

Do Not Stumble The Children

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and childlike innocence in the Christian walk, contrasting the desire for greatness in the church with the simplicity of a child's heart. It delves into the responsibility of parents and believers to protect and nurture the faith of children, highlighting the seriousness of causing them to stumble and the need for self-reflection and repentance in parenting.

Scripture: Matthew 18:1, Luke 15:4, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4, Mark 9:42, Genesis 9:20, Matthew 18:3, 1 Timothy 3:4, Psalm 127:3, Hebrews 12:9

Topics: "Humility", "Nurturing Faith in Children"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like you, please, to turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 18. Matthew 18, this is the place where the disciples came and asked Jesus, in verse 1, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? I find that even after many have read this passage many times and heard messages on it, the desire to be great and famous in the church doesn't go away easily. If you, and I don't want to exclude anybody here, if you examine your heart, you will find in your heart the desire to be well known in this church, whoever you are, brother or sister.

You want to get a name in this church for whatever it is, for holiness or for kindness or compassion or preaching ability or anything. The desire to be great in the church. And so, it's good to hear what Jesus said.

He took a little child and you've got to take the smallest baby here and say, you want to be great? Be like this child. And you look at that child and ask yourself, how much desire does this child have to be famous or great or to be known in this church as holy or compassionate or kind or good or generous or whatever it is, all the things that Christians seek to get a name for among other believers. Ask yourself, how much does that little baby have any interest in that? It's so innocent and so happy.

My dear brothers and sisters, it's because we don't meditate sufficiently on what Jesus said here that spiritual growth in our lives is very, very slow. I'll tell you honestly, spiritual growth is very, very slow in most of us sitting here. Let me encourage you to take this passage more seriously and meditate on the thoughts that are going through the mind of a baby and ask yourself, are those your thoughts? There's nothing wrong in being great in the sight of the Lord.

The angel told Zechariah about John the Baptist when he was born, he'd be great in the sight of the Lord. And that's a great desire. I have a desire.

I'll tell you honestly, I want to be great in the sight of the Lord. I don't want to be great in the church. I have zero interest in being great in the church.

I do want to be great in the sight of the Lord. And I see that to be great in the sight of the Lord, I must meditate on the thoughts that are going through the mind of a baby and have my thoughts like that about myself. I want to encourage all of you to consider that from now on.

It's a good way to live this new year. Lord, help me to have the thoughts of a little child more concerning myself. And as far as responsibilities in the church are concerned, we must be mature adults and take that responsibility seriously.

But I'm thinking of thoughts of myself and thoughts of what other people should think of me. In such matters, only the thoughts of a baby. But in my responsibility in the church, the thoughts of a mature adult.

That's the balance we need. So that's something we can think of when we look at these babies being dedicated to one or two other things. Jesus said in verse 10, See that you do not despise one of these little ones.

It's easy to despise a little child. If that were not the case, Jesus would not have given us this warning. Take every warning seriously.

When you read a verse like that, don't say to yourself, Oh, I never despise a child. You probably do without realizing it. Don't despise a little child.

You know when so many people come to meet me and sometimes I don't have time to talk to all of them and I may have to turn away some of them. But if a little child comes, I always want to smile at them. I never, never want to disobey this command.

There are a lot of older people I don't have much respect for, to tell you honestly. Jesus had no respect for the Pharisees and neither do I. But when it comes to a little child, I never want to despise them. I want to value little children.

Because that's how my Savior was. And I don't know the full meaning of the second part of that verse. There are angels in heaven who are continually seeing the face of my Father who is in heaven.

It means that when the angels look down on earth, they see the closest to heaven. Angels see a lot of wickedness on this earth. Even among believers, pride and hypocrisy and selfishness and all that.

But then the angels look at little babies and say, Wow, there's something like heaven even on the earth. Those are the little babies. And so those are the ones the angels are very happy to see.

Because so many others who claim to be believers, there's all types of bad ways they behave at home or in the office. And the angels are disturbed by that. But when they see a little baby, they see so much of heaven there.

And so they look at the face of the Father in heaven. These angels that have been commanded to protect the babies. There's another thing, it seems to me, that they're angels.

That means a child has an angel. There are billions of angels. And your child, your little baby has got an angel to look after it.

Trust it. Many accidents that your children were saved in childhood, it's those angels that protected them. And if you keep the attitude of a child yourself, I want to tell you those angels will continue to protect you.

Those angels won't go near an arrogant, proud, selfish man. No. Keep a distance from such people.

So keep the attitude of a child, a baby, all your life. And grow up to be a little baby. It's a wonderful message of the gospel.

