

Command #15: Be humble like little children and don't look down on them.

Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:13-15 // Jerry Barber

Matthew 18:1-5

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³ And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Matthew 19:13-15

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

Condensed Version

Read Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:13-15 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. Why would Jesus point to children as his example for humility?
2. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus does not insist that they become children or childish. Why does he stress the need to change in order to become like little children?
3. Meditate on Philippians 2:1-11. What do you admire about Jesus from this passage?
4. In what ways does pride affect the way you think about and relate to others? (family members, church members, neighbors, coworkers, etc.?)

Study (answers follow below)

1. Read and meditate on Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:13-15. What strikes you? Write down a few observations you have about the text.
2. Read Matthew 20:20-30 and write down how that experience, even though it comes after this text, informs us of what the disciples were struggling with.
3. In Matthew 20:20-30, how did the other ten disciples react to the request by the mother of James and John? What principle about competition can be gleaned from this?
5. Why would Jesus point to children as his example for humility?
6. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus does not insist that they become children or childish. Why does he stress the need to change in order to become *like* little children?
7. Read Matthew 19:13-15. How does this passage support the principles taught in Matthew 18:1-5?

Answers:

1. Many possible answers.
2. In Matthew 20:20-30, two disciples (James and John), through their mother, ask Jesus to allow them to sit beside him when his kingdom is consummated, showing their lack of humility and desire for power, position and recognition.
3. Matthew 20:24 says, "When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers." They were ticked! Principle: unhealthy competition rooted in pride destroys community, whereas humility fosters community.
4. In that culture, children were weak, defenseless and vulnerable. Without the support and protection of a parent, they would die. This is like an "object lesson" that Jesus uses to stress the importance of humility; rather than striving to achieve status, power and authority, his followers need humility to accept him and his way.
5. By nature, we want to be self-sufficient, to make our own way in life. A child is dependent on others. With God, we cannot "make our own way"; i.e., become good enough in our own strength to get to heaven. We need to repent of that kind of thinking and trust Christ and Christ alone for salvation.
6. Matthew 19:13-15 illustrates what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:5, "And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." So there are two related principles in Matthew 18:5: (1) Greatness is emulating the humility of children (18:1-4); and (2) Greatness is following Jesus by welcoming children (18:5; 19:13-15).

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Worship

1. What do you learn in Matthew 11:28-30 that uniquely qualifies him to teach what he did in Matthew 18:1-5?
2. Meditate on Philippians 2:1-11. What do you admire about Jesus from this passage?
3. Write out a prayer of worship directed to Jesus, praising him for his humility and how he embraces those with a "lowly position."

Answers:

1. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. He has modeled humility for us, so teaching his followers to be humble is fitting for him.
2. Many possible answers, including: He obeyed his Father's will even though that cost him everything; He refused to grasp and hang onto the way he was existing in heaven before coming to earth; His humility knew no limits, as he embraced many steps downward, etc.
3. Personal

Obey

1. Philippians 2 makes it clear that humility is a mindset. After having studied humility, and worshipped Jesus for his humility, ask God to reveal to you ways and places you exhibit pride rather than humility.
2. In what ways does pride affect the way you think about and relate to others? (family members, church members, neighbors, coworkers, etc.?)

Train:

How to help disciple others:

1. Study Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:13-15 yourself, ask your disciple(s) to study it, then discuss it and pray about it together.
2. Consider memorizing and meditating on Philippians 2:1-11 with your disciple(s).
3. Humility, like so many other virtues, is more caught than taught. Yield to Christ to live through you so you can model humility for those you are trying to influence for God.