



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

October 22, 2017

### **Like a Child** **Dr. Steve Walker**

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I hope we've settled in our hearts this morning once again that God is worthy, good, and faithful, and so we worship like that. We continue to worship now in a very tangible way as well as we trust this God we just claimed we love and worship and we give, knowing that God provides everything we need. He calls us to give toward the spreading of the good news of Jesus.

While we're doing that worship, let me just give you a little bit of an update, just a tiny little kind of progress report. You remember back at the beginning of summer, the leadership (the elders and pastors) of the church determined that we needed to add a fourth service, which is the service right after this, because of just the sheer amount of people who were trying to make their way into this building and into the parking lot of Sundays. We just reached capacity, and so we added a fourth service about six or seven weeks ago.

Yet we know that isn't the long-term solution to what God is doing. It's just more of a relief valve, really, to help us kind of just get a little bit of breathing room in this building. The long-term solution the elders prayerfully and carefully determined was that we were just going to add another location a little bit farther north.

We're not going to sell this place and look for a bigger piece of property and build a bigger building. That is not our heart and we don't want to do that. We're just going to add more seats. It's just going to be at a different address is all. We're going to do that sometime in the next year or so, when God provides.

The first step was taken. We signed kind of a working contract with a broker to help us locate the facility we want to purchase for that new location. That starts tomorrow. That search is officially underway. We also hired an architect/space planner, whatever those guys are called, to make sure what we want to buy actually will work, is feasible, is zoned right, and all those important things we don't want to mess up.

So, that is underway and I just wanted you to be updated on that, just in case you were wondering what was happening. You do need to know that we're not taking suggestions, so you

don't have to email me and tell me where you think God wants this church. We have indeed heard from many of you.

It always happens to be that your suggestion happens to be right in your neighborhood, and while that may work great for you and your family, we have determined some zip codes a little bit up north from here that will work best for the whole church, so don't send me your recommendation. We already know what we're going to do here. So, that's underway. I just wanted you to be aware of that, that things are moving, albeit slowly, but that's good. We're just headed in the right direction.

I want you also to know by way of history lesson, this month, the month of October, marks the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Now, for some of you, that is incredibly good and happy news. Others of you are just not quite sure what that means for you, for us today.

Back on October 31, one of the weirdest days it happened to fall on, in the year 1517, a Catholic monk named Martin Luther protested against the heresy and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. The whole Reformation started by him nailing 95 theses (criticisms) on the door of the Catholic castle in Germany, criticizing first and foremost that the Catholic Church had begun to sell God's forgiveness, going to heaven, eternal life, and salvation for money. It had gotten that corrupt and that heretical.

On top of that, the priesthood and the papacy had the Bible chained under lock and key. They had made it illegal to translate the scriptures into any languages of the common man so that, they determined, no person was allowed to read or own his own Bible. That's how bad it had become by the time the 1500s came along. The light of the gospel had been snuffed out for centuries and many people, men like Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and Tyndale, at the loss of their own lives, relit the light of the gospel and made the Bible, the Word of God, available to the people.

In just over 100 years from when this amazing Reformation began, the five *solas* of the Christian gospel were recovered. Many of you will recognize these *solas* as the Latin phrases that ultimately describe the great foundational rally cry of the Protestant Reformers. If you've been to our membership class, you know these five things form the basis of our Statement of Faith here at Canyon Hills. We talk about these at great length in the membership class, but just by way of reminder...

*Sola scriptura*, Scripture alone. The Reformers determined that it would be true, that the Scriptures, the Bible, reveals the glory and salvation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything we believe must come from the Scriptures.

*Sola gratia*, grace alone. The Reformers understood that grace literally means unmerited, undeserved, unearnable favor. Forgiveness is God's favor. It's God's gift to those who believe in Jesus.

*Sola fide*, faith alone. Since salvation is God's gift to us, it can only be received by faith alone.

*Solus Christus*, Christ alone. The Reformers determined that the object of our faith would no longer be the pope, the priesthood, Mary, or the Mass, but the object of our faith would be Jesus and him alone. Then, the great crown of the Reformation...

*Soli Deo Gloria*, for God's glory alone. We will boast in the Lord, but in him alone, because of only what God can do for us in Christ.

Now, with all that said and being reminded of where our heritage comes from, the passage we're going to look at this morning really, at its core, shines its light on *sola gratia*, grace alone. Yet the circumstance that brought this lesson to light was unpredictable and unconventional, to say the least. It involves Jesus and a bunch of kids.

