

Discipling¹ Children



SABBATH—JANUARY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 127:3–5; Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Luke 2:40–52; Matthew 18:1–6, 10–14; Mark 10:13–16.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ they asked him. ‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘Haven’t you [Have you not] ever read about it in Scripture [the Bible]? It says, “You have made sure that children and infants [babies] praise you” ’ ” (Matthew 21:16, NlrV).

WHEN WE WANT TO PREACH TO THE WORLD AND MAKE DISCIPLES FROM EVERY NATION, WE MUST NOT FORGET ABOUT CHILDREN. Studies show that most Christians give their lives to Christ at a rather young age. Fewer converts are older people. Many churches miss this important fact in their evangelistic² planning. They direct more money and materials toward adults. Christ’s earliest disciples also made the same mistake. They did not think children were important. Jesus was not pleased with that attitude (feeling). And He made room for children. He made children important.

So, we must do the same.

1. discipling—making followers for Jesus.

2. evangelistic—having to do with spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 19**THE HEBREW CHILD'S
ADVANTAGE (BETTER POSITION)
(Psalm 127:3–5)**

Hebrew (Jewish) children enjoyed special treatment when compared³ with the children from other nations. The other nations practiced child sacrifice as part of their culture. Children's value in other nations also was measured by how much they helped society financially. They were judged by how hard they worked and by how much they were worth to adults. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking is still true in our present world.

Clearly, Israel's backsliding had some influence on how people judged the value of children. For example, Manasseh⁴ was involved with witchcraft. He sacrificed his sons (2 Chronicles 33:6). But he was only one of the few kings who practiced child sacrifice. When the Israelites were under more spiritual leadership, they greatly valued their children.

Read Psalm 127:3–5; Psalm 128:3–6; Jeremiah 7:31; and Deuteronomy 6:6, 7. What do these verses say about God's love for children? How might the Bible help us to understand better our relationships with children?

Education, birthright,⁵ and many other cultural practices clearly

showed how valuable children were in Israel during Old Testament times. It is not surprising, then, that Christ improved the already honored position of children. After all, children are humans, too. And Christ's death was for every person, both young and old. This is something that we should never forget.

It is hard to believe that there are adults who are so sinful and so evil, that they hurt children—sometimes even their own. Knowing this, how can we better love and protect and influence children spiritually?



Israelite children were greatly valued under spiritual leadership.

MONDAY—JANUARY 20**JESUS' CHILDHOOD (Luke 2:40–52)**

Imagine that Jesus had skipped childhood and arrived as a fully grown adult on planet Earth. Then

3. compared—shown how two or more things are the same or different.

4. Manasseh—one of Judah's wicked kings in the last days of Old Israel.

5. birthright—the right of the eldest to inherit his parents' property after they die.

people would ask questions about His ability to work with children. But, instead, Christ grew as all children must. He did not skip any part of human growth. He understands teenage temptations. He went through the weaknesses and fears of childhood. Christ met those challenges that all children face. And His childhood experience was another important way that our Savior showed He was a human.

Read Luke 2:40–52. What does this verse teach about Jesus' childhood?



The rabbis were impressed by Jesus' questions and answers.

“Among the Jews, the twelfth year was the dividing line between childhood and youth. When a Hebrew boy finished this year, he was called

a son of the law and also a son of God. He was given special religious education. He was expected to take part in the holy feasts and services. Because of this custom, Jesus in His boyhood made the Passover visit to Jerusalem.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 75.

According to the verses, Jesus received wisdom. Christ's temple experience during the Passover visit shows us that Jesus had a great knowledge of the Bible. And the rabbinical teachers were very impressed by Jesus' questions and answers.

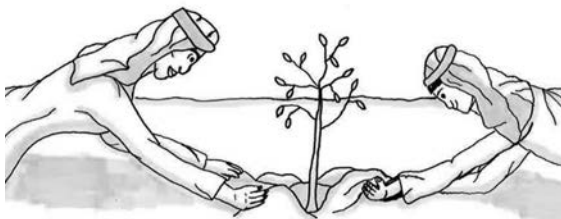
God surely used many childhood experiences to influence Jesus' perfect character.⁶ Perhaps Jesus' carpentry skills, faithful parents, regular Bible study, and life among Nazareth's townspeople influenced His early growth. Jesus was an amazing (wonderful) child. But in the end, He was still a child just as we all have been.

“The Child Jesus did not receive education in the synagogue [church] schools. Jesus' mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls⁷ of the prophets, Jesus learned about heavenly things. At His mother's house, Jesus was taught the very same words that He had spoken to Moses.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 70. Think deeply about what these words mean. What do they teach us about Jesus being

6. character—the way someone thinks, feels, or behaves.

7. scrolls—instead of books, prophets (special messengers from God) wrote their messages on very long rolls of “paper” that were made from animal skins.

raised as a human?



Mary was Jesus' first human teacher.

TUESDAY—JANUARY 21

HEALING THE CHILDREN (Matthew 9:18–26)

Read the following verses: Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 7:24–30; Luke 9:37–43; and John 4:46–54. Whose children were healed in these stories? How are the backgrounds of these children almost the same? What differences are you able to find, if any? What lessons can we learn from these verses that can help us today?

All of these stories have one thing in common. In each case, a very worried parent came to Jesus and tried to get help for a child. What parent has not felt pain, worry, fear, and horror when his or her child was very sick or even dying? For those who have been there, there is nothing worse.

