

COMPASSION SUNDAY:
IT BEGINS WITH A CHILD...



SERMON: **DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE:** Children Nobody Wants

By Greg Nettle, Senior Pastor, RiverTree Christian Church Jan. 16, 2008

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We're going to continue with our series today, "Dealing With Difficult People," and this morning we want to talk about the topic, "Children That Nobody Wants." "Children Nobody Wants."

Now, I know you, as parents, may have felt occasionally like you have children that nobody wants, but most of the time that's probably not true. For me, when we talk about difficult people and children nobody wants, that's almost an unimaginable phrase. I mean, how can there — how can that even be possible to have children that nobody wants? But doing some research over the past few days, right now in the state of Ohio alone, there are more than 3,000 children — about 3,500 children waiting to be adopted, right in our state, children that nobody wants.

The Christian Children's Home of Ohio and International that we partner with as well right now — I was talking about them yesterday — they have more than 80 children down there at the children's home, children that nobody wants. The pregnant support center, in talking with them — another synergy partnership for us as a church — each year, hundreds of women come to the pregnant support center considering abortion, to get council for that, hundreds a year, children that nobody wants. And so in spite of that being an unimaginable phrase to most of us, it's a real issue that we need to face head on as Christians and do what Jesus would do.

If you'd go ahead and open your Bibles right now to the Book of Mark, second book in the New Testament. The Book of Mark. We're gonna once again look at the life of Jesus specifically and say, how did Jesus deal with this issue, of children that nobody wants.

Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 10. I'm gonna be reading verses 13 through 16. Mark chapter 10, verses 13 through 16. One day, some parents brought their

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children to Jesus so he could touch them and bless them, but the disciples told them not to bother Jesus. But when Jesus saw what was happening, He was very displeased with His disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to Me, don’t stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you,” He said, “anyone who doesn’t have their kind of faith will never get into the kingdom of God.” And then Jesus took the children into His arms and he placed His hands on their heads and He blessed them.

Now, what I’d like to do is just walk down through this story and just kind of pull out some things that Jesus did. And then let’s look at them at how they affect our lives and how we deal with these children as well.

I think the first thing that we need to notice here is it says “one day some parents brought their children to Jesus.” You see, it’s the parents who bring their children to Jesus. And, you know, parents, it’s our primary responsibility to bring our children to Jesus. We’re the ones — we’re not gonna get to heaven some day and be able to say, well, Jesus, I know my children were never brought to you, but, you know, really, the Sunday school teachers weren’t good enough and they didn’t have good enough programs at church. Jesus is gonna say, “You know what? It’s your responsibility. You, as a parent, were given the responsibility to bring your children to Me.”

And you know what studies have found? Children whose own parents bring them to church have a much higher percentage chance of coming to Christ than children whose parents don’t bring them. But an even more sobering fact is the father. If the father comes to church with the children and brings the children, it’s exponential how high the rate is that children come to Christ than if just the mom — which is often the case — brings the children. That really makes a difference, the spiritual impact you have in the life of your children.

Now, I want to shift gears just a bit as we talk about these children that nobody wants. In James 1:27 that Gary read earlier — read this out loud with me, if you would.

“Religion that pleases God the Father must be pure and spotless. You must help needy orphans and widows and not let this world make you evil.” What I would contend is that we have a responsibility to become parents to children that have no one to bring them to Jesus.

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According to that verse in James, it becomes our responsibility for those orphans to take care of them, and one of the responsibilities is that we help bring them to Jesus as well.

You know, in our vision for this as a church — and I just love this part of our vision — we want to be a church that is just known for how we care for kids. We want this church to be just a magnet for kids in the community. I mean, this church should be known as the place where kids come and they learn about Jesus and they love coming here. And they have adults to take care of them. But I love the other part of the vision, that we're a church that cares for unwanted children, for children who may not have a mom or a dad or people to bring them to Jesus. We're gonna take responsibility and say, "We're gonna bring those kids to Christ."

There are a couple ways we can do that. And many of you were involved in our 12- hour prayer vigil from 6 p.m. on Friday night until 6 a.m. Saturday morning. We appreciate that. And that's one of the first things that we can start doing, is praying for these children who don't have anyone to bring them to Jesus.

In the book of Lamentations chapter 2, verse 19, it says, rise during the night and cry out. Pour out your hearts like water to the Lord. Lift up your hands to Him in prayer.

Why? Plead for your children as they faint with hunger in the streets. It says, listen, here's what I want. I want you to pour your heart out in prayer for these kids. I want you to pray, lift them up in prayer.

You know, the early church was noted — it was one of their characteristics for taking in unwanted children. You see, children had very little value in the day of Christ.