So, I'm going to ask you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Mark, chapter 10. If you're new, we're working our way through the gospel verse by verse on Sunday mornings. We're going to pick it up right where we left off last week: chapter 10, verse 13. Let's stand for the reading of God's Word. I love that we stand. It just expresses that we understand that when we open our Bibles, God is speaking. These are his words to us. So, out of incredible reverence, respect, and anticipation, we stand.

**"And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them."**

Father in heaven, we praise you for this passage and we just ask where our ears are deaf to its meaning, you would open our ears and help us to hear. God, where our eyes are blind to what Jesus wants us to see, help us to see the truth. God, where our hearts may be hardened or just skeptical, cynical, or confused, I pray you would open our hearts to the unbelievable lessons Jesus just taught the disciples.

God, we stop and we say we're grateful. We thank you that we are alive in this day and in this place because we know around the world, brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering more than we could imagine because they love you and trust your Son, Jesus, for their Savior. So, God, we pray that you would give them much courage and much mercy as they endure and persevere so the light of the gospel will shine brightly in those dark places. God, we pray for them. We pray that you would have mercy on them. In Christ's name, amen.

Like a child... On the surface, this can certainly be seen as a story about the tender side of Jesus. We could spend a lot of time today talking about what it is in Jesus that children are so drawn to, but that is not what Jesus did. Jesus turned the focus immediately to the children, not himself.

This little story is not without its theological implications, and rightly so, because the disciples, once again, were getting it wrong. Somewhere in their hearts, they were thinking maybe Jesus

was too dignified for these common people with their kids to come to Jesus and bother him. Maybe they just considered children as a big nuisance to their plan and their journey, wherever they were headed.

Ultimately, they might even have been believing these parents and their kids were just kind of barging in on this whole scene. I mean, after all, they'd been following Jesus through thick and thin for the last two years.

"Who are these people in this little town who are just going to come up, barge onto the scene, throw their kids at the feet of Jesus, hang out, want to touch him and talk to him and have their kids be blessed? I mean, what in the world? You have to earn your right to do that. You can't just barge in on this whole scene." All those things are probably somewhere swimming around in their heads.

Jesus has taught them so many lessons already in the gospel of Mark. Lessons about love, sin, faith, forgiveness, marriage, divorce, and so many other lessons... Yet church, I want to tell you I think this might be the most important lesson of all. This might be the very most important lesson they learn from Jesus their entire time they're with him on this earth.

The big issue here is obvious. It's entering the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Those two terms, *kingdom of God* and *kingdom of heaven*, are synonymous and they stand for God's children living under the saving, sovereign, loving rule of God now and forever. That's what it means to be in the kingdom of God.

The main characters in this little passage are clear. It's the disciples. It's Jesus. It's the children. I think kind of the unintended heroes of the story are the children, based on what Jesus says, but there are some subtle heroes in the story I don't want us to pass by before we jump all the way in here. To me, the subtle heroes in the story are the parents.

Hidden in this story is a parenting principle. Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, bring your kids to Jesus. Introduce them to Jesus. These parents more than likely didn't really fully grasp who Jesus was yet, but they did know. They did understand. They did see that Jesus was special, compassionate, powerful, loving, joyful, and wise. What parent would not want their child to come and be with a person like Jesus?

They were good parents, and I want us to learn from them. Introduce your kids to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Teach them what it looks like to love and trust him, especially when times are hard. Let them know about the love and mercy of God that's available to them every day. So, Mom and Dad, Grandmas and Grandpas, let's not miss out on the little kind of sidebar story there that these parents love their kids so much, they wanted them to be near Jesus.

Now, the big idea is beyond that. The idea of the passage is *forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven require childlike faith in Jesus*. Let me take that a step further. I think the big idea here is that the characteristics of true saving faith in Jesus are infinitely more evident in a child's heart and disposition than in an adult's heart. That's what's going on here. Jesus looks at the disciples

as if, "What are you guys doing? You don't need to shoo these kids away. You need to become like them." What does that mean? Let's try to learn from this.

1. *Followers of Jesus are not smarter or more deserving than anyone else.* Now, you may know that. That may be really obvious. Going to heaven is not about human achievement. It's not about our own wisdom and figuring it out. I don't think the problem here is that the disciples had the wrong perception of children.