Jesus Himself was not a parent. But He related enough to these adults as a human that He healed their children. In each case, the healing came. He turned no one away so that His love came through clearly. And not

just for the parents but for the children.

Of course, this leads to many questions about times when parents pray and plead to Jesus, but their children are not healed. Maybe there is no sadder experience than when a child is buried. And witnessing parents mourning a child's death makes the heart even sadder. During these funerals, the mourning parents almost always ask, "Should it not have been me who died instead of my child?"

However, mourning physical death and watching spiritual decay may be equally painful. How many parents have suffered as they watched their children's lives become overcome by drugs, sex, or uncaring attitudes (feelings)? But we must learn to trust in the Lord and His goodness and love, even when things do not turn out so happily. Remember that the same sad things happen in the Bible stories listed above. Ellen G. White, a prophet, also buried two children. Our world is a difficult place. But our God is a loving God. And we must hold on to that truth, no matter what happens.



Jesus turned no one away who asked for healing.

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 22**A FEARSOME WARNING
(Matthew 11:25, 26)**

Study the following verses: Matthew 11:25, 26 and Matthew 18:1–6, 10–14. What truths about faith can we learn from these stories? Think about just how stern (rough) Jesus' warning was here. Why should we fear it?

There is a simple honesty among children, an honesty that Jesus often pointed to when He was explaining what His kingdom was like. This is because the true, humble, and innocent attitudes (thoughts and feelings) of children describe what Christian living really means. We should all try to have that simple trust as we live out our faith!

Modern disciple-makers need to learn another lesson: children do not need to give up their childlike faith. If they are properly educated, children may carry their trusting attitude into adulthood. Certainly, as children mature and get older, they will question things. They will have struggles and doubts and unanswered questions as we all do. But a childlike faith never becomes old-fashioned. As parents or as adults, we should do all that we can to teach children about God and His love. The best we can do is to show God's love to them through our lives, our kindness, our mercy, and our care. We can preach all we want. But the best way for us to disciple (teach) children is by being

living examples of God's love.

Criminal acts against children can destroy a child's confidence (faith; trust) in the church and in the God of the church, especially when such acts happen during church-supported activities. Terrible punishment waits for those who do such things! Christ and His message, after all, awaken confidence and trust. No one should destroy that childlike faith!

What is your church doing to support its children and to make sure that they are protected in every way possible? Think what it means when Jesus said the angels of children "do always behold [watch] the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). Why should that make anyone who hurts a child fear God's punishment?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 23**SUFFER (LET) THE LITTLE
CHILDREN (Mark 10:13–16)**

Read Mark 10:13–16. How does Christ's acceptance of children lead to their acceptance of Him? How should we understand His rebuke (scolding) of the disciples? What must we learn from this story about how we relate to children?

Surely Christ's disciples meant well when they tried to stop the parents from bringing their children to Him, but they were wrong. They were trying to protect Jesus' valuable time. They wanted Him to save His energy

for more “important” matters. They greatly misunderstood what Jesus wanted them to know.

Imagine yourself being rejected by rough adults and then being hugged by the loving and caring Jesus. No wonder the children hugged Him back. In this story, then, we have a very important example of the way that children should be treated by people who claim to be disciplinarians.

“In the children who were brought to Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be receivers of His grace and servants of His kingdom. Some of them would give their lives for His sake. Jesus knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Savior far more quickly than grown-up people would. Many of the adults were worldly wise and hard-hearted. In Jesus’ teaching, He came down to the children’s level. He, the King of heaven, did not refuse to answer their questions. Jesus made His important lessons simple to meet their childish understanding. Jesus planted in their minds the seeds of truth. These seeds would spring up later and bear fruit unto eternal life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 512–515.

How often have we met adults who suffer through so much pain, so much trouble, and so much heartache over things that happened to them in their childhoods? What should this tell us about how

gently, carefully, prayerfully, and lovingly we should treat children?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Blessing the Children,” pages 511–517; “The Temple Cleansed Again,” page 592, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Baptism,” pages 93–95, in *Testimonies⁸ for the Church*, volume 6; “Bible Teaching and Study,” pages 185, 186, in *Education*.

“It is still true that children are the most willing of all people to accept the teachings of the gospel. Their hearts are open to God’s influences, and strong to remember the lessons received. The little children can still be Christians, following the truth at the level of understanding for their age. They need to be educated in spiritual things. And parents should give them every advantage so that they may develop characters like the character of Christ.

“Fathers and mothers should look upon their children as younger members of the Lord’s family. They should accept the responsibility of educating them for heaven. The lessons that we ourselves learn from Christ we should give to our children. We should do so as their young minds can receive them. In this way, we can, little by little, open to them the beauty of the principles [rules] of heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 515.

8. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why do you think that many people who accept Christ do so when they are younger rather than when they are older? Doubters could argue that it is because they are too young to understand that what they are accepting as truth is silly. On the other hand, could it be because they have not yet become hardened with doubt as many adults have? Maybe they are more open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Discuss.
- ② What can today's church do to become more Christlike in reaching children? What can each member do to be friendlier toward youth who

may experiment with strange ideas and styles? How can the church as a whole become more friendly in reaching active youth?

- ③ What steps can members take to prepare themselves to work with interested youth who desire baptism and a life-changing decision to follow Christ?
- ④ Think more about the character of children that made Jesus say, " 'You need to change and become like little children. If you don't [do not], you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven' " (Matthew 18:3, NIV). What does that verse mean? At the same time, what does that verse not mean?