

# Life Lessons from Jesus part 1.

## Luke 9:46-48

Some of you have read the little book by Robert Fulgum entitled, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. In this book Fulgum asserts simpler is better—and if we would all just apply the things we learned in kindergarten, our society would be a better place to live. Here are some of the things he says we ought to do:

1. Play fair
2. Share everything
3. Clean up your own mess
4. Put things back where you found them
5. Don't hit others
6. Say you're sorry when you hurt someone
7. Flush
8. Hold hands and stay together

That's pretty good advice and I think we all ought to do those things but I gently disagree with Fulgum's title and his thesis, for two reasons. First, I have trouble with the word "all." I learned a lot in kindergarten but that's not *all* I really need to know. There are some very important life truths we don't absorb in kindergarten. My other objection to the title is the word "learned"—it's in the past tense. It infers learning is something that can be finished. And I believe all of life is a learning process. I would like to revise his title and thesis along these lines: "All I Really Need to Know, I *Learn* as I Walk Jesus." But Robert Fulgum and Jesus *do* agree on one very important point. As adults, we need to recapture a childlike approach to life. In the last verses of Luke 9, as Jesus is walking along with His disciples, He gives them some important life lessons. As we walk with Jesus today, He is trying to teach us the same lessons. Beginning in Luke 9:46, we read:

- 46 Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.
- 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him,
- 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."

Jesus teaches His disciples at least three lessons in this passage: a lesson about greatness; a lesson about acceptance; and a lesson about revenge. In each of these life lessons we will learn something about Jesus and something about ourselves. Today we'll spend most of our time on this first lesson.

In Luke chapter nine, Jesus has been teaching His disciples and demonstrating to His disciples who He is. Think about the mighty things that Jesus did in this chapter. In verses 1-6 Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He gave them the power and authority to do some of the

amazing things that they had seen Him do. In verses 10-17 Jesus feeds five thousand people with five little loaves of bread and two fish. Everyone had their fill and the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers. In verses 27-36 Jesus took three of His disciples up on a mountain where He was transfigured into His true glorious nature; He talked with Moses and Elijah; and God the Father spoke out of the cloud. In verses 37-45 Jesus healed a demon-possessed boy when the disciples were powerless to do it.

Now anybody who could do all those things we would surely call great, right? We would say that Jesus had power, authority, wisdom and compassion. But even though Jesus was powerful, wise and did amazing miracles—that is not all of who Jesus is. In verse 43 after Jesus had just demonstrated His power by healing the boy, they are all standing there, **“amazed at the majesty of God.”** But look at the second half of verse 43 together with verse 44, **“But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, ‘Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.’”**

Jesus echoes what He taught His disciples earlier in this chapter. You see, right in the middle of all His demonstration of power and authority Jesus makes this startling statement in verse 22, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”**

Even though Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one of God; even though He had power and authority over diseases and demons; even though He was truly majestic and glorious; Jesus came to die. His mission as the Messiah was to be betrayed, to suffer, to be rejected, and to be killed. Jesus’ greatness would not be demonstrated in a military conquest. It would be demonstrated on a cross on which He suffered and died and by a tomb from which He arose from the dead.

Jesus’ path was one of humility, as Paul says in Philippians 2, **“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”**

Jesus’ path was one of servanthood so He says in Mark 10:45, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**

Jesus’ path was one of sacrifice as He says in John 10:11, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”**

This is what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ of God: servanthood, humility, and sacrifice.

But in verse 45 we see the problem. The disciples did not understand all this. There Luke says, **“But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.”**

These disciples had completely missed the point. They did not understand Jesus’ nature or His mission. So it is no surprise then that the very next thing we see from the disciples is completely out of place with who Jesus is and what He came

to do. In verse 46 the disciples have an argument over who is the greatest:  
**“Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.”**

This argument was fueled by their continuing ignorance about the true nature and purpose of Jesus. They still thought Jesus would overthrow the Romans and set up a literal kingdom. They were jockeying for position in that kingdom—who would be the vice Messiah, who would be the prime minister, who would sit next to Jesus. It’s one of the worst aspects of our human nature. We all possess this drive for selfish ambition that we want to promote ourselves to the positions of power and prominence.