And what parents in the Roman civilization would do is they would have these babies, and if they didn't want these kids, they would just take them down by the river and they would leave them there by the river, just to die, exposed out in the elements. You know what the early church did? The early church — those Christians would go to the river and they would just pick those babies up and they would take them into their own homes and they would raise them in their Christian families. They were known for that, how much they would love unwanted children. So we pray for those kids.

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And then the second thing I want to encourage you today, if you haven't done so already, to considering adopting a child into your immediate or your extended family. You know, right now, we have more than 30 families that are working with our Born in Our Hearts adoption ministry right here at Rivertree to adopt a child into their immediate family. Thirty families. Right now, the Christian Children's Home of Ohio and International, we have people partnering with them already that are taking care of foster children, bringing them into their home. Very, very difficult, challenging situations.

I'd encourage you to consider that today, to making that part of your ministry and sharing Christ with kids who don't have parents to bring them to Jesus. But you heard the plea already today and the challenge, and we've been praying about it for several weeks.

The next way you can do that right now is to begin with our synergy partnership with Compassion International today and to leave here and to walk out in that atrium and say, God, how many kids do you want me to sponsor? How many kids do you want me to help share Jesus with? Consider adopting a child into your immediate family or your extended family.

And back in our story with Jesus — you know, the parents brought the kids to Jesus. But secondly — it's an interesting thing. The disciples were actually hindering the children from coming to Jesus. This is Jesus' own disciples. And I want to read this passage again out of the New International Version, just verse 14. It says, "When Jesus saw this, He was indignant." You know, in the original language it's a strong, strong anger that He felt. He said to them, "Let the children come to Me and don't hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Now, why would Jesus' disciples even think of stopping children from coming to Jesus? That doesn't seem very logical. Well, again, in Jesus' day — in the Roman society, especially — children virtually had no value. They were just something that parents had as a possession, virtually.

Now, especially — ladies, I hate to bring this up again, a sore subject, but do you remember the Jewish prayer that all the Jewish men would pray in the synagogue each week? Blessed art thou O God, because you have not made me a women. All the men would pray that. Well, that was a reflection as well. If you were born a male child, that was a whole lot better than being born a female

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child. And so there was virtually no value.

But I want to remind you again, that when Jesus came into this world, what Jesus did was take society's known ethics and just put them — turned them upside down.

Remember the rule of women? He completely — women were looked down upon, not valued, and Jesus came in and throughout His ministry raised them to equality with men.

Well, Jesus did the same thing with children. He took little youngsters that the world didn't value at all and He said, "These youngsters have value in My kingdom," and He raised up their value. And that's what Jesus did all the time in His ministry.

Well, with that, I think we have a responsibility to make sure that we're not hindering any children from coming to Christ. I was thinking about that a lot this weekend and thinking, well, how in the world would we even begin to hinder children from coming to Christ? Well, you know, as parents, one of the ways that we can hinder our children is, once again, by not making sure that they're in church each week, by not making sure that they're involved with their youth programs, by not making sure that we are reading the Bible in our homes, that we're praying together as a family. If we're not doing those things, in essence, one of the things we're doing is actually hindering children from coming to Christ.

You know another way? It's by not getting involved in our children's ministries. Now, I walk up and down the halls, and you can see hundreds of children here every week and every Sunday morning. And so I appreciate all of you who lead in our servant ministries there to take care of kids and hold the babies back there. If we don't do that, if we don't provide those opportunities here as a church, then we're, actually, in essence, hindering children from coming to Christ.

Do you remember the reason — we talked about it last week — that the 240,000 within an easy driving distance don't come to church anywhere on any given Sunday? Remember that reason? Because no one invited them. No one invited them.

Friends, one of the easiest things to do is to invite children to come with

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you to church. I watch you all do it all the time. You'll say, got my niece and nephew with me this week. I've got my granddaughter with me today. Take the opportunity whenever you can to invite a child to come with you and to become part of our children's ministries here.

Now, at a global level, when we talk about hindering children, it's simply that we need to extend Christ's love to these children. If we don't do it, then they're hindered from coming to Christ. And just by virtue of where they've been born, by the poverty they've been born into, by the fact that Christianity isn't as known there, if we don't go, then who will? Then who will tell them?

I love this next part of the story. It's actually my favorite part. It says, "Jesus took the children in His arms. Let them come to Me." And then it says, "Jesus took the children" — I started thinking about that this week. I was actually sitting up in my chair where I do a lot of my morning meditation and prayer time, and then I started just imagining, what would it be like? You know, let's say you're a little 6-year-old child. A little 6-year-old child. Just imagine that with me, if you would. What would it be like if you're going to Jesus and you're being brought to Jesus and His disciples are saying, no, you can't come over? And then Jesus says, no, no, no. I want them to come to Me. And you go to Jesus and He picks you up in His arms and you're being held by Jesus. What would you feel? What would be the things that — what do you think if you were actually in the arms of Jesus? What would you feel? Anybody? Love. Unimaginable love. Wouldn't you? Joy.

