

1 **The Prodigious Children of God**

- How to welcome God in our lives?

2 **Scripture**

- They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. (Mark 9:30 NIV)
- He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. (Mark 9:31–32 NIV)

3 **Scripture**

- They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. (Mark 9:33–34 NIV)
- Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” (Mark 9:35 NIV)

4 **Scripture**

- He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:36–37 NIV)

5 **Prodigious Children**

- In 2014, the Lifetime channel took a break from airing movies about women in peril.
- Instead, they sponsored an intelligence contest called Child Genius that offered a coveted prize of a \$100,000 college fund along with bragging rights for being the smartest kid of the year.

6 **Prodigious Children**

- The show followed 20 gifted kids from around the country as they prepared for the competition.
- They were given 16 rigorous tests on subjects like math and geography.
- They were tested on memorization.
- And, of course, the show featured a lot of "hovercraft" parenting, sobbing children and high doses of performance anxiety.

7 **Prodigious Children**

- The winner was 13-year-old Vanya Shivashankar of Olathe, Kansas, who was also headed to the Scripps National Spelling Bee for the fourth straight year.

8 **Prodigious Children**

- Kids with an IQ approaching that of an Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, and Pastor McCowan are often known as “child prodigies,” or kids whose brains function on a level equal to or better than most adults.
- Last year, in fact, Paulius Zobotka, a 14-year-old in the United Kingdom, scored two points higher on an IQ test than either Einstein or Hawking -- a brain-bending 162 on the scale, or the highest score possible for those under age 18.
- His mother, who clearly has a gift for understatement, said, “Everything he does, he seems to be so good at.”

9 **Bumper sticker**

10 **Prodigious Children**

- History reveals a number of such child prodigies.
- Blaise Pascal, the 17th-century mathematician, wrote a treatise on vibrating bodies at age 9.
- Mozart and Beethoven were musical geniuses at early ages, and Pablo Picasso painted Picador when he was 8 years old.
- Bobby Fisher won eight straight national chess championships beginning at the age of 13 before famously beating Boris Spassky for the World Chess Championship in 1972.

11 **Quotes from Blaise Pascal**

- There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.
- Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much.
- The strength of a man's virtue should not be measured by his special exertions, but by his habitual acts.
- Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.
- All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.

12 **Wunderkind**

- The German word for these young geniuses is wunderkind, or kids who are natural wonders.
- That would have been a curious designation in Jesus' day, when children weren't even really considered to be people until they reached the age of 13 and went through the rite of passage to adulthood.
- At that point, they were expected to function like adults, having survived their early years in an ancient culture with a high rate of childhood mortality.
- No child prodigy awards, and no scholarships for these kids.

13 **Wunderkind**

- Of course, we could argue that Jesus himself was a child prodigy, given Luke's description of the 12-year-old Jesus dazzling the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:41-52).

- Perhaps that's why Jesus seemed to be so fond of children, seeing in them the capacity for great things, despite their humble status.

14 **Wunderkind**

- Jesus' adult disciples, on the other hand, are acting like a bunch of spoiled children with the IQ of a bag of hammers.
- In today's text, Jesus and the disciples are on the way back to Galilee from the mountain where Jesus was transfigured (vv. 2-13), and where the disciples had an argument with a man whose son was beset with an evil spirit (vv. 14-29).
- Instead of being able to deliver the boy, Jesus had to step in and do the job Himself.

15 **The Twelve**

- This should have humbled the twelve, but on the road they got into a childish argument on who among them was the greatest.
- Jesus had to nip this right in the bud ASAP because when individuals are thinking more of themselves than they should not only does it become self-delusional, but it also creates division, strife, and conflict.
- For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:16 NIV)

16 **People's Opinions of Themselves**

- I was listening to a talk radio show the other day and they were talking about a recent survey on people's opinions about themselves.
- The questions were as follows . . .
 - Do you feel you're a better driver than the average person?
 - Do you feel you're smarter than the average person?
 - Do you feel you're funnier than the average person?
 - Do you feel you're better looking than the average person?

