

The Path to Greatness in the Kingdom (Matthew 18:1-4)

The disciples came to Jesus with a question that reveals their hearts: *“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* (v.1). Their desire for status and position among themselves shows that even those closest to Jesus struggled with pride and ambition.

Instead of rebuking them harshly, Jesus used a powerful visual lesson. He called a little child, placed him in the middle of the group, and said, *“Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (v.3).

Personal Application:

True greatness is found in humility, trust, and dependence—just like a child. Children don’t worry about their status or strive for power; they simply trust and depend on their father. That’s the kind of heart God wants from us.

Ask yourself: *Am I striving for recognition, position, or status in my faith, or am I humbling myself before God?* Jesus calls us to let go of pride and embrace humility.

The Value of Children & the Warning Against Stumbling Blocks (Matthew 18:5-10)

Jesus continued by saying, *“Whoever receives one little child in My name receives Me”* (v.5). But then He gives a sobering warning: If anyone causes a child to sin, it would be better for them to have a millstone hung around their neck and be drowned in the sea (v.6).

The seriousness of this warning cannot be overstated. Destroying a child’s faith, leading them into sin, or corrupting their innocence is a grave offense in God’s eyes.

Jesus also warns about personal stumbling blocks. *“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off”* (v.8). He is using hyperbolic language to stress the importance of removing anything that leads us into sin.

Personal Application:

- How do I treat the younger or weaker in faith? Am I encouraging their walk with Christ, or am I careless with my words and actions?
- Am I tolerating things in my life that lead me into sin? Jesus calls for radical action—not literal self-mutilation but removing temptations and influences that draw us away from Him.

Take an honest inventory: *What needs to be cut out of my life to pursue holiness?*

The Father’s Love for the Lost (Matthew 18:11-14)

Jesus gives the parable of the lost sheep to illustrate the Father’s deep love for every individual. A shepherd with 100 sheep will leave the 99 to seek the one that has gone astray. And when he finds it, he rejoices more over that one than the 99 that never went astray.

Personal Application:

God values each person, no matter how lost they may be. He doesn't give up on us.

- Do I share God's heart for the lost?
- Am I willing to leave my comfort zone to pursue those who are far from God?
- Do I truly celebrate when someone repents and comes to Christ?

If God does not want even **one** to perish (v.14), neither should we. Pray for the lost, reach out, and reflect God's love.

Restoring a Brother Who Has Sinned (Matthew 18:15-20)

Jesus provides a practical guide for dealing with conflict and sin in the church:

1. Go to the person privately – Handle offenses one-on-one (v.15).
2. Take one or two witnesses – If they don't listen, bring others (v.16).
3. Bring it before the church – If they refuse correction, let the church intervene (v.17).
4. If they still refuse, treat them as an outsider – Not in a hateful way, but as someone who needs restoration.

Jesus then speaks about binding and loosing (v.18) and gives the power of agreement in prayer (v.19-20). He promises, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (v.20).

Personal Application:

- When conflict arises, do I handle it biblically and privately first, or do I gossip about it?
- Do I value prayer in agreement with others?
- Jesus is present when we gather—even in small groups. Do I live with the awareness of His presence?

Take time to reflect on any unresolved conflicts. *Am I approaching them with humility and a desire for restoration?*

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

Peter, perhaps feeling self-righteous, asks, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (v.21).

Jesus' answer is radical: "Not seven times, but seventy times seven" (v.22). In other words, forgiveness should be limitless.

Jesus then tells the parable of the unforgiving servant:

1. A servant owed 10,000 talents (millions of dollars today) to the king. He couldn't pay, so the king forgave his entire debt (v.27).
2. But that same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (a few thousand dollars) and choked him, demanding payment (v.28).
3. Even when the fellow servant begged for mercy, he refused to forgive and threw him into prison (v.30).
4. The king, upon hearing this, was furious and delivered the unforgiving servant to the tormentors (v.34).
5. Jesus concludes: "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if you do not forgive from the heart." (v.35).

Personal Application:

This parable illustrates the absurdity of refusing to forgive. If God has forgiven us an infinite debt, how can we withhold forgiveness from others?

- Do I truly grasp the weight of my own sin and the depth of God's grace?
- Am I holding onto bitterness, refusing to release someone from their debt to me?
- Do I forgive "from the heart" (v.35), or do I say I forgive but secretly harbor resentment?

Bitterness **binds** us, but forgiveness **frees** us. Ask God for the grace to let go and forgive as He forgave you.

Conclusion: Living as Kingdom People

Matthew 18 gives us essential truths for life in the kingdom:

1. True greatness is found in humility (v.1-4).
2. We must guard and value the faith of children (v.5-10).
3. God pursues the lost with relentless love (v.11-14).
4. Conflict should be handled with wisdom, grace, and restoration in mind (v.15-20).
5. Forgiveness is not optional—it is the natural response of those who have received God's mercy (v.21-35).

Final Personal Application:

Ask yourself:

- Do I seek humility over status?
- Am I a stumbling block to others in their faith?
- Do I have a heart for the lost like Jesus does?

- How do I handle conflict? Do I seek restoration or revenge?
- Is there anyone I need to forgive today?

Jesus calls us to a radically different way of living—one marked by humility, love, and grace. May we walk in these truths and reflect His heart in our lives.