

Children: Gift and Model

Mark 9:36-37, 42; 10:13-16

SS Lesson for 04/19/2026

Devotional Scriptures: Matt 10:40-42

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In today's text, Jesus speaks and models his lesson to the disciples. As the most significant role model in history, we seek to learn and imitate his values and ways.

Lesson Context: Historical

Our text lands between Peter's confession of Jesus, "Thou art the Christ" (Mark 8:29), and the triumphal entry (11:1-10). Sandwiched between these events are clarifying motifs defining God's kingdom as upside down and backward to natural human instinct. Examples of these motifs are the high cost of discipleship (10:21-22), the difficulties of wealth (10:24-31), and a redefinition of greatness (10:36-45). Throughout this section, Jesus

exalts the weak and lowly while humbling the powerful and proud. Just prior to today's text, Jesus and his disciples traveled the 25 miles between Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum (Mark 8:27; 9:33). Caesarea Philippi was a town in the hill country at the base of Mount Hermon. Capernaum was a small fishing village that Jesus used as the home base of his ministry on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:13). Capernaum is mentioned in all four Gospels and named more than any other town in the New Testament except Jerusalem. It is where the centurion asked for Jesus' help and where Jesus healed the paralytic who was dropped through the roof (8:5; Mark 2:1-12). In contrast, Scripture mentions Caesarea Philippi only twice: in Matthew 16:13 and its parallel in Mark 8:27.

Lesson Context: Children

In the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD, children held little significance. Adults viewed them as lacking reason and requiring training. The aim of their training was to learn their parents' business and duties. Their value was in their contribution to the family. In the extreme, children were considered property—to be nurtured or disposed of as the head of household determined. The same was true in Jewish households, but God also taught his people to consider children as a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). God instructed parents to teach Israel's faith to their children and train them properly in behavior and wisdom (Deuteronomy 11:19; 31:12-13; Proverbs 22:6). Still, they had little power or status.

Key Verse: Matt 10:15

Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Gift of Children (Mark 9:36-37, 42)

36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,

37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Gift of receiving children (36-37)

Receiving a child is like receiving Jesus (Matt 10:40-42)

40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

One must be like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3-4)

3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Receive a child because angels protect them (Matt 18:10)

10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Welcoming a child is like welcoming Jesus (Luke 9:48)

48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all — he is the greatest."

Gift of training children (42)

Train in godliness (Prov 22:6)

6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Train by seeking and using God's grace (Titus 2:11-13)

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Train by teaching how to mature in the faith (2 Peter 1:5-8)

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Train what has been godly learned (Ps 78:3-4)

3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done

Train in the Lord without exasperating the child (Eph 6:4)

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Model of Children (Mark 10:13-16)

13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

16 And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

Model of access to Jesus (13-14)

Access through God's call (Acts 2:39)

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Access through the way of Jesus (John 14:6)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Access through faith in Jesus (Eph 3:10-12)

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Access through Jesus as High Priest (Heb 4:15-16)

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Access through Jesus' body (Heb 10:19-22)

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Model of innocence (15)

Innocence that accepts maturing in God's word (Heb 5:12-13)

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

Innocence that accepts wise revelations (Matt 11:25)

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

Innocence that grows in salvation (1 Peter 2:2)

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Innocence that receives without full knowledge (1 Cor 3:2)

2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

Model of being blessed (16)

Blessings from a father for a godly future (Gen 48:14-16)

14 But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the Angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."

Blessings from the good shepherd (Isa 40:11)

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Blessings to enable obedience (Deut 28:2-4)

2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Blessings received because of righteous parents (Prov 20:7)

7 The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

2. The pitfalls of discipleship 9:33-50

Jesus next taught His disciples lessons dealing with the dangers that threatened their effectiveness as His disciples. These were the desire for greatness, the folly of a sectarian attitude, and failure in self-discipline. They would suffer as He would. Moreover their suffering would threaten their unity with Jesus and with one another.

"Jesus warned against the spirit of elitism that can exist within a ministry team and between ministry teams. The answer to elitism from within is to have a servant's heart, and the answer to elitism toward outsiders is to recognize the unity of the family of God that transcends smaller groups of ministry." [Note: Bailey, p. 84.]

Verse 35

By seating Himself, Jesus assumed the traditional position of a rabbi. He taught them that greatness in His kingdom depends on sacrificial service. All three synoptic evangelists recorded His words, indicating the importance of this lesson.

"The spirit of service is the passport to eminence in the Kingdom of God, for it is the spirit of the Master Who Himself became diakonos panton ["servant of all"]." [Note: Swete, p. 205.]

The Greek word for servant, diakonos, describes someone who serves willingly. It does not describe the servile status of such a person, which doulos (slave) suggests. The desire to excel need not be unspiritual (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1). However it must include willingness to put the welfare of others before selfish interests. [Note: See Santos, pp. 20-23, 25.]

Verses 36-37

A child was the least significant person in Jewish and in Greco-Roman culture. [Note: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "pais," by Albrecht Oepke, 5:639-52.] By using a child as His object lesson, Jesus was saying that service involves caring about people, even insignificant people such as children. The same Aramaic word means both "child" and "servant." [Note: Lane, p. 340.]

