

Overcoming the reliance trap!

Breakthrough Christianity:

Luke 18:15-17

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Thirty-five hundred years ago, God directed Moses to appoint his brother Aaron as priest. Aaron wore special clothes that carried the names of twelve families when he offered sacrifices and prayers. Each Israelite came from one of those families. Thirty-five years ago, I heard my parents carry the names of their congregation's families to the Lord, not on their clothes but in their prayers. Daily they named them and prayed for breakthroughs. One student experienced a breakthrough while away at college. Tom discovered the love of Jesus through a campus ministry. His heart was on fire, and my parents were so excited. They invited Tom to share his story with the congregation. Although he had grown up under my father's preaching, Tom said that he had never heard the gospel until it was explained on campus. Some preachers would have taken offense, but my parents believed that there is a spiritual deafness that must be removed for people to hear and respond to the gospel. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. (2 Corinthians 4:4, NLT)

The young man was truthful. He had not heard the gospel. That did not mean it was not preached. It meant he had not heard it. It made no sense to him. That experience is so common that I can't begin to count the numbers of people who have echoed that very thing to me. Elderly have experienced breakthroughs in prayer ministry or in courses like ALPHA. They often say

with tears, “How I wished I would have known and could have shared this relationship with my children when I was raising them.” Fortunately, their present relationship with God and their prayers will now make a difference in the lives of their children and grandchildren. One young man experienced a personal breakthrough in ALPHA. He compared his experience to learning math. He said that the teacher could talk until he’s blue in the face and you still wouldn’t get it. Then one day something clicked and he understood math. That’s also what happens with Christ.

That click is not random or chance. It is a work of God. Right now, there are people praying for you and me, asking God to lift any deafness to his voice or blindness to his work so that “click” happens to us, not just in our relationship but in the truths God wants to reveal. Since these teams began praying two years ago during our worship services, that “click” or understanding has come to so many. Before I had prayer partners like this, I identified with the disciples who fished all night and came up with nothing. That described a lot of my preaching. It was sincere. It was earnest. It provoked thought. It may have entertained. It may have even enlightened some, but there were few breakthroughs until people joined me in prayer.

Today I want to point you to something you can do, beyond the prayers people pray for you, that will that will bring breakthroughs. Let’s reflect on a challenge our Lord Jesus gave us.

Parents had heard Jesus talk. They had witnessed his ministry to wounded and crippled people. They saw his compassion. They observed the healing and freedom that resulted from those he touched. They themselves weren’t sick. They weren’t afflicted by anything haunting. Their families were healthy. Their lives were stable, but some father or mother or both of them together thought of their precious little one and wiggled their way to Jesus. When he put hands on that little infant or toddler, other parents rushed up. They wanted Jesus to bless their most precious possession. As Jesus put his hands on these children, there were no visible results. No

eyes opened, no lame stood up, no demons screamed, no ears were open. The crowds were not taught. The disciples were not challenged, and they thought that this must be a waste of time. They thought these parents were interfering with Jesus' business, or at least they were interfering with his priorities. Jesus challenged them. He said that these little ones are his business. The work that was healing the wounded and instructing the hungry also had power for the infants who were not sick. Although they were not sick, nor could they understand his words, this kingdom power was for them. It was their portion. It belonged to them, so Jesus told his disciples: "Don't hinder these children. Let them come. The kingdom of God belongs to ones such as these.

There are a couple lessons in this. *First, part of the work of God is invisible to us.* When blind people open their eyes, that is visible. When people hungry for counsel receive it, that's visible. However, when you lay your hands on healthy children and bless them, that's invisible. The evidence of Christ's kingdom power was not clearly seen by the disciples and that's why they thought it was a waste of time. The evidence wasn't seen, but Jesus affirmed that it was there. Can you imagine the kingdom power released by believers in our church nursery when they in faith rock and hold infants and toddlers in their arms and pray for them? Those acts of care and prayer change destinies with the same power that stunned the world in the first century. That's worship for the whole family. I covet that kind of care for your little ones. *Second, the power of God to change lives is not contained by our thinking.* It's so much greater. You and I can't comprehend it. That's why Jesus corrected his disciples, and that's also why Jesus issued this challenge. He said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18:17, NIV)

This statement by Jesus is so important that he introduced it in a special way. He used the Hebrew term “amen.” He began, “Amen” I say to you. John remembers Jesus using those words repetitively: “Amen, amen, I say to you.” Every time Jesus begins a statement with “amen,” John writes in his gospel, “amen, amen.” The English translators of the King James Version would translate, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” Matthew, Mark and Luke stuck to just one “amen.” The significance is this. Jesus wanted the statement that followed to stick out. He wanted to assure his listeners that what followed was bedrock truth, crucial truth to put your confidence in and build your life on. He didn’t want you passing it up. With that in mind, this is what Jesus said:

Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18:17, NIV)

Why do you suppose Jesus wanted his listeners to especially hear that statement and then act upon it? Something about what was happening that day with the little children was vital to the adults. Something about what was going on with those little kids was essential to the experience and future of those adult. I’m convinced that it is not any less essential to us.

As children grow up, they become more self-reliant. I recall the story of a father who was going to superglue a toy for his son. The son had just used some glue in school; and so without asking, he took the project away from his dad, ran to another room and tried gluing it. Within a minute, his father heard the child’s cries. The toy, the tube and his fingers were all glued together. The boy knew something about glue, but not superglue. What the little boy thought he knew prevented him from seeking the knowledge he needed. What about you and me? Could we be like that little boy? We might know a good deal about superglue, but are there other areas where we think we have knowledge, and it prevents us from learning. In my experience it is what I think I know that always gets in the way of really knowing. Was not Jesus saying that

spiritually? You disciples think you know what's going on here. You've been with me for a time and so you think you have perspective, but you are still clueless. How many of us think we really know what's going with God and our lives? Could we be clueless?

Two things those babies and toddlers lacked were *pride* and *fear*. Their *pride* did not make them self reliant. It did not trap them so that they were isolated. Although they had little understanding, they were willing to receive whatever Christ offered. They saw no stigma in seeking and receiving. Second, if the toddlers had *fear*, their parents' reassurance was enough to help them embrace Jesus. *Fear* did not prevent them from seeking and receiving.

One day a husband brought his wife Mary to my office. When Mary walked in, she saw her two daughters, her boss and a woman she did not recognize. Immediately Mary's face tensed. I told her the woman was from an alcohol treatment center. I pulled out from my closet a garbage bag full of liquor bottles that the daughters and husband had collected in the last month. Mary had been hiding them, but they had retrieved them from the trash and different places. One by one, each family member and the boss confronted Mary with the concern they had and how they were affected by her drinking. She resisted. I was afraid she'd run out the door. Tears gushed as her daughters told Mary their hurt. Finally, Mary was ready to receive. She went with the lady from the treatment center even though she had no idea what would follow. Mary just realized that her own knowledge and efforts were not enough. Only when Mary was like those little children who were ready to receive could she be helped.

Jesus said that *you don't even get to square one with God until like those children you are ready to receive*. When it comes to spiritual things, are you like the little boy who thought he knew all about superglue? Are you trying to work things out by yourself? Are you keeping Jesus at a distance? Are you afraid? Is your pride in the way? Jesus awaits you.