

Start Acting Like A Child

Mark 10:13-16 March 11, 2026

It's the time of year when college-bound high schooler seniors are getting serious about that next step into a new domain. For many it will mean packing up and moving onto a campus in another city, maybe another state. They're going to *become* Bulldogs or Bruins or Banana slugs. In my case, I became a Sunbird - the most fearsome of all flying creatures.

For all of these schools you must *qualify* for acceptance. You're ranked beside all other applicants and positioned in a line. The UC system requires a minimum 3.0 grade point average (3.4 if you're out of state), with no grade below a C. Applications are judged on 13 different criteria.¹

On top of the academic, you'll have to prove that you've received a particular list of vaccines and you'll be required to take the flu vaccine every year, regardless of age.

And then there's the matter of the fee. If you want into the club, it'll cost you just shy of \$50,000 a year. Unless you're not a Californian, then it's \$86,000 a year.

Even *if* you meet all these standards, you *still* might be allowed into the UC of your choice, though *if* you rank in the top 9% of California high school students, they promise to find you a spot at another UC campus if space is available.²

So, what do I have to do to get accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven? What are the prerequisites? Jesus gives a surprising list of requirements tonight - truths that proved to be naggingly difficult for the disciples to accept. They were constantly jockeying for position and frequently trying to point out to Jesus that they were, indeed, the top 1% of applicants. But once again Jesus stops them in their tracks to explain that God's way is *not* man's way. And what He's looking for is *not* high achievement, but humble acceptance. And as He reveals this essential truth, the Lord does so with an affection and tenderness we don't want to miss.

As we look at this scene, let's notice how important Mark thinks it is. This story is told in Matthew, Mark, *and* Luke. But Mark's account is the longest. And he's the Gospel writer with the shortest book! He's constantly editing and moving quickly. But here he takes an extra breath to tell us about Jesus taking toddlers into His arms with grace, kindness, and generosity.

Mark 10:13 - ¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

Let's first talk about these parents. What they were doing is great. This wasn't superstition. Matthew explains that they are also asking for prayer for their kids. This was a proper tradition for the Jewish

¹ <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/how-applications-are-reviewed.html>

² <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/admission-requirements/first-year-requirements/>

people. We see times in the Old Testament where the patriarch would lay his hands on children to pronounce God's blessing on their lives. How much *more* to have Jesus do so?

So often we see people coming to Jesus with emergency needs - they bring the blind, the lame, the leprous. But how sweet it is that they had the same desire for God's grace for the futures of their kids as they would if they were dying or demon possessed. That *every* day of their lives mattered on the spiritual level and that God had grace and power for regular life, too. We need Jesus every day. Not only in the moments of crisis.

Now, in *this* time, children *were* much more vulnerable. In Egypt at this time, *half* of children died by the age of 12.³ These loved ones wanted the true best for their kids, and the hope they had for life and growth was anchored on Jesus.

But now to the disciples. They *rebuked* the people bringing their little ones to the Lord. We don't know why. We are left to assume motives, but clearly they're still stuck in this gate-keeping, posturing mentality. Who's the greatest? Who's important? Who is in line *behind* us. And they simply didn't think little kids were important enough to take up Jesus' valuable time.

The disciples were self-appointed bouncers, often restricting access to Jesus. Remember they tried to stop that other exorcist from casting out demons in Jesus' name. In John, we see some Greeks who had traveled to Jerusalem and they want to see Jesus, but they get stopped by Philip, and then Philip goes to Andrew, and *then* those two guys go to Jesus.⁴ They put these layers of access between seekers and Jesus that Jesus never asked for.

Here's what's so frustrating: We only have to go back *one* chapter where we see Jesus saying *specifically* to the disciples, "Whoever welcomes a little child *welcomes Me!*" He told them, "Don't forbid or exclude these other people who are on our side!" And yet, here they are, doing the *exact opposite* of what He told them.

It made me wonder: What am I slow to apply from God's word? Undoubtedly, there are things, probably *many* things that God has said to me, *commanded* me again and again as I read His word, yet I just breeze past and do the opposite. May God help us to see where we are acting like these forgetful disciples.

Mark 10:14 - ¹⁴ When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Indignant is a strong word - only occurring here in all the New Testament.⁵ It's a term that speaks of pain.⁶ Of being much grieved. Jesus is *very* upset by what they were doing.

³ Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Second Edition)*

⁴ John 12:20-22

⁵ R. Kent Hughes *Mark: Jesus, Servant And Savior*

⁶ Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

His response to the disciples was sharp and demanding - a *double* command. He said, "start allowing and stop preventing."⁷ It wasn't just, "Don't do that again," it was, "Go fix what you did."

He said, "Don't *stop* them." That term for stop was what He told them specifically *not* to do up in Mark 9 when He talked to them about the exorcist. And so, He brands them as obstructionists.⁸ They're doing the thing He commanded them to stop doing a short time ago.

It was *not* their job to be spiritual bouncers, putting obstacles between seekers and the Savior. We've seen how seriously God takes it when people put barriers or obstacles in the walk of faith.

David famously said, "I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness,"⁹ but Christians aren't supposed to stand at the door and keep people out. We are there to show people the way *in*.

Think of the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21. The gates *never close!* God is never trying to limit access to His Kingdom. There *are* requirements. There *are* demands, but the door is open.

