

SM Let the little children come

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in the 19th chapter, Matthew 19. Matthew 19.

And today we're looking at verses 13 through 15. If you'll look there with me, Matthew 19, verses 13 through 15. Let's pray together.

Lord, we again ask for your Spirit's help in the preaching of the Word, that you would make it clear and that you would apply it to our hearts. Lord, this is a short passage, but we know your Word is full of meaning.

And we pray that you would help us to understand this Word and to live out the truths that are spoken of here. Lord, positively, that we would do what's called for and that also negatively, that we would avoid that which you have forbidden.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So as you heard in my prayer, as you saw from our text, we have a very brief passage today, a very brief scene, in fact, of what happens.

[1 : 45] But we have this one unit that fits together, and I want to look at it in particular. What we see here is probably something that's not all that unfamiliar to us, something that's really quite common today.

For example, you see politicians still on the campaign trail with people bringing their babies to the politicians to kiss the baby or bless the baby in some way by meeting or greeting this politician.

I don't know why it seems to die off after the election season. But during election time, we see politicians on the campaign trail and this kind of thing going on.

I thought maybe another example, a little more humorous and different, but in our own town, in Hazleton, I know there's at least one church that they bless the dogs. Like people bring their dog and the priest sprinkles it with some kind of holy water and blesses it, and I don't get it.

But you still get this idea that there's still a sense in us that individuals can give certain blessings if we bring them to them. And so we've seen people do this in our time with children and with dogs.

[2 : 43] And so the disciples seem to assume that Jesus has something more important to do.

These children are coming to him. They're rebuking the parents. Leave him alone. He's busy. Don't you know who this is? That kind of thing, but pushing them away.

And they communicate a sense that children are in the way. That they're a nuisance. And I think, again, this too is something that's common to us today, isn't it?

Think of the world we live in. Isn't this exactly the attitude that's rampant in our culture? Children are a problem. Children are a nuisance. We don't want to have too many children unless they interfere with what's going on in our life.

Or we want to get our careers in order, and then we can deal with children. Or even, I don't know if you guys saw this some months ago, but actresses like Michelle Williams, who was an actress in maybe the 90s or early 2000s, who admitted to having abortions to avoid it affecting her career. She wanted to continue her career, and children are a nuisance. So we think it's okay to have an abortion if a child might get in the way of what we want to do. And so our society, our culture, is taking this attitude that children are in the way.

[3 : 57] And so you get funny looks. I remember one time we went with the foremans to the gardens down there in Philadelphia. I forget the name of them.

But we went to these gardens, and we're walking through there. And this lady actually sits there, and she starts counting the kids as they go through the door. And then finally, both sets of parents come through. She goes, oh, good, it's two families.

But you definitely get this mentality that people are looking at you and thinking, especially Christian families, why would you have more than one and a half kids or whatever is expected? Even it's become more normal for people to avoid having children altogether if their careers are too important for that.

And so we've taken this attitude that children are really in the way in our culture. And I think God's word is pointing against that. But we see something similar being communicated to the disciples. What are you doing with the children?

Stop that. Jesus is too busy for children. He's that, if we were to say in our day, he's the president. He's the CEO who doesn't have time for kids.

[4 : 59] But we see the contrast that Jesus wants children to be brought to him. Mark 10, 14 says that Jesus was indignant with his disciples.

Whatever that looks like without it being sin, he's irritated with them. He's bothered by them. They're working contrary to what he's striving to do. They think children are in the way, and in reality, who's in the way?

Disciples. Jesus is indignant because their attitude is actually interfering with the work he's seeking to do. In fact, he makes it clear in this passage that he's come to minister to them.

He says the kingdom is theirs. And so we see from this that they are worthy of his attention and his blessing. We see this communicated in Jesus' words and his actually doing so, his blessing them.

He laid his hands on them, and they went away, we see in verse 15. So what I want us to look at in this sermon is, the first point is children in the kingdom. What does Jesus teach us about children and their relationship to the kingdom?

[6 : 03] So in some ways, this is the exposition of the passage. Let's understand what is Jesus teaching us in this passage. And then the second point I want us to consider is the sin of hindrance. So Jesus specifically says don't hinder them.

So we have a positive command not to do something, or a negative command, however you want to look at it. But God commands us that we're not to hinder children from coming. And so to disobey that command, therefore, would be sin.

And so I want us to spend some time considering the sin of hindrance. And that really is going to be much of our application of the sermon. So a large part of the sermon is going to be in applying this passage, this short passage.

So short passage may mean a little less time in exposition, a lot more time in application. But let's look together first at children and Christ, or children in the kingdom. And I first want you to notice Jesus' desire that children be brought to him.

He says, let the little children come to me. So we see here the positive command. Bring the children to me. Let the children come to me. As we think again of this attitude of children being a nuisance, what we see in Jesus is a humility.

