

OTHERS FIRST

MATTHEW 18



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

T. M. MOORE

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Others First: Matthew 18
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Matthew 18: Introduction

We do not receive, dwell in, or seek the Kingdom of God alone. Nor do we seek it without having to struggle mightily against sin and its subtle ways. We must be careful to work out our own salvation, being diligent to bring holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord. And we must watch out for one another, and for the overall wellbeing of the Kingdom community.

In chapter 18 Jesus shows us what our attitude must be toward sin, and guides in how to help one another increase in Kingdom righteousness.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 This Way to Greatness

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2.

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Sing Psalm 146.1, 2, 10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise!

And exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Read and meditate on Matthew 18.1-5.

Prepare.

1. What were the disciples wanting to know?

2. What makes one great in the Kingdom of God?

Meditate.

This is now the second time the matter of Kingdom greatness has come up in the Gospel of Matthew. The first time, Jesus brought it up – as if to whet His disciples' attitude for such a thing (Matt. 5.17-19). There we learned that being great in the Kingdom involved learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God.

Here Jesus showed that greatness in the Kingdom is sort of a background virtue – always at the ready to serve, but never ostentatious. Children, we all know, should be seen, but not heard. Well, not exactly. Children look to others and want to please them. They find their greatest pleasure by being applauded by those they love and esteem. When they're at their best, they deny themselves to please those they love. Kingdom greatness involves such a self-denying, cross-bearing, others-serving disposition. Do you want to be great in the Kingdom? Kingdom greatness involves pleasing others. Happily, the Law of God has been given us for just this reason. It teaches us how to please God and our neighbors, as we love them consistently and well.

If we combine this passage with the earlier one, we can see that learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God must not be done in a bullying or authoritative manner. If this is our view of teaching and making disciples, we don't understand how life in the Kingdom works. In the Kingdom, righteousness, peace, and joy are the defining motifs (Rom. 14.17, 18). We learn the Law and keep it so that, by its wisdom and light, we may love God and serve others well. As we internalize the Law – or, to be more precise, as the Holy Spirit writes the Law on our hearts (Ezek. 36.26, 27) – we are formed into childlike souls who live to please God and serve others, following the grace and truth God has established for us in His Law (Rom. 3.31).

Wonder and humility; obeying to serve; learning to love; loving to teach – these are how the citizens and ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom climb the ladder of greatness.

Reflect.

1. What would you say are the greatest hindrances to realizing greatness in the Kingdom of God?

2. Can we ignore or neglect the Law of God and realize greatness in the Kingdom? Why not?

3. What opportunities for seeking Kingdom greatness are before you today?

He called a child to him to ask its age or to show the image of innocence. Or perhaps he actually set a child in their midst—he himself, who had not come to be served but to serve—to show them an example of humility. Jerome (347-420), Commentary on Matthew 3.18.2

I want to be great in Your Kingdom, Lord, so help me today as I...

Pray Psalm 146.3-10.

Rejoice in the hope of salvation, the freedom you have in Jesus, His daily provision of all your needs, and the opportunities He gives you for serving others.

Sing Psalm 146.3-10.

Psalm 146.2-10 (Hallelujah! What a Savior!: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand;

Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.

By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessed Name,
Them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

2 No Offense

Pray Psalm 96.1-4.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.

Sing Psalm 96.1-4.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)
Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised –
Fear Him, and sing His glory!

Read Matthew 18.1-9; meditate on verses 6-9.

Prepare.

1. What seems to be Jesus' main point in these verses?
2. How does He make that point?

Meditate.

Jesus the poet is at work here, using a rhetorical device called hyperbole – gross exaggeration – to make a very important point.

The point is this: Among His followers, sin has no place, either in our lives, or in the lives of those who share our communion in Christ. Believers are to hate sin (Ps. 97.10). They must not tolerate it in their own lives (vv. 8, 9); and they must be careful not to be the cause of it in others (vv. 6, 7).

Let's take a closer look.

