



Empowering People to Change the World

Encounter the Kingdom Like a Child: Dramatic Changes in our Thinking

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2019: Encounter the Kingdom like a Child Dramatic Changes in our Thinking

Jesus opened his ministry proclaiming that ***“the kingdom of God had come” (Matthew 4:17)*** and subsequently he proclaimed the message of the kingdom over 100 times.

Yet the disciples not only did not understand it's meaning but they even questioned and competed for a prominent place in the ministry with Jesus. To the point, that they began to argue over who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. The competition reached a crescendo with the disciples finally deciding that the debate would never be settled without asking Jesus Himself to settle the dispute.

Matthew 18:1

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- Literally “who will reign in the kingdom realm in heaven?”

Our world of:

- Competition
- Ambition
- Pecking order
- Establishing who's superior and inferior
- Race to get ahead
- “Who is the top dog on the Jesus team”

Jesus inserts the Kingdom way...

Matthew 18:1-5

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of

heaven. ⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

- We must “dramatically change our thinking.”
- For us to encounter God in 2019, experience God, see miracles of the kingdom and see God show up, you cannot think like an adult but like a child.
- This living metaphor of the kingdom that Jesus uses is through bringing a child to his side.
- It is like the diving board over a lake; Eagle Lake has this giant cushion or pillow that catapults kids out into the lake.
- Jesus is jolting or catapulting our thinking.
- What is it about the thinking of the disciples that would even push the children away (Matthew 19:13-15)? It is the same mentality that keeps us from a kingdom encounter with Jesus and keeps people from serving and loving our kids in Children’s Ministry. What is it?
 - Think about the nature of kids. Think about what kids do.
 - Kids cause us to lose control.
 - They do not know protocol—they just do what they feel.
 - They do not follow the rules.
 - We like control of our environment and kids do not follow the rules.
 - The disciples wanted control but Jesus did not.
 - Kids are very spontaneous and unpredictable.
 - Kids are impressionable. Recently I was talking to an older man who said he still remembers going to church as a child and getting a postcard in the mail saying that the church “missed” him. He never forgot that. Kids are impressionable; they remember the “first time” of things that were meaningful to them.

We must dramatically change our thinking in 2019 if we want a fresh encounter with Jesus Christ!

Matthew 18: 3

³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 Dramatic Changes in our Thinking in 2019 that we learn from kids. This is from Jesus!

1. In the moment—Presence. Learn Presence in 2019. They want our presence, our attention.

- For example, when Penny, my grandchild sees me, she runs over, gives me a hug and wants to play.
- Kids do not think about tomorrow but focus on today—they are truly excited about encountering us right now.
- A child wants us to get down on the floor and play with them. They do not just want the dollhouse or the puzzle or the ball. They want us to play with them—children want our presence.
- But listen, it's not the puzzle; it's not the dollhouse—it's about YOU. It's about you being there with them!!
 - i. Baby Jesus puzzle with Penny.
 - ii. Does this puzzle have high quality?
 - iii. Is this puzzle theologically sound?
 - iv. Does the baby Jesus really really LOOK like the real Jesus as a baby?
 - v. Did they really have wood framed barns in Bethlehem? I mean I heard it was a cave. Hmmm
 - vi. Was there a donkey in the original manger scene? Hmmm
 - vii. Is Penny thinking about all these things or is the puzzle just a tool to enjoy Grandpa's presence? And having him enjoy her?
- Adults overanalyze the tools and children just love the presence that is there. Spiritual gifts are that way. They are gifts of God's presence. Be careful in overanalyzing the gifts of the Spirit and missing the presence of the Spirit.
- What if a child does not like puzzles but likes games. It is not the formula but about your presence. You ask a child "What do you want to do?" and believe me, they do have an opinion and based on their talents, gifts, and interests sovereignly given by God, they

will have a predisposition in a particular direction. So, they want you to go along and be in presence with them as you throw the ball or kick the ball or play with dolls. The point is not what you are doing but who you are doing it with!

- In 2019, dramatically change your thinking by going after God's Presence in everything you do.

viii. Israel went after the presence of God in the Tabernacle of Moses.

ix. Israel camped around the presence of God.

x. It has been said that 95% of what happened in the early church could not have happened without the presence of the Holy Spirit.

