



Chapter 18

Who is the greatest _____? I'm sure you've been in an argume-, or, a "discussion," related to this question. You might discuss who is the greatest *actress, author, quarterback, Fortnite dancer, singer, teacher, golfer, chef, Civil War General, or late-19th century French impressionist painter*. The possibilities are endless.

Icebreaker:

1. Let's get into an argument! As a group, pick a category that's significant to and then let each strongly opinionated person :) make a case for why _____ is the greatest.

People are considered the greatest based on their accomplishments. It's their skills. It's their talent. It's their hard work. It's their dedication. It's their intelligence. It's their bravery. This is the just the way life works. That is, unless we're talking about God's Kingdom.

Verses 1-4

The disciples' question is easy enough to understand. Who doesn't want to be great?! The disciples may have had in mind both a present-day and future greatness, although Jesus's answer focuses more on the present moment. His answer also reveals that the disciples were more concerned about power and status than about the kind of qualities that would make one great in matters of righteousness.

2. Today, what makes someone "greatest" in the Church? Is it based on their accomplishments, talents, or some other qualities?

We shouldn't read too quickly through verses 3-4. The phrases here include actions that the "greatest" take in the kingdom of heaven. It's shocking!

3. Jesus calls us to "turn and become like children" by humbling ourselves. How does a young child's humility contrast with virtually any other idea about greatness?

Verses 5-9 (Note: Some translations take v. 5 with 1-4, but this guide follows the format of the ESV.) Jesus moves from the topic of *greatness* to the issue of *how to treat others in the Kingdom Community*—the Church. It's best to understand "one such child" in these verses as any believer since we are all called to be "children" in terms of our humility. The idea of "receive" in v. 5 conveys a sense of welcoming and showing hospitality. We do this "in my name," as we operate under the authority given us by Jesus.

4. Jesus is making an inseparable link between Himself and those who comprise the Kingdom Community. We welcome Him when we welcome them. What would it look like for a community of people to live this out?

The warning of verses 6-9 are the proverbial "other side of the coin." Our interactions with each other are meant to build up, not destroy. We're all capable of harming others' faith. So is the external world. In a passage reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, we are to take our own conduct with complete seriousness as well.

5. We can be tempted from any angle! The outside world can entice us. Our inward sinful desires can entice us. Even a fellow believer can entice us! Which of these possibilities do you find most easy to beware of and which is easiest to forget? Why?

Verses 10-14 (Note: Verse 11 is missing! The earliest copies of Matthew do not include it.)

Everyone in God's Kingdom Community is of immense worth and importance. Again, it's best to understand "these little ones" as fellow disciples of Jesus rather than only little children, as the language represents the childlike nature (i.e., humility) all believers are to exhibit.

The second half of v. 10 is attention-grabbing! We should focus on what's plainly stated rather than speculate about whatever else we might want to know about "their angels." In this case, the incalculable value of each disciple is even reflected in the role of angels who—in a way that is mysterious to us—represent God's "little ones" with unhindered access to God.

The illustration of the sheep is likely familiar and is an incredible picture of each disciple's value.

6. If Jesus would go to such lengths to rescue even one who has gone astray, how much more should we value each other in how we treat each other? What are one or two things we can do, as LifeGroups, to demonstrate this value to each other?

Verses 15-20

It's relatively easy to care for each other when we're all getting along. The Bible is real, though. Jesus knows how normal sin-fueled conflict can be, even within His Kingdom Community. These verses supply an escalating pattern for confrontation: individually and privately, with one or two members of the community, and, finally, with all of the community. The goal is redemptive, to bring about repentance and reconciliation; however, the final step is excommunication or ostracism from the local church. Although not explicit in this passage, it's worth noting how even tax collectors and Gentiles are *not* outside the reach of God's grace.

The Kingdom Community is to exhibit and practice grace toward one another, and this cannot occur where sin is merely ignored, denied, or even minimized. Verses 18-20 remind us of the Church's God-given authority and discernment in dealing with sinful conflicts.

7. How do these verses sit with you? Have you seen this done well or even done at all? Have you seen these verses abused? Talk about this together.

8. These verses assume something essential: that Christians are integrated into the life of a local church! How does this challenge the idea of a "lone-ranger" Christian?

9. Here at Calvary, we are always trying to practice this in our LifeGroups. Being *Biblical Communities on Mission* means we work and live out these tough moments. Why do you think Jesus set up this way in confronting each other about sin in our lives?

Verses 21-35

Peter's question prompts a jarring parable from Jesus. The number seven commonly represents fullness, so Peter's proposal in verse 21 probably seemed generous. Jesus, though, by replying seventy-seven (or, seventy times seven in other translations) is almost certainly indicating an unlimited number of times that forgiveness is to be given.

Read slowly so you don't miss the storyline. Commentators point out how a talent approximated 6,000 denarii (a denarii = 1 day's wage for many laborers). If you do the math, the 10,000 talents

owed by the servant is inconceivable—on the magnitude of billions of dollars. Grant Osborne points out how “Jesus’ hearers would simply have thought of an impossibly large debt, like a child saying ‘a million gadzillions.’” In comparison, this same servant was owed a mere 100 denarii...yet he was unwilling to forgive. What hypocrisy!

10. The one who was forgiven an incalculable debt refused to forgive a comparatively paltry amount. If you’re brave, talk about whether you can see yourself in this parable!

Tying the Bow

If Jesus’s Kingdom Community is one where we confront sin in ourselves individually and in each other corporately, *it makes sense that the greatest are those who display childlike humility.*

If we are a community where we are to value each other the way God values us, *it makes sense that the greatest are those who display childlike humility.*

If we are a community that is to extend forgiveness to each other an unlimited amount, then *it makes sense that the greatest are those who display childlike humility.*

As His disciples, Jesus is our model to follow, and we cannot live this out apart from His grace.

11. Take time to pray in your group, asking for God’s Spirit to be at work in and among you so that you would have the kind of humility that God requires. If you need to forgive a fellow believer, confess that and ask for God to grant you the humility to do so, keeping in mind how much greater you have been forgiven your offenses against God.