

Childlike Faith vs Childish Faith

Air Dates: March 21 - March 25, 2022

Day One

Is your faith childlike or childish? Jesus called a little child to him one day, and then said to his disciples: *“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3)*. But the Apostle Paul wrote: *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11)*.

In reading Philip Yancey’s book, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, I was struck by his thoughts on childlike faith versus childish faith. He writes, *“Somehow we must learn to distinguish between appropriate child-like behavior, a prerequisite for the kingdom of heaven, and inappropriate childish behavior, a mark of stunted growth” (page 214)*.

David gives us some insight into this in Psalm 131. He says, *“I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psalm 131:1b-2)*.

And so, a childlike faith is one that does not complicate issues. One that takes God at his word, even when failing to comprehend it. A childlike faith is unconcerned with all the details that are God’s responsibility, and rests in the assurance that the Heavenly Father has promised to supply all our needs.

For those of us who have raised children, we can easily distinguish childlike behavior from childish behavior. When our children are doing childlike things, we find them endearing, lovable. Those are the things we put in the baby book and tell grandma and grandpa. Childlike behavior is a beautiful part of the maturing process.

Childish behavior, on the other hand, is not so attractive. Those are the traits and characteristics we dutifully try to eliminate through teaching and correction.

We want to develop a childlike faith and eliminate a childish faith. Our Lord is looking for grown-up people with childlike faith. Does that describe you?

Day Two

We know from Scripture that without faith it is impossible to please God. And the kind of faith that pleases God is childlike faith. Frequently our faith is more childish than it is childlike. Our challenge is to nurture childlike faith and eliminate childish faith.

There are many examples in Scripture of childlike faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated childlike faith when they were facing that fiery furnace. They told King Nebuchadnezzar, *“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:17 – 18)*.

In childlikeness, these grown men, who were among the most intellectual and educated men of their time, chose not to concern themselves with the great matter of how God would deliver them from the furnace. They neither went into panic mode, nor into denial about the furnace in front of them.

They recognized the reality of their predicament, and then, without questioning or complaining or worrying, they chose to trust God in an uncomplicated, simple way. That is childlike faith.

Think of the centurion who approached Jesus about healing his servant. Think about Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, who asked Jesus to come heal his daughter. Think about Peter stepping out on the water to walk to Jesus. Their faith was childlike. They had no regard for what others thought about them nor did they worry about looking foolish.

In Luke 7 (verses 1-10) we read about the Roman Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his sick servant. Here was a Roman soldier who demonstrated great faith in Jesus, believing that he could heal his servant by just speaking a word, without even seeing the servant.

And when Jesus heard this, he said, "*I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel*" (Luke 1:9b). Jesus was amazed at his faith. It was a childlike faith, unconcerned about what others would think and willing to humbly ask Jesus to do what he could not do.

Ask yourself: Is my faith childlike or childish?

Day Three

Let's enumerate some childlike traits that are so appealing:

Childlike Trust

Children are naturally trusting. They believe you when you make a promise to them.

Childlike Innocence

Children will believe in things that adults find foolish. They have no difficulty believing in miracles. They have not become cynical or double-minded, but in their innocence, they believe fully and without hesitation.

Childlike Acceptance

If you offer a child a gift, they gladly and quickly accept it with great enthusiasm and joy.

Childlike Thankfulness

Children have no problem giving thanks for the ordinary things of life. Their prayers are full of thankfulness for dogs and clouds and their friend next door and new shoes.

Childlike Lack of Concern

You won't find many children worrying about the future. For the most part, they live in the moment and enjoy it to the fullest. They don't borrow trouble from tomorrow.

Examine your own walk with the Lord and ask yourself if you have the kind of childlike faith that Jesus said we all must have.

•Do you trust the Lord, regardless of what your eyes and ears may tell you? Have you learned to turn your doubts and unanswered questions over to him and simply trust? Maybe you have mistakenly thought that God was like your earthly father, who was not trustworthy, or some other authority figure in your life who has failed you.

- Is your faith an innocent one, taking Jesus at his Word? Or are you too worldly-wise and sophisticated to believe Jesus?
- Can you accept the gifts God gives you with a thankful heart and great joy, knowing that it comes from the Father's heart? Or do you try to repay God, to perform in order to gain his approval and his blessings?
- Are you aware each day of the daily blessings of your life? Do you live in daily thankfulness because of your daily blessings, or do you take them for granted?
- Can you in childlike faith let go of your worries about tomorrow and cast all your care upon the Lord? Or do you carry that heavy burden around with you all the time?

Is your faith childlike? Pray for childlike faith.

Day Four

What are some indications of childish faith?

Childish Faith Is Self-Focused

Children typically want everything their way. They are certain that the world revolves around them and they expect everything and everybody to run according to their plan.

Childish faith believes that God exists to fix everything in life for the believer. Childish faith expects God to make the rough places smooth all the time and take adversity out of life. Childish faith doesn't want to hear about suffering and growing pains and learning lessons. Childish faith expects God to act on our behalf, according to our plan and our timetable.

A mature faith comes to understand that life is not all about us and finding fulfillment and having every need met. It is all about God and bringing honor and glory to him.

Childish Faith Is Legalistic

Children need lots of rules to protect them. "Don't play in the street." "Don't play with matches." "Stay out of the pool." These are typical legal requirements that we place on children in order to keep them safe and protect them from their own inability to yet make wise decisions.

But as we grow, we jog in the streets and use matches to start fires and swim in pools and rivers freely, enjoying freedom because we have the maturity to use our freedom wisely.

If your faith is simply a formula that keeps you a slave to rules and regulations, your faith is childish.

Isaiah 29:13 says: "*The Lord says, 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.'*" That's a description of childish faith.

Ask God to show you any areas where your faith is childish.

Day Five

Have you ever met an adult who was childish? A person who is supposed to be grown up but yet behaves in childish ways is not someone we admire. Yet, many Christians have never grown up in their faith and their walk with God has many childish characteristics.

Peter wrote: *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good”* (1 Peter 2:2-3).

But in Hebrews we read: *“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil”* (Hebrews 5:13-14).

How would you describe faith that lives on milk? Well, these types of Christians are those who run from one person to another, one church to another, one event to another, looking for a new experience or seeking Christian entertainment. They want easy-to-digest teaching rather than in-depth study of God’s Word.

Another trait of childish faith is that is rooted in emotionalism instead of being rooted in truth. Emotions are fine; they are God-given gifts that we need. But if your faith is based on your feelings, it is a childish faith. It runs hot and cold, just like your feelings do. Childish faith is often a roller-coaster ride—up one day, down the next.

Christians living on milk are those who have no structured Bible study plan in their lives. They are no further in their walk with God this year than they were last year.

Immature, childish faith is characterized by being easily discouraged and giving up quickly. It expects to be served rather than to serve. Childish faith expects the church to meet its needs, instead of looking for ways to minister to others.

The Apostle Paul said that when he became a man, he put away childish things. I urge you to seriously pray for a childlike faith, and dedicate yourself to putting away the childish things. You don’t want to stay in that childish mode. I’m sure you want to grow up in Christ to full maturity and have a faith that has wonderful childlike qualities but is not childish.