It's that we can become like a baby once again. We who are arrogant, proud, selfish, just like all the other human beings in the world, can grow up to be like a little baby in our thinking, while still being mature in our responsibility in the church. And we all know the story of the hundred sheep and one was missing.

But when you read that in Luke chapter 15, we don't know which that one sheep was. That one sheep was not really a backslider, because it's a sheep that went astray. In that story, the prodigal son was a backslider.

He went away in rebellion. But the sheep was not a backslider. It just went astray.

But in Luke 15, we are not told what that sheep was. But here we are. Verse 12.

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the mountains, leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and search for that one lost sheep? And if he finds it, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So Lord, what is that little sheep? It's one of these little children. Verse 14.

Did you know the lost sheep was a little child? A little child is not a backslider. But a little child can go astray from the flock. Generally, by what's written in verse 9. Someone causing them to stumble.

If you cause one of these little ones to stumble, you know, it's very dangerous. It's better for you, he says in verse 8, to tie a millstone round your neck, go and drown in the depth of the sea. Very serious words.

You know, not only despise one of these little ones. Verse 10. But something that you do.

Verse 6. Causes one of these little ones to stumble. So how did that one sheep go astray? Through some adult causing it to stumble. That little child is not a backslider.

It went astray because either his parents or some brother or sister in the church who thought too much of himself spoke in a very rude, arrogant way. And the poor child will stumble. There are many cases of that.

Nowadays we hear of little boys and girls being molested sexually. Oh, that's the worst possible thing. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine what the judgment of such people will be? Finally in hell, they'll be in

the deepest level of hell for all eternity.

And those who stumble, little children, in other ways, may be a little higher in hell than the deepest level. But it's terrible. Because Jesus said it's better that he puts a heavy millstone around it and ties it around his neck and go and jump in the sea.

You know, many people don't understand this. That the meek and mild Jesus, the compassionate Jesus, could speak like this. When people have told me, Brother Zach, sometimes you speak very hard and strong.

I said, that's because you haven't read the Gospels. Go and read how Jesus spoke. I've never told anybody you should put a millstone around your neck and go and drown in the sea.

I've never told a person, you're a generation of vipers. I never said to anyone, how will you escape the damnation of hell? Those are the words of Jesus. People haven't read the Bible properly.

They've got their own idea of what Jesus is like. He's loving, compassionate, and he allows you to do what you like, go where you like, and finally go to hell. That's not Jesus.

You can treat little children as you like. It's all right. It's not serious.

They're not adults. It's more important to treat little children properly than even adults. I don't know how many of you have realized it.

I'm very careful. I take these words very seriously. If I do anything that will cause one of these little ones who watch me, you know little children are watching adults all the time.

That's how they learn to speak. How do little children learn to speak? Because they hear their parents speaking at home. If you never speak at home, your child will never learn to speak, and the children are learning many other things.

And how quickly they learn to speak, and they're learning many other things from your actions and behavior. Be very, very careful with little children. There are a lot of little children here.

Just be careful, everyone, that you don't do anything, or say anything, or behave in any particular way. Don't let your little children see you arguing and yelling with your wife or husband at home. I remember one godly man who was a preacher saying, I heard him say this myself, he says, when I was a little child, and my father and mother were in another room, and they thought I had gone to sleep, and they were yelling and screaming at each other, and I was a little child, I was not asleep, and it made me so insecure and frightened as to what's happening.

My father and mother are yelling at each other, what's happening, what will they do to me? You don't realize a little child is not mature. So I say, if you want to express your disagreements, go away from the hearing of your children. Go for a walk.

And don't think your children are asleep. Sometimes they are not asleep. Many Christian parents are the ones who lead their children astray, and prepare them for a wayward life.

It's parents who, by their actions, which they think the children have not noticed, or the words they think the children have not heard, our end result is children do not grow up as wholehearted disciples of Jesus.

Many of you have children. Many of them are grown up.

Are they serious disciples of Jesus? Don't be prejudiced. Be honest. Just because your children don't cover up for them, say, yeah, yeah, they are disciples of Jesus, they take baptism.

Don't fool yourself. You won't help your children if you fool yourself. Ask yourself, are they serious disciples of Jesus? Number one.

Secondly, ask yourself, when they were born, were you a Christian? If you were not, you can be forgiven. Were you a Christian when they were born? Were you born again? Did you understand the value of discipleship, at least when your children were small? Then you have no excuse. They saw things in your life, heard things in your home, which inwardly they said, I don't want this.

Or, the only thing important is to go to church, act nicely, sing the songs, take part in all the activities, and the dramas, and this and that. That's the main thing. And they've grown up like that, and the kingdom of God has lost witnesses for him.