"Jesus was one of the first ever to see how essentially precious any person is, particularly a young child. A concern for children was not invented by the welfare state: it goes back to the teaching of Jesus." [Note: Moule, p. 75.]

Jesus proceeded to compare the humblest of His disciples to the child (cf. Mark 9:42). This was the focus of Jesus' teaching that Matthew recorded (cf. Matthew 18:3-14).

Verse 38

This is the only place where the synoptic writers mentioned John speaking out alone. John spoke for the other disciples in the house (Mark 9:33).

Evidently the exorcist was a believer in Jesus though not one of the Twelve or possibly not even one who spent much time following Jesus around. He evidently commanded demons to leave the people they afflicted by using Jesus' name. The Twelve apparently did not mind that this man claimed Jesus' authority to exorcize demons. They objected to his actions because Jesus had not commissioned him to do so as He had the Twelve (Mark 3:14-15). Perhaps his success and the recent failure of the nine disciples irritated them further. In view of what Jesus had just said about receiving little children, John wondered if the Twelve had done right in rebuking the man. They had tried to protect Jesus' honor by rebuking him (cf. Numbers 11:26-29).

"It is striking . . . that after each of the three major prophecies of the passion the evangelist inserts the response of one of the three disciple who were closest to Jesus: Peter (Ch. Mark 8:32 f.), John (Ch. Mark 9:38), and James, with John (Ch. Mark 10:35-37). Mark shows in this way that even the most privileged of the disciples failed to understand what the passion signified for their life and mission." [Note: Lane, p. 342.]

The folly of a sectarian attitude 9:38-42 (cf. Matthew 18:6-7; Luke 9:49-50)

Verses 39-40

Jesus did not mind that the man was casting out demons by invoking His name. Since the man had such respect for Jesus he would not speak against Him soon. By casting out demons he showed that he was not against Jesus. Jesus expressed the opposite truth in Matthew 12:30: "He who is not with me is against me." There is no neutral ground regarding one's orientation to Jesus. Jesus' point was that the disciples should not view the exorcist as an antagonist just because he was not part of their group. He was doing God's will and would not oppose them.

Verse 41

The connecting idea with what precedes is the "name." Not only would the exorcist receive God's blessing, but anyone who does anything to help another person using even the name of a disciple of Jesus would receive His reward. This help extends to the almost insignificant act of giving a cup of cold water to some thirsty person. This act was much less helpful than delivering from demonic affliction.

This is one of the rare occasions when Jesus used the title "Messiah" of Himself. His use of it here makes the lesson even more forceful. The person giving the cup of cold water might have only a superficial understanding of Jesus. Nonetheless if that person offered simple hospitality to one of Jesus' disciples because he was a disciple of "Messiah" that one would receive God's blessing.

Verse 42

This verse gives the other side of the idea just expressed. Anyone who discouraged a disciple of Jesus from following Him faithfully could expect severe treatment from God. Probably Jesus used the little child present to illustrate a childlike disciple (Mark 9:36-37; cf. Matthew 18:3-14). Jesus referred to a large donkey-driven millstone (Gr. *mylos onikos*), not a small one that people turned by hand (Gr. *mylos*). The Romans had so drowned some insurrectionists in Galilee (cf. Acts 5:37), and a group of the Galileans had so dealt with some of Herod's supporters. [Note: *Ibid.*, p. 346; Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* 1:67; Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 14:15:10.] The disciples had probably heard about these events.

"This brief incident stands as a firm rebuke to the spirit of sectarianism. It condemns that exclusive attitude which insists that only those who carry on their work in harmony with our own views and practices can be accepted as really doing God's work. If they demonstrate that they are on God's side in the war with Satan, even though their views may be imperfect, they must not be condemned for such work or regarded with abhorrence." [Note: Hiebert, p. 231.]

John evidently learned this lesson well as evidenced by the frequent references to loving one another that appear in his writings.

(Adapted from URL: <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/mark-9.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Culture teaches us that the "good life" is for the smart, powerful, and accomplished. This concept is a constant refrain heralded by academia, work environments, media, and social circles. Even our children express this outlook—bragging about how good they are at something, how well they do in school, or how much bigger they are than younger siblings. This behavior points to social and cultural values that promote competition and comparison to determine who's in and who's not. Jesus' point is quite the opposite. Jesus teaches a nonhierarchical mindset among his followers. He challenges his disciples to recalibrate their values and embrace a new kingdom mindset. Jesus encourages unity, service, and childlike faith. He calls his people to accept entry into his kingdom with the delight of a child receiving a gift. To be sure, there are childish attitudes and actions we must avoid, correct, or otherwise put behind us (1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20; Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:2). Knowing what those are and how to grow beyond them while honoring and embracing Jesus' viewpoint is our continuing challenge. How might you adjust your goals, vantage points, and perceptions to better align with Jesus' directives? In what ways might you embrace childlikeness, vulnerability, innocence, and trust on a day-to-day basis?