I think the bigger problem is that they don't see themselves as needy or unworthy. Their mistake? They don't get that their only hope for the forgiveness of their sins and going to heaven is beyond anything they can achieve or deserve. They don't get that, and there's a grave danger in not getting this.

We all know no one gives grace better than a person who is deeply convinced that he needs grace himself. Nobody is more gracious than the person who has received much grace in their own life. When you think you're deserving, it's really easy to look down on or to condemn people whom you don't think deserve what you deserve. See, if the disciples were to carry out the work of taking the gospel to the whole world, it would be imperative for them to get this right.

Romans 3 tells us, **"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside..."** That's every human being. Ephesians 2 says that before Jesus **"...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world..."** So, for us this morning, if we're to bring the gospel of Jesus to our coworkers, neighbors, or those weird family members on our wife's side who need Jesus, we have to get this right.

We have to get it right, because if we get it wrong, we're going to give up on people. We're going to give up on people who are enslaved in sins and lifestyles we think are beyond God's grace. If we don't get this point right, we're going to tend to judge people as too sinful, too unworthy for Jesus to love and save. We're going to be unforgiving and quick to condemn the addict. "After all, they're getting the fruit of their addiction." We're going to be quick to condemn that homeless person. "You know what? That's their choice. They don't want to get their life together."

We're going to be quick to condemn or judge the pro-abortion person or that person in the LGBT community, and we're going to say, "You know what? They're just too far from God. They'll never get it together enough for God to forgive them. They'll never come to God the way I did," and so we'll pass them by because somehow, we've decided in our minds that we, somehow, in some weird way, kind of deserved the salvation we have in Jesus.

Do you want to bring this closer to home? If we get this wrong, we're not going to be very gracious people in our own families and homes, especially when our kids or our spouse blow it or fail. Instead, we're going to be harsh. We're going to be self-righteous and unloving, the exact opposite of who we see Jesus here as. So, we have to get this right, church. Followers of Jesus are no more deserving and have no more wisdom than anyone else in the world who has come to Christ.

2. *Followers of Jesus must be childlike.* Now, this is closer to the main point of the passage, but here's where we're going to spend the rest of our time, really. The characteristics of saving faith in Jesus are infinitely more evident in a child's heart and disposition than an adult's. The key that unlocks the door of God's forgiveness for our sins and eternal life is the key of a childlike faith in Jesus.

Look at verses 14 and 15 again. **"But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant [furious] and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'"** Those are pretty clear statements.

Now, before we get to know why and what that means, let's be sure Jesus is not referring to a child's innocence. Children are not innocent. Just ask any preschool teacher. Some children are especially apt at proving this to be true. They are not innocent. This is not about the innocence of a child. It's about the natural disposition of children. It's about the spirit of a child that Jesus requires the person who wants to come to him for forgiveness and salvation to have.

So, I thought, "What is it about these children?" Now, most scholars agree that the age of the children is not clear in the passage, but they agree that the context around it more than likely lends itself to think these people were bringing small children, maybe even babies, and placing them in the arms of Jesus for him to love, touch, and bless.

More than likely they're little children, little toddler-type aged, maybe early, early childhood children, where they're just bringing them to see Jesus and let him bless them. So, what is it about these children that Jesus wants us to be like, both in order to come to him for forgiveness and salvation as well as to live out our faith in his kingdom?

A. *Children are naturally dependent.* Now, if you've ever been a parent, you don't need that explained. We don't have to spend time there. The point is that saving faith totally requires complete and utter dependency on the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. The Christian life is 100 percent surrender. That's what it is.

Ephesians 2 reminds us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, none of it. It's the gift of God. It's not a result of works. It's not a result of anything you've done, so that no one is able to boast." You see, the bad news of the gospel is that we are all sinners, condemned, unclean.

The whole gospel of Jesus begins with that truth. Every single person is born with a sin nature, inherited in the spiritual DNA of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Every one of us has absolutely no ability to remove the guilt of our sin from our own hearts. We can't do it, but the good news of the gospel is exceptionally good. It's that Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

So, like a child, we must do what the hymn writer writes and sings. "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to the cross I cling." Children are naturally dependent. They know they can't do it for themselves.