Because you were not zealous and faithful in your life at home with your child. You stumbled him. Don't excuse yourself.

Judge yourself. Because if you are honest, there's hope even at the last minute. The thief on the cross acknowledged his guilt and he had hope in the last minute.

There's hope, always. But as long as you say, like I've heard so many children say, oh brother, you don't know my child, he's like this, he's like that. Always the blame is, it's like Adam.

Lord, you don't know, it's my wife. Also I've heard parents say, it's not me, I've been a perfect father and mother. They don't say that, but they give that implication.

But children are different. What to do? Some children are like that. Really? But doesn't the Bible say, train up a child, any child, any child, in the way he should go.

And when he's old, he will not depart from it. And the Lord asks, why did he depart from it? Lord, that verse did not work in this case. I did it perfectly, but he went astray.

The Lord says, really? Dear brothers and sisters, face up to the word of God, and unlike Adam, be like the thief on the cross and take the guilt yourself. Then there will be hope for your children even today. But as long as you keep blaming your children like Adam blamed his wife, God's not going to help you.

He helps those who judge themselves and say, Lord, I was wrong. I made a mistake. I want to do it right at least from today.

Thank God my children are not dead. I can still pray for them. They may be 50 years old, but Lord, I can still pray that they will change even now.

Don't stumble them. It's not your Father's will that one of these little ones should perish. That sheep that went astray was not a sheep, it was a lamb.

When I compare Scripture with Scripture, I understand that it was a lamb that went astray. And the Father, and Jesus goes after that, and he's appointed us as parents to be under shepherds, to go after those

ones. I see them missing the track.

Oh, I wish we would stop them as soon as you see them leaving the track. I've seen parents say, oh, they are children. Okay.

You see how they'll turn out later on. They'll turn out with, you say, but my children don't commit adultery. Okay.

Do you know something worse than adultery? Worse than adultery? My children haven't killed anybody. Okay. You know something worse than murder? I'll tell you.

The first sin that came in this universe, rebellion against authority. Lucifer did not commit adultery or murder. He just was arrogant towards the authority over him.

That is worse than adultery and murder. And if your children are not submissive to you as their parents, they're not respecting you as their parents, like Noah's son did not respect him. What a curse came on.

You know who Noah's son, Ham's descendant was? Canaan. That was the son of Ham, and he was cursed. And the entire Canaanite nation, which the Israelites destroyed, where did it start? It started with Ham, their father, despising his father.

And it went down the generations. And so, once they don't respect their father, then the next step is they don't respect the elders in the church. They think, who are you? We are quite capable.

Particularly when they get a little educated and get a little job and all that. It really goes to their head how sad it is. Don't we want to have some good testimonies in our church of godly young men who respect their parents, who respect their elders, even if the elders are not so educated, but will respect them because they are elders in the church, and who will never be swollen-headed just because they got a post-graduate degree or a good job, or because they earn 100,000 rupees a month.

That it will never go to their head. That they will be lowly. Don't we want many, many testimonies like that, that CFC is producing such children? It's your responsibility as parents to make sure that there are such children that will be a testimony in the next generation for the values of the Kingdom of God.

You be the shepherd, under-shepherd, who goes after that one little lamb as soon as you see it missing the track. Read this verse. It is not your father's will, Matthew 18, 14, that even one of these little ones, little ones, should perish.

What does perish mean? Go to hell? Dear me, if your concern is only that my child should not go to hell, why did you leave Babylon? Why did you come here? There are thousands of churches that have got people who only want to go to heaven. You belong there. If your only interest is, my child should be in heaven with me.

That's no different from any other church. What are you sitting in CFC for? Do you really want your child just to go to heaven? Did Jesus say, go into all the world and bring people to heaven? You say we want to make disciples, but you are not keen about doing that for your own child. And the Bible says, how in the world can you make other people disciples, if you are not making a disciple of your own child, and you keep blaming your child, and this is wrong with the child, and that's wrong with the child.

It's not my fault. Of course, I'm perfect. But my child went astray.

It's evil. It's 100% evil, 100% selfish, 100% proud, however humble and godly you think you are. Let me tell you that, my dear brothers and sisters, I want to speak strongly, because I want to wake you up.

The house is on fire, and you are asleep. Please take it seriously. It is not your heavenly Father's will that one of your little ones should perish.

And if they don't walk the way of discipleship, as far as I'm concerned, they are perishing. They are perishing right now. They are leading other people astray.

So let's pray for these children, and as we pray for these children, my brothers and sisters, let's pray for our own children, all of us.

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