You'd be laughing and just — it would just be joy. What else? Security. Security. Anything else? What would you feel if you were in the arms of Jesus? Peace. You might eventually just fall — drift off to sleep, wouldn't you, because you'd have all that wonderful peace as well. I think all of those things we'd feel if we were actually in the arms of Jesus.

I just want to say that I think we're responsible because we are now the hands and feet of Jesus to take children in our arms the exact same way, that we're responsible, that we should be the ones that children find all of those things with us as well.

Psalms 27:10 says, "Even if my father and mother abandoned me, the Lord will hold me close." And, again, who are we as a church? We're "Jesus" to those children. So even if a father and mother abandoned a child, then Jesus — us,

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as the church, we hold those children close. They find all those things with us as a body of believers. And so we, as a church, we need to provide a safe atmosphere for those children. Those children need to find security. They need to know that they're gonna have another meal the next day.

You know, when our adoption ministry here — I've talked to a couple of the families that have adopted children from overseas, and these kids have been living in orphanages over there and — to these kids, it's a fascinating thing when they bring them over here because the kids — when they feed these young children, the children want to save some of the food. You know, we can't even begin to fathom that here in the United States. These children won't eat all the food on their plate. They want to take some of it to bed with them at night because when they awaken the next day, they never know if they're gonna have food the next day. So here they get that food and they want to take it to bed with them to make sure, yeah, tomorrow morning I'll have something to eat.

But that's — we can provide that security to them. God's blessed us abundantly with the ability to do exactly — we can provide affection. You know, when you take the children in your arms — we take for granted a lot of times that physical touch. But there are children out there that, you know, have no physical affection. And what I've learned is as those children get older, if they don't get physical touch and physical affection, they get something called "attachment disorder," and it means that once they're adults, they will never be able to receive affection from no one, nor will they be able to appropriately give that. If we don't do that, if we don't give them that affection and love right now as little children — and then the last one I think we need to do is we need to provide affirmations for those children as well.

Now, I'll tell you, I think those of us who grew up in homes where we had moms and dads that gave that affirmation to us, we know how important it is. Now, I want — little Tabitha — I'll tell you what. I don't think I miss a day when I say, "Tabs, I want you to know that I love you, and there is nothing that you can do ever that will make me stop loving you. You know, you're my sunshine." And she'll walk in — there are many days she'll walk in and she'll say, "I'm Daddy's sunshine, huh?" And I'll say, "That's right." You know? And I want her to know that affirmation.

These kids desperately need — there are so many children out there, children

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in our children's ministries here that need to hear someone say, you are loved and you are valued, Jesus died for you, that's how much God loves you, and affirm those children.

Well, Jesus picks the children up in His arms. But He didn't stop there. And, I mean, this is a very vital part to what we do. Jesus actually laid His hands on them and blessed them. And, you know, I studied this to figure out what exactly was Jesus doing there? And in essence, there was a long-standing tradition in Jewish culture that Jesus would actually — the elders in the church and the rabbis — people would bring their children to the rabbis. They would lay their hands on the children and they would say, we're blessing you in the name of God. You are God's child. And that's what Jesus was doing, if you can imagine that.

And see, for us it's — and that's why I love the partnership with Compassion. It's not just about feeding these children. It's not just about, you know, providing them — making sure they get training. It's most importantly leading them to Jesus and saying, "You're God's child, Jesus died for you, and we want you to know that." So we have a responsibility to share the blessing of Jesus with children.

You know, just yesterday, we had 35 junior high students — 35. Think about that. We departed yesterday with their youth sponsors, and they're in Milwaukee — they should be there now — in inner-city Milwaukee, this whole coming week ... They're doing a vacation Bible school for children in inner-city Milwaukee. Thirty-five of our junior high kids. That will change those junior high kids forever. But you know what else? It will change those kids in inner-city Milwaukee forever.

Statistics tell us that 85 percent of the people that come to Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before the age of 18. So we have a responsibility to bless kids, to tell them about Jesus.

Friends, I had an awful, awful experience this past week. I watched one of the worst grief situations I think I've ever seen in my life. Last Monday evening I drove to ... Pennsylvania, and I helped perform the funeral of my cousin. He was 18 years old, and they found him dead in bed last Saturday morning. Eighteen years old. And as I went up and I — I can't begin to explain the grief of these parents, that that was their only child, you know. And my grandparents

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— his grandparents, my aunt and uncle were there. You know, the tragedy of it? To my knowledge, he never gave his life to Christ. He's one of those 18 years old. By the time they're 18, 85 percent — and so there's 18 — I mean, if you can just imagine that, all these kids turning 18. And if we don't tell them about Jesus, who is going to? Who is going to?

We have that responsibility. And so rarely do we have the opportunity to give you such a specific plea and challenge today as what we have with Compassion International.