First is the instruction not to give offense to “these little ones” – new or young believers, presumably. We may consider that we are free in the Lord to do all kinds of things, but not if any of what we freely do causes a brother or sister in the Lord to fall into sin. Paul argues this point extensively in 1 Corinthians 8. We must be careful that our behavior is – [as C. S. Lewis put it](#) – always nudging and leading our neighbor to higher heights of glory in the Lord. To do otherwise is a serious fault. To emphasize just how terrible this is, Jesus introduced the image of the millstone around the neck of the one who makes others stumble. That would be a hard image to forget, I think, and thus effective to help us remember that loving our neighbors means not causing them to stumble into sin.

Closer to home, we need to be brutal with ourselves when it comes to harboring sin. Harboring sin in our lives defeats our prayer (Ps. 66.18). It leads us down the path of deception and the lie, deprives us of the grace of forgiveness, and even runs the risk of calling God a liar, if we say we *have* no sin (1

Jn. 1.8-10).

So if there is lingering sin in your life, get it out – whatever it takes. I don't believe Jesus intended us to literally maim ourselves – He was speaking in hyperbole, for the shock effect, to make a point. But standing guard against sin is *the* most important thing any of us can do each day. Sin offends not only our neighbors, but God Himself. If we can deal with the sin in our own lives, we'll be much less likely to cause our neighbors to sin.

And let's remember – all hyperbole aside: It took the battered, torn, nail-scarred body of the sinless Savior to take away the sin of the world. Why would we ever want to bring it back?

Reflect.

1. How do you know when there is sin in your life? What are you supposed to do when you become aware of this?
2. What are some examples of things we are free to do, but which – under certain circumstances – might cause a fellow believer to stumble?
3. How can believers help one another to grow in grace and to hate sin?

To impart the greater vehemence to the threatening, he adds, that neither a right eye nor a right hand ought to be spared, if they occasion offense to us; for I explain these words as added for the purpose of amplification. Their meaning is, that we ought to be so constant and so zealous in opposing offenses, that we would rather choose to pluck out our eyes, or cut off our hands, than give encouragement to offenses; for if any man hesitate to incur the loss of his limbs, he spares them at the risk of throwing himself into eternal perdition. John Calvin (1506-1564), Commentary on Matthew 18.8, 9

Help me to hate sin so much, Lord, that today I will...

Pray Psalm 96.5-13.

What opportunities for bringing renewing grace to the world are available to you today? Ask the Lord to cleanse you of any sin, and to prepare you for edifying your neighbors, rather than causing them to stumble.

Sing Psalm 96.5-13.

Psalm 96.5-13 (Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

All other gods are idols vain – the Lord created heaven.

Splendor and strength with Him obtain; to Him be glory given!

All fam'lies, praise this mighty Lord! Give strength and glory to His Word;
exalt the Lord of heaven.

Bring offerings sweet to Him, our Lord, in holy garments praise Him!

Tremble before Him, all the earth; among the nations raise Him!

The earth is fixed, it will not move; the peoples will His justice prove –
exalt the Lord and praise Him.

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!

Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness –
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

3 Little Ones, Rejoice!

Pray Psalm 28.1, 2.

To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock:
Do not be silent to me,
Lest, if You are silent to me,
I become like those who go down to the pit.
Hear the voice of my supplications
When I cry to You,
When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary.

Sing Psalm 28.1, 2.

(Angel's Story: [O Jesus, I Have Promised](#))

I cry to You, our Savior, O, be not deaf to me!
Lord, speak to me with favor, lest I should dying be.
Hear now my supplications when for Your help I cry.
Receive these, my oblations, before Your throne on high.

Read Matthew 18.1-14; meditate on verses 10-14.

Prepare.

1. How is it clear that the Lord cares for His “little ones”?
2. Why did Jesus come to earth?

Meditate.

In the Kingdom of God, we're all “little ones.” Think how little we must be to God, Who contains the entire vast cosmos within Himself. Think how little we must seem amongst the teeming billions who populate this earth. Yes, we are all “little ones” – the “little ones” of the Lord. And as Kittie L. Suffield reminds us, “Little is much when God is in it.”

