

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I enjoyed reading the little book by Robert Fulgum entitled, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Fulgum asserts simpler is better—and if we would all just apply the things we learned in kindergarten, our society would be a better place to live. Here are some of the things he says we ought to do:

1. Play fair
2. Share everything
3. Clean up your own mess
4. Put things back where you found them
5. Don't hit others
6. Say you're sorry when you hurt someone
7. Flush
8. Hold hands and stay together

That's pretty good advice and I think we all ought to do those things but I gently disagree with Fulgum's title and his thesis, for two reasons. First, I have trouble with the word “all.” I learned a lot in kindergarten but that's not *all* I really need to know. There are some very important life truths we don't absorb in kindergarten. My other objection to the title is the word “learned”—it's in the past tense. It infers learning is something that can be finished. And I believe all of life is a learning process. I would like to revise his title and thesis along these lines: “All I Really Need to Know, I *Learn* as I Walk Jesus.” But Robert Fulgum and Jesus *do* agree on one very important point. As adults, we need to recapture a childlike approach to life. In the last verses of Luke 9, as Jesus is walking along with His disciples, He gives them five life lessons. As we walk with Jesus today, He is trying to teach us the same lessons. We will look at the first two life lessons today and study the last three next week. Beginning in Luke 9:46, we read:

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 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 he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”

“Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.” As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?” [even as Elijah did] But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and [said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.”] they went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

If you are like me, you’ll agree that all we really need to know, we learn from Jesus as we walk with Him. In each of these five life lessons we will learn something about Jesus and something about ourselves. Today we’ll spend most of the time on this first lesson.

LESSON ONE: GREATNESS (vs. 46-48)

In the previous verses in this chapter, Jesus took three disciples up to the Mount of Transfiguration, and then came down into the valley of human suffering. There was a father with a demon-controlled boy and the disciples were unable to help him. Jesus stepped in and delivered the boy. As they are walking back toward Capernaum, the disciples got into an argument over which one of them was the greatest. I can’t help but think old Simon Peter was part of that argument. After all, Jesus chose him and two others to see His glory.

This argument was fueled by their continuing ignorance about the true nature and purpose of Jesus. They still thought Jesus would overthrow the Romans and set up a literal kingdom. They were jockeying for position in that kingdom—who would be the vice Messiah, who would be the prime minister, who would sit next to Jesus. It’s one of the worst aspects of our human nature. We all possess this drive for selfish ambition that we want to promote ourselves to the positions of power and prominence.

Jesus knew the disciples were arguing over this issue, but instead of rebuking them, He used a living object lesson to teach them the truth about greatness. He summoned a little boy (child is in the masculine gender) child and had him stand among these grown men. Mark tells us Jesus took the little lad in his arms and told the disciples that to be really great, they would have to become like this little guy. Here are two great lessons:

1. Jesus loves and welcomes children

We know Jesus loved kids and they loved Him. We read in Mark 10 some children tried to see Jesus, but some of the disciples try to shoo them away from the busy Master. When Jesus saw this, He became agitated, even indignant. He rebuked the disciples saying, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Mark 10:14) Then He took the children in His arms and put His hands on them and blessed them.

This was not common behavior. In the Roman culture, children were considered property and many were simply killed at birth if they weren’t quite perfect. Even among the Jews, it was unusual for an adult to pay attention to children. Children in that day were not valued. They were the smallest and most insignificant group in Jewish society. The Talmud said spending time with

a child was a waste of time. One rabbi actually wrote “Morning sleep, midday wine, chattering with children...destroy a man.” But Jesus didn’t agree with that attitude. He welcomed children into His arms.

Probably the first song about Jesus I ever learned was, “Jesus loves me.” But the second one I learned said, “Jesus loves the little children; all the children of the world; red and yellow, black and white; they are precious in His sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world.” How true!

Because Jesus loved children, we ought to love them, too. He said when we welcome children, we are really welcoming Him!

I have always loved children and working with children. Nothing blesses my heart more than to kneel down and to hug a child or to have one of our children draw me a special picture. Right now we are looking for a Minister to Children at Green Acres. I tell you, I love working with kids so much I’d apply for that job myself—except it would take you too long to train another pastor!

But as I drive through these neighborhoods around our building I see dozens of kids out playing in the yards and the streets. I wonder if they know Jesus. I wonder if they go to church anywhere. We have got to be a church that aggressively goes after children to introduce them to Jesus.

I want to say THANK YOU to the many of you who have heard God’s call to work with children. We are right now enlisting workers for our new Sunday School year. We don’t want to just fill those classes with warm bodies. Instead, we want folks who have sensed a call from God to work with these precious kids and to show them the love of Jesus. Many of you don’t feel qualified to stand up before a bunch of adults and teach the Bible. Well you may be a perfect candidate to work with our children. What do you need? You need to be a good hugger; you need to be able to sit in those small chairs, you need to have a love for Jesus and a love for kids and you’ve got to have a sense of humor because they will keep you laughing.

