

Childish to Childlike: Perspectives

Luke 9: 43B-50

Romans 8: 5-14



Believe it or not, we've reached the fifth Sunday of Lent already, which means this is our last week in this Childish to Childlike series.

I want to spend some time this morning reflecting on the things we've talked about over the last four weeks, and I also want to try to tie this all together. There's a common thread here that has been weaving through all of these sermons.

But first, let's recap what we've walked through together.

In the first week, we looked at pain. We talked about deep, intense emotional, spiritual, mental, physical pain. And what we came away with there was that God doesn't prevent pain in our lives. Expecting Him to make our lives pain-free because we are Christian is childish. But trusting God, knowing that He is working even through pain, is childlike faith.

Next up was hard hearts. We read about Pharaoh's hard heart in the Exodus story, and we looked at Jesus telling us that even some believers will make it to eternity and will be turned away. That might seem unfair, but that way of thinking is childish. A more childlike way to see this is that God gives us what we want in the end, and if we live our lives with hard hearts that do our own will above God's will, then we've already chosen our own path.

The third week was about strength. The world we live in tells us we are strong on our own, and so we end up trying to live as if we don't need any help. That, of course, is childish. It's when we realize that when we bring our burdens to Jesus, that when we find our rest in him, we come to a childlike truth that our strength comes only from God.

And finally, last week we talked about being happy and being holy. We want to be happy, and so we think God exists to make us happy. When we put away our childish ways, we realize that God has something much better for us than temporary happiness. A childlike faith brings us to see God wants us to be holy, and in turn, that leads to permanent joy.

That's where we've been.

But like I said, through all of these messages and lessons, there's been one particular thing that has stood out to me. There's one thing that we need to address when we're looking to mature in our faith.

What is that one thing?

Have you ever gone back and watched something from years ago, some movie or show that you know you very much enjoyed, maybe as far back as childhood. And maybe you came across it on Netflix or saw a DVD sitting in Walmart and you thought, "I would really enjoy watching these again," so you pick it up and take it home.

But when you hit play, you're met with a very different experience than the one you remember.



A number of years ago, I sat down to watch *Fern Gully*. It's an animated movie from 1992 that I remember enjoying quite a bit. I even remember liking some of the characters so much that I would sit down and draw them on my own.

So I was ready to enjoy it all over again. This is going to be great – I'll get my nostalgia fix and have a blast revisiting my childhood.

Imagine my surprise when after 30 years, it wasn't quite like I remembered it. In fact, I had a very hard time sitting through the whole thing. It was not at all the experience I was expecting.

So what happened? That movie didn't change. It's the same as it's always been.



What changed is me. My perspective shifted.

Now, that may sound bad, and in the case of me ever wanting to watch *Fern Gully* again, it's bad news. But a shift in perspective isn't a bad thing.

Pastor, author, and speaker King Duncan tells a story he calls "Mr. Macho & Forty Days of Love."

As he tells it, one church chose as its Lenten theme, "Forty Days of Love." Each week members of the congregation were encouraged to show their love and appreciation in different ways. The first week they were encouraged to send notes to people who had made positive contributions to their lives.

After the first service a man in the congregation wanted to speak to the pastor. The pastor describes the man as "kind of macho, a former football player who loved to hunt and fish, a strong self-made man."

The man told his pastor, "I love you and I love this church, but I'm not going to participate in this Forty Days of Love stuff. It's okay for some folks," he said, "but it's a little too sentimental and syrupy for me."

A week went by. The next Sunday this man waited after church to see his pastor again. "I want to apologize for what I said last Sunday," he told him, "about the Forty Days of Love. I realized on Wednesday that I was wrong."

"Wednesday?" his pastor repeated. "What happened on Wednesday?"

"I got one of those letters!" the man said. The letter came as a total surprise. It was from a person the man never expected to hear from. It touched him so deeply he now carries it around in his pocket all the time. "Every time I read it," he said, "I get tears in my eyes."

It was a transforming moment in this man's life. Suddenly he realized he was loved by others in the church. This changed his entire outlook. "I was so moved by that letter," he said, "I sat down and wrote ten letters myself."

Receiving that letter shifted the perspective of Mr. Macho.

God has a habit of breaking into our lives. He has a habit of changing us, of shifting our perspective if we let Him.

What God is trying to speak into us, is that in order for us to mature in our faith, we need a shift of perspective. Our perspective must move away from ourselves, from our own wants and desires, from our own truth, how we think things *should be*.

Our perspective needs to move solely to God – to what He wants and how He says things *are*.

Jesus, being the Son of God, also had a way of breaking into the lives of the disciples and changing how they saw the world.



Let's read an example of this from the Gospel of Luke, the ninth chapter, the second part of verse 43 through verse 50:

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples,⁴⁴ "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."⁴⁵ But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

⁴⁶ An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷ Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. ⁴⁸ Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."

⁴⁹ "Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

⁵⁰ "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."



The disciples have seen Jesus perform incredible, life-altering miracles. His teachings have been world-changing.

You would think that seeing these things first-hand would bring about a change of perspective on its own, that the disciples would realize there's so much more at play here.

But instead, they argue. And it's the most petty and childish argument possible after all the disciples had seen and heard – they argue about which of them would be the greatest.

It's a good thing we have the benefit of hindsight so we are never like the disciples in this moment.

We never miss the glorious and wonderful things God does in our lives because we're too focused on everything else. Right?

We never argue amongst ourselves about worldly things when there's heavenly work to be done. Right?

Our perspective is always on God, never on ourselves. Right?

Of course, those are facetious questions. Of course, we can be (and often are) exactly like the disciples in this passage.

But we have a Lord and a Savior who knows how to get our attention. He got the attention of the disciples (using a child, no less), and he immediately shifted their perspective.

I think our Epistle reading from Romans sums up this whole perspective shifting, childish to childlike conversation rather perfectly. So let's go back to verses 12 through 14:



...we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

When our obligations are to our own selves, our own flesh, we really have no choice but to live with a childish faith. And a childish, flesh-driven faith leads to death.

What we have been talking about all along is shifting that perspective. We've been talking about moving from a flesh-driven faith to a Spirit-led faith.

As we are in this season where the foremost thought in our minds is Jesus meeting death of the flesh to be raised in the Spirit, there is perhaps no more appropriate thing than for us to figure out what that same thing means for our faith...for our lives.

What I hope for this season of Lent is that it has been a time where we have allowed God to start to break into our lives, to reveal His truth to us more deeply.

I hope that as we move into Palm Sunday and Holy Week and culminate in the celebration of Easter Sunday that we honestly ask ourselves what areas of our faith remain childish, remain in the flesh.

I pray that we can see the events we're about to recount in the weeks to come in a new, spirit-led perspective.

And I pray that this leads us to a childlike faith, one that is every bit as alive as our risen Savior.

And all of God's children said...