



*Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.*  
(Matthew 19:13-15)

One day not long ago I had an experience where I thought I knew exactly what was going on. It was crystal clear from my perspective. And we all know what happens when we think we have something completely figured out. Typically, we discover there's a lot more going on than meets the eye and that we didn't bother to consider. And so without going into detail I can tell you that's precisely what happened to me. As a result I learned (after the fact, of course) that my experience involved: (1) a failure in communication; (2) assumptions about the intentions of certain individuals and; (3) an important reminder to gather information before forming an opinion.

It's not hard for these kinds of things to happen to any of us. With our love affair with social media, access to 24/7 news coverage, and the emotional toll caused by coronavirus overload, we may have taken to reacting rather than responding, while skipping important steps of self-reflection, patience, and honest evaluation. I came away from the experience referenced above a bit disappointed in myself, vowing for the millionth time to do better and, in an effort to frame it through the lens of faith, thought about the time when people were bringing children to Jesus for a blessing.

The disciples didn't approve because they thought it was a waste of time, an impediment to the greater and more important work Jesus had on his agenda for the day. So they chastised the ones bringing the children, presumably parents. I often wonder what the disciples thought when Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children. Certainly they had never thought of it that way.

And therein, of course, lies the point. When we stop to reflect on a situation from someone else's perspective we learn something new, not just about others but about ourselves.

Carl Jung once wrote, "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves." Whatever it was that got under the disciples' skin about the people bringing their children to see Jesus revealed something about the disciples themselves. I don't claim to know what that was, but I'm pretty sure Jesus knew. At the very least he encouraged the disciples to find out for themselves, to ask the question, what is it about these people that causes such a visceral reaction within myself? When the question is answered, greater self-awareness occurs.

Developing a higher level of self-awareness can be a very useful tool in building stronger, more mature relationships. Here are some exercises you may want to employ:

- Stop blaming others for your choices.
- Get feedback from as many significant people in your life as you can. This can be uncomfortable for both you and them, but it is the fastest method for gaining a better picture of yourself.
- Understand that your biggest irritations look a lot like you. (I try to keep this one in mind all the time.)
- Look beneath your behavior to reveal your assumptions and filters. They dictate how you see yourself and others, and impact how you relate to them.
- Look at your roadblocks. Learn to separate facts from your interpretations of them.
- Reflect daily on your behavior. Ask questions like: How do I handle difficulties? What do I think or do when I don't get my own way? How adaptive am I? Can I control my emotions? Do I tend to say what I'm thinking when I'm thinking it?
- Be careful what you say. Words mean a lot. Your language reflects your thinking and attitudes.

Let us pray. Good and gracious God, help us to be more aware of ourselves so that we may grow into mature followers of Jesus. Amen

In Christ,

Pastor Chuck