One of our teachers of four year olds told me she was trying to write down the names of the parents of a new little boy who had come to Sunday School. She said, “Brian, what’s your daddy’s name?” He looked at her and said, “Daddy.” So she said, “What’s your mother’s name?” He said, “Mommy.” But this teacher was pretty sharp, so she came up with a brilliant way to get the information. She said, “Brian, what name does your daddy use when he calls your mommy?” Brian’s face lit up and he lowered his voice and said, “Hey, baby doll.”

Some of you have been attending a Sunday School class, being blessed. Now it’s time for you to *be* a blessing. One of these days, if you are saved, you’ll be in heaven. Imagine standing there one day with Paul, Stephen, or Phillip. They say, “tell me what you did for Jesus when you were on earth.” You think for a moment and you say, “Well, I sat in a chair in Sunday School every Sunday.” Don’t be surprised if they give you a funny look. Some of you are new members of our church and you came in and decided to take a little time off from Christian service—that little vacation has now been extended far longer than you intended—it’s time to get back involved in serving Jesus. A great way to do it is to welcome and love children, the way Jesus did. If you

think God is calling you to work with kids, call our church and just say, “I want to work with kids.” Somebody will get in touch with you.

That’s a lesson about Jesus, now let’s learn a lesson about us:

2. God’s view of greatness is different than this world’s

Throughout history, there have been many people who were great. Some even took the title. There was Alexander the Great, Catherine the Great, and Peter the Great. Just like the disciples of Jesus, our human nature strives to be “the greatest.” I submit the word “great” is so overused it has lost its impact. Even Tony the Tiger reminds us a certain cereal is GRRRRReat! We even use the word to mean just the opposite sometimes. If you walk out to your car one morning, late for work, and find you have a flat tire, you’ll probably say, “Well, that’s just great!” (No wonder people have trouble learning to speak English)

Everyone wants to be the greatest. But greatness is relative. I heard about three restaurants on the same block. One of them was a large restaurant, which put up a huge sign bragging, “The greatest restaurant in this city.” Another huge eating establishment put up a larger sign boasting, “The greatest restaurant in this state!” The third restaurant was small, but the food was excellent. The owner placed a small sign in the window simply stating, “The greatest restaurant on this block.”

Americans are obsessed with greatness. I want all of you to answer at the same time out loud: Who is the greatest living baseball player? Who is the greatest living basketball player? Who is the greatest living golfer? Tennis player? Everyone has a different opinion. Let’s try another question: Who is the greatest living preacher? Wait, I guess we’ll have to say the second greatest living preacher ... since Billy Graham is still alive! On second thought, don’t answer that last one.

American is obsessed with the greatest. The losing World Series team doesn’t go around saying, “We’re number two! We’re number two!” No, it’s number one or nothing for Americans. That was the attitude of the ambitious apostles. They were arguing over who would be number one among their group. They were jockeying for power, position, and prestige. The attitude of wanting to be the greatest can be summarized in one word: PRIDE. Pride is the attitude which makes you *want* to be the greatest, and the attitude that makes you think you are *better* than others.

I heard about a girl who really was obsessed with her appearance. She never passed a mirror without stopping to fix her hair and admire her beauty. The only problem was—she wasn’t all that pretty. One Sunday, her preacher was preaching on the sin of pride. This girl came to the front and said, “Oh, pastor, I want to confess the sin of pride. I think I’m the prettiest girl in town and I know that’s pride. I’m going to ask the Lord to forgive me of my pride.” The preacher looked at her and said, “That’s not the sin of pride. That’s the sin of ignorance!”

Someone said the difference between pride and humility can be seen in the difference between a dog and a cat. How many of you own a dog? When you come in, your dog will run toward you

and wag his tail. And if you bend down and scratch him behind the ears, he will almost smile. Do you know what that dog is thinking? "My master must be a god!" How many of you own cats? You don't own a cat; you may just board it. A cat may not jump into your lap but they like to be stroked. Do you know what they are thinking when they are petted? "I must be a god!"

Pride is the attitude that makes you think more highly of yourself than you should. Pride was the sin that caused Lucifer to fall. He had "I" trouble. He said, "I will ascend to the throne of God. I will make myself like the Most High. I will be as great as God." But God said, "You aren't going up, old Lucifer. You're going down, down, down." The Bible says, "God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6) Are you guilty of pride? Let me ask you a series of diagnostic questions to help you see if pride has crept into your life:

1. Do I continually think about myself?
2. Do I continually use the personal pronoun "I" in most of my conversations?
3. Do I listen greedily to what people say about me?
4. Do I insist on consideration and respect?
5. Do I sulk if people are not grateful for favors I have shown them?
6. Do I remember every service I may have rendered and expect to be appreciated?
7. Am I sensitive to slights, jealous, or envious?
8. Do I remember criticisms?

