

Growing up God's way!

To what can I compare the people of this generation?" Jesus asked. "How can I describe them?"³² They are like children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends,

'We played wedding songs, and you didn't dance, so we played funeral songs, and you didn't weep.' Luke 7:31-32 NLT

Jesus was a master storyteller. In those days they were called parables and they served as illustrations to help people grasp His teaching and thoughts. In the context of this scripture Jesus was dealing with the shallow unbelief of the Pharisees. They had been around forever and had made up lots of rules about faith but more importantly they had a lifeless form of religious faith.

Alan Hirsh goes around the country asking groups of leaders to list the good things about the Pharisees. He said despite the bad rap they get, they did do some good things. So the group of 70 or so began to share good things about the Pharisees. Below is the list:

- Good Tithers
- Students of the Word
- Good attenders
- Charitable
- High moral values
- Worshipers of God (prayed consistently)
- Sincere about their faith
- Believed in the Resurrection
- Custodians of Israel (maintained their identity)

Then he asked this question. "Who does this sound like?"

I said, "The church."

Hirsch said, "Be more specific."

Someone said, "Christians."

Hirsch said, "Be more specific."

Finally someone said, "Us."

Isn't that list what we look for in good Christians? Someone who is a good tither, a student of the word, a good attender, has moral values, who worships God (prays and other ritualistic worship events), a believer in the resurrection, sincere, charitable and maintains the identity of the church. YES!

Here's the kicker, they are the ones who killed Jesus. The point is all those things might be important in the life of a Christian, but the most important thing is that we let Jesus lead. The most important thing is that we become more like Jesus.

Hirsch pointed out that churches need to rediscover Christology in the church. The

problem is that when we bring up living more like Jesus those who are defined only by the list above try to stop this movement.

The bottom line is that when we truly refuse to follow Christ and His ways and make it up on our own we are inconsistent and insincere. We lack a certain moral earnestness that is critical to our faith.

Jesus uses this parable about children playing to get a point across to adults that should know better. I think this teaching may help some of us to move toward a higher level of maturity in our faith and journey.

Here are three major things that I think He was trying to communicate.

1. We need to distinguish between being childlike and being childish in your faith.

If you know anything about the account of Jesus as found in the four gospels you know that He loved kids. He found in them innocence and trust that is rare in adults. Jesus appreciated the fact that children are open, eager, trustful and unpretentious.

- a. Jesus taught an idealistic view of being childlike.

Then He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:3 NLT

He often used them as examples of the way we should be but He also showed not only the idealistic characteristics of children but He also shared a realistic view.

- b. Jesus taught a realistic view of being childish.

The children that Jesus was using in this parable were spoiled children. He is saying to these adults that are Pharisees, this is what you are like. What's a Pharisee? They were people that were highly critical and self-absorbed about getting their own way. Jesus says they are like children pouting over not getting their way in the games that kids play. You hear kids do this all the time. "He's not playing fair." Or "She hit me and took my toy." Jesus nails them with these words:

For John the Baptist didn't spend his time eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, 'He's possessed by a demon.' ³⁴ The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!' Luke 7:33-34 NLT

Jesus is saying if you are a cranky and self-centered church attender you are like annoying and peevish children. You expect six year olds to not be self-aware of their behavior at all times but adults are often far worse at being able to see themselves and their actions.

Just like the ancient Jewish Pharisees there are a high percentage of people in our churches in America that have never experienced the power of the Risen Christ. In fact their brand of Christianity is not the real thing but a shallow copy and substitute based on compromise and what others are doing rather than on the Word of God.

I think often we know it because we lack the power of the New Testament church. Often this illusion is only kept alive by the minimum factor of church attendance or even service working in some area of the churches ministry.

If this is true then what are our options? What can we do to help ourselves?

By introducing this concept of childishness Jesus hints at ideas that might help us develop.

2. We need to develop in a spiritually healthy way.

Let's look at a couple of things that might help us mature in our Christian walk.

a. Children love self-expression better than self-discipline.

A child's life revolves around themselves. It's a natural characteristic that you try to help them overcome as they grow. If children remain self-centered into adult life then they and society will have major problems in the future. This problem manifests itself in adults in numerous ways. It's adults that can't get along within the family. It shows in the way we spend our money and where we put our priorities. We see it in the way we discriminate against those less fortunate than ourselves. Sometimes we see it in the way we blame everyone else for our problems.

So what does God offer to help us with these kinds of things in our lives? He says take yourself out of the center and anybody else that's there and put Him there where He belongs. It's the commandment that you can't avoid. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart. . . and our neighbors as ourselves. This love for God is a gift from Him to us. You and I can have as much of God as we want. Self-discipline is critical to our focus on God.

b. Children prefer fiction to truth and romance to reality.

Francis Thompson wrote many years ago these words, "Do you know what it is to be a little child? It is to be so little that elves can whisper in our ear. It is to turn pumpkins into coaches, mice into horses, lowliness into loftiness and nothing into everything." Children love to live in a world of make believe.

Sometimes we allow our world to become one of make believe. We think that somehow we control our own destiny. Look at the story of the rich fool in the Bible. He had vast lands, many crops, bulging barns but a shriveled soul. He tried to convince his soul that his material possessions made his life worthwhile. He said, "Take it easy, eat and drink

and be merry. He had it all and yet wasn't satisfied. But one day death knocked on his door and that knock comes for every one of us. When death came to him there was no more fantasy or fiction. It was all real. He could no longer count on his assets. God stepped into his picture and all of the sudden it was reality. Of course God was there all the time but in his selfishness the man in the parable never had eyes to see him or ears to hear Him.

Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." ¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Friend, who made Me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" ¹⁵ Then He said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

¹⁶ *Then He told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. ¹⁷ He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. ¹⁹ And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"*

²⁰ *"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' ²¹ "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." Luke 12:13-21 NLT*

Robert Abrahams penned these words:

Tonight Shanghai is burning, And we are dying too...
What bomb more surely mortal Than death inside of you?
For some men die by shrapnel, And some go down in flames,
But most men perish inch by inch, In play at little games.

We must move out of childishness and into the fullness and wisdom of Christ.

3. We need to understand the demonstration of Jesus teaching.

There appears to be this random verse at the end of this conversation. Jesus says:

But wisdom is justified by all her children." Luke 7:35 NKJV

But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow. Luke 7:35 NLT

If you aren't really living the life Christ demands of His disciples the great promises of God will make little difference in your life. God won't force you to follow. If you are flippant and careless about Jesus Christ and His blood shed for you, or consecration, or full surrender or the body of Christ (the church) or selfless service and heaven and hell they will all be strangely unreal to you.

Wisdom is to follow God's ways. Jesus was clearly teaching that the ministry of God, the ability to connect with God and be in a relationship with God would be clearly visible to those who were wise enough to see it.

In Proverbs you are going to find a lot about wisdom. And I want to give you three quick steps to applying this message.

Learn and develop
Lean in and on and depend
Love God and deny yourself

*Tune your ears to **wisdom**, and concentrate on understanding.* Proverbs 2:2 NLT

Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted. Proverbs 2:12 NLT

*For **wisdom** is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold.* Proverbs 3:14 NLT

*Don't turn your back on **wisdom**, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you.* Proverbs 4:6 NLT

*Fear of the Lord is the foundation of **wisdom**. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.* Proverbs 9:10 NLT

*Sensible people keep their eyes glued on **wisdom**, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.* Proverbs 17:24 NLT

*Those who trust their own insight are foolish, but anyone who walks in **wisdom** is safe.* Proverbs 28:26 NLT

A pastor of one of the largest churches in America wrote: "I have been at the bedside of many people in their final moments, when they stand on the edge of eternity, and I have never heard anyone say, "Bring me my diplomas! I want to look at them one more time. Show me my awards, my medals, that gold watch I was given." When life on earth is ending, people don't surround themselves with objects. What we want around us is people – people we love and have relationships with. In our final moments we all realize that relationships are what life is all about. Wisdom is learning that truth sooner rather than later. Don't wait until you're on your deathbed to figure out that nothing matters more."

Christian author Neil Anderson wrote a list he called The Twenty Cans of Success. These are based on what the New Testament says is true of Christians. These are promises, claimed by believers through the centuries. Let me give you few of them. Allow God to speak to you through these assurances.

1. Why should I say I can't when the Bible says I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13)?
2. Why should I lack when I know that God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19)?
3. Why should I fear when the Bible says God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7)?
4. Why should I lack faith to fulfill my calling knowing that God has allotted to me a measure of faith (Romans 12:3)?
5. Why should I be weak when the Bible says that the Lord is the strength of my life and that I will display strength and take action because I know God (Psalm 27:1; Daniel 11:32)?
6. Why should I allow Satan supremacy over my life when He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)?
7. Why should I accept defeat when the Bible says that God always leads me in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14)?
8. Why should I lack wisdom when Christ became wisdom to me from God and God gives wisdom to me generously when I ask Him for it (1 Corinthians 1:30; James 1:5)?
9. Why should I be depressed when I can recall to mind God's loving-kindness, compassion, and faithfulness and have hope (Lamentations 3:21-23)?
10. Why should I worry and fret when I can cast all my anxiety on Christ who cares for me (1 Peter 5:7)?
11. Why should I ever be in bondage knowing that there is liberty where the Spirit of the Lord is (2 Corinthians 3:17)?
12. Why should I feel condemned when the Bible says I am not condemned because I am in Christ (Romans 8:1)?
13. Why should I feel alone when Jesus said He is with me always and He will never leave me nor forsake me (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5)?
14. Why should I feel accursed or that I am the victim of bad luck when the Bible says that Christ redeemed me from the curse of the law that I might receive His Spirit (Galatians 3:13-14)?
15. Why should I be discontented when I, like Paul, can learn to be content in all my circumstances (Philippians 4:11)?

16. Why should I feel worthless when Christ became sin on my behalf that I might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21)?

17. Why should I have a persecution complex knowing that nobody can be against me when God is for me (Romans 8:31)?

18. Why should I be confused when God is the author of peace and He gives me knowledge through His indwelling Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:33; 2:12)?

19. Why should I feel like a failure when I am a conqueror in all things through Christ (Romans 8:37)?

20. Why should I let the pressures of life bother me when I can take courage knowing that Jesus has overcome the world and its tribulations (John 16:33)?

What are you going to do without Christ as the center of your life? Are you that smart that you don't need Him? Are you in control of your future, your health and your income? What about today? Are you comfortable with who you are and where you are living? I am calling us today to allow God to help us grow up. Do whatever you have to do to stay connected to God.

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun. And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth.

"Perhaps most remarkable," writes Jaroff, "those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth."

The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

So it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with 8-watt abilities.

God cannot work, however, through someone who quits. Kids quit. They give up. They pout. They put on a sad face. God wants us to grow up and do life His way.