17 **People's Opinions of Themselves**

- The result of the survey was as follows and may surprise you.
 - 91% of people think they're better than the average driver.
 - 84% of people think they're smarter than the average person.
 - 80% of people think they're funnier than the average person.
 - 72% of people think they're better looking than the average person.
- According to the social sciences, this problem of thinking too highly of ourselves is referred to as "illusory superiority," which according to the experts is the result of having bias blind spots in our lives.

18 The Object Lesson

- Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” (Mark 9:35 NIV)
- He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:36–37 NIV)

19 Children as Object Lessons

- Jesus interacted with children on many occasions in the New Testament.
- Twice in the Gospel of Mark, He used children as object lessons.
 - In chapter 10, He tells his disciples that they must become like little children to receive the Kingdom of God, and
 - Here, in chapter 9, He tells his disciples that to welcome little children is to welcome Him.

20 Children and Status

- Children had no status in first-century Jewish culture. Social rank was very stratified, and it was hard to move from a lower rank to a higher one.
- The disciples seemed to see their association with Jesus as a potential elevator, whereby their own social status would shoot to a higher floor.
- If he was truly the Messiah, Israel’s king, then those who were closest to him would most certainly rank high in his kingdom and, perhaps, even score a box seat near the throne in Jerusalem.
- Later in Mark, James and John ask this very thing, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” (Mark 10:37 NIV)

21 Status in God’s Kingdom

- The wunderkinds in Jesus’ kingdom aren’t the ones with the highest scores or the genius titles, but the ones who willingly volunteer to serve everyone—regardless of status.
- It’s not about the intelligence test so much as it is about the test of servanthood.
- So when Jesus takes a child in His arms, it is to represent this important point that we are never so important where we don’t need to stoop down and serve others—even those with low status and influence.
- “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matt 25:40 NIV)

22 Welcoming God

- There is also something else that is very important in this lesson tonight as well—especially when we look at verse 37.
- “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:37 NIV)
- The spiritual truth here that many neglect is how servanthood is a door that welcomes the Holy Spirit activity in our lives.
- Therefore, don’t think more highly of yourselves because ministry—even to nobodies and people with low status welcomes and fosters God’s activity in our lives.

23 Welcoming God

- In other words, the most prodigious of his disciples are not those who cultivate relationships with the high and influential, but the ones who are willing to minister to all both high and low alike.
- The byproduct of such faith is a deeper relationship with God.

24 Favoritism

- Believe it or not showing favoritism—that is the practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group at the expense of another is highly criticized in the Bible.
- In fact, God goes out of his way to show that He is no respecter of people—as it relates to status, wealth, and position in society.
- For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. (Deut 10:17–18 NIV)

25 Favoritism

- The Bible is clear that favoritism is not God’s will for our lives.
 - First, favoritism is incongruent with God’s character: “God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11).
 - All are equal before Him. Ephesians 6:9 says, “There is no favoritism with him.”
 - Colossians 3:25 teaches God’s fairness in judgment: “Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.”

26 Favoritism

- The Bible teaches Christians are not to show favoritism as well.
- My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. (James 2:1 NIV)
- The context concerns the treatment of rich and poor in the church. James points out that treating someone differently based on his financial status or how he is dressed is wrong.

- If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (James 2:8–9 NIV)

27 Favoritism

- To get an idea of how bad favoritism was to the Apostle Paul, observe the seriousness of his tone to Timothy in the following directive.
- I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. (1 Tim 5:21 NIV)
- To mention not only God but the elect angels as well suggests how important fairness is to God in the governing of His church and kingdom.
- God proving Himself to be good, fair, and just is at the heart of His redemptive work here on the earth.

28 Summary

- So then, let us be willing to associate with people no matter their status.
- Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Rom 12:16 NIV)
- When we do, we also welcome the Spirit of the living God in our lives—growing in our knowledge of Him—developing the mind of Christ.

29 Conclusion

- When Jesus held a little child in His arms, it was to teach His disciples not to show favoritism.
- In other words, they will never reach the point in their lives where they don’t need to be servants and minister to the needs of both high and low.
- As humans, we tend to form judgments based on selfish, personal criteria rather than seeing others as God sees them.
- We will do well to keep this in mind as the Lord gives us strength because when we have done it to the least of God’s people we have done it unto him. (Matt 25:45)
- He who does so, will be great in God’s kingdom and a prodigious (exceedingly great) child of God.