One of Dr. Seuss’s had some insight into the folly of the human desire for greatness. Listen to the story of “Yertle the Turtle”:

On a far away island of Salamasond,  
Yertle the turtle was king of the pond.  
A nice little pond. It was clean. It was neat.  
The water was warm, there was plenty to eat.  
Until - one day - the king of them all  
decided the kingdom he ruled was too small.  
“I’m a ruler of all that I see.  
But I don’t see enough and that’s the trouble with me.”  
“With this stone for a throne I am too low down  
I cannot look down upon the places beyond.”  
So Yertle the turtle king lifted his hand,  
and Yertle the turtle king gave a command.  
He ordered nine turtles to swim to his stone  
and, using these turtles, he built a new throne.  
He made each turtle stand on another’s back;  
and he piled them all up in a 9 turtle stack.  
Then Yertle climbed up. He sat down on the pile.  
What a wonderful view! He could see ‘most a mile!  
“All mine!” Yertle cried. “Oh the things I now rule.  
I’m king of a cow. I’m king of a mule!  
I’m king of a house! And, what’s more, beyond that  
I’m king of a blueberry bush and a cat!  
I’m Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me!  
For I am the ruler of all that I see!”

As the story of Yertle the Turtle progresses, Yertle wants to be more and more powerful. He wants to rise higher so that he can see more and to rule over more. Then, he notices the moon rising above him as the night approaches. And looking at the moon, he says:

“What’s THAT?” snorted Yertle. “Say, what IS that thing  
That dares to be higher than Yertle the King?  
I shall not allow it! I’ll go higher still!  
I’ll build my throne higher! I can and I will!  
I’ll call some more turtles. I’ll stack ‘em to heaven!  
I need ‘bout 5000, 600 and 7!”

And then as he starts to get that done - in an echo of God's statement that "**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall**" (Proverbs 16:18) - the bottom turtle burps, and the entire tower of turtles come tumbling down leaving Yertle the Turtle as the King of nothing but mud.

Yertles like us need the lesson Jesus teaches His Yertle disciples.

### **LESSON ONE: GREATNESS (vs. 46-48)**

Jesus knew the disciples were arguing over this issue, but instead of rebuking them, He used a living object lesson to teach them the truth about greatness. He called a little child and set the boy next to Himself while all these grown men are watching. Jesus told the disciples that to be really great, they would have to become like this little child. In verse 48 Jesus says to His arguing disciples, "**Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.**"

Here are two great lessons:

#### **1. Jesus Loves and Welcomes Children.**

We know Jesus loved kids and they loved Him. We read in Mark 10 some children tried to see Jesus, but some of the disciples try to shoo them away from the busy Master. When Jesus saw this, He became agitated, even indignant. He rebuked the disciples saying, "**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**" (Mark 10:14) Then He took the children in His arms and put His hands on them and blessed them.

Jesus' attitude toward children was not common in His day. In the Roman culture, children were considered property and many were simply killed at birth if they weren't quite perfect. Even among the Jews, it was unusual for an adult to pay attention to children. Children in that day were often not valued. They were the smallest and most insignificant group in Jewish society. The Talmud said spending time with a child was a waste of time. One rabbi actually wrote "Morning sleep, midday wine, chattering with children ... destroy a man." Yertle type people aren't interested in little kids. They're ok to kiss on the campaign stops... but beyond that they're not of much use to important folks.

But Jesus didn't agree with that attitude. He welcomed children into His arms.

I loved children and love working with children. One of my favorite weeks of the year is the week we do Vacation Bible School. Nothing blesses my heart more than to kneel down and to hug a child or to have one of our children or to hear a child pray.

