



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Be childlike

Maturity in
Christ

Tabitha

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2017

November

Session 1 – Be childlike

Hello, and welcome to the first midweek experience for November. The theme for the divine services this month is “Christ, our hope.” At first, we might say, “Of course I place my hope in Christ,” but there are a number of reasons that our hope in Christ might diminish. Often people find security in material things and become self-reliant, instead of seeking security and hope in Christ. We may also feel that He does not provide the assistance that we believe He should, and our hope in Him diminishes. It is critical that we always keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus – *My kingdom is not of this earth*. Thus, the kingdom for which He is preparing us is His eternal kingdom. This kingdom, not the earthly one, is why we place our hope in Christ. In order to have a strong and properly focused hope, it is necessary for one to be humble.

In Matthew 18:1-5, we read how the disciples asked the Lord about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Here we can see that the disciples were trying to understand the Lord’s kingdom from an earthly perspective. Jesus made it clear that such a perspective is completely inappropriate, saying: *What I’m about to tell you is true. You need to change and become like little children. If you don’t, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who takes the humble position of this child is the most important in the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3-4 NIRV). Humility is an important characteristic of those who seek His kingdom. Let’s consider some of the characteristics of a child, which can help serve as measurements of our own humbleness.

Children are trusting. Think of the young Israelite girl who spoke to Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army who was afflicted with leprosy (2 Kings 5:2-3). She had no doubt that he would be healed if he sought help from the prophet Elisha. Do we trust in God’s love for us and His overarching will for us to be saved, even when we do not understand or like the circumstances that He allows in our everyday life?

Children recognize that they need help. How wonderful is it when a child reaches out her hand when crossing the street or asks for help with his homework. With children, it seems that this attitude disappears all too quickly. In our relationship with the Lord, do we allow Him to lead us so that we grow in His nature, even when this requires that we subordinate our own nature, opinions, and perspectives? Do we seek His help in understanding and knowing Him more deeply, so that we can change?

Children are completely dependent. Without the most basic provisions provided by their family, children would not be able to survive. At times, it can be difficult for us to accept the fact that our salvation cannot be earned through our own actions. Are we willing to depend completely on the Lord’s grace, and pay the price that receiving this grace demands?

Children’s strength is limited. Physically, a child is easily overwhelmed by an adversary and is therefore dependent on the strength of the adults who care for him or her. If we were left to our own devices, we would readily be pushed around by the various spiritual currents that surround us. However, when we are closely connected with the Lord, especially in the worthy partaking of Holy Communion, we can gain the victory over the evil one.

Measuring our own humbleness is not an easy thing to do; it demands deep introspection and painful honesty. But by using the wonderful example that the Lord provided in considering a child, we can evaluate the depth of our trust in Him, our willingness to seek and accept His help, our acknowledgement of dependence on Him for salvation, and our need for the strength that He offers, especially in Holy Communion. Our growth in humility puts us in the position to have a firm hope in Christ.

Session 2 – Maturity in Christ

Welcome back. In our last session, we highlighted how humbleness enables us to have a hope in Christ that is increasingly secure. In this session, we will focus on maturity in Christ.

To do this, I'd like to share with you a portion of Jesus' parable of the sower. Parables are not actual events, but stories that Jesus told using common examples and imagery so that people would be able to understand the meaning. The parable of the sower appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Luke 8:14 we read, *Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

This is only one verse out of a passage of five, yet it is packed full of truths to excavate. Let's stop first at the phrase, *when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life...* Jesus is speaking about people who have indeed heard the word of God, not people who aren't exposed to it. We can count ourselves among those who have been exposed to and have heard the word of God. However, do we allow cares, material things, and pleasures of life to be thorns that choke out what God is trying to plant in us?

The final phrase from this verse is: *and bring no fruit to maturity.* Let's focus on the last word, "maturity." Can you imagine an adult pursuing *immaturity*? In fact, by definition, immature means "not fully developed." Don't we all want to see ourselves and our efforts fully developed? So, what are some signs and attributes of being developed and mature in Christ?

Mature Christians understand the need to build and strengthen their faith. They realize that a Christian life is a journey of development and of being continually shaped by God. 2 Peter 1 exhorts believers to develop by adding *to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-8).*

Mature Christians know *when* to speak and *what* to say. Conversely, immature ones can't help but speak their own opinions about everyone and everything. In Ephesians 4:29, Apostle Paul instructs the congregation to *let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.* If you long to mature in your faith in Christ, really immerse yourself in this verse. Pass everything that you do and say through this filter, and keep a cautious guard over your words and over your online posts. Ask yourself, "Will what I'm about to say be edifying and impart peace to those who hear or read it, or will it be destructive?" There is no neutral position here.

