

Seen but not heard...



What constitutes the value of a child? Parents dream big dreams about the future of their children and work hard to provide for their education in order to pursue a specific career.

For many, the child has value only in the potential of what that child might become (or how it may benefit adults), instead of appreciating the inherent and intrinsic value of the child.

Children's rights are regularly on the agendas of policy makers, but according to the media we see that children often have very little or no value in the eyes of the very people in whose care they are – with incidents of family violence, molestation, rapes and murders.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 18:5 is in sharp contrast with this, when He said: *"And whosoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."*

It can therefore be said, by implication, that if we do not accept children in the same spirit as that in which Jesus accepted them, then we also do not accept Him (or that which He wants us to do)!

On what does one base the value of a child who crosses your path? On what does one base the value and opportunities of children in the Church?

According to Judith Gundry-Volf¹, Jesus identifies himself with children for four reasons:

- Jesus identifies children as primary objects of care and service by his disciples. As vulnerable and dependent ones, children should be served with humility by anyone who is seeking to be great in the reign of God.
- Children are identified as co-recipients and model entrants into the reign of God. They are receivers of God's reign primarily because, along with the poor and the oppressed, they are lacking in social status: they bring nothing and simply depend on the goodness of God to uphold them. Children also exemplify the right way of receiving God's reign in their attitude of trusting dependence.
- Children are those who have true insight into spiritual things, for God reveals to infants what is hidden from the learned. The spiritual insight of children does not rest on their education, but on their openness to being vehicles of divine revelation.
- Children actually represent Jesus, so that those who receive children gladly, also receive Jesus and God.

According to William Barclay² *"in my Name"* can have two possible meanings:

- *...for My sake.* Nurturing children is something which is being done for the sake of Christ. Teaching children, and raising them in the ways in which he must live his life, is not done only for the sake of the child, but also for the sake of Jesus himself.
- *...with a blessing ...*receives the child, and in this way actually proclaims the Name of Jesus over the child. Those who bring Jesus and his blessings to a child, are doing a work that Christ wants to have done.

To help the child to live correctly and to get to know God better, is to help to serve Jesus Christ. This can also mean to recognize Christ in a child.

Children should not only be seen, but taken notice of and should be heard. (Also read sub-article on p. 1)

1. J.M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. M.J. Bunge, 29-60.

2. William Barclay, *Matthew Vol 2*, p177-178.