[7 : 10] He's humble. In some way, we might not be surprised for a very powerful man not to have time to associate with children. Maybe not even to associate with some adults if we don't have an appointment and we have certain pedigree or status to be able to talk to him.

But here's Jesus, God incarnate. And he's humble enough to receive children. And I would argue that humility is actually the primary lesson that he's trying to teach to the disciples.

Now, if you remember back in chapter 18, now we're in a different situation now, but I think the same teaching is continuing on here. But back in chapter 18, you may remember that the disciples were arguing over which one of them will be the greatest in the kingdom.

And Jesus brings his child in their midst. He says, unless you become like him, none of you will even get into the kingdom. And then we have all of chapter 18 that I argue was about becoming like a child in humility and depending upon God the Father.

Well, both Mark and Luke in the parallel account actually repeat Jesus' command in relation to this. So when we see the passage that we're looking at today, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

[8 : 28] We actually have a repetition in Mark and Luke where Jesus again says, unless you become like them, you won't enter the kingdom. And so, though Matthew doesn't include it because he's addressed it already earlier, we do see this repeated.

Jesus is again trying to teach them humility in how they relate to children, how they think of themselves, and how they understand the kingdom. I think part of what we see, even as we think of Jesus' humility, is that he turns away no sinner.

I think this is huge, and we've got to get this in our heads. The attitude of the disciples is that some people deserve to be turned away. They're not worthy of God's attention or the Messiah's attention, of Christ's attention.

And there are probably ways that we can have that same kind of attitude, that we think some people are not worthy of Christ's attention. Now, maybe we as Christians can, in our pride, assume that we're better than others and that other people are not worthy of Christ's attention.

And that's wrong. And we see this communicated to us in the passage. But I think maybe there's some of you in this room who are not Christians, and we can have the same attitude in relation to ourselves. Why would Jesus care about me?

[9 : 36] Why would Jesus want to be involved in my life? Why would he accept me and receive me into his kingdom? And so one reality that Jesus is communicating is, come to me.

Now, we see this reality especially expressed in John 6, 37, where Jesus says, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. And so what we actually have communicated to us is the character of Christ.

This is the character, the nature, the attributes of Christ. Those who come to him, he will never turn away. And so far different from the attitude of the disciples, and probably most of us today, Jesus is welcoming of all who will come to him.

I think, do we even have the same attitude of the church? Are we welcoming of all who would come into the church? Are there some people who, maybe based on how they're dressed, or how they behave, that we think, maybe this isn't the right place for them?

I just look around, and you guys are probably like, oh, no, no, that never happens. I think, look at what we see with the disciples. These are the followers of Jesus Christ. And they're aggravated.

[10 : 49] They're annoyed by these parents bringing children to Christ. He's too busy for that. Do we have that same kind of attitude in relation to people? And what I want you to understand is that the character of Christ is, he welcomes all who come to him.

And then Jesus actually says in verse 14, let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belong the kingdom of heaven. He says to such.

I would make the distinction that it's not exactly the same thing as saying, to these belong the kingdom. Jesus isn't trying to say specifically that the kingdom belongs to these specific children, and probably not trying to say that it belongs to children more generally or broadly.

I think this is a minor parenthetical comment. What we have revealed in God's word is that salvation comes through belief in the gospel.

How will they believe unless someone preaches to them? How will they preach unless they're sent? Romans 10. I think our confession makes allowance for this. I think we have to as well acknowledge that God is capable of working beyond and above his stated means of salvation.

[12 : 01] In other words, should God choose to save some? And our confession speaks of elect children who die in infancy. I think we have to understand that that's absolutely a possibility.

Our confession doesn't elaborate how many of the children are elect who die in infancy. Maybe because it's all of them. Maybe not. We don't really know. But I think there's at least an encouragement toward us.

Maybe I could say it this way. There's encouragement toward those of us who have had miscarriages or children who have died in infancy. That God welcomes the children. Jesus welcomes the children to his presence.

That though we don't have specifically stated that they're elect per se, the character of our God ought to encourage us at the very least to rest in his work one way or the other.

Now that was parenthetical, not really in my notes. My point was to actually say that what Jesus is saying is not specifically that two children belong in the kingdom, but to such as these. And so let's think back at what we've seen in Matthew 18.

[13 : 06] And what is the lesson that Jesus is teaching? Remember Matthew 18? He brought a child in the presence of the disciples and said, Unless you become like him, you will never enter the kingdom. And so to such as these, to those of the character of children, I think is what he's speaking of.

Maybe I could say it this way. Children represent the kind of people who are received into the kingdom. Or the kind of people to whom the kingdom belongs. They are the kind of people.

Now I've said already in the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, he actually says, Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.

And so again, I think Mark and Luke elaborate on this in a way that helps us understand it. What is Jesus saying to, when he says that, To such belong the kingdom of heaven.

