

# The Nursery

By Andy Smith

**P** eople brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. *'Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in.'*

*Luke 18:15-17 (The Message)*

One Sunday morning, I volunteered to serve in the nursery at my church. As I surveyed the fifteen empty baby cribs lined up against the wall, I prayed silently that all these babies would sleep soundly for the entire two hours of my shift! Within fifteen minutes, I was standing in the midst of thirteen noisy little people, some of whom came with a distinct odor! A changing table was conveniently placed in the middle of the row of cribs. Neatly stacked on the top of the table was a box of diapers, petroleum jelly, baby powder and Kleenex tissues. Above the table hung a beautifully framed verse of Scripture:

***"We will not all sleep, but we must all be changed!"***

Newborn babies need to be changed regularly. So do older disciples. In the days of Jesus, children were to be "shooed off" from the important matters of the day. Jesus always "called them back" to be with him. He commanded his followers to "leave them alone and don't ever get between little children and the Savior." In Luke's gospel, Jesus reverses the norm of the day with a piercing challenge, "Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." (Luke 18:15-17)

Jesus came preaching about a Kingdom where the last were first, little children were important and important people were little, where enemies were loved, losing was winning, weakness was strength, poor was rich and dying to self was actually finding life. Jesus insisted that little children know much more about this new Kingdom than grown-ups do.

Please pull up a little chair and join us for story time in the nursery. Grown-ups are welcome. Jesus is present. He loves spending time in the nursery. ***An American Parable*** is an engaging children's story for grown-ups. You will meet Big Ed, the boys, a wandering father and a precious little girl. The story is based on the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). The message is really quite simple: *God offers extravagant grace to those who don't deserve it.* Little children understand that.

So, enjoy story time in this special nursery...where babies are not the only ones who need to be changed!

Questions for Thought:

1. Read Matthew 20:1-16. Who in this parable seems to be the most like you? Why?
2. Spend 10 minutes in a nursery this week. What is it that Jesus appreciates in little children?
3. What needs to change in your life for you to become more like a little child?

# **An American Parable**

**A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck**

Have you ever lain within your bed  
Awake, but with closed eyes?  
You know the sky is lightening  
And the time has come to rise

Yet there you lay beneath the sheet  
You hear the tick and tock  
What would you give if you'd the chance  
To freeze that blasted clock

Left up to you, you'd slip back to  
That dream about the beach  
But as with dreams, it softly fades  
And stays just out of reach

You name and then eliminate  
Each excuse to stay in bed  
When these reasons are exhausted  
Only then you lift your head

The morning air is chilly  
So's the floor beneath your feet  
You shuffle to the kitchen  
To make something to eat

There sitting at the table  
With a half sipped glass of water  
Is why you finally rose from bed  
Your smiling, lovely daughter

She brightly chirps "Hi Daddy"  
It's a greeting straight from heaven  
You can't believe she's grown so big  
Next week she will be seven

You kiss her on the forehead  
Her scent, a flower petal  
Despite the cold, she warms the room  
As you move to fill the kettle

You search for bread for toasting  
What's left? One slice, one heel  
Your back's kept to the table  
So your worried look's concealed

For you'll never let her see it  
Never let her share your trial  
By the time you reach the table  
Digging deep, you find a smile

You set a plate before her  
And exchanging tickling touches  
You move to share her breakfast  
Careful not to bump her crutches

They lean against the table  
As you slide around behind her  
She doesn't really notice  
As you dodge those grim reminders

It's near two years they've been with her  
She never does complain  
Or comment on the accident  
That's caused you so much pain

You think about her mother  
And the note she left behind  
That feeling that your world was  
Spinning only to unwind

You shake your head and sip your tea  
There's no profit in these thoughts  
The rent is due, there's bills to pay  
Don't tie yourself in knots

You're rescued from your thinking  
By the one that you love most

For she's telling you a little tale  
Between her bites of toast

"Daddy, Grandma read me a story"  
"From a very special book"  
"I really, really liked it"  
As she spoke her finger shook

"You should read it to me"  
"Grandma said you have one too"  
"It's about a man from long ago"  
"Who everybody knew"

"He really loved the children"  
"When all others would forget them"  
"Some tried to chase the kids away"  
"But the nice man wouldn't let them"