Mature Christians do not point out the sins of others, and they do confess their own sins. Genesis 9:18-23 relates an interesting story about Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood, Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard. One day, he got drunk and laid naked in his tent. Ham saw his father in this state and told his brothers about it. Shem and Japheth took a garment, held it between them, turned their faces away, and walked backward over their father, covering him with the garment. They did not want to see their father's nakedness, nor did they want others to see it. Today there are still people like Ham who expose every situation in detail and want to make a big issue out of others' mistakes, using all forms of media. Then there are others like Shem and Japheth who cover the weaknesses of their neighbors and don't dwell on them. Let us recognize that sometimes we also have been the one who exposed the sin of others and at times, we have also been the victim of such exposure. This requires reconciliation and forgiveness.

The last characteristic of mature Christians that I'd like to highlight is that they are thankful. They understand that everything comes from God and don't deserve anything. God is an amazing provider, and mature Christians live in such a way that their speech, actions, reactions, and decisions bear evidence of their thankfulness to God and their dependence on Him. Thankfulness is a response, and when we intentionally take the time to ponder over and marvel at what God has done, how can a mature Christian be anything but thankful?

While not a comprehensive list by any means, these four characteristics of a mature Christian highlight important areas that we should be striving to grow and mature in. A living hope for our eternal future must be evidenced by actions in our daily life. At His return, Jesus will take mature souls unto Himself, and we can only become mature when we truly have made Christ our hope.

Session 3 – Tabitha

During this month, our services and small groups have been focused on the theme, “Christ, our hope.” Jesus Christ is the source of all our hope. Because of our faith in Him, we never have a reason to doubt or become hopeless. For our last session, we’ll take a look at the experience of a disciple named Tabitha in the Book of Acts. We’ll learn that we can have hope in Christ during the most difficult moments of our life, even in the face of death!

We can read about Tabitha in the ninth chapter of Acts:

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha... This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which [Tabitha] had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. (Acts 9:36-42)

Tabitha was a disciple of Jesus, and because of her good works, she was a credible witness of Christ. Her death greatly affected her fellow disciples, yet in their moment of despair, they still had hope and sent for Peter. Why? God had worked so powerfully through Peter and the other apostles, that even in this moment they did not give up hope. As followers of Jesus, they could recall His miracles and how, even in the most desperate of times, the end of the story changed. Where do you turn first in moments of despair?

Upon his arrival, Peter connected himself with God through prayer and then echoed the words of his Master as he commanded Tabitha to get up. The hope of the disciples who sought out Peter was fulfilled, and through the sharing of this experience, many more came to believe in Jesus Christ. Are we willing to share our experiences with Jesus in order to help others believe?

The sharing of this encounter could certainly have reminded Jesus’ followers of the experiences that they had with Him during His time on earth when various people placed their hope in Him during difficult moments of their lives. Peter witnessed the power demonstrated by Jesus during those times. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, he was able to call on that same power to help those who believed.

One experience that Peter witnessed was when Jesus was sought out by Jairus, a synagogue leader, to help his daughter, who was sick and would soon die. When Jairus found Jesus, he fell at His feet and begged Him to *come and lay your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live* (Mark 5:22-23). This request showed that Jairus was aware of what Jesus had done in the past and that he was willing to place his hope in Him during that anxious time. When Jesus arrived at the home, He comforted the grieving by assuring them that the girl was just sleeping. Then, along with Peter, James, John, and her parents, Jesus approached the little girl. He took her hand and said, *Little girl, I say to you, arise*, and immediately she woke up and arose.

A similar experience took place when Lazarus died and Mary and Martha reached out to Jesus for help. The sisters knew who Jesus was, believed in Him, and were confident that if He had been with them, their brother would not have died. Jesus once again demonstrated His power when He called out to Lazarus to arise, and restored his life. However, before He even approached the tomb, Jesus said to Martha, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?* (John 11:25-26). The same question that Jesus asked Martha can be asked of us. His words and actions are our source of hope. But do we believe, even if we don’t experience a natural miracle? Do our actions during our most difficult moments demonstrate the hope we have in Jesus? How do the experiences of Jesus, which we read in Scripture, affect our faith and our hope?

The effect of the Holy Spirit's work through Peter inspired many believers because, through the revival of Tabitha, Jesus was seen, heard, and lifted up. And that's what we do when we share Jesus – our hope, our joy, our Savior – with those around us. Even though we don't look for Jesus to perform the miracle of physical resurrection today, when we seek Him and always trust Him, His power is revealed to us in new ways. He rescues us from our sin, breathes life into our souls, restores our broken relationships, and replaces our worry with confidence, to name just a few. Each of us will go through difficult days, but because of Jesus Christ, we can go through those moments with peace in our hearts and with a secure hope because He is the resurrection and the life, and all who believe in Him will live!