Consider the way Jesus stated it in Matthew's account: He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:2-4) We must *change*. That means *repent* and become like little children again. What does it mean to be like a little child? Let me do what Jesus did. Let me illustrate it with a child. Can one of you kids come up here and help me? I'd like to have a little boy younger than eight years old. Let me ask you: Have you ever been to Six Flags? Why do you like to go to Six Flags? (Fun). Great, now I want to set you up on this wall. Will you jump into my arms? I promise I'll catch you. (Trust). How did you get to church this morning? (You can't drive?) Did you buy those clothes with your own money or did your parents buy them? Do you have enough money to buy your own lunch today? (Dependence).

Here are three **great humility qualities of children:**

1. Fun-loving

Some of us old adults have lost the joy and the laughter that ought to be a part of our lives. We have become party-poopers and fuddy-duddies. A childlike spirit loves to laugh and have fun. I have served two "First Baptist Churches." At these two churches, we said FBC stood for Fun Being a Christian. As I was thinking about this, I think we ought to make GABC stand for Grin A Lot Being a Christian! Another childlike quality is

2. Total trust

This child was willing to jump into my arms. Have you noticed children don't worry as much as we do? Not too many children have ulcers. Children are trusting. That's why we have to warn them to be suspicious of strangers, because of their trusting natures. When I was a kid, my brother and I were wrestling and his head hit my front tooth, loosening it. I was crying and my mother told me it would be all right. She pulled my tooth out and told me to put it under my pillow that night and the tooth fairy would come and take my tooth and leave me some money. I believed her! So I put that old tooth under my pillow and found a shiny quarter there the next morning. I liked that! So I told my brother I wanted to wrestle again! Children are trusting. There really isn't a tooth fairy but when my mother told me there was I believed her! Our society is so full of con men and scams we grow up learning to be skeptical. When it comes to the world, you should be careful. But when it comes to God and His Word, we should have that same kind of childlike faith in God and in His promises. The final quality is

3. Complete dependence

Little guys can't drive and they don't have money to buy their food or clothes. They are utterly dependent on others. The older we get, the more independent we become and we're even proud of it. We can take care of our own needs and our own problems. We don't need anybody else and sometimes we act like we don't even need God. We need to be like a child and realize the very next breath we take is a gift from God. The next pulse of our heart is a gift from God. Every dollar we ever earn is because God has given us the ability to work. We must have that kind of complete dependence on God. Do you have a childlike attitude? That's what true greatness is in the eyes of God. Let's look at another life lesson:

LESSON TWO: ACCEPTANCE (vs. 49-50)

After their petty argument over greatness, I'm sure the disciples were deeply convicted and feeling uncomfortable by what Jesus had to say. It appears John brought up a totally new topic to simply change the subject! He complains he saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name. John didn't like that, so he had told the man to stop because he wasn't one of the chosen disciples. Look at John's exact words in verse 49, “he was not one of us.” He probably expected Jesus to commend him for his action, but instead, Jesus uses it to teach a lesson. Jesus said, “Don't stop him, because if he's not against us, he is for us.” What's the lesson we learn about Jesus?

1. Jesus has servants we may not recognize

It's so easy for us to criticize or minimize other groups of Christians because they are “not one of us.” We can be guilty of the same spiritual bigotry that infected John. In Acts 2 we see the beginning of the church; they didn't have another name in front of church—they were just the church. That's the way it was for over three hundred years. Then the Roman Empire embraced Christianity. Suddenly there was a new adjective. It became the *catholic* church, small “c,” which simply meant “universal church.” A few hundred years later, the Greeks broke away, forming the Orthodox Church based in Constantinople. So the church based in Rome became the Roman Catholic Church. No longer was it just the “church.” Those two groups became competitors and each claimed to have the full truth and each claimed the other group was wrong.

They didn’t have anything to do with each other because, like John, “they are not one of us.” So they built a wall to keep the other out.

Then, another group broke off from the Orthodox Church to become the Russian Orthodox Church, so the other group became the Greek Orthodox Church: more walls were built. A few hundred years later, some Christians “protested” the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, and this was known as the Protestant Reformation. It gave birth to a whole new group of adjectives: The Lutheran Church, The Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal church, the Baptist Church. More and more walls were built as more and more splits and arguments took place. These groups opposed each other and even killed each other. Wars were fought over these adjectives. During the Inquisition, thousands of Protestants were hunted down and killed by zealous Catholics. Some Protestants killed Catholics. To this day, the Protestants and Catholics are still warring in Northern Ireland.

