

Discipleship

Discipling Children

Lesson #4 for January 25, 2014

Scriptures: Psalm 127:3-5; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Luke 2:40-52; Matthew 18:1-6; 10-14; Mark 10:13-16.

1. In this series of lessons about discipling or discipleship, we must not forget that most Christians become Christians at a relatively young age. Why do you think that is? Are children more responsive to the gospel? (Matthew 18:1-6) Are they more gullible? Do they learn Christianity from their parents? Or, do they remember better at that age? Or, is the problem that we have done such a poor job of discipling adults?
2. In ancient times, children had very low status in society. Many children died before they were 5 years old. Many of the cultures surrounding the Hebrew nation actually offered children as religious sacrifices! Hopefully, it was because those children were the most precious things in their lives. Manasseh—perhaps the worst king the country of Judah ever had—actually sacrificed his own children as offerings to pagan gods. (2 Chronicles 33:6) And even in nations far away from Palestine such as in Greece and Rome, the status of children was very low.
3. Read **Psalm 127:3-5**; 128:3-6; Jeremiah 7:31; and **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**. These verses should make it very clear that God recognizes the great value of children and their future potential. The story is told about an evangelist who came home one day, and his wife asked him about the success of his efforts. He reported that 3½ people had become Christians. She responded, puzzled, “Do you mean three adults and one child?” He said, “No, three children and one adult. The children will be able to live most of their lives as Christians, but the adult has no more than half of a life left!”
4. There are terrible stories on the Internet and among professionals about children who have been abused. It is really hard to believe that a parent or even any mature adult could do such a thing to a child.
5. What can we learn about childhood and its challenges from the life of Jesus? From the Bible we know almost nothing about the life of Jesus between His infancy and the start of His ministry at age 30. Read Luke 2:40-52.
6. But, in two incredible chapters, Ellen White gives us considerable detail. Read *The Desire of Ages* pp. 68-74; 84-92. From Ellen White’s writings, we know that Jesus did not attend the schools of the rabbis. So, where did He get His education? Where did He learn about the Bible? Look at the following paragraphs taken from the above chapters in *Desire of Ages* about the childhood of Jesus.

Among the Jews the twelfth year was the dividing line between childhood and youth. On completing this year a Hebrew boy was called a son of the law, and also a son of God. He was given special opportunities for religious instruction, and was expected to participate in the sacred feasts and observances. It was in accordance with this custom that Jesus in His boyhood made the Passover visit to Jerusalem.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 75.

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. **The very words which He Himself**

had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70. [Bold is supplied.]

Dwell on the incredible implications of those words. What do they teach us about the humanity of Christ?

Heavenly beings were His attendants, and the culture of holy thoughts and communings was His. From the first dawning of intelligence He was constantly growing in spiritual grace and knowledge of truth.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70.3.

Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did. As we try to become acquainted with our heavenly Father through His word, **angels will draw near**, our minds will be strengthened, our characters will be elevated and refined. We shall become more like our Saviour. And as we behold the beautiful and grand in nature, our affections go out after God. While the spirit is awed, the soul is invigorated by coming in contact with the Infinite through His works. Communion with God through [71] prayer develops the mental and moral faculties, and the spiritual powers strengthen as we cultivate thoughts upon spiritual things.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70.4.

7. Some of Jesus's most remarkable miracles involved children. Read Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 9:37-43; and John 4:46-54. Each of these stories tells us about a desperate parent with a seriously ill or even dead child. When they were healed, those children must have shown great appreciation for what Jesus had done for them. We are used to radio, television, and even cell phones. But, the people in Jesus's day had no concept of how someone might speak and affect someone else many miles away. But, they believed Jesus's words. Is it possible that the story recorded in John 4:46-54 involved the family of Joanna who was mentioned in Luke 8:1-3? Is that why she believed in and supported Jesus?
8. But, there are troubling questions about those stories as well. If Jesus so lovingly healed those children, why didn't/doesn't He heal other children, even today? Think of the parents who say, crying over their dying children, "Why doesn't God take me and spare my child?"
9. Read Matthew 11:25-26; 18:1-6; 10-14. What specifically did Jesus have in mind when He suggested that we should become like children? Would you describe children as trusting? Or, gullible? Critical? Or, uncritical? When children spend some time around their parents or other adults, they become very skilled in detecting any phoney action! Children have lots of energy. At times, they can be very destructive. They may need constant care and attention. Which of those things is supposed to describe us? Also see #21 below.
10. The most important sermon children will ever "hear" is not the one the pastor preaches but the one that their parents live. Remember Matthew 18:10 and Mark 10:13-16. God's eyes are constantly on every living person including children.
11. So, how did children respond to Jesus?