What is Jesus communicating? Well, this helps us understand. He says, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child. So what defines those who belong to the kingdom? There's a childlike mentality that they have in relation to God.

[14 : 16] And so we see a continuation of the message that's being communicated in Matthew 18. And the message is one of, if you want to enter the kingdom, do so like a child.

Some commentators, I think, made a good point, but they were actually arguing that the very existence of children is to teach us how we enter into the kingdom.

God could choose to fill the world with his glory any way he would choose to. But he's chosen to do so through procreation, through his image being carried to the very ends of the earth, through children.

And we see that as a major reason why children exist. But they're arguing, we have to see as well that children exist to teach us, grown-ups, adults, to teach us how do we enter the kingdom?

What does it look like? What does our relationship to God the Father look like? Well, look at your kids. How they believe and how they trust your children. I mean, how they trust their parents. And so their very existence of children teaches us a lesson of how we come to Christ in faith and the dependence that we have on them.

[15 : 26] Think of a child, how dependent, an infant. I haven't mentioned this yet, but Luke actually uses a different word at the very beginning. He says they were bringing their infants to him.

Now, children could imply basically age a newborn all the way through 11, 12, maybe even 13 in that time. I've seen different ranges. So the children, what age were they?

Not really clear. But Luke actually says they were bringing infants to him. So very much like we speak of the politicians. And again, what's our mentality? Now, an infant can't really understand, right?

They're not going to understand what Jesus is saying. They're not going to get his teaching. What good is he going to do to bring an infant to Jesus? But what we see is that we are taught a lesson in this.

How dependent is an infant? If you just don't do this, if you just left an infant out on their own, how long are they going to get by? How long will they survive?

[16 : 25] How will they get food? You all know a newborn, what they do if they're hungry or if they're dirty? They cry because they're needy for someone else to come and do it for them because they can't do anything on their own.

And Jesus is saying to us, unless you become like one of these, you will never enter the kingdom. And so the lesson for us is really teaching us our dependence upon Christ.

That spiritually we can do nothing on our own. Unless we abide in him and he abide in us, we can do nothing. And I think that's really the lesson that Jesus is communicating to us.

I think we also here begin to see the connection with what Jesus is saying here in the preceding passage. We spent two weeks looking at the idea of marriage and why marriage exists.

And now we see a connection here as Jesus speaks of the dependence that is there for the children upon the parents. But we also see that he blessed them. Now what does this mean?

[17 : 25] What does this look like? I don't have a clue. A blessing implies that he did something good for them. He communicated some grace, some blessing to them. But we're not exactly sure what that means.

But Jesus blessing them actually did something good for them. Unlike the poor dogs in Hazleton. Sorry, but the blessing of the dogs in Hazleton is not really doing anything for your dog.

It's not going to live longer. It's not going to be a happier dog. I don't know. But what Jesus does actually communicates blessing to them. I could say likewise with a politician. Right? Not doing anything for you.

Some politician touching your baby doesn't make your baby somehow special. But something that Jesus did communicated grace and blessing to them. Now what is that good?

I'm not sure what it is. But it's touching part of some blessing to them. Some good. Some grace to them. And again, I think there's a lesson learned for us here. That there is blessing for all who will come to Christ.

[18 : 22] Regardless of how young or how old. Coming to Christ is a blessing for us. Grace is communicated to us as we come to Christ. In a little bit we'll be taking the Lord's table.

And we need to remember as we take at the table. It's our coming to Christ. It's our remembering him and his work. That there's some blessing communicated in this. That he's spiritually present with us and we meet with him.

And so there's blessing for us to come and meet with him. And so we're encouraged to do so. Now I've spent a good deal of time explaining that the lesson that Jesus is teaching here. But I don't want you to miss also the reality of the fact that Jesus is speaking about children.

It's not just metaphorical. He's teaching us a lesson of how we have to be like children. But he also is actually welcoming children into his presence. He's actually blessing children. They actually receive a blessing as they go from there.

And so there is a lesson for us about how we relate to children in this sermon. That's really what I want to focus on for the rest of our time. Is considering what Jesus then says.

[19 : 24] So look at verse 14. Jesus says, let the little children come to me. And we've talked about the positive here. And do not hinder them.

And so I've argued this already. But we have a command from Jesus not to hinder children from coming to him. If that's a command from Jesus not to do so. Disobedience to the command therefore is sin, right?

And so there is a way in which we can sin by hindering children from coming to him. And that's really what I want us to consider. What does that look like? And likewise, again, the positive command, let the little children come to me.

So as we look at how we hinder them, I want to think positively. What do we do instead? As we think of ways that we hinder children from coming to the Lord, what should we do to bring them to Christ?

To let them come to him? And what does that look like? And so let's take some time to consider that. And again, for those of you who are keeping track of my minutes in exposition application, this is actually intended for the application.

