

# Lesson 3: What Does It Mean to Be Chosen?

## You are Cherished

CHILD #4: Where were You yesterday?

JESUS: I had to stay in town later on; there was a woman who needed my help.

CHILD #3: Did You build something for her?

JESUS: No ... do you remember when I said that I have a job that is bigger than

My trade? There is a woman who has had much pain in her life, and she was trouble, so I helped her.

JOSHUA: Is she Your friend?

JESUS: She is now. And I have chosen her and others, and more soon, to join Me in traveling.

ABIGAIL: Do they know You?

JESUS: Not yet.

CHILD #1: But what if they don't like You?

JESUS (*laughing*): Many won't. This is My reason for being here.

ABIGAIL: I still don't understand. What is Your reason for being here?

(*Jesus takes a moment. The children lean in as He talks quietly but firmly.*)

JESUS: I'm telling you this because even though you are children, and the elders your life have lived longer, many times adults need the faith of children. And if you hold on to this faith, really tightly, someday soon you will understand all of what am I saying to you.

But you ask an important question, Abigail. What is My reason for being here? And the answer is for all of you:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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JOSHUA: Isaiah.

JESUS (*nodding*): Isaiah.

## Precious in His Sight

One of the most well-known Sunday school songs of all-time was written more than one hundred years ago, but it declares a timeless truth in its lyrics: "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world."

While political correctness would like to banish such notions, the song stubbornly endures because its message resonates deeply and profoundly and universally: we were made in the image of God, and God loves what He has made.

This episode of *The Chosen* is titled "Jesus Loves the Little Children," but it's not just about children. When it comes to God's love, it's not about our age, our appearance, our abilities, or anything else we may or may not bring to the table. It's about what already is.

We are precious to our Maker.

Your Turn

1. What does our sweet little song have in common with Galatians 3:28?

[Mercy: Not receiving the punishment we deserve.]

[Grace: Receiving an undeserved gift.]

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## OT Context

In the Old Testament era, the people of God were sometimes described as the children of God (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 1:10-11; 11:1), and occasionally God was referred to as a father (Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9-11) or compared to a mother (Isa. 49:13-16). Of course, the point is that God loves His chosen people the way good parents love their children. Good parents do anything, endure anything, sacrifice anything to care for their own. Now multiply that by a gazillion, and you're in the ballpark of God's love for His chosen people.

Just as a parent pursues a wayward child, time and again God pursued the nation of Israel (1) at great cost, (2) to great lengths, and (3) with unrelenting mercy and grace. According to Isaiah 43, God demonstrated just how far He would go to bring His people back, including ransoming other nations in their place (stay tuned for more on that). Naturally, the mention of Egypt brings to mind the exodus rescue. For the people of Isaiah's day, they could look back and see that God had been faithful all the way from Egypt to the Promised Land. But then His protection and provision extended further - to Cush and Seba and beyond - because God cherished His chosen people, which is why He wouldn't let them go.

[Cush is in northeastern Africa (sometimes called "Ethiopia" back then, but not the same as today's Ethiopia!). We're not sure where Seba was located, but it was most likely somewhere along the Red Sea.]

### Your Turn

2. What are some characteristics of a good parent?

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3. Having a not-very-good parent can negatively affect the way we see and respond to God.

Read Jeremiah 31:9-11 below and underline all the ways God is a good Father:

With weeping they shall come,  
and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble,  
for I am a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,  
and declare it in the coastlands far away;  
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock."

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob  
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. (Jer. 31:9-11)

4. God pursued Israel, in spite of their wanton rebellion. Compare what they deserved to receive from God with what they actually received from God, time and again.