"Grandma told me all about it"  
"It was just before my nap"  
"He sat upon a rock and"  
"Let the kids sit on his lap"

"He'd pick them up and hold them tight"  
"At the place called Galilee"  
"And Grandma said if I'd been there"  
"He would have carried me"

"It made me glad to think of it"  
"I have been ever since"  
"Will you read it to me?"  
Her request held such suspense

"I don't know if I can find it"  
You tell your little lie  
For you know it's in your closet  
On the shelf above your ties

You remember when you put it there  
That was such an awful night  
When in anger and frustration  
You just shoved it out of sight

“Well, I will look while you’re at work”  
Her joy was plain to see  
“When you get home we’ll snuggle up”  
“And you can read to me”

You’re thankful when the doorbell rings  
And you can move to answer  
While in her chair, she sings a song  
And dreams that she’s a dancer

Through the door comes Grandma  
As she does most every day  
You grab your hat, put on your coat  
Prepared to make your way

You gently hug your mother  
And kiss your little girl  
They both call out “good luck” to you  
As you step out in the world

Down four flights you quickly move  
You take the stairs by twos  
Stepping over refuse and  
Discarded fifths of booze

Then out the door and down the street  
Around and up the hill  
Your breath creates soft puffs of white  
In the morning’s icy chill

Then down the hill, around the bend  
You see your target corner  
Already men are gathered there  
Like a church yard full of mourners

Their hands are shoved in pockets  
And their collars turned up high  
Each man a stark reminder  
Of how hard you’ll have to try

As you join the milling throng

Just outside a wooden shed  
A booming voice is rising  
From the man they call Big Ed

“Alright you men, now gather ‘round”  
“The trucks will soon be here”  
“You know the drill, no man gets work”  
“Except through me, that clear?”

“So form a line and pony up”  
“You better make it good”  
As he spoke, the trucks arrived  
With each half filled with wood

So one by one the huddled mass  
Starts moving towards the trucks  
Before they climb aboard each man  
Gives Ed some hard earned bucks

As you advance your eyes just burn  
And tear up in their sockets  
Because you know so very well  
There’s no money in your pockets

And with each man who pays and goes  
Your heart is filled with dread  
For soon you stand with empty hands  
And have to face Big Ed

Right now you have no money  
But the boss should pay today  
You promise Ed you’ll double  
What you normally would pay

“What am I, a charity?”  
Ed gives his thumb a jerk  
“If you ain’t got no money”  
“Then my friend, you got no work”

He pushes you aside  
And then hollers out “That’s all!”  
The gates close on the trucks

And away they slowly crawl

As you stand there on the corner  
With the others who are broke  
One by one they walk away  
No one tarried, no one spoke

You hurry to the brickyard  
For there may be something there  
But the foreman says he's sorry  
Open jobs are really rare

It's the same down at the bakery  
And at the lumber mill  
There's no work found at the stockyards  
Or at the bar and grill

The morning turns to afternoon  
Your shoes feel worn right through  
You can't conceive of going home  
Without bread or soup or stew

Despair begins to raise its head  
You know the signs of warning  
You walk back to the corner where  
You first began your morning

As you stand there out of options  
And not knowing what to do  
A truck pulls up, a man leans out  
And hollers loud "Hey you"

You nod and hurry over  
Just as quickly as you can  
The man inquires "You want some work?"  
"We need another man"

"The pay won't be too hefty"  
As his voice got low and dour  
"But if you're interested and willing"  
"We can work you for an hour"

With a yes and with a handshake  
You leap into the back  
The truck moves down the roadway  
As you sit on burlap sacks

When you reach the destination  
You see off to your right  
Big Ed and all the fellas  
Are at work on this jobsite

The foreman calls you over  
And he shows you what to do  
You're fresh, and so the task's complete  
Just as your hour is through

A whistle's blowing loudly  
All the men put down their tools  
Their foreheads bead with sweat  
Just like a thousand little jewels

The foreman sets a table  
Upon which the roster's laid  
The men fall in to form a line  
Excited to be paid

"Attention" calls the foreman  
And the men respect his power  
I'll start with wages for the man  
Who worked the last shift hour

You walk up to the table  
Past Big Ed and all the boys  
The foreman has an envelope  
His face seems full of joy