[20 : 27] So there, in under 20 minutes, we finish the whole exposition. All the rest is just the conclusion. Now, don't you hate it when pastors say, and finally, and then they speak for 20 more minutes, so don't get your hopes up quite like that.

But this is the application. Primarily this, that we should remove all hindrances. For children coming to Christ. Do all that we can to remove any hindrance from a child coming to Christ.

In John 14, 6, we read, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So we have to understand, how does anyone come to the Father? Or if I were to put it in Matthew's language, how does anyone receive the kingdom? It's only through Christ, right? It's only through Christ. No one will enter the kingdom in any other way other than through Christ.

So if that's true, consider how great is the sin if we hinder someone from coming to Christ.

Especially a child. But regardless of age, we ought to seek not to put up any hindrance to anyone coming to Christ.

[21 : 32] So are there ways that we've done this, and perhaps even unthinkingly, without thought, without premeditation, are the ways that we go about doing things that hinder people from coming to Christ?

I think the reality is, as I've expressed already, that our attitudes are often much like the disciples. And they're far removed from the attitude of Christ.

Christ is welcoming them. The disciples are rebuking these parents or these children for coming. I think one realization that we have to see is our attitude betrays a defective view of Christianity.

So if we have this kind of attitude, it betrays in us a defective view of Christianity. Here's Psalm 127, verses 3 through 5. I've spent some time recently kind of explaining what that means exactly when he meets his enemies at the gate, so I won't belabor that point.

But what we do see is this, that blessed is a man whose quiver is full of them. Blessed is a man whose home is filled with children. And he specifically says that the fruit of the womb is a reward and that children are a gift from the Lord.

[23 : 04] And so we have to be, first and foremost, careful about our attitude. Because we don't want this pervasive attitude in our culture to become also in our hearts.

And so as our culture views children somewhat as a nuisance, as a problem. We won't... I've just heard this recently because of all that's going on in Georgia right now.

We have family and friends and Georgia's... I think Pennsylvania's moving this direction, but Georgia's already gone to all virtual schools. Maybe for the first nine weeks or 13 weeks or something. And parents are in an uproar.

Partly, and granted there's complicated reasons for this, but partly because this means I have to spend another 13 weeks with my child at home. It's like summer doesn't end. And how contrary is that attitude where they're a problem.

I need to get them out of the house so I can get back to my free time. Back to my work or whatever may be needed. And that's not the view of the Bible. The view of the Bible is they're a gift, they're a reward.

[24 : 12] And we need to be careful to communicate and have that kind of attitude. For our own families, but also for others in the church. We want to communicate that. We want to encourage them in those ways.

We want our children to understand this. That we view them as a blessing, as a gift, and as a reward. Not as something to get in our way. Not as something that annoys us or dirties our house. My wife and I love that verse in the Proverbs. Where it says... Where they... Just allow me to paraphrase. Where the barn is empty, the manger is clean. But when the barn is filled with aughts and the manger is dirty.

We're like, yes! Our little aughts and... Right? It's okay that your house isn't clean. That's a reality, right? For parents, oftentimes. It's not going to look like you want it to look.

I think sometimes our yard just is amazing. Like the stuff that accumulates in the yard. Like... It's amazing. But it's indicative of a blessing and reward.

[25 : 15] We're going to look at them like, oh, those people are blessed! Right? Not like, oh, you know, their yard could be all neat and green and pretty. But how do we communicate that to our children?

Are we sharing with them that we think it's a blessing for them to be here? Not that we're annoyed by their presence. I think hindrance of children, hindrance of people coming to Christ is a common sin.

I think even the fact that we see this in agreement of the disciples. We don't see any of the disciples who are like, wait a minute now. I wish you wouldn't be like that toward the church. Welcome these kids. You know, it's Jesus. We want everybody to come to Jesus.

It seems like they're unanimous. Let's take a vote. What do you think about children coming? No. Bad. Keep them away. I think this is a reality even for Christians today when we think about at what age do we let children into the church?

I shared with some men the other day that there was one pastor. I listened to him and he was saying that when he first got to the church that they had children's church up to age 13 or through age 12.

[26 : 28] He said when 13-year-olds came into the church, they were horrible in the church. Like it was just so distracting. And they dropped the age back to like age 8 or something.

He said then 9-year-olds were coming in. They were huge distractions for everyone. They couldn't behave. And they moved it back to 5 and 6-year-olds were a problem. And they kept moving it back to his realization was that it takes a while for children to learn how to behave in church.

But there's a mentality in many churches today that children don't belong in church. It's for grown-ups. It's for adults. We're going to push them to the side and we're going to have children's church or whatever else to keep them from being a part of that.

And we see the disciples here seem to have that kind of attitude and not one of them being contrary to that. So what does it look like to hinder them from coming? I've probably gotten ahead of myself. We'll come back to that one. But first, I thought one way that we hinder children from coming is by assuming that they're already saved.