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## Welcomed

"Then children were brought to [Jesus] that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'" Matthew 19:13-14

That last part would've been a head scratcher for those listening, because parents in the ancient world didn't appreciate childhood the same way we do. It's not that parents had loveless, utilitarian attitudes toward their children; on the contrary, children were thought of as blessings to their parents (Deut. 28:1-6; Ps. 103:13; 127:3-5; 128:3-4; Matt. 2:16-18; John 4:46-54). But in first century AD, a person's contribution heavily weighted their value, and young children couldn't contribute much. While modern Western culture has extended childhood into the early twenties - have mercy - children in ancient times were expected to start working as soon as physically possible. Childhood was simply not a cherished time of life and definitely ended at puberty, which may be the reason the Gospels say nothing about the childhood experiences of our four main characters.

And yet we can surmise based on what we do know.

**Mary Magdalene** was from the town of Magdala, a place known for being so morally bankrupt that Rome ultimately destroyed the city for its corruption. Whether or not Mary experienced a godly Jewish upbringing, through life's tragedies and demonic influence, she slipped into a life of debauchery. Mary likely didn't feel precious to anyone, and wickedness and evil had a stranglehold on her life.

**Nicodemus**, a teacher among the Pharisees, probably had a solid Jewish upbringing. Perhaps he was like another famous Pharisee in the New Testament, the apostle Paul, who remarked, "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem,

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is known by all the Jews ... that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee" (Acts 26:4-5).

Sounds like a real hoot. In any event, it's likely Nicodemus felt pride over his heritage, accomplishments, and stature rather than feeling cherished by God for who he was.

**Matthew** also likely benefited from a childhood with godly training and education; his historic Hebrew name, Levi, indicates as much. But that didn't stop him from choosing to serve Rome. Like other Jews who willingly worked for the enemy, Matthew got rich by betraying his fellow citizens. His family would've been damaged by his open display of disloyalty.

By pursuing the promise of wealth, Matthew willingly gave up any sense of being cherished for who he was. Contrary to the meaning of his name ("gift of God"), Matthew chose instead to be paid for what he could do.

**Simon** was a man of meager learning (Acts 4:13), but staying faithful to the God of his fathers was instilled in him from his youth. Nicodemus's pride in being religiously accomplished was not available to Simon, nor was Matthew's financial self-sufficiency - such things were beyond Simon Peter's reach. But from what we do know of the fisherman-turned-follower, he was the kind of guy who suffered from *both* pride and self-sufficiency and perhaps would've been entirely uncomfortable with the sentimental notion of being cherished.

**Abigail and Joshua** are fictional children created for *The Chosen*, but they're based on actual interactions, as well as Jesus's words *about* children: *to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*. Unlike most of the adults who came in contact with Jesus, the children knew they had nothing of value to offer Him except their love and excitement to be there - and Jesus welcomed them. He wanted to spend time with them, hug them, and heal them. He *wanted* to. He accepted them, not because of who they were or what they could do, but because of who **He is** and what **He does**.

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## Your Turn

5. According to Matthew 18:1-4, what quality do children have that we should seek to emulate?
  
6. Whose imagined childhood experience do you most identify with? Mary's darkness and brokenness? Nicodemus's need to perform and earn his worth? Matthew's rebellion and isolation? Simon's constant struggle to make a life for himself?
  
7. Read each of their actual come-to-Jesus stories in Luke 8:1-3; John 3:1-12; Matthew 9:9-13; and Luke 5:1-11. In spite of having vastly different life experiences, what do all four of these people have in common? (Hint, hint: the thing they have in common with each other is the same thing they actually have in common with children.)

## Jesus is our Keeper

[Ransom: a sum of money other payment demanded or paid for the return of a prisoner.]

It's easy to understand why children are welcomed and cherished by Jesus. Children are uncomplicated. They're appropriately awestruck by the world around them. They're cute and innocent and vulnerable and unvarnished. They're wide-eyed, expectant, mouldable, and trusting

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- unlike us. They're not jaded or judgmental, self-reliant, self-promoting, or stained by a lifetime of sinful choices, which means it's much harder to believe we're cherished by God the way they are. That we could be the recipients of His perfect love.