2. Joy—learn Joy in 2019. Kids want to have fun. They do not have a “to do list”; they do not worry about a job, money, even responsibilities but rather they want to experience joy, spontaneity.

- Kids want to have fun. It is why they follow the most fired up, excited, fun loving adult in the room.
- Think about what adults do? We comment on what people say, whether they are looking at their watch, he was on his computer, etc. We are always analyzing everything.
- Jesus said to Martha: “you are worried and troubled about so many things”; you have a lifestyle of worry and trouble.
- We need to plan to be more like a child. For example, if you are in debt and have been irresponsible, but getting out of debt enables us to be more like a child.
- Worry and trouble is a call to responsibility but also a call to be more Child-like by getting out of debt.
- Parable of the feast and the wedding: remember who cannot go? I've got this business deal, I have this cow that needs to be milked, I got a new wife. If you are worried and troubled by all these things

—none of these things are bad in of themselves but they have become distractions to encountering God!

- “The joy of the Lord is our strength.”
- Fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, JOY, peace, patience...
- We want to minister with joy! We want joy at work, in our home, in our marriage. Go after joy. Kids do. Kids want to hang out with joyful people.
- **Matthew 6:30-33**
³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
- For example, we had our friend Jeb comes after Christmas over and do our plumbing work and we had so much joy together as he did his job. It is not just WHAT we do but HOW we do it. We shared our life together and laughed a lot.
- Being like a child is not just doing a puzzle but when you do your job, do it with joy. Bring cookies into the office; bring up some doughnuts and if you are into lots of healthy stuff, bring some quinoa into the office.
- Raise the joy level in your surroundings. In a healthy acceptable environment, children will raise the joy level.
- That is why in our children’s ministry we are going to have some surprises each week in the lobby and in our classes to bring joy and spontaneity to our children. Wait and see what it is—NEXT WEEK.

3. Kids love to learn if they enjoy the presence of the person whose teaching them and if there is joy in the environment. In 2019, Be a Continual Learner.

- We have this amnesia problem. We will look at something new for awhile but then we just go back to our old way of thinking. The passage says “continually humble ourselves.” But we forget and we are joyful for one week, and then we go back to being a crab. So, what is that? You have to stay on this new path, this new way of thinking. Continual Learner.
- Doing things we can maintain—stay a learner. See the value and continually keep changing.
- The losing weight thing. Everyone over 40 sets that goal. And we have all these goals---you get a trainer, a gym membership, you google how to do it, you start getting all this new food...like quinoa and you do it through January and lose 3 lbs and then you hate the gym, hate the trainer and hate quinoa.
- What if you just said, I’m going to take a walk once a week with my spouse. I’m going to do the gym once a week and do exercises you enjoy. Do things you like to do as often as you can.
- Humility says this is what I can do. For me, I started prayer walking because I connected with God that way.
- We make goals that are unrealistic and we do not even enjoy the goals.
- Kids think of way of having fun and we need to put fun into our pursuit of God.
- For example, on Thursday night we had a bunch of people over for our Children’s Ministry meeting. It was a vision casting Think Tank, Heart Tank gathering at our home of about 40 people: we had the Valentine’s kids lead us in worship (Nathan is 12; Zak is 10; Charity is 13 leading us into the presence of God!) We shared about our personal experiences of God encounters when we were children,

we ate great food, there was tons of laughter throughout. You stay a continual learner when you enjoy the teacher and love their presence! Get it?

- Remember the original question by the disciple? Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Kids do not care.
 - i. They want to be loved by our presence.
 - ii. They want have fun and joy in your presence.
 - iii. They want to learn when they have love and joy!
 - iv. How about you?
 - v. Do you come to church to be cool? Do you go to Shine wanting to know if your are the most beautiful person? If so, you are missing the point.
- Will you dramatically change your thinking in 2019 to encounter the Presence of the Lord and His joy and love in your life?
- Do you want more of God? Do you want to experience more of the “desire of the nations” in your life?

4. Serve Children in 2019.

Yes, serve them, love them, become a little bit like them this year! Study their lives, learn from them. Quit baby sitting and start baby serving! Quit putting up with kids and start blessing them.

- **Matthew 18: 5 *Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.***
See every child as Jesus in that little body! Dramatically change your thinking and serve Jesus by serving children.
- We are building a church that will last for 100 years and our most valuable resource are children!