Assuming that they're already saved. Or maybe another way of saying this is that they will automatically be saved because you're saved. Because they have Christian parents, it's automatic. They're just going to become Christians.

[27 : 36] And if I were to express this more clearly, I would even say that what it looks like is we can hinder children from coming by not giving them the gospel.

By withholding the gospel from them. And what I just expressed are reasons why we might do that. So reasons why we might do this is because we think they're saved because they have Christian

parents.

Or we think they're going to be saved because they have Christian parents. I don't want to downplay the fact that I think there's blessings for children to be raised in a Christian home. To sit under the preaching of the word.

That does not mean that they're automatically guaranteed to become Christians though. And we ought not take that for granted. And so in the home and in the church, we must preach the gospel to our kids.

We must long to see them actually profess faith in Jesus Christ. Here's what Spurgeon said. He said, Spurgeon nails it.

[29 : 07] We're all born sinners. There's blessings to being raised in a Christian home, but that's not automatic. I think if we were even to, for example, look back at the Old Testament, the good kings in Judah.

I think without fail that every good king that brought reformation, Josiah, Hezekiah, the very next generation turns away. You might think, here's a guy who's brought reformation to the whole nation. There's going to be a golden age of people trusting in the Lord and their kids don't even believe. Now that's not to discourage you parents. But I want you to understand reality is it's not automatic. And therefore we have to present the gospel to them. And if we assume it's automatic, then we actually are hindering our kids from coming to the Lord. If we think our kids don't need the gospel, all they need is behavior improvement, then we're dooming them.

I think we're making them into little Pharisees. Maybe another example of this is we realize birth doesn't determine salvation now any more than in the Old Testament.

[30 : 08] For example, we have Ishmael and Isaac, or Jacob and Esau. Born in the womb together, God chooses to save one and not the other.

Same parents, twins, and yet one's saved and one isn't. And so it's not the way God's ever operated.

Children need Christ. If they need Christ, what they need is the gospel, don't they? And so we have to be giving our children and children within the church the gospel. We must share the gospel with them often.

We must share it with them early. I remember one of my favorite memories was I spent time reading through the whole gospel of John with my first child.

When he was still so small, I had to hold him in my arms. And by all accounts, he's not going to understand this. But who of us understands how the Spirit works anyway in salvation?

[31 : 11] Right? The Spirit works to save. How do you explain even John the Baptist leaping in the womb at the presence of Jesus? Had the Spirit already worked in John the Baptist's heart to convert him in the womb?

It's possible. The Spirit can work even beyond, I think, our comprehension. Which goes back to our statement in the confession about I let infants die in infancy. The Spirit can work to do this.

So we need to be presenting the gospel to them regardless of their age and praying that the Lord will work. Maybe another hindrance to children or children to Christ is not bringing them to church at all.

Assuming preaching and worship is only for adults, and I've talked a little bit about that already. There's ways we can have children's programs or things where we think they don't need to be in here for the preaching of the word or for corporate worship, prayer, singing, any of those aspects. They don't need that. What they need is story time or crafts or something that's going to keep their attention. What they need is what we need. They need the gospel. They need the preaching of the word.

[32 : 13] They need the corporate worship of God's people. And so if we assume that it's only for adults, we can hinder it. Instead, I think we must bring them to church.

We have them in the worship service. I realize sometimes it's very difficult, and we have a nursery for the youngest of our children, and I'm not trying to put a necessary burden on anyone.

Don't feel like, oh, I've got to do this. I know how difficult it can be. You have to make decisions for your own family. But I think we need to be encouraged to have children in our worship service. This is a blessing.

And realize as well, for those of you who are older, that does mean that the worship service is going to be a little noisier. We've got to be okay with that. Right? Babies can cry in the service.

It's okay. Don't get annoyed by that. Children are a blessing. They're a gift. They're a reward. Can we say not just for the parents? It's a blessing for us. Like, we're all, I mean, you heard in how I prayed, we're rejoicing with the machitas for the sake of our church.

[33 : 11] We ought to be thankful when the Lord brings children into the church, into our worship, and not be annoyed that they cry. That's what children do. But something else I think has to go along with this is that we actually explain the sermon to our children.

Don't assume they're going to get it all. They're not. That's not what I'm arguing. You're a three-year-old. You're a four-year-old. Five-year-old. Sometimes you're 11, 12, 18-year-old. May not get it all.

We have to model, I think, in our homes that when we go home from church on Sunday, we spend some time talking about the sermon.

What was it about? Maybe even ask your kids, what did you learn in Sunday school? Tell me about what you learned and helping them to understand it. I can't tell you. And this is a confession because my wife actually teaches some of our kids in Sunday school.

And our kids sometimes don't get the message. And she's like, that's not what I taught at all. So, look, I know for the rest of you, Sunday school teachers, whatever we hear from our kids, don't necessarily think that's what was communicated in Sunday school.