Today, there are over a thousand different Christian groups. Everybody has his own set of adjectives. I remember a little church in South Alabama called the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of Jesus Christ of Pre-millennial Saints, Inc. Their sign was bigger than the church building!

Do you know how the Body of Christ got more and more divided through these past twenty centuries? Every time a man or a group disagreed with another man or group about doctrine or practice, they walked away and formed new little groups. They built another wall and added a few more adjectives before the beautiful word *church*. Our temptation is to reject and to resent all those other people because “they are not one of us.” Like John, we almost feel like we are doing the work of God when we say, “Stop what you are doing!! How dare you use the name of Jesus in a different way than we do!!” Jesus has all kinds of children in his family and most of them are *not* like us! We need to recognize that.

2. Anyone who honors the name of Jesus is my friend

The key to this lesson is that John pointed out this stranger was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. I’m not advocating some kind of universalism that says any religion is okay. There is *only* one way to God and that is through Jesus—and Jesus alone. Jesus is not just *one* of the ways to God. He is not even the *best* way to God: He is the *only* way!

I realize many people and groups use the name of Jesus in a way that is not legitimate. Terrible things have been done in the name of Jesus. What a group believes about the Deity of Jesus is absolutely essential for fellowship, that’s what it means to honor the name of Jesus.

We still try to add all these adjectives, “Oh, he’s a charismatic Christian” I don’t want to have anything to do with him. “He’s a Calvinist Christian.” “She’s a Moderate Christian.” “He’s a fundamentalist Christian.” On and on it goes *ad nauseum*.

We need to realize those who don’t do it the way we do it are our friends, if they honor the same Jesus we honor. In fact they are more than our friends—they are our brothers and sisters!

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was a revolutionary. He was an Anglican preacher who was kicked out of the Anglican Church because he started doing something new. He started preaching out in the fields and the streets. He started singing a bunch of new songs his brother had written, radical new songs whose tunes were taken from popular drinking songs like, “Blessed be the name, blessed be the name, blessed be the name of the Lord ...”

Wesley was criticized and ostracized by the official church. But I love his attitude about people who believed and practiced differently from himself. John Wesley wrote:

“I have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he takes his wig off and shakes the powder in my face, I shall make it my duty to leave him as soon as possible.” ... “I resolved to avoid that narrowness of spirit, a party zeal, that miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves.”

Did you know in heaven, God is not going to corral us into different areas? St. Peter is not going to have a loudspeaker saying, “Okay, let’s have all the Catholics over here, Baptists in this area, Methodists over here, Church of God folks in this corral, Church of Christ folks, to the left ...”

When real revival comes to our community, the flood waters of revival have a way of raising us up until all these man made fences are submerged under the flood of God’s mercy and grace. That’s when “heaven comes down and glory fills your soul!” Let’s learn that lesson and start loving and praying for other people who honor the name of Jesus, but aren’t “one of us.”

CONCLUSION

These are not just five disjointed teaching lessons Jesus gave. I believe they are all connected. When you become like a humble little child, you will be less exclusive of others. Long before blacks and whites started getting together in the South as friends, little black kids and white kids played together without any qualms. It was only when they grew up they learned blacks and whites don’t socialize. I think they had it right as children, don’t you? Think about the precious little children in our church. They get out on the playground and have such fun with each other. They don’t ask each other which country club their parents belong to. They don’t inquire about where their parents graduated from college or where they work or how much money they have. They just play together. That’s the kind of childlike spirit Jesus was talking about.

Some of you need to *repent* and become as little children again. Ken Blanchard retells the story of a little girl named Schia. Schia was four when her baby brother was born. Schia began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that, like most 4-year-olds, she might want to hit or shake him, so they said no. Over time, though, since Schia wasn’t showing signs of jealousy, they changed their minds and decided to let her have a private conference with the baby. Elated, Schia went into the baby’s room and shut the door but it opened a crack, enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw her walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his, and say, “Baby, tell me what God feels like. I’m starting to forget.”

Have you grown older and forgotten God? It’s like the older we get the more we forget our Creator and what He’s like. Jesus said to enter the kingdom of God, we must simply receive it like a little child. Will you receive God’s free gift of eternal life today?

OUTLINE

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2. God’s view of greatness is different than this world’s

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1. Fun-loving
2. Total trust
3. Complete dependence

II. LESSON TWO: ACCEPTANCE (v. 49-50)

1. Jesus has servants that we may not recognize
2. Anyone who honors the name of Jesus is my friend



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes