and equipped by God to foster. We thank God and pray for those who serve Him and children in this way. In our church that includes Dave & Hilda Fehr, Richard & Gert Harder, Corney & RONALDA Wolfe, Henry & Sheila Wolfe. First let’s look at God’s love for children.

God’s love for children.

We see God’s love for children in Him giving them as His gifts to us. Psalm 127 tells us that “children are a gift of the LORD” (3). This statement drives us back to the truth that God is the creator of and sovereign over all. As Isaiah wrote, “God, the Lord, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth” (42:5, NLT). If we think of children as coming only from ourselves we are ignoring an important truth and a beautiful picture of God’s love. Yes, as Psalm 100 tells us, “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his” (3, ESV).

God gives good gifts. All good gifts come ultimately from Him. He tells us through James, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (1:17). Children are God’s good gifts to us. And so when we have the dedication of children and their parents, as we did last Sunday, we ask the parents and congregation to acknowledge God as the giver of that precious child and give thanks to Him.

Then we see that God loves children and their humble, simple faith. We know that God loves everyone. As Jesus said, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,

that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”² This includes children, “all the children of the world.” It includes those who are needy and vulnerable, without the love, care, protection and nurture of a stable family.

Turn to Matthew 18 (page 799 in the pew Bible). Verse 1.

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me’” (1-5, NIV).

There are a number of important truths in these familiar and touching verses. Think about the term “little children.” It generally was used of children from infants to about seven years old. In that time children were not always highly valued. When Jesus talked about being like children, humbling ourselves as a child He reminded those gathered around and us that children depend on adults for nurture and protection. That they are at the mercy of adults.³

Spiritually, Jesus is underscoring what He said in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”⁴ Blessed are those who know they are spiritually bankrupt, who know they have nothing to offer God and depend solely on Him, His grace and mercy. Jesus tells us the dependent state of children is the standard of true faith in Him. Yes, God loves children and their humble, simple faith.

Another picture of God’s love for children is in His care for them. Let’s start with the fact that children are the weakest of the weak, the most dependant of the dependant, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. The Bible speaks frequently of God’s care for the weak, dependant and vulnerable.

When King David felt vulnerable and abandoned he clung to the truth that God would care for Him. He testifies, “Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.”⁵ Again he wrote, “I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.”⁶ God Himself tells us in Isaiah 41 verse 17, “The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them” (NIV).

We don’t see how all of this works out and, yes, God uses people in providing His care. But God Himself is aware of needy people, of needy children, and He Himself cares for them. Specifically of children we read in Psalm 68, “Father to the fatherless... this is God ... God places the lonely in families.”⁷ When we go back to the events of Matthew 18 and the other gospels, we see Jesus’ love for children as He took a child in His arms,⁸ pointed out the preciousness of children and blessed the child.⁹ He said there is a blessing for receiving, accepting and caring for children, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”¹⁰ But He also gave a warning which underscores His deep love and

care for them. Look at Matthew 18 verse 6. “If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (NIV).

Let us be clear—this is spiritual in the first instance, but also applies to the entire relationship with children. Abuse and neglect of children in any and every way is a very serious matter before holy, loving God who cares for them, for all of them, all the children of the world.

Our love for children.

Jesus loves the children ... so should we! We should love them as He loves them. Looking at our love for children we start with going back to God’s foundational, overall command. In Leviticus 19 God instructs, “love your neighbor as yourself” (18). But who is your neighbor, my neighbor? One day a man tested Jesus, trying to trap Him in an error. He asked, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered with the now familiar parable of the good Samaritan. Two religious men passed by and did nothing for a man along side the road who had been attacked and left for dead. Then a lowly Samaritan stopped and cared for him.

Jesus asked the one testing Him, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” The man answered, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” To which Jesus replied, “Go and do the same.”¹¹

Our neighbor is the one whose path we cross, and particularly those in need. Jesus makes it clear here that we are to love those who are easy to turn away from, who are difficult to love. We are to love children who are bright, nice, well adjusted and polite, and also those who are not as bright, not as nice, not as well adjusted or polite. That love is to provide what is needed, just as the Samaritan provided immediate care, transported the man left for dead to a safe place, continued to care for him and then when he left, provided for the man’s ongoing care. As Jesus said,

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”¹²

Building on that, the Scriptures tells us we are to love children by caring for them, defending and protecting them. Here again we go to the Bible’s directions to us about how we are to relate to the needy and vulnerable. God instructed Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 15,

“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need” (7-8, NIV).

And also,

“Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land” (10-11, NIV).

In Psalm 82 God commands, “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (3-4, NIV). Proverbs 14:31 tells us that as we do this we honor God.

Some, even many say, “That’s society’s responsibility. That’s the government’s job.” We are fortunate to live in a country that values children and so to have governmental and non-governmental agencies defending, protecting and caring for children. But God’s directions are to all of us, individually as well as collectively. We should pay our taxes and donate to private agencies that care for children. But our responsibilities and opportunities don’t stop there. We should be personally involved.

Once again, that does not mean all families should be fostering. But each of us should see and respond to children in need. We should pray, encourage, give a hand, support those who are working with children, do whatever we can.

And then too, loving children means teaching them. God instructed Israel that after they had committed themselves wholeheartedly to His words, then they were to “Repeat them again and again to [their] children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.”¹³ The purpose of this is not just so that the children learn some facts but, as Psalm 78 tells us, that they will “put their confidence in God,” that they will know and follow God and in turn teach their children (7-11).

We teach children about God so that He becomes real to them, that they know God and then as they grow up and go on with life they will keep on following God.¹⁴ We do this individually in our families and together in our ministries. We have Sunday school, children’s and youth ministries. We pray for our children and youth. We hold a VBS each summer. Some churches reach out with children’s ministries and special events throughout the year. We help equip parents and ministry workers for these important tasks. We do this and more because Jesus loves them as so do we—not only our own children, but all the children around us.

As we think about our love for children, we should be encouraged and have confidence because God is with us and promises to bless us for this. God told Israel that as they helped the needy and vulnerable He would bless them in all the work they did.¹⁵ God was not saying He would make all of them wealthy. He was saying that He would smile on them, give them the grace of His fellowship and assurance, that he would give them a true and deep sense of fulfillment.

I love God's words in Isaiah 58 where He tells us that as we help the oppressed, hungry, homeless and needy

- “[our] godliness will lead [us] forward and the glory of the LORD will protect us from behind,”
- that “when we call the LORD will answer,”
- that “[our] light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around [us] will be as bright as noon,”
- that “the LORD will guide [us] continually ... restoring [our] strength and [we] will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.”¹⁶

Yes, there are blessings here and now as well as in heaven loving children as God loves them.

Conclusion

Jesus loves the children ... so should we! Fostering is not easy. As with all ministry for God, there is a cost, there are sacrifices to be made. There is much that is beyond our control. Even with committed love, prayer and hard work it doesn't always go well. But as we invest in children through fostering or the many other opportunities, God will use us to make a difference.

A seminary professor tells the story of one of his colleagues who was a foster parent. That couple served as temporary foster parents, taking children in for a short period of time until a longer placement was found. One day they received a call asking them to keep twin boys for six weeks. They had never had twins before. These twins were just 18 months old and had already been in 9 different homes. The couple agreed to take them.

The first night after they put the boys to bed, both were quiet, not a sound. Checking on them a bit later, both boys were crying, but muffling their cries with their pillows. You see, they had been mistreated in some of the previous homes when they cried. The emotional scars were deep.

The couple had the twins for more than six weeks—it was two years before a suitable home was found for them. A psychological assessment was done before the boys left which surprised the workers at how well the boys were doing.¹⁷ Was it worth it? I'm sure that couple would give us a resounding *Yes!*

As a church, we say *Thank you!* to those who are fostering and we commit ourselves to pray for you and support you. Whatever our opportunities, in whatever roles, let all of us invest in loving children as God does from the depths of our hearts for the benefit of children and God's glory.

Let's bow our heads, thank God for all the children, thank God for those who are fostering, and commit ourselves to love all children as Jesus does.

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- ¹ C.H. Woolston, George F. Root. *Jesus Loves The Little Children*. Public domain.
- ² John 3:16.
- ³ William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, page 609.
- Albrecht Oepke in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V*, Gerhard Friedrich, Editor and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Translator & Editor. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967, pages 636-654.
- Craig L. Bloomberg. *Matthew, Vol. 22, The New American Commentary*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992, page 273.
- David L. Turner. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, pages 436-436.
- ⁴ Matthew 5:3.
- ⁵ Psalm 27:10, NLT.
- ⁶ Psalm 140:12, ESV.
- ⁷ Psalm 68:5-6, NLT.
- ⁸ Mark 9:6.
- ⁹ Mark 10:16.
- ¹⁰ Matthew 18:5, NIV.
- ¹¹ Luke 10:25-37.
- ¹² Matthew 22:37-40, NIV.
- ¹³ Deuteronomy 6:7, NLT.
- ¹⁴ Proverbs 22:6.
- ¹⁵ Proverbs 14:21; 28:27.
- ¹⁶ Isaiah 58:6-11, NLT.
- ¹⁷ Cited by J. Ligon Duncan in *A Kingdom Perspective on Stewardship*. <<http://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/a-kingdom-perspective-on-stewardship>>. 01 November 1998. Accessed 23 October 2014.

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