But that's exactly what we are, and the evidence can be traced all the way back to Isaiah: "I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life" (Isa. 43:4).

Ransoms are paid to keep what would otherwise be lost. As indicated by Isaiah some seven centuries before Jesus arrived, God cherishes His chosen people so much that He ransoms them back for Himself. He keeps them, no matter the cost.

"You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

1 Peter 1:18-19

When sin was stealing us away, Jesus became our ransom. He came in service of us, to exchange His life for ours, to be the "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) and to return to God His chosen people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). We are dearly cherished by our Maker - in spite of having nothing to give - because He pursues and forgives and redeems and keeps.

JESUS: I have loved spending this time with you. You are all so very special. And I hope that My next students ask the same questions you do and that they listen to My answers. But I suspect they do not have the understanding you do.

*(He looks at Abigail.)*

And I hope that when the time comes, they will tell others about Me like you have.

CAMPSITE (NIGHT)

*(Jesus puts the finishing touches on something we don't see, and He sets it down next to a rock. We then see Him writing something with coal on the rock. He smiles, and*



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(we-CUT TO:)

FIELD (MORNING)

*(Abigail is walking alone with her doll. She rounds the corner to the campsite and freezes.*

We see the site is empty. Other than a lifeless fire pit, everything is gone. Well, not quite everything. As Abigail approaches, we see a simple but well-crafted dollhouse: rock slabs held together by first-century rope. Abigail notices the writing above it and reads aloud.)

ABIGAIL: "Abigail, I know you can read. You are very special. This is for you. I did not come only for the wealthy."

Your Turn

8. In order to keep us, Jesus became like us. According to the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-8, what did that entail?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. How should you respond to the idea that Jesus cherishes you enough to (a) ransom Himself as payment for your sin and (b) restore your relationship with God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Not only did Jesus become like us to keep us, He also promises to make us more like Him - which is exactly what He did in the lives of Mary, Matthew, and Simon Peter. Read Galatians 5:18-24 and make a list of the characteristics that become ours through the power of His Holy Spirit.

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## Prayer Focus

**Give thanks** to Jesus for sacrificing Himself in your place in order to bring you back to your Maker. **Ask** God to **empower** you to have a childlike faith (not a childish faith) and to **trust** that He'll keep you through the hardships of life. You might even consider **praying** the words in Jude 1:24-25: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

## Further Study

- The Old Testament encourages strong family relationships and family-based training on faith in God. For example, in the passage that inspires the daily prayer of the Jews called the *Shema* (recited by the children in episode 3), Moses reminded the Israelites of their responsibility to not only teach their children about their covenant relationship with God but to also conduct their whole lives around that relationship.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontiers between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

- As we mentioned, God is addressed as "Father" in the Old Testament (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). Jesus also referred to God as "Father" but used the more intimate Aramaic word *Abba*, which is a near equivalent to the modern day English word for "Daddy" (Mark 14:36). This way of referring to God was unprecedented in Jesus's day. As the one and only Son of God, Jesus has a unique

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relationship to the Father in the Trinity (John 1:14; 5:17-47; 10:22-39; 20:17); nevertheless, He encourages His followers to also address God as "Father" (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-4) and "*Abba*" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

- John 17 records a conversation Jesus had with the Father just prior to His arrest and crucifixion. He clearly knew the part He would play in the plan of salvation, and that He would soon be called back to heaven, so He prayed for His followers. Notice that He asked God to keep His followers safe while He would be gone (17:11), to keep them "in [His] name" (17:12), and to not remove them from the world but to protect them from the devil (17:15). Notice too that Jesus's prayer was not only for His twelve apostles or the other first-century believers; Jesus included everyone who would become a believer through the testimonies of those first followers (17:20). Which means we are mentioned in the Bible (!) and that Jesus prayed for us (Rom. 8:34).

Mind. Blown.