



PART 4

INTRODUCTION

We need to take responsibility for our things and look after them. This doesn't just apply to the things we own; it's more important for our relationships too. Life will make relationships harder and more challenging, but if we do not take care of them, we will inevitably miss the value of community. In Matthew 18, Jesus preached that relationships are vital to God's kingdom, much like how the children of Israel received God's commandments (Exodus 34), in order to learn how to become his people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most expensive/valuable thing you own that you take great pains to look after it? How do you look after it?
2. Think about the last time you experienced a conflict in a relationship. What were the circumstances? How did you resolve or settle it?
3. Read Matt 18:1-5. The disciples were often concerned about the question of greatness. Jesus' response to them, "*Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom.*" Jesus sets a child as an example of humility. What does the word "humble" mean? What does it mean to humble yourself?
4. Read Matt 18:5-9. In this context, an offense is something that stumbles others in their faith. Jesus uses the hand, foot, and eye as metaphors for things that cause us to sin. What does He imply we should do with those things that cause us to sin (vv. 8-9)? Why should a person deal with sin in such a radical way?
5. We are often told that we should 'forgive and forget'. What does forgiveness mean to you? Do you find it easy to forgive someone who has wronged or disappointed you? What effects does not practicing forgiveness have on our lives?
6. Read Matthew 18:21-35. Do an inductive bible study (observations, interpretation and application). You can use the following as a guide:
 - i. Posture your heart. Spend some time in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. Open your heart to the Lord to speak to you.

ii. Read the passage aloud

iii. Ask some context questions of the passage:

- What sort of writing is this? (a letter, a poem, a narrative etc?)
- Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written?
- What has happened so far in this particular book of the Bible?

iv. Some observation questions of the passage:

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the passage?
- What is the main point or points?
- What surprises are there?
- What are the key words? What words or ideas are repeated?

v. Some leading questions of the text:

- How does this passage relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach us about God?
- How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?

vi. Some application questions of the passage:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude you need to change?
- How does this passage call on me to change the way you live?

Based on what you learned from this story, would you say God's forgiveness of us is limited or unlimited? Conditional or unconditional? How about your forgiveness of others?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18: 10-14 marks the centre of the Christ's message in the chapter and is a powerful example of how everyone matters to God. This is an important reminder to us (as God's children) that there is no hierarchy in heaven, but we all come before God, needing one another. Pride is the primary reason we get into relationship conflicts, but they are also opportunities for us respond in humility to a process of restoration, and the continued practice of forgiveness.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matthew 18:12-14)