But I'm just gonna encourage you to consider, you know, sponsoring one of those children.

And I know some of you — you know, you're not called to do that. And I'm very comfortable with that. [Inaudible]...out right now, that's fine. But for the rest of us — you know, and I think all of us at least need to make a commitment to praying through that. I put a world map up here just to show you — if you look where South America is down here in the left corner — Ecuador is a country in South America, just to show you where we're headed. Let's put the next map up there real quick. If you go down into South America, Ecuador — it's a small — up in the top left corner, you can just see it. It's just a small country up there in yellow. That's the country of Ecuador. So in South America — you can see where it is.

Now, let's go to the next map up there, and this is actually a map of the country of Ecuador. And I want to tell you a little bit about Ecuador, the actual country. Ecuador is about the same size as the state of Colorado in the United States of America. It's a hundred and nine thousand square miles. Now, here's the interesting part. While it's the same size as the state of Colorado, Colorado has about 3 million people that live within it.

Ecuador, on the other hand, the same size, has 14 million people that live within that small country. It has a democratic form of government. Its official language is Spanish, and its currency, of all the crazy things — is the United States dollar. Seventeen percent — think about this. Seventeen percent of the roads in that country are paved. Eighty-three percent of them are unpaved roads. Sixty percent of the children under the age of 5 go to bed hungry every night. Sixty percent. And the reason the vast majority in Ecuador

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aren't registered in school? It costs too much. You know how much it costs? Twenty dollars a year. Twenty dollars a year.

So, I want to introduce you to Joy and Tabs and my new extended family members.

This is Kevin David Moralis, and he lives in Ecuador. He's 6 years old. And this is Inte Elizabeth ... and she's 7 years old and she lives in Ecuador. They actually live in the same hometown. That's why we picked these two. So if we can get over there and visit them, we'll be able to visit them together.

You know, we did this for a few reasons, as we were praying through this. We adopted these two children into our extended family for these children. You know, we want them to have some of the blessings that we can give them. We want to tell them about Jesus. We want to share — do all those things we talked about in the sermon today.

You know another reason we did this? We did this for us, quite honestly. You know, every time we pray for these children, every time we send a check, it's gonna remind us of how blessed we are. We did this for another reason, too. We did it for our daughter, Tabitha. We did it because we want her to grow up in a home knowing that we care for other kids, you know, so she's not a spoiled little brat. We did it for her. Seriously. So when we pray at night together, we pray for these little kids.

You know another reason we did it? We did it for Jesus. We did it for Jesus.

Because in the Book of Matthew, Jesus says, "Whatever you do for the least of these, you've done it for Me. You've done it for Me."

You see, there's something miraculous — and I don't fully understand it, and I don't think we will until we go to heaven. But Jesus said, when you do something for little children, you're actually doing it to Me. You're actually taking care of Jesus. And then the other miracle that happens in the opposite direction is that somehow, when we do this, we become Jesus to these children. And God let's us take part in that.

So I would encourage you — I want to encourage you to pray about that and see what God would have you do.

I wasn't gonna share this, but I'm gonna go ahead and do it. You know, one of

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the struggles that we had — that I had personally with Compassion was, gosh, God, do you know all the bills that we have here to pay, all these things we've got to do? What if everybody starts writing checks to Compassion and nobody gives to the church, you know — I'm just telling you the honest stuff that goes through my head sometimes. You know what? We all need to keep giving to the church and doing that. That's what God says. Our first tithe goes to the local church. But, man, we are so blessed abundantly.

Now, I just want to encourage you — I have no fear whatsoever of what God's gonna do because I know as we take care of these kids, God's gonna bless our socks off as a church. And I can't wait to see, you know, someday in heaven when we get there at Rivertree and, you know — we've got maybe the Rivertree campground area up there, and we invite all these people that came to Christ because Rivertree sponsored these children.

And God says that there's gonna come a time in heaven when people from every tongue and tribe and nation are gonna gather together. And we're gonna be part of that.

Would you stand? We're gonna sing a song — the verses are gonna be sung for us, and then we're gonna sing on the chorus. But I want you all as you're listening to this song to pray about what you'd do here. If you're here today and you've not given your life to Christ, I would invite you to come forward right here to the front row, friends. I'll be waiting for you up here. I would invite you to come and say, today I'm gonna give — I want to accept that gift from God, accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord and make an eternal difference. If you need a church home, I'm gonna invite you to make your way to the front here and say, I want to be part of a church like this that's serious about changing the world.

You know, there's an old phrase that says, sometimes the church is so heavenly minded it's no earthly good. Well, that is not what we're gonna be. We will be heavenly minded, but we're gonna make a difference right here, right now.

Let's go ahead — if you have a decision to make right while this song's being sung, we ask you to make it.