B. *Children are naturally simple-minded.* There's an absence of intellectual pride in a child that is so refreshing, isn't it? The disciples needed to understand that saving faith in Jesus is not an exercise in some intellectual superiority. It's not some special, unique privilege or gift that only the few get to figure out about the whole spiritual world and the afterlife. Not at all! It has nothing to do with how smart you are or how much education you have. Paul wrote to clarify this in the Corinthian church when he said this, in 1 Corinthians 1:

**"For the [message] of the cross is folly [foolish] to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe..."**

**For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers [and sisters]: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise... And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"**

The beautiful thing about our salvation is that God made sure money, power, education, age, race, and gender have no advantage. God plays no favorites. Amen? That is the beauty about a child. They are just so perfectly simple-minded.

C. *Children naturally know good from evil.* Children easily perceive that a person is either good or bad. They don't have a sliding scale of what is true, good, or right. They have this natural intuitive ability to know a person is bad or a person is good.

For example, my little kids were raised on *The Little Mermaid*. When that wicked witch, Ursula, came onto the screen, I didn't have to tell my kids she was bad. They would run behind the couch and hide when she came onto the screen, literally, because they knew that was wrong. That was bad. That was evil.

As I continued to raise them on the theology of Disney films, they did not need me to tell them that that wicked little boy, Sid, who lived next door to Andy and Woody in *Toy Story*... There was something wrong with that kid, and I didn't have to tell them one thing. They just knew he was mean and bad. There's a beauty about a child. We have to know that. Kids know Jesus is good. They know he's holy. They know he's safe. They know he's wise.

I love when Jesus tenderly makes this invitation to all, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden..."** He's talking about salvation there. "Come to me, all you who are continually

trying to make yourself worthy for me to love you. Stop that. **"Come to me...and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."** See, children get that. They know Jesus is humble. They know he is gentle.

What do we adults do? Do you know what adults do? Adults call evil good and good evil. Adults glamorize criminals, immorality, and wickedness and make them our heroes. Kids can't do this. They're incapable of it. They take one look at Jesus and they naturally know he's the ultimate good. No one can come to Jesus unless they come like a child.

D. *Children naturally live in the present.* In other words, barring terrible circumstances, children don't worry about tomorrow, and they're free from the anxious cares of the world. How many people do we know who just keep putting Jesus off for another day? What do adults do with Jesus? They procrastinate. James, in the New Testament, actually addresses this very adult-like trait when he says, in James 4,

**"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes... As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."**

Jesus said in Revelation 22, **"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my [punishment] with me, to repay each one for what he has done."** In 2 Corinthians we read, **"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** See, this is what's so arrogant about the adult disposition toward Christ. Many adults will say they believe in Jesus. They don't doubt that he existed. They don't even doubt that he died on the cross. They may even think and hope he might have done it for them.

But here's the adult. The adult will say, "Hey, that's cool. That's good. Thanks for dying for me. Thanks for paying my penalty and taking my punishment, but listen. I've got some stuff I still want to do. I have some life I still want to live. I want to do this, that, and the other, and when I'm done with that, I'll come get you. I'll come get you when I need you. Just stay right there for now." Is it any wonder Jesus said, "If you don't come like a child you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven"?

E. *Children are not encumbered by worldly vices.* Their hearts are not entangled with worldly stuff and things. The apostle John said, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."**

Unless you come like a child, you have to be willing to see that the most valuable pearl, the pearl of greatest price, is the pearl of the gift of God's forgiveness for your soul. Everything else can wait. Come like a child.

F. *Children naturally have great imaginations.* Some children more than others, but naturally, they have a great imagination. Do you know what? I think kids have the ability to see the Christian life as a story of a life that is beautiful to them, a life of God's love, forgiveness, and favor. They look at that and they say, "Wow!" Do you know what else? Just as beautiful is a child's ability to see and long for heaven for what it is, a place of infinite beauty, good, and peace. Revelation, chapter 21, thrills the soul of a child. John writes,

**"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"**

You read a passage like that to a child and they will rejoice. They will smile. They will say, "I want to go there! Where is that? Take me to that place! I want to be where God is, where all of those bad and horrible things sin has broken in the world have been destroyed. Let's go there!" That's how a child responds. What about us adults? Our tendency is to have way too low of an opinion of what eternal life in heaven is going to be like and way too high an opinion of what this temporary life in this world is. We get it mixed up. We get it confused.

G. *Children naturally receive gifts with joy.* Have you ever seen a child refuse a gift on Christmas morning? None of mine did. I don't know about yours. Now, I know there are varying degrees of excitement, especially the older they get, but when they're little children you notice there's no effort by a child to try and pay for the gift. There's no effort by a child to try and judge the motives of the gift-giver. They're not cynical. They're not skeptical.

