

## “Being a Child of God”

*Matthew 18:1-4, 19:13-14, Luke 9:48, & Mark 9:35*

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The disciples found themselves doing plenty of walking. Jesus was always on the move caring, healing and teaching. On one of these long walks, these tough fishermen swapped stories. The tales grew bit by bit and developed into bragging. They were sharing their most triumphant moments. This escalated into a debate over which one of them was the greatest. Who should be the leader in Jesus' absences? They went and asked Jesus, **Matthew 18:1-3 “which one of them was the greatest?” “Jesus called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”** This account is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each disciple understood Jesus' words and command to be like a child in a slightly different way. For Matthew the key characteristic of children to follow is humility. **Matthew 18:4 “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”** Mark focused on Jesus words, **Mark 9:35 “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”** The words that resonated with Luke were, **Luke 9:48 “for the least among all of you is the greatest.”**

We are to be humble servants. Humble is defined as courteous, respectful, meek, modest; not arrogant or prideful. A humble servant respectfully seeks to understand another's point of view, then modestly shares their own perspective. A humble servant strives to serve with others to create a loving, joyful world.

Biblical Scholar Ben Witherington sees a widespread attitude of entitlement as the major obstacle hindering our humility today. Whether at home or the workplace many people believe they are owed something. Sometimes it is reciprocal. The cycle of you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Sometimes it is justification based on what I have given or sacrificed, I deserve more compensation, a better home or car, a more loving spouse, better friends and more obedient children. We even play the entitlement game with God: I am a pretty good person, I support your church God, now bless me with \_\_\_\_\_. We want perks, rewards, and bonuses in many different forms. We feel it is owed to us. This is a self-centered orientation that leads to a vicious cycle of acquiring what we believe is rightfully ours. The gospel of Matthew deals with this over and over. As Christians, we are to be humble remembering that we don't own anything. The earth and all that is in it is the Lord's. We are stewards and caretakers of God's gifts for a time but never owners.

Most young children are humble. They are not yet concerned with status, entitlement, the world's pecking order or ownership. Most young children are gracious. Grace has absolutely nothing to do with what is owed, deserved, or earned. Grace is receiving the free gift of God's love and forgiveness. Grace is freely giving love and forgiveness to others.

Jesus said, **Matthew 18:5 “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”** If you were involved in VBS in anyway, please raise your hand. Whether you taught, acted, cooked, cleaned, donated, or loaned an item or brought a child to VBS, you are great. You have welcomed Jesus. Well done good and faithful servants.

Jesus is endlessly patient and forgiving. Just a little while after this teaching we get our second lesson regarding children. **Matthew 19:13-14 “Then little children were being brought to Jesus 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.”** What is it about children that Jesus would teach we must become as a little child? Certainly we need to be humble. Perhaps we are to be teachable, pliable so Jesus can lovingly mold us into a humble, serving, loving disciple. Children know how to have fun, laugh and are often filled with joy. They marvel at the simple beauty all around us in God's creation. Jesus wants us to be filled with joy and quick to laugh. A child is curious and easily filled with awe and wonder. Have you ever noticed how children are accepting; giving and receiving love with no strings attached? Children tend to be at peace for they live in the moment; not in the past, or in the future. Little children are quick to forgive and forget. They are eager to join in and be a part of a community. Children are dependent and trust others to care and love them. A child knows

how to receive grace, to delight in a free gift. Young children are innocent, free of hate, worry, and fear. They delight in all skin colors, orientations, political affiliations.

Henri Nouwen writes, “Community is like a large mosaic. Each little piece seems so insignificant. One piece is bright red, another cold blue or dull green, another warm purple, another sharp yellow, another shining gold. Some look precious, others ordinary. Some look valuable, others worthless. Some look gaudy, others delicate. As individual stones, we can do little with them except compare them and judge their beauty and value. When, however, all these little stones are brought together in one big mosaic portraying the face of Christ, who would ever question the importance of any one of them? If one of them, even the least spectacular one, is missing, the face is incomplete. Together in the one mosaic, each little stone is indispensable and makes a unique contribution to the glory of God. That’s community, a fellowship of little people who together make God visible in the world.”

Model the child like quality you identified so that together we will show a beautiful mosaic of God.

Amen