Jesus delights to think of us as His “little ones.” We are like frolicking lambs, and He is our Good Shepherd. From our text, it is clear that though we are little, the Lord cares for us greatly. Apparently, each of us has an angel (or angels) who stand before the face of our heavenly Father, ready to come to our aid or defense at His Word (v. 10). We don't make as much of angels as we should, probably because we don't see them at work. But they're there, doing whatever the Father decides and Jesus commands, to care for us in our journey to the lush meadows and still waters at the end of life's journey.

Jesus came to earth to seek (v. 11, cf. Lk. 19.10) and find those who are lost. He tracks us down in our lostness and takes us to Himself. Little ones can easily become lost. Indeed, we're born lost, and need Jesus to find us. The longer we're lost, the “loster” we become. But we can't be so lost that Jesus can't find us. Ask Saul of Tarsus.

Our Father in heaven will not allow a single one of His “little ones” to perish. The Good Shepherd has died to pay the cost of our lostness; and He sends His Spirit to seek and save each one the Father has set apart for Himself. We are perhaps daily reminded of our littleness and our tendency to get lost. Rejoice, little ones, the Good Shepherd and His angels are on the job, and nothing can separate us from Him (Rom. 8.38, 39).

Reflect.

1. Is it helpful to think of ourselves as the “little ones” of the Lord? Explain.
2. Where were you lost when Jesus found you?
3. Give thanks and praise to God for the angels He uses to care for you. How might you be more mindful of their presence and work throughout the day?

How much grace the Lord has toward each one believing in him he himself declares when he shows their angels always beholding the face of the Father who is in heaven. Great is the grace of the angels toward all who believe in Christ. Chromatius (fl. 400), Tractate on Matthew 57.1

Thank You, Lord, for the angels who will go before me today. Remind me to give You thanks and praise as I...

Pray Psalm 28.3-9.

Praise and thank the Lord, throughout the day, that He is your Good Shepherd, your strength, your shield, and your saving refuge. Once you were lost, but now you are found. Give thanks and praise to God!

Sing Psalm 28.3-9.

Psalm 28.3-9 (Angel's Story: [O Jesus, I Have Promised](#))

Lord, count me not among those who walk in sinful ways.
With words of peace their tongue glows while evil fills their days.
Your works they disregard, Lord, while evil fills their hands.
Destroy them by Your Word, Lord, and let them no more stand.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus, for He will hear our prayer.
His strength protects and shields us with mercy and with care.
In You our heart rejoices; You help us by Your Word.
To You we raise our voices to praise and thank You, Lord.

Our strength are You, O Savior, our strong defense and sure.
Anointed with Your favor, we rest in You secure.
Save us, and bless us, Jesus, upon us turn Your face.
With shepherd's care, Lord, keep us forever in Your grace.

4 Our Brother's Keeper

Pray Psalm 63.1, 2

O God, You are my God;
Early will I seek You;
My soul thirsts for You;
My flesh longs for You
In a dry and thirsty land
Where there is no water.
So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.

Sing Psalm 63.1, 2.

(Nun Danken: [*Now Thank We All Our God*](#))

O God, You are my God, and earnestly I seek You!
My soul thirsts and my flesh in weariness now greets You!
Thus I would see Your face, with glory and pow'r arrayed,
In this Your holy place – Your beauty here displayed.

Read Matthew 18.1-17; meditate on verses 15-17.

Prepare.

1. What should we do if someone sins against us?
2. What is confrontation supposed to achieve?

Meditate.

Jesus shows us that, in the Kingdom of God and within the community of His people, we are our brother's keeper, especially when it comes to sin. We have seen that Jesus wants us to hate sin and to avoid causing anyone to stumble into it. Now, when sin reaches us, we need to take action. When someone sins against us, we are not to simply shrug and say, "Oh, well." Sin not dealt with remains in the soul, and from the sin-harboring soul, it can negatively affect the entire community.

Let's analyze the procedure outlined here. First, what are we trying to achieve? Jesus says we want the one who has sinned against us to "hear" us when we explain the offense (v. 15). Implied in the verb here is "hear with understanding", that is, to agree, confess, repent, and seek forgiveness. A sin has been committed; a fault has ruptured the peace of the community. It may be difficult to talk to the person who has offended us, but we have to do it. There is no punishment in this, just the attempt to repair a relationship that has been adversely affected by sin.

Notice, too, that we are to keep the confrontation with sin to within the context of those involved (v. 15). We are not to gossip with others about how someone has mistreated us. If we did that, we would sin against the person who has sinned against us.

What if our brother doesn't "hear" us? Then we need to bring in another witness to confirm both that the offense has happened and that it needs to be acknowledged and repented of (v. 16). Indeed, more than one witness, who understands the situation, can be brought into the confrontation to try to help our brother understand his offense and repair the breach.

If that step fails to gain the hearing and repentance we seek, we are to “tell it to the church” – the Body of Christ. If the sinning brother will not agree when the whole congregation confronts him, then it’s clear he has no part in the congregation whatsoever. He should be put out until such time as he is willing to confess his sin and repent (v. 17).

This process is frequently referred to as “church discipline”, with all the negative connotations that second word entails. But sin is worse than discipline, and discipline is only the exercise of right practices in order to strengthen or repair that which has been weakened by neglect or misuse or sin. In the Church Jesus is building, church discipline is an important resource for keeping sin at bay and for making it possible for all members to increase in Christlikeness.

Reflect.

1. Every church member needs to be ready to confront the presence of sin in the church. Why?
2. How can we be sure that someone has sinned against us? Is it just because we feel that way (cf. Rom. 7.7)?
3. Church discipline is not for punishment, but for correction and growth. What’s the difference?

The one who is healthy must go to the one who is sick. You must conduct your judgment of him privately. Make your cure easy to accept. For the words “correct him” mean nothing other than help him see his indiscretion. Tell him what you have suffered from him. John Chrysostom (344-407), The Gospel of Matthew 60.1

Let me be open to hear if I have sinned against anyone, Lord, so that...

Pray Psalm 63.3-11.

Pray that God’s love, which reaches you every day in numerous ways, will extend through you to all the people you see. Give Him praise and thanks for His love, His Word, His salvation, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 63.3-11.

Psalm 63.3-11 (Nun Danken: [*Now Thank We All Our God*](#))

Your steadfast love, O Lord, than life is better to me.
So I will praise Your Name, and bless You, Lord, most truly.
My soul is richly blest; to You my hands I raise,
and open now my mouth to offer joyful praise.

By night, Lord, fill my mind with pleasant meditation;
for You have been my help as ‘neath Your wings I station.
My soul clings, Lord, to You; I rest in Your Right Hand;
may all who seek my life in Your displeasure stand.

Unto the sword’s strong pow’r let our foes be delivered!
Pursue them to devour their mortal lives forever!
In God will we rejoice and glory in His grace;
but all who live by lies shall perish from His face.

5 Binding, Loosing, Agreeing

Pray Psalm 119.171-173.

My lips shall utter praise,
For You teach me Your statutes.
My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments are righteousness.
Let Your hand become my help,
for I have chosen Your precepts.

Sing Psalm 119.171-173.

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

With our lips we praise You, Jesus, for You teach us, full and free.
Now Your Word will ever please us; Your commandments true shall be.
Let Your hand come forth to ease us; we Your Word choose gratefully!

Read Matthew 18.1-20; meditate on verses 18-20.

Prepare.

1. What did Jesus promise His disciples here?
2. How can we know Jesus is present with us?

Meditate.

Binding, loosing, and agreeing: What's Jesus talking about?

Let's remember the context: Jesus has been teaching about the hatred of sin, and warning His followers to keep it from gaining a foothold in our lives or communities. Our natural tendency is to drift away from the Lord into sinful, selfish ways. This is because the law of sin is still very much operative in our souls (Rom. 7.21-23; Heb. 2.1).

We need God's Word to bind us to Him, so that we don't drift. Like Ulysses, lashed to the mast so that he and his men would not yield to the temptation of the singing sirens, we need to be bound to the Word of God. But we also need to be loosed into the freedom of God's truth and His perfect Law of liberty (Jn. 8.32; Jms. 2.12). The Word of God can keep us from drifting into sin, and it can liberate us into all truth and life. The disciples were charged with the duty of teaching that Word so that it would accomplish the purpose for which God sends it forth (Is. 55.10. 11).

But to do that, the disciples – and all of us as disciples – needed to be attuned to heaven and the will of God. He alone can show us the right way to use His Law and Word for “binding” and “loosing” ourselves. His will and plan are already in effect, and we can discern and apply these by looking to His Word. All believers have the duty of searching the Scriptures to know how we should be bound and where we might be loosed; those who are called to teach others have an even greater responsibility, and need to make sure they know how to handle the Scriptures as God intends (Jms. 3.1; 2 Tim. 2.15).

When Jesus is present with us, and we are in communion with Him, we will know what to bind, what to loose, and how we must agree in serving Him. By working together with two or three or more, we can be more assured of getting God's Word right. But we each need to bring something to the

discussion from our own time with the Lord. Then, together, we can reach agreement about what to bind and what to loose. This is not a guarantee of infallibility in our judgments, just a guideline to help us make sure we gain the perspective and take the steps that have already been determined in heaven for our good and God's glory.

Reflect.

1. Give an example of the Word "binding" you. Give an example of the Word "loosing" you.
2. Why must each believer be diligent to read and search the Scriptures daily?
3. Why is it important to check our understanding of Scripture with other believers?

How important a place the unanimity and harmony of brothers hold with God! We can know from this very fact that the Lord has clearly said that when two or three pray in unanimity, the Father grants everything from heaven. For with God nothing is more pleasing than brotherly peace, nothing better than unanimity and harmony, according to what is written: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." Chromatius (fl. 400), Tractate on Matthew 59.1

Teach me Your Word, O Lord, and help me always to...

Pray Psalm 119.174-176.

Praise God for His grace and all His Word! Pray for opportunities to speak His Word to others today, knowing as you do that His Word will accomplish His purpose as you speak (Is. 55.10, 11).

Sing Psalm 119.174-176.

Psalm 119.174-176 (Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

For Your saving grace we plead, Lord, and Your Law is our delight.

We to live and praise You need, Lord, all Your help by day and night.

Straying sheep, we do not heed, Lord; come and seek us by Your might!

6 As You Are Forgiven

Pray Psalm 51.10-13.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

Sing Psalm 51.10-13.

(St. Anne: [*Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*](#))

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;
Thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

Read Matthew 18.1-35; meditate on verses 21-35.

Prepare.

1. What are the preconditions for forgiveness?
2. How does compassion relate to forgiveness?

Meditate.

In this chapter, Jesus has been teaching His disciples – and us – to think about others, and not just themselves. We are to humble ourselves and serve others if we wish to be great in the Kingdom. We must be careful not to become a stumbling block to others, causing them to fall into sin. We must seek the lost as Jesus did, to bring them to salvation and the joy of eternal life. We must confront a brother who has sinned against us, that we might win him back to a good standing with the Lord and ourselves; and we must be diligent to “bind and loose” in line with what God has decreed in heaven. Thus, by looking out for one another, we will be able to serve one another according to the teaching of God's Word.

In today's lengthy passage, Jesus teaches about the importance of forgiveness. He was responding to a question from Peter, as he was puzzling over how often he needed to forgive someone. Jesus' initial answer was, in effect, as often as he comes asking forgiveness (vv. 21, 22).

The parable of the ungrateful servant teaches us about the nature of forgiveness. The servant who owed the great debt to his master pled with him for time to pay his debt. He could not pay it when it was called for; and the likelihood of his ever being able to pay it seemed remote. In response to his falling down and seeking an extension, the master, “moved with compassion”, forgave him the debt (vv. 23-27). This is the way things work in the Kingdom of heaven (v. 23).

But the forgiven servant was not sufficiently grateful for the grace received. He went right out and demanded payment of a much smaller debt from “one of his fellow servants”, taking him by the throat, and demanding that he pay all. He had no compassion on the man, and refused even to give

him an extension on his debt. Instead, he had the man imprisoned until he could pay all. Which would probably never happen, since he was in prison (vv. 28-30).

When this became known to the master, he realized that the grace he had shown his servant had not taken hold in his heart, and that he was not truly grateful for having been forgiven. Consequently, the master determined that he must be punished and pay his debt (vv. 31-34). The lesson Jesus wanted His disciples to gain was that we must forgive from the heart – sincerely, compassionately, holding nothing back or in reserve (v. 35). This is how God forgives those who seek mercy and grace from Him; it is how we must forgive one another as well.

Reflect.

1. What is forgiveness, and why must we seek it from the Lord?
2. What does forgiveness accomplish?
3. What are the conditions under which we may expect to be forgiven?

Therefore, since in no way—that is, with no satisfaction and no worthy penitence—could we pay off this debt of sin and eternal death, that eternal King came down from heaven and by remitting the human race its sins forgave all the debt of every one who believes in him. Chromatius (fl. 400), Tractate on Matthew 59.5

Forgive my sins, Lord Jesus, and fill me with gratitude so that I...

Pray Psalm 51.1-9.

Wait in silence on the Lord to bring to mind any sins; then confess and repent, and commit your day to the Lord.

Sing Psalm 51.1-9.

Psalm 51.1-9 (Passion Chorale: *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*)

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin.
Look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean.
Thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within.
To wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

In Jesus' blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.
Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

7 Thinking of Others

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2.

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Sing Psalm 146.1, 2, 10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise!

And exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Read and meditate on Matthew 18.1-35.

Prepare.

1. What attitudes towards others does Jesus encourage in this chapter?
2. What should the Christian's attitude be toward sin?

Meditate.

We do not live the Christian life alone, or even merely for ourselves. We are fellow-citizens with other believers, and we have a responsibility for one another, to help each other live as citizens of the Kingdom not of this world.

That means humility, honesty, consideration of others, caring and compassion, and a readiness to teach, encourage, and forgive. The more we cultivate and practice these attitudes and duties, the more the Spirit works within us to transform us into the image of Jesus, and to flow the grace of God's living waters to others (Jn. 7.37-39).

It's natural for us to think about ourselves first – our interests, our needs, our convenience, our desires. But in the Kingdom, where grace is the currency that we spend and invest in one another, we must be constantly thinking about others, so that we do not cause them to stumble, or wander around in sin and lostness, or fail to gain the binding and loosing benefits of the Word of God.

This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us to “consider” how to encourage one another to love and good works (Heb. 10.24). We have to think about one another, pray for one another, look for opportunities to serve and teach one another, and bear one another's burdens. The mindset we need is the mindset of Jesus, Who did not look on His own interests, but took up our concerns and needs, and brought us to the glory and joy of eternal life (Phil. 2.1-11).

Reflect.

1. What is your approach to “considering” the people God sends you to each day, to serve them as Jesus would?
2. How can believers help one another to nurture the attitudes and encourage the practices that lead to serving others in Jesus' Name?
3. How is God's Word leading you to reach out to someone today with the grace and truth of Jesus?

The Lord teaches that we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless we revert to the nature of children, that is, we must recall into the simplicity of children the vices of the body and mind. He has called children all who believe through the faith of listening. For children follow their father, love their mother, do not know how to wish ill on their neighbor, show no concern for wealth, are not proud, do not hate, do not lie, believe what has been said and hold what they hear as truth. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367), On Matthew 18.1

Use me as Your child today, Lord, so that I...

Pray Psalm 146.3-10.

Pray that the Lord will use you today to extend His grace to others, to encourage, assist, edify, or instruct them in His lovingkindness.

Sing Psalm 146.3-10.

Psalm 146.3-10 (Hallelujah! What a Savior!: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand;
Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,
Them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What attitudes should we as Christians nurture toward others?
2. What should our attitude be toward sin? How can we nurture that attitude?
3. Why do we need both the binding and loosing power of Scripture? How can believers help one another in realizing this?
4. Why do we need others to confront us when we're in sin?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 18.1-35? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.