[34 : 18] Your objective is then to decipher what was the teacher getting at and feed it to them again. Take the time one-on-one to make sure they understand it. Don't just assume they got it.

The same is true for the sermon. This is a good exercise even with our spouses. Whole family, let's talk about what was communicated in the sermon. What do we, what truth do we garner from that? Now, not just for my sake, but let me say, don't make this a time of critique. What you don't want to teach your kids is, how do we critique the sermon? How do we find errors with the sermon or with the worship or anything that happened?

We're not trying to teach our kids to be judgmental. What we're trying to teach them is, how do we glean something of value from the sermon and from the worship? Even if we thought there wasn't a lot of value in it.

What was valuable in it? How do we get them to understand it and take a hold of it and believe it and hold on to that truth? Now, rebuke myself and say, occasionally I think this also means that children should be addressed in the sermon.

[35 : 20] As a pastor, I ought not always preach over their heads. My goal ought to be to preach in a way that little children can understand the sermon. And if I can preach in a way that little children can understand the sermon, there's some hope for the rest of you, right?

If I can put it down that level, maybe we can all get it. There are other ways, I think, related to this. Withholding maybe any opportunity for them to come to Christ.

Now, God's word doesn't mandate that we go to Sunday school or that our kids go to a kid's club or anything like that. But I think, as well, here's an opportunity for your kid to hear more of Christ.

To hear the gospel presented another way. To talk with people about the truth of the word. Why not? And I want you to consider, maybe I'm not making quite this bold of a claim, but...

God's word doesn't require you to come to Sunday school or your children to come to Sunday school. But if you withhold that, are there ways in which you're hindering them from coming to Christ? And if that's true for children, I think the same could be said for adults with prayer meeting or growth groups.

[36 : 36] With our Sunday night worship, with Sunday school. I know we're in a peculiar time in life, but when we finally start doing these things again, why not? Do we think we don't need Christ?

Again, God's word doesn't say we have to worship twice on Sunday. God's word is very clear that his people are to gather together for worship. But if we choose to worship twice, why miss an opportunity to worship God a second time?

Why not take advantage of that and be blessed by it? God's word does say we're to pray together. Why not be there and join us in prayer and praying for these things? Here's another example that we can hinder people by, hinder our children by not reading the word to them or by not having family devotions.

Instead, we need to be faithful in opening the word to our children. They need to hear the word in our home. They need to hear the word taught, read, explained. Another way is not praying for our children. If we believe that everyone's born with a heart of stone, if we believe that we're born in sin,

then we have to know that it's only the spirit that changes the heart.

And so we ought to be praying for them daily, praying that the Lord would save our children. I'm going to say this again later, but I know there's some of you probably in this room that are probably already thinking like, I'm glad my kids are grown and this doesn't apply to me.

[37 : 55] Or I don't have children, I don't have to worry about this. I think the burden is not only to parents. In fact, he speaks this rebuke to the disciples, who we have no account of them having children anywhere in the word.

I don't think even historically there's any record of that. And if that's true, that's true for all of us in this church. You ought to be praying that God would convert the children and everyone who's an unbeliever in this church.

You ought to be seeking to give them the gospel, to share the word with them where you're able to. Here's another way I think we hinder children.

I think this is a very big one. Hypocrisy and inconsistent behavior in our homes. That we say one thing and we do another. You guys are all familiar with this, right?

Do what I say, not what I do. Great parenting advice, isn't it? No, right? It just expresses our own hypocrisy. I want you to do this, but it doesn't apply to me.

[39 : 00] And in reality, there are some rules that don't apply to parents. Kids aren't allowed to drive cars, and parents are. So we know there's some allowance for this. But are the ways we live in hypocrisy that our kids see this every day.

Now, here's what I want to say. You're going to sin. Your children ought not believe that you're perfect. Kids, your parents aren't perfect.

Your parents sin. But here's my, what I understand the difference to be in this. Hypocrisy is acting like we don't sin. Because we're Christians.

What I want to encourage every family to do in this church is, when you sin, especially when you sin against your child, acknowledge it. Confess it.

And then express the gospel. This is not easy. It's humbling to go to a three-year-old, or a four-year-old, or a five-year-old, and say, Daddy sinned.

[40 : 04] I should not have done that. Here's the reality, though. I'm a sinner. I need Christ. It's Christ.

It's in Christ that I find forgiveness. It's Christ who's died for my sins. And so there's no hope for Daddy to get to heaven. Because I'm a sinner. Unless I understand that Christ has died for those sins, and I put my trust in Him.

You sin too. Do you remember that time when you did this? Yeah, remember we talked about that? That was sin. What do you need? You need Christ too.

We all need Christ. And so I want to encourage you to point your kids to Christ, even if it means, or not even if, through the confession of your own sins against your children, against your spouse.

Now, I sort of say again, we're Christian families, right? We don't ever get angry with one another and yell at each other. Most of our homes, there's probably occasions where we get angry at our spouse.

