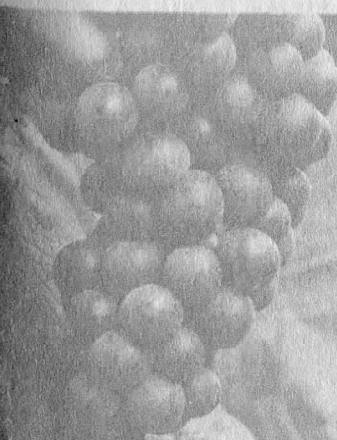


LESSON NINE

HUMILITY

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

MATTHEW 18:3-4 NKJV



REFLECTION

Mother Teresa gained worldwide recognition during her lifetime for her tireless work among the poorest of the poor in the streets of Calcutta, India. What admirable qualities did she possess? Why do you think her story stands out in people's minds even today?

SITUATION

During the time of Christ, Israel was under the authority of the Roman Empire. Honor, power, pride, prestige, acclaim were all the dominant values of Rome. Not surprisingly, Jesus advocated and modeled a different value system for his followers. The ways of the world are not the ways of the kingdom of Christ.

OBSERVATION

Read Matthew 18:1-14 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

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.

⁶ "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

¹⁰ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. [¹¹]

¹² "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

² Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

⁶ "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because

of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

⁸ "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

¹⁰ "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹ For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

¹² "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? ¹³ And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴ Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

EXPLORATION

1. What topic were the disciples discussing that they wanted an answer from Jesus?

2. How did Jesus settle their dispute? What quality did he call them to demonstrate?

3. How did Jesus inject an eternal perspective into this conversation?

4. According to Jesus, who is great in God's eyes?

5. How did Jesus illustrate the importance of "lowly" and "forgotten" people like children?

6. What does the parable of the lost sheep reveal about how God cares for everyone?

INSPIRATION

Deflating inflated egos is so important to God that he offers to help.

He helped me. I recently spent an autumn week on a book tour. We saw long lines and crowded stores. One person after another complimented me. For three days I bathed in the river of praise. I began to believe the accolades. *All these people can't be wrong. I must be God's gift to readers.*

My chest puffed so much I could hardly see where to autograph the books. Why, had I been born 2,000 years earlier, we might read the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. About the time I wondered if the Bible needed another epistle, God shot an arrow of humility in my direction.

We were running late for an evening book signing—late because the afternoon book signing had seen such long lines. We expected the same at the next store. Concerned, we phoned ahead. “We are running behind. Tell all the people we’ll arrive soon.”

“No need to hurry,” the store manager assured.

“What about the people?” we asked.

“Neither one seems to be in a hurry.”

Neither one?

By the time we reached the store, thankfully, the crowd of two people had tripled to six. We had scheduled two hours for the signing; I needed ten minutes.

Self-conscious about sitting alone at the table, I peppered the last person with questions. We talked about her parents, school, Social Security number, favorite birthday party. Against my pleadings, she had to go. So I sat alone at the table, Big stack of Lucado books, no one in line.

I asked the store manager, “Did you advertise?” “We did. More than usual.” She walked off.

The next time she passed I asked, “Had other signings?” “Yes, usually we have a great response,” and kept going.

I signed all the books at my table. I signed all the Lucado books on the shelves. I signed Tom Clancy and John Grisham books. Finally a customer came to the table. “You write books?” he asked, picking up the new one.

“I do. Want me to sign it?”

“No thanks,” he answered and left.

God hit his target. Lest I forget, my daily reading the next morning had this passage: “Do not be wise in your own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7 NKJV).

When you’re full of yourself, God can’t fill you. (From *Curse for the Common Life* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. Why do you think we get so full of ourselves so often?

8. How would you describe humility? Give some examples.

9. Our society is a bit different from the ancient Roman Empire. What are the dominant values that our neighbors and colleagues live by?

10. What are the risks of living humbly and showing extraordinary kindness to the “least of these”?

11. In *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis observed, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.” Why is it difficult to remember this and treat others—all others—with dignity and respect?

12. What are the dangers of pride (see Proverbs 16:18)?

LIFE LESSONS

We will either take our cues from the world or the Word. There are no other options. We can buy into the dominant temporal value system that says: *Be cutthroat. Compete. See all others as rivals. Promote yourself (by tearing others down). Pursue the acclaim of others.* Or we can embrace the rare and precious eternal value system that says: *Be Christ-like. Submit. See others as those whom you can serve. Live to promote Christ. Pursue the commendation of God.* The first way is the way of pride. The second way is the way of humility. The first way ends ironically in destruction. The second way culminates in exaltation.

DEVOTION

Lord, give me a discerning spirit and the transformed mindset necessary to see that things are not what they appear. Help me to say no to the constant temptation to promote myself. Remind me constantly that my calling is to promote you and that I do this by serving others using the gifts and opportunities you give.

JOURNALING

Who are some people God is nudging you to serve? What are some concrete ways that you can serve those individuals?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Matthew during this twelve-part study, read Matthew 18:1-35. For more Bible passages on humility, read Psalm 18, Proverbs 11:2; 29:23; James 4:10; and 1 Peter 3:8.