

Dwelling in the Word

Prayerfully read Matt 18:1-35 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Beginning the Conversation

1. How do you respond to Jesus pointing to a little child as an example of what it means to be a disciple?
2. Have you ever experienced the process of reconciliation as described in this passage? How do you think it went? How could it have been improved?

Digging Deeper *(pick some of the following questions to discuss as a group)*

1. In this passage Jesus talks about those, such as little children, who are vulnerable and often ignored. Who is ignored or vulnerable in our faith community? How can we ensure they are welcomed and not despised?
2. In 18:15-20, Jesus addresses how his followers are to address conflict. Is what Jesus says workable? What limitations or modifications would have to be considered for different circumstances (Pastor Tyler in the sermon mentioned a couple)?
3. What do you think is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? List at least three differences.
4. Matt 18:22 says that we are to forgive others an unlimited number of times (that would be the sense of “seventy seven”). How would you summarize forgiveness, based on the passage and the sermon?
5. The teaching in this passage may not take into account some of the complexities in actual situations where forgiveness and reconciliation is needed. How and why should power differentials be taken into consideration regarding forgiveness?
6. Is it possible that Jesus was urging the offended to spend time with the unrepentant offender and show the person grace? Of course, safety needs to be considered. When does it seem safe and good to spend time with someone who has sinned against you and work towards forgiveness and reconciliation? And when should grace simply be considered from afar?

Living it Out

1. What is one way you can “become like a little child” (18:3) this week?
2. Forgiveness is not easy and can be a long painful process. If there is someone in your life you need to ask forgiveness from, or alternatively someone who you need to forgive, spend some time praying about the situation and make an action plan. If it is a situation where you do not feel safe, it would be wise to consult with a trusted friend and perhaps take them with you.

Community Values: Little Ones, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness (Matthew 18:1-35)



Discourse 4
Community of the
Kingdom (14-18)

March 8, 2026
Pastor Tyler Williams
Greenfield Community Church

A Question about Status

“Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (18:1).

- This question may have been elicited by recent experiences where some disciples have been singled out (16:15-19; 17:1-2); or
- Jesus’ mention of his impending death (16:21) and a serious concern over a succession plan; or
- It may just reflect the broader cultural obsession with status (see 20:21-28; 23:11-12; etc.).

Little Children & Little Ones

“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (18:2-3).

- Jesus’ use of a little child (*paidion παιδιον*) as a model disciple is a unique and shocking inversion of cultural assumptions about status.
- Talking about literal children **and** those who become like children.
- Accepting a position in the social scale which is the same as a child; giving up power and becoming vulnerable.

Little Children & Little Ones

“And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. And if anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble...” (18:5-6).

- Welcoming a child is equated with welcoming Jesus (25:40, 45; cf. 19:13-14).
- Jesus issues a severe warning to those who bring harm to children or “little ones” – including vulnerable disciples, perhaps those young in the faith.
- Stumble (*skandalizo σκανδαλιζω*) – to cause to be brought to a downfall, “cause to lose faith” (GNB).

Little Children & Little Ones

“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” (18:10).

- “Their angels in heaven” – angels represent them before God in heaven (not individual guardian angels); perhaps an implied warning?
- Jesus closes with the **parable of the wandering sheep** (18:12-14; cf. Luke 15:3-7), illustrating how much recovering the wandering matters to God.
- The community as a whole is to reflect the pastoral mind of God and be concerned for children and vulnerable believers.

Seeking Reconciliation

“If your brother or sister sins [against you], go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over...” (18:15).

- Textual Question: Is it just “sins” (NIV2011, NASB) or “sins *against you*” (NLT, NRSV, ESV, KJV, NIV1984)?
- Translations reflects a difference in the Greek textual evidence; it is so divided the UBSGNT Committee put the variant in brackets.
- In the context, “sins against you” makes better sense (cf. 18:21).

Seeking Reconciliation

- Principles of *Progressive Reconciliation* & *Minimum Exposure*: ideal is to reconcile in private without involving others; then two or three (quoting Deut 19:15); and only then the church.
- The process is *restorative, not punitive*: the goal is to “win over” the individual (18:15).
- The scenario in the passage assumes the complainant is in the right and the two have equal footing (siblings) with no power imbalance (in real life things are often more complex).

Seeking Reconciliation

“If he still refuses to listen, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, you [sg] should treat him as a pagan or a tax collector” (18:17).

- The community is involved in order to strengthen the pastoral appeal.
- If the conflict remains unresolved, then the individual moves from being regarded as “brother or sister” (18:15) to being regarded as a “pagan or a tax collector” (18:17) and is treated accordingly.
- Note that its the individual who “treats him like a pagan or tax collector” (singular), not the church as a whole.

Seeking Reconciliation

“Truly I tell you [pl], whatever you [pl] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you [pl] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (18:18).

- “Binding” and “loosing” refers to the practice of discerning how the Scriptures apply; this situation being one of conflict.
- Broadens the subject to include any “binding” or “loosing” decisions of the church to discern this particular conflict (cf. 16:19).

Seeking Reconciliation

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (18:19-20).

- Need to keep these verses in the context of discernment about conflict and reconciliation.
- Highlights the importance of prayer in the process of reconciliation.
- The church possesses the authority to “bind” and to “loose” *because* Christ dwells in its midst (18:20; cf. 28:20).

Unlimited Forgiveness

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (18:21-22).

- Peter was thinking he was very generous in suggesting up to seven times.
- Jesus goes over the top and suggests forgiveness is to be granted “seventy [and] seven” times (quoting LXX Genesis 4:24).
- Whatever the number, the point is unlimited forgiveness: A community of the forgiven must be a forgiving community!

Unlimited Forgiveness

Parable of the Forgiving God & the Unforgiving Servant (18:23-35)

- The servant had been forgiven a debt 600,000 times greater than what he was unwilling to forgive! (10,000 talents vs. 100 denarii).
- *The point is rhetorical:* when you are tempted to withhold forgiveness (even if for valid reasons), ask yourself, “What if God were like this?”
- Parable underlines the magnitude of God's mercy and forgiveness: There can be no limit to forgiveness for those who experience the limitless grace of God.

Seeking & Granting Forgiveness

"Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of peace, and it can allow reconciliation to take place" (*Prepare-Enrich*).

Steps for Seeking Forgiveness

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions.
4. Assure the offended you will not do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Steps for Granting Forgiveness

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger.
2. Be specific about future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to "get even."
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness.
6. Work towards reconciliation (when safe).

Kingdom Values – Community Values

Each section highlights a value of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is to characterize the Community of the Kingdom, the Church.

- Children (and vulnerable believers) are to be valued in the community because they are precious to God — and we are to become like children.
- Maintaining good relationships through reconciliation and forgiveness is to be valued in the community because they reflect the practice of God.

Invitation

I invite you to consider the grace and mercy of God demonstrated toward you in Jesus Christ, and — through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in your life — show the same grace and mercy in all your relationships.