[41 : 10] Our kids aren't ignorant of that. They can see it. They can pick it up even in, Daddy, you're looking at Mama a little funny. Why are you making that scowl at Mama? Or the tone in which we talk.

We need to confess that. Together. Mama and Dad, come to your kids and say, what we did was wrong. That's not how we treat one another. That's not how we should treat each other. That's sin. And we need the gospel. And so, I mean, we use that as an opportunity. And so, what I'm saying is hypocrisy is acting like we're still perfect, even though we keep doing that. And our kids see it and they go, that's not real.

Sinning, I think, doesn't push your kids away from Christ. As long as you take them to the gospel. As you point them to the gospel and your need for the gospel. Sinning, when you make no acknowledgement of it, when you act like this is what Christians do and this is normal.

It doesn't bother me. But I expect you not to when you're not even a Christian. That's hypocrisy. That's going to push our kids. That's going to hinder them. Maybe another way we hinder them is by raising them or training them in worldliness.

[42 : 21] We know the world we live in. We know the culture is not for Christ. Our culture is not going to point us to Christ. And yet we have to live in this culture in some way or another. But are

the ways in which we're just giving our kids the world with no filter.

We're just allowing them to partake of the same things the world is. And surprise them when they adopt the views of the world and the culture around us. There's almost nothing we can find today that's still neutral.

There seems to be an agenda in Hollywood in particular, but in our culture, where somewhere they're going to inject something that's contrary to God's word. There's now going to be a homosexual character or pushing feminism in some way or some other agenda item.

Are we just giving that to our kids and saying, have at it? Maybe there's ways in which, well, let me stop there and say, inevitably your kids are going to interact with culture.

Help your kids to think through it. Help them to understand it. Filter it before it ever gets in the home. There's some things that just kids ought not be exposed to. But when kids are exposed to things, you talk to them about it.

[43 : 36] You help them work through it. You say, now you know when they did that in the movie? Well, God's word says this. And that's wrong. And we wouldn't agree with that. And what always happens is, well, why is it in the movie then?

Kids are outraged. Why? Because not everyone agrees with that. Not everyone holds to God's standards. That's even helping them prepare for when they enter into the world. And they see that for themselves.

They ought not be surprised that everyone doesn't agree with all their biblical standards. Instead, we, well, with worldliness as well, it's just consumerism, the wealth of America.

Are we just teaching them by our actions, by our behavior, that here's what you hope in, the riches of America, instead of hoping in Christ. So instead, we need to help them to set their sights on heaven and to live for Christ rather than the fleeting pleasures of this life.

Another way we hinder our kids is through our own fear. And what I mean by that is that sometimes we don't talk with our children about the Bible because we're afraid of what they might ask. We're afraid we don't have the answers.

[44 : 44] Well, first I want to encourage you that we're not always going to have the answers. But this ought to encourage us as well that we ought to be students of the word of God. Because our children need answers.

They need help. And your elders are always glad to be of help. But our first response ought not be, well, you should talk to the elders about that. We're not the experts that you must always go to. You're called in some way or another to be students, disciples of the word of God in your home. And as you have learned from Christ, you ought to teach your children as well.

And so I want to encourage you to be students of the word. And then likewise, you're not always going to have the answer. You're welcome to come talk to us. We're glad to help. Another way is that by not expecting children to be saved or assuming they lack the ability to understand the gospel.

So I know this is contrary to what I've already said, assuming that they're already saved. But we can also err on the other side, can't we, and assume they're not going to understand the gospel. I'm going to wait until they can understand before I even try to communicate the gospel to them.

[45 : 52] Instead, we must depend upon the Spirit's work. So we talk with them. We ask them questions. We take time to answer their questions. There needs to be an interaction going on in your home where you're letting your kids know it's fine and okay for them to come talk to you.

About the gospel, about church, the Bible, about anything, that they're free to come talk to you. And then I realize as well that children often understand a lot more than we think they understand. You ever try to have a conversation with your spouse over the head of your kids and you think they don't get it? And then the kids are coming to you like, they know exactly.

Oh, you're saying that next week we're going to go camping over at this park. We didn't mention a park. How did you get that? I mean, they got it, right? And I think we have to realize the same is true, that oftentimes they're getting more than we understand.

And so we need to be presenting it to them, praying that they would understand it. I've mentioned already that they're born with a heart of stone. They need a heart of flesh. But we understand as well that there's ways in which living in this world hardens your heart.

[46 : 58] It makes you insensitive to the gospel. And so I think we need to have expectations and hopes that our children would come to know the Lord before they're really facing all the hardness of

this world, before their hearts are hardened by sin.

Our expectation and hope should be for God to save children. Again, this is another quote from Spurgeon. He says, their parents or their other relatives think they are too young and discourage them.

He says, oh, that we all had a right idea of the possibility of the conversion of little children. Nay, not only of the possibility, but that we look for it, that we watch for it, that we encourage young children to come to Christ.

