



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 18:15-17

To understand more about childlike faith.

Wonka

In the 1971 film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (the proper, good version), chocolatier Willy Wonka (played by *Gene Wilder*) launches a worldwide frenzy when he inserts five golden tickets into his famous Wonka Bars. Each ticket gives the owner a chance to tour the chocolate factory and win a lifetime's supply of chocolate. Five children find the tickets and come to the factory for the tour. As the day passes, each of the children falls prey to his or her own greed, except for Charlie Bucket—a poor boy who won the last ticket available. In this scene near the end of the movie, Wonka unveils his true plan: to find a suitable owner to whom he could give the factory:

Wonka: How did you like the chocolate factory, Charlie?

Charlie: I think it's the most wonderful place in the whole world.

Wonka: I'm very pleased to hear you say that, because I'm giving it to you. (Charlie and his grandfather are stunned.) That's all right, isn't it?

Grandpa: You're giving Charlie the...

Wonka: I can't go on forever, and I don't really want to try. So who can I trust to run the factory for me when I leave to take care of the Oompa Loompas? Not a grownup. A grownup would want to do everything his own way, not mine. That's why I decided a long time ago I had to find a child—a very honest, loving child whom I could tell all my most precious candy-making secrets.

Charlie: And that's why you sent out the golden tickets?

Wonka: That's right. So the factory's yours, Charlie. You can move in immediately.

Grandpa: And me?

Wonka: The whole family. I want you to bring them all. (He hugs Charlie.) And Charlie, don't forget what happened to the man who suddenly got everything he always wanted.

Charlie: What happened?

Wonka: He lived happily ever after.

Much in the same way, Jesus says of the children: “For to such as these belongs the kingdom of God” (Lk. 18:16). Below is a brief overview of this passage with special attention given to what “childlike” faith is.

“Let the Children Come to Me”

Verses 15 through 17 form a small narrative within chapter 18 that Luke likely borrows from the Markan account (Mk. 10:13-17). Before examining the text, consider some important contextual details. The very idea of children and the emotional response we feel to them in our modern context is drastically different than that of Jesus’ day. James Edwards put it this way: “The modern West generally regards the qualities of childlikeness—innocence, trustfulness, humility—as inherently praiseworthy, and hence tenderness to children as virtuous. The ancient world did not regard children likewise. In Judaism, women and children derived their position in society primarily in relation to adult males. Sons were of course regarded as blessings from God, but largely because they ensured the continuance of the family for another generation. In general, “childhood” was an unavoidable and uncelebrated interim until the young were mature enough to bear children and contribute to the work force. One will search ancient literature in vain for sympathy toward the young comparable to that shown them by Jesus.”¹ This explains why the disciples rebuked people for “bringing even infants to him that he might touch them” (Lk. 18:15). Keep in mind, the people Jesus is rebuking in this passage are not Pharisees or religious leaders, but his followers. This means that even followers of Christ get it wrong and require the Lord’s rebuke.

Understanding this sheds a different light on Jesus’ words in verse 16: “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for such belongs the kingdom of God.” Jesus fundamentally redefines the value of children in this one statement. Children are not a nuisance, but embody the very characteristics necessary for citizenship in the kingdom of God. Below is a breakdown of some of the key terms and concepts found in this passage.

DO NOT HINDER

The imperative (or, command) in this passage is “do not hinder them.” The Greek word for “hinder” is the term κωλύω (kōlyō), and it means “to hinder, restrain, or prevent.” This commandment can be read both specifically and generally. Specifically, it is a response to the disciples who were literally hindering infants from being brought to Jesus. More broadly, it could be applied to any person who hinders people such as infants from coming to the Lord. More will be said concerning this in the next section below.

FOR TO SUCH BELONGS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Notice, also, that Jesus does not say that the kingdom of God belongs to infants, but that it belongs to “such as (these).” The ESV translates τοιοῦτος as “such,” but the implied “these” is rendered in NIV and NASB. In other words, it isn’t infants to whom the kingdom of God belongs, but those who embody the same qualities or characteristics as infants. How literal infants come into the kingdom of God is a topic for another discussion. They do, however, embody characteristics necessary for kingdom citizenship.

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 507.

This passage is important for at least a couple of reasons in that it speaks to two different groups. For one, it speaks to those who come to Jesus in that it implies important characteristics needed to approach Him rightly. Infants are simple; they don't overcomplicate things. They see faith as simply trusting in someone wholeheartedly, and being fully dependent on those around them to care for them. This kind of trust and dependence are necessary to faith in Christ. If Christ is Lord (and He is), then childlike faith follows Him entirely, regardless of what change is demanded of them. Childlike faith is not necessarily innocent, in that no one is innocent. The individual then who possesses childlike faith will follow and trust and depend upon Jesus no matter what. They will not overcomplicate what discipleship looks like, they will simply do what Jesus demands of them. They will not over-qualify the Scripture, but take it for what it says.

This passage also speaks to the individual who might "hinder" a person from coming to faith. Consider that infants cannot (usually) just come to anyone, but must be brought to them. They are dependent upon a parent or caregiver to provide for them shelter, food, clothing, and nurturing love. They cannot develop properly nor healthily without the care and oversight of another person. These same implications can be correlated to the spiritual life. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins." Dead people can't do anything for themselves. The Lord must "make them alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). And how does the Lord do such a word? Paul says in Romans 10:14: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"

And again, once they are born again, they begin as "infants" (1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:2). They require oversight and care. And to the point that Jesus is making in this passage, that also means one could potentially "hinder" a person as well. This kind of spiritual sabotage would reveal not only disbelief but utter opposition to Christ.

What About Now?

The main takeaway of this passage is best summarized in the words of Jesus in verse 17: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." We ought to believe with the simplistic faith of a child, taking God at His word (from the Scripture) without overcomplicating it. Another takeaway is the profound importance of not standing in the way of anyone else coming to Jesus, lest we "hinder" them.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 18:15. Who were people bringing to Jesus, and why did they want Jesus to touch them?

2. Read Luke 18:15. What was the response of the disciples when they saw what was happening?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 18:15. According to the notes, how were infants and women treated in the ancient world?

2. Read Luke 18:16. What did Jesus say to His disciples when they tried to prevent the infants from being brought to Jesus?
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Day Three

1. Read Luke 18:16. Why did Jesus say, “For to such as these?” What does this imply?
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2. Read Luke 18:16. What does it mean to have faith “such as” an infant?
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 18:17. How does Jesus say people should receive the kingdom? What does this mean?
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2. Read Luke 18:17. According to the notes, how does someone lead a person to Christ?
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Week 65 Discussion: Childlike Faith

In Luke 18:15-17 talks about the importance of “receiving the kingdom of God like a child” (Lk. 18:17). Talk as a group about what that would like for you, and what changes you might need to make in order to surrender more fully to Christ’s commands in this passage.

1. Icebreaker: What are the differences between infants and adults? How do these differences connect to spiritual life?
2. Do you believe you possess childlike faith? In other words, do you have an easy time simply taking God at His word, or do you regularly question it or overcomplicate it?
3. When is it hard to have childlike faith?
4. Who led you to the Lord? Talk about your experience.
5. Have you ever tried to “hinder” someone from coming to Jesus? Why?
6. How can the church better emphasize the qualities of simple faith?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus tells the disciples to let people bring their children to Him.
2. Jesus uses that moment as an illustration for the importance of having childlike faith.