Jesus needed to adjust the disciples' thinking. He says, "You're trying to keep these children out, or at least thinking they don't matter, but the Kingdom *belongs* to them." That doesn't mean everyone's a kid in the Kingdom. One commentator notes, "It indicates not so much exclusive ownership, but having a rightful share in."¹⁰

This was an extremely counter-cultural idea at the time. Children were *not* considered special or wonderful, *especially* in the Gentile culture. Infanticide was not outlawed until 375 AD! And even then, the law wasn't very effective.¹¹

Jesus elevates children to equal standing in His Kingdom. And Jesus turns the tables on the disciples, demanding that *they* reshape their hearts and minds to be *like* children.

Mark 10:15 - ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive, the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

So the disciples were in this pattern of saying, "this guy didn't follow us, so we tried to kick him to the curb. These children aren't important like us, so we sent them packing." And now Jesus says, "Fellows, you need to become *like them*."

⁷ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

⁸ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁹ Psalm 84:10

¹⁰ France

¹¹ Hughes

First, let's consider the gravity of this statement. If you don't do this *you won't enter the Kingdom!* And the term Christ uses for "never" is a strong one, meaning "never, no never."¹² So, the question is: What does it mean to receive the Kingdom like a child?

Children aren't perfect. In fact, they do *many* things that they have to be trained not to do. Think about it - it's *not* a good thing usually when someone has to be told, "You're acting childish." It means they're being selfish or rude or throwing a fit or uncaring in some way. So what does Jesus mean?

We can examine the example of the children in this story and pair that with a direct command from Jesus in Matthew 18. In Matthew 18:3-4, Jesus is talking about this same issue and says:

Matthew 18:3-4 - ³ "Truly I tell you," he said, "unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Ok, so Jesus says humbling ourselves like these children is what He's talking about. But humility can take a variety of forms. How is it happening in the scene?

Well first, the children are brought in total dependence. All they're doing in the scene is *receiving* grace, presence, love, prayer from Jesus. But they *were* receptive. I mean, can you imagine that *any* of these kids were crying in fear like little ones do when they're placed on the lap of the mall Santa?

One of the great things about kids is that they *are* content and excited to receive gifts - even when they're small things. You can give a three year old a quarter and they're gonna be excited. If I gave *you* a quarter, might not move the needle.

But the children in this scene are ready to receive from the Lord. They're not worried about whether they have a better position in the Kingdom than the kid next to them. They're receiving the love of God and the work of God and the presence of God as a *gift* to be enjoyed, not some sort of entitlement we think we're owed, or one that we try to gatekeep others from tasting.

The disciples were trying to exert dominance. The children in the scene are fine with littleness. One commentator writes, "The disciples need to learn not only to minister to the little ones but also to adopt the attitude of littleness."¹³

As human beings, we always want to be "big," don't we? As children, we're always wanting to get big. And that doesn't go away once we *are* big. Then we tend to want to be "big" in other ways. But that mindset is what Jesus is talking about. And we *know* that because He says in Matthew, "Look, the key is childlike humility," *and* because in the *very next scene* we're going to see a guy coming to Jesus, talking about all the *big* time spiritual things he's done and how he thinks he's owed

¹² Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

¹³ David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

greatness in eternal life, and Jesus says, "You need to humble yourself," and the man goes away sorrowful.

Instead, spiritual greatness is found in trusting the Lord like a little, little one would. As they entered the house, they're not worried about pomp or decorum. There's the door, we go through it. There's Jesus, I go up to Him and climb into His arms. It's about acceptance, not achievement.

Mark 10:16 - ¹⁶ After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them.

Let's note that Jesus did *more* than He was asked to do. And the term Mark used indicates that the Lord *fervently* blessed them.¹⁴ He didn't just touch them, He *embraced* them. This wasn't just a politician's photo-op with a local baby in the stroller. He folded them up into His arms with *real* tenderness and affection. Not just *one* of them as a token, but *each* one of them.

Jesus Christ has tender, affectionate, attentive care for even the small things in your life. The small moments. The little concerns. The quiet questions and hopes. *This* is our King, taking *you* into His arms of love to hold you close and squeeze you tight.

Greek linguists note that the compound rendered "blessed" in this verse is only found here in all the New Testament.¹⁵ Isn't it interesting that the word for indignant is only found here *and* the term for this blessing is only found here? Mark thinks this scene is *incredibly* important. *We* should, too.

If you apply to the University of California, if you have the grades, if you write a great essay, you take all the shots, there's *still* a 1 in 4 chance that you won't get in. The doors to Christ's Kingdom are open to all who will humble themselves and receive the free gift of salvation, by grace, through faith. Faith requires doing things God's way - obeying His commands, His directives, His directions for our lives. But to grow in spirituality and to be great in the Kingdom means joyfully embracing our loving Savior as a child in His arms. Not jockeying, not demanding, but receiving what God wants to say and do in our lives with ready hearts, little and humble and responsive, like a child full of trust and joy and wonder.

D. L. Moody once returned from a meeting and reported two and a half conversions. "Two adults and a child, I suppose?" asked his host. "No," said Moody, "two children and an adult. The children gave their whole lives."¹⁶

¹⁴ Ralph Earle *Mark: The Gospel Of Action*

¹⁵ Marvin Vincent *Word Studies In The New Testament*

¹⁶ Hughes