Are we looking for it, expecting it, hoping for it, wanting young children to come to Christ? I think, what if we had a six-year-old who's professing faith in Jesus Christ that wants to come and be baptized?

What's our response? Is there part of us that wants to think, oh, they're too young. You know, come back when you're 13, we'll baptize you then. Are we actually expecting and hoping that young children will come to know the Lord?

[48 : 02] Now, a second application, final application. I'm out of time, but first, this doesn't apply only to parents.

I mentioned this already, but look at the disciples. They're not parents, but if you're not at present a parent of a young child, think about what are ways that you can serve children.

What are ways that you can help children come to the Lord? I thought some practical ways might be serving in the nursery, teaching in children's Sunday school, working with our youth group.

Realize I'm probably going to step on some toes, but sometimes we have a mentality, much like the world of children being a nuisance, where we think, I've served my time with children. Right? I had kids at one point, and the people who ought to be serving in the nursery and teaching Sunday school are the ones who still have kids.

And now that I've served my time, I'm off the hook. I don't have to deal with teaching kids anymore the rest of my life. That's a worldly attitude. I think you ought to look to it as, I now have freedom, and I know what it's like, how hard it can be sometimes.

[49 : 12] How can I serve the parents and these children? I have a heart to see them to come to know the Lord. I want to keep working with children. Jesus loves the children. So do I.

Secondly, let's think through how we can bring children of unbelieving parents to Jesus. Right? I've primarily been speaking of children within the church, but how do we bring children of unbelieving parents?

How do we welcome children from our community into the church? I think, first off, there's maybe other ways that we haven't thought of. So there, brainstorm.

What are ways that we can reach children in our community? Maybe one obvious way is that we really have a heart to reach adults in our community, that they might bring their families into the church. Maybe there are other ways that we might think of, like backyard Bible study or vacation Bible school.

I've known churches that have had bus ministries where they go, they pick up kids that their parents don't want to come to church, but they want their kids to go to church. And I think that's not uncommon. There are unbelieving parents who think, I want my kids to learn how to behave, learn right morals.

[50 : 24] I want to send them to church, but I'm not going there. What are ways that we can serve to bring children to church? Thirdly, I want you to see that our hindrance of children likely reveals a deficiency in our own hearts.

It likely reveals a deficiency in our view of Christ. John Piper says, If you're receiving the kingdom yourself like a little child, then you will not do anything to hinder little children from coming to Jesus. But if you're trying to enter the kingdom some other way than by receiving it like a child, then you will probably be a hindrance to children. If you are not childlike toward God, children will probably be beneath you and not worth your time.

So let's consider for a second, if our attitude toward children reveals our attitude toward Christ.

Jesus' point, I've said already with the disciples, is to say, unless you become like a child, you won't enter the kingdom.

So are we entering the kingdom like children? Are we depending upon God the Father? Or do we think we've got it all worked out? That we're going to enter the kingdom some other way? And so we have to remember that we're all children of our Heavenly Father.

[51 : 31] In a minute we're going to sing a hymn, or at the end of our service we're going to sing a hymn that I think expresses this and helps remind us that we're all children of our Heavenly Father. That's how we come to Christ. We have to understand that the illustration that Jesus is teaching is that like an infant, like a child or a baby, we come to Christ.

We come to God the Father as helpless, as incapable, as dependent upon Him. That's the only way we come to Christ.

The one who thinks he doesn't need Christ doesn't come to Christ. The one who thinks he can save himself won't ever come to Christ. And so we come as those, like children, who are dependent upon their parents for every spiritual blessing.

And so we look to our Heavenly Father for all good things in our life. We depend upon Him to provide for us spiritually and really, truly, physically, everything for us.

And then likewise, we long to be with Christ and God the Father. That ought to be our desire that we, like children, I think of, you heard in my prayer, my wife has gone to Georgia for a funeral.

[52 : 41] And my kids come crying at night. I miss Mommy. They want to be with her. I would that not be our attitude, like little children, that we long to be with our Savior and to be with our Heavenly Father.

Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help us to welcome children and really all unbelievers into your kingdom.

And Lord, we pray that you would guard us from hindering them. Lord, help us to see that every interaction that we have with a child is either pushing them toward Christ or pushing them away from Christ.

And really, that's true of everyone that we encounter in this world, Lord. What are we doing to push people toward Christ, to welcome them to our Savior?

And Lord, what are we doing to hinder them from coming to Christ? Lord, we pray that you'd forgive us for our sin of hindrance.

[53 : 52] And give us a welcoming heart. And Lord, we know that foremost to that is that you give us a dependence upon you, our Heavenly Father.

That we live as children looking always to you for every good thing and blessing in our life. And when things are not going well, that we cry out to you. Lord, be to us, Heavenly Father, that we might welcome children to you, our Father.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.