Even little children were attracted to Him. They loved to climb upon His knees and gaze into the pensive face, benignant with love. (SC 11.2)

The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him; even little

children were attracted to Him. They loved to climb upon His lap and to kiss that pensive face, benignant with love. (3T 422.1; GW92 261.3)

12. How good are we as adults at making church and Sabbath school interesting for children?
13. Try to imagine yourself as a child in the days of Jesus. How do you think you would have responded to the Pharisees? The Sadducees? The Scribes? To Jesus?

In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake. He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown-up people, many of whom were the worldly wise and hardhearted. In His teaching He came down to their level. He, the Majesty of heaven, did not disdain to answer their questions, and simplify His important lessons to meet their childish understanding. He planted in their minds the seeds of truth, which in after years would spring up, and bear fruit unto eternal life.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 512.3-515.0.

14. And yet, we know that in our world there are so many children suffering because of abuse they have experienced from a trusted adult. Some estimates suggest that up to 40% of girls and 20% of boys have experienced some kind of sexual abuse as children. This has terrible implications for them for the rest of their lives. And what are children learning from television, radio, and the Internet?
15. Earlier, we suggested that most Christians become Christians at a relatively young age. Why do you think that is true? Consider the following words from Ellen White.

It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years. They need to be educated in spiritual things, and parents should give them every advantage, that they may form characters after the similitude of the character of Christ.

Fathers and mothers should look upon their children as younger members of the Lord's family, committed to them to educate for heaven. The lessons that we ourselves learn from Christ we should give to our children, as the young minds can receive them, little by little opening to them the beauty of the principles of heaven.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 515.

16. Should we as adults tell children that Jesus will come in their lifetime? Doesn't it seem like that is an increasing possibility? We should not try to scare them into serving God; we should make that an attractive and appealing idea. Do we know how to share the great controversy theme with children?
17. What is your opinion about why most Christians become Christians when they are still young? Why is it that as adults we become more cynical and skeptical? Is it because we have seen how Christians live? Would it be possible for an Adventist church to organize itself in such a way as to be attractive to children? We know that sometimes the young people get involved in bizarre fashions, unusual music tastes, and sometimes, even outlandish behavior! Does your church need to become more energetic and more able to attract vigorous young people? Is it possible to adapt to the tastes and needs of young people without sacrificing the truths that make us what we are as a church?
18. What is your church doing to identify the gifts and talents of your children, encouraging

them to become involved in church programs of various kinds? What would happen if every church member would seek to interact in some positive way with the children in his or her church? Not all of us are parents. Some will never be parents. But, all of us have been children. Can you remember the times when you were a child in church? How did you react to those experiences? Were you excited to go to church each weekend? Did it seem like the pastor and the rest of the church were interested in you? Did it seem like a friendly place? Were you excited to go to church on Sabbath mornings? What if you went to church on Sunday mornings? Did you grow up with the words, "Children are to be seen and not heard"?

19. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What is implied by these very significant words? How are you supposed to teach your children when "you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working"? Is that implying that we are supposed to be good examples in everything we do?
20. Do we always act as if we recognize the fact that if we are adults and a child is present, in effect, we are acting as a mentor? Do we recognize the fact that children will judge God based on what they think of us?
21. When considering what Jesus had in mind when He said we must become like little children, we need to remember that **the most important characteristic of children is their capacity for growth** in every area. If a child fails to grow physically, we are concerned. If he fails to grow mentally, we become alarmed! But, if he fails to grow spiritually, are we supposed to say, "That's wonderful"? Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3 and Ephesians 4:13-16. Children are supposed to grow up and become mature.
22. What were the temptations you struggled with as a child? During a few hours on Sabbath, is it possible for the church to have a major impact on the lives of our children? Or, do we need to think about activities during the week?
23. Read Proverbs 22:6. Is it true that if you "train a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not turn from it" (KJV)? Is this a promise that applies only to parents? Or, does it also apply to teachers and other responsible adults in the child's life? Or, would it be more correct to say that this is not a promise at all but a proverb. And what is a proverb? A proverb is a statement about the way things usually work.
24. Does your church have a plan for discipling children? Have you been a part of that plan? Or, do you think that is someone else's responsibility?
25. Are you comfortable in relating to children of a certain age? Why do you prefer that age?
26. Is it possible and even a good idea for conservative, adult Seventh-day Adventists to relax and have fun with children? Can we learn to be spontaneous and imaginative? Can we learn to play games with children, games that they enjoy? Remember that those children that you might be having fun with right now will one day be the responsible adults leading the church! Are we truly preparing them for that?

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