As I drive through these neighborhoods around our building I see dozens of kids out playing in the yards and the streets. I wonder if they know Jesus. I wonder if they go to church anywhere. We have got to be a church that actively loves children and introduces them to Jesus.

I want to say THANK YOU to those of you who have heard God's call to work with children. You have helped teach Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

Right now we need some help teaching the kids on Wednesday nights. We don't want to just fill that ministry with a warm body. I know that God calls His people to serve and He empowers His people with gifts to serve. We want folks who have sensed a call from God to work with these precious kids and to show them the love of Jesus. Some of you don't feel comfortable standing up before a bunch of adults and teaching the Bible. Well you may be a perfect candidate to work with children. What do you need? You need to be a good hugger; you need to be able to sit in those small chairs, you need to have a love for Jesus and a love for kids and you've got to have a good sense of humor. You need a servant's heart.

Some of you have been attending this church for some time, being blessed. Now it's time for you to *be* a blessing. A great way to do it is to welcome and love children, the way Jesus did. If you think God is calling you to work with kids, I want you to personally tell me today. Just say, "Pastor, I want to work with kids." And we will help you get started.

Jesus says when we receive a little child in His name, we receive Him.

That's a lesson about Jesus, now let's learn a lesson about us:

## **2. To Be Great We Must Be the Least.**

**God's view of greatness is different than this world's.** Throughout history, there have been many people who were great. Some even took the title. There was Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, Catherine the Great, and Peter the Great. Just like the disciples of Jesus, our human nature strives to be "the greatest."

Americans are obsessed with greatness. The losing World Series team doesn't go around saying, "We're number two! We're number two!" No, it's number one or nothing for Americans. That was the attitude of the ambitious apostles. They were arguing over who would be number one among their group. They were jockeying for power, position, and prestige. The attitude of wanting to be the greatest can be summarized in one word: PRIDE. Pride is the attitude which makes you *want* to be the greatest, and the attitude that makes you think you are *better* than others.

Pride is the attitude that makes you think more highly of yourself than you should. Pride was the sin that caused Lucifer to fall. He had "I" trouble. He said, "I will ascend to the throne of God. I will make myself like the Most High. I will be as great as God." But God cast him down. The Bible says, "**God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.**" (James 4:6) Are you guilty of pride? Let me ask you some diagnostic questions to help you see if pride has crept into your life:

1. Do I continually think about myself?
2. Do I continually use the personal pronoun "I" in most of my conversations?
3. Do I listen hungrily to what people say about me?
4. Do I insist people respect me?
5. Do I sulk if people are not grateful for favors I have shown them?

6. Do I remember every service I may have rendered and expect to be appreciated?
7. Am I sensitive to slights. Am I jealous, or envious?
8. Do I dwell on criticisms?

Consider the way Jesus stated it in Matthew's account: He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, "**Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**" (Matthew 18:2-4 NIV) We must *change*. That means *repent* and become like little children again.

Jesus tells us that if we're going to impress Him, we need to be receive children.

- Receive people who can't contribute anything to make the church strong & influential.
- Receive children who are too young to fix things, or teach, or lead singing
- Receive widows who are too poor to contribute to the church budget
- Receive anyone who is too weak or crippled or handicapped to be able to repay our kindnesses.

We need to be like a child and realize the very next breath we take is a gift from God. The next beat of our heart is a gift from God. Every dollar we ever earn is because God has given us the ability to work. We must have that kind of complete dependence on God.

Do you have a childlike attitude? That's what true greatness is in the eyes of God.

Jesus used this boy because he WASN'T that important. Jesus didn't ask him over because of what he knew, or what he could do, or because of what he owned, or what he could give Jesus. This boy's value lay in his willingness to obey. He did exactly what Jesus told him to do. The little boy came to Jesus and allowed himself to be used.

When we're willing to humble ourselves to the point where we think of ourselves as having little value within ourselves, but instead come before God with the gentle openness of a little child ... then God can use us.

Jesus said: "**everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**" Luke 14:11