Now, we learn, as parents, they got probably more excited about the wrapping paper and the box than they did the actual gift itself, but that's all part of the purity of a child. In 1 Peter, Peter writes, **"Though you have not seen him, you love him. ...you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."**

Paul writes, in 2 Corinthians 9, **"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift [of Jesus]!"** You must come like a child. The gift of God in Christ is an unbelievable gift. Why would anybody ever look at that gift and say, "Eh, no thanks"?

3. *Followers of Jesus are loved and saved by grace.* Christianity offers a forgiveness of salvation promised, given, and kept by God's grace. It's all over this incident here. When Jesus saw what the disciples were doing, he was angry and he said, "Let the children come to me. Don't hinder them. Don't stop them. Don't make it difficult. It's not difficult, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

Then, in verse 16, it says, **"And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them."** Here's the point. Jesus doesn't love us because we're so lovable. He loves us because he is so loving. When you get this right, everything changes. When you understand that in Christ, there's nothing you can do to make God love you more and there's nothing you can do to make God love you less... When you get that, everything changes.

Your worship changes. You cannot worship God the way he deserves if you don't get this one point. Your service changes. Your giving changes. Your joy changes. Your ability to persevere in the midst of tribulation and trial, your strength to endure those moments when you will be persecuted, rejected, ridiculed, and treated unfairly just because you love Jesus... When you get this right, that you are loved and saved by grace, everything changes.

It's what brings us back to Jesus when we blow it. It's what causes us to run back to the cross when we fall on our face in sin and not away from the cross. I think it's what allowed Peter to face Jesus after the resurrection, after Peter denied him three times. Jesus came up to him and said, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "I do."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Do you love me?"

"I love you." I don't think Peter ever forgot that. That's grace.

I think the only way I know of how to make this come alive is kind of through the picture of a story I heard many, many years ago in my Christian life. It's part of what caused my conversion to be so real and radical in my life. It's a story you've heard maybe multiple times from different pulpits or in different books.

It's simply the story about the man who made a lot of dumb choices in his life that led to some really terrible decisions where he committed some crimes he never dreamed in a million years he would ever go and commit, but he gets caught and he gets arrested, and the trial is quick. The jury and the judgment are true. He is guilty, and there's no appeal. The sentencing comes and the judge with the sentence says 15 years. You cannot get out one day before. There's also a \$500,000 fine you must pay with any and all assets you have.

This was a death sentence. He would miss 15 years, some of the most crucial years in the lives of his three children. He would cause his wife and children to basically fend for themselves with nothing left after they stripped him of all of the stuff, anything he might have had of value, in order to start paying this off. When he heard that, it was an impossible fine to pay and a life sentence.

The judge calls for the bailiff to bring the handcuffs. They handcuff the man and right when they go to walk him out, the judge stands up and says, "One minute." The judge takes off his robe and he lays it on the bench and comes down off from around the bench, down to the man, and he says, "I am going to serve your sentence. I am going to pay your fine."

He orders the bailiff to take the handcuffs off the father/husband, the guilty criminal, and he holds out his hands and they cuff him. As the judge is walking away, he turns around and looks at the man and he says, "You are free. Go."

Now, as unimaginable as that story is, it's exactly what Jesus did. He leaves the throne of heaven to come to fallen mankind and he holds out his hands and his feet and says, "I am paying for your penalty. I am taking your death sentence upon myself, and when I am done, it is finished. You are free." Come like a child.

I'm going to ask you close your eyes just for a minute. Would you let that sit? Would you let that just stew in your heart? Would you just maybe take one moment right now before you leave this room and just in your own childlike way, thank God? Thank God for Jesus.

**"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."**

God, I pray that we are a church filled with childlike believers and followers of Jesus. God, this week, may it show on our countenance. May it be heard from our lips. May it be seen and experienced by the grace that we offer those who desperately need grace. O God, may this little story about these little children make it come alive in our hearts. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

Now, you may be sitting here right now and you've never totally surrendered your heart to Jesus Christ. You've never asked him to forgive you and take away your sin and to come into your heart and be your Lord and Savior. We want to help you take that step of faith.

If you are ready to turn from your sin and trust Jesus for your forgiveness and salvation, there are some people standing up here right now who would love to help you take that next step. They want to give you something to go home with. They'd love to just allow you to know what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus by faith alone. I hope you'll do that.

Have a great, great week acting like a child. I hope you will. God bless you.