He moves to hand it over  
This man who's so respected  
It seems far too substantial  
And much more than you expected

You tell the smiling foreman  
There must be some mistake

For you only worked an hour  
There's more here than you should make

"I really like your attitude"  
"And how you work your way"  
"To acknowledge your good effort"  
"Your wage is for the day"

He reaches out to shake your hand  
This means so much to you  
"I'll expect you back tomorrow"  
"We've got so much work to do"

You move beyond the table  
Feeling lighter than a feather  
While behind you Big Ed laughs out loud  
And rubs his hands together

"Imagine boys" Big Ed exclaims  
"If he fulfills his hopes"  
"Is there any doubt that we'll be pleased"  
"With our pay envelopes"

Then one by one the men were paid  
But their laughter came to sputter  
For the wage they got was for the day  
They began to whine and mutter

Big Ed walks to the foreman  
With a visage dark and grim  
"Excuse me but it isn't fair"  
"We're paid the same as him?"

"I've been here since this morning"  
"Now the sun is going down"  
"This is not what I expected"  
"Something more here should be found"

"Why are you dissatisfied?"  
"You're paid as we'd agreed"  
He sensed a darkness in this man  
The avarice and greed

“I kept right to our bargain”  
“My word was straight and true”  
“If I am generous with him”  
“What’s that to do with you?”

Big Ed, he had no argument  
No leg on which to stand  
He turned and strode out angrily  
With his pay clinched in his hand

As you climb into the truck  
The other men do too  
Big Ed’s the last to jump in back  
You can feel his eyes on you

And when you reach the corner  
It’s getting nearly dark  
The trucks pull up with squealing brakes  
The men all disembark

You turn to start your journey home  
As the dusk grows ever colder  
But before you move a single step  
A hand lays on your shoulder

“I think we’ve got some business”  
Says Big Ed, his presence trouble  
“I accept the early offer”  
“That you made to pay me double”

“I’m sure you’ve just forgotten”  
“So I thought that I’d remind you”  
As his words hung in the air  
You sensed some men move in behind you

As you quickly lose your options  
Between the choice of fight or flee  
Big Ed leans close and smiling says  
“Ok sport, what will it be?”

Surrounded by a dozen men

And confronted by this baddie  
The tension's sharply broken  
As a voice calls out "Hi Daddy"

The head of every man is turned  
The surprise is so complete  
As a little girl on crutches  
Makes her way across the street

"Grandma said that we could come"  
"That you would think it's nice"  
"I hope that you are proud of me"  
"I only rested once or twice"

"I might need help as we walk home"  
The men all heard her say  
"Maybe you could carry me"  
"A little of the way?"

It was then she really noticed  
All the men around her dad  
She thought just for a second  
Then brightly spoke to add

"These men must be your friends"  
"I'm so happy I can meet you"  
"It's really good to know you all"  
"And I'm very glad to great you"

"Next week I have a birthday!"  
She said, now so excited  
"I know my dad won't mind a bit"  
"If I say you're all invited"

The men had dropped their eyes  
And were shuffling their feet  
That is except for Ed  
Who found this charming child a treat

"Oh now my little darlin'"  
And his laugh was rich and hearty  
"You don't want this bunch of tramps"

“Coming to your birthday party”

“You are sweet and generous”  
“And I feel you have unmasked me”  
“For ‘tis you who’s given me a gift”  
“Just because you kindly asked me”

“So thank you little missy”  
“You’ve made this gang so glad”  
“I hope we get to meet again”  
“You go on home now with your dad”

Big Ed then looks right at you  
Cracks a smile and gives a wink  
“Come on you scurvy lads” he calls  
“Let’s go get ourselves a drink”

As Big Ed and all his boys  
Make their way back down the street  
You kneel and hug your daughter  
Nothing feels quite so complete

For life still has its lessons  
No matter breadth or length  
It’s in what we see as weakness  
That God shows his greatest strength

You put her on your shoulders  
With her Grandma by your side  
You start the journey home  
A new bounce found in your stride

“Daddy, I just remembered”  
“I really, really looked”  
“I searched and searched for hours”  
“But I couldn’t find that special book”

You smile and look up skyward  
For there’s no greater love than His  
“Don’t worry little sweetheart”  
“I know exactly where it is”