

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY THIRTEEN

Life Lessons We Learn from Children

Matthew 18:1–14

Jesus said, “Are you interested in the kingdom life as I have been teaching? Are you interested in what heaven is all about? Are you interested in connecting with the world I’m trying to introduce you to? Start with a child.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DO you remember how it felt to be a child? When the world was filled with mystery and excitement? When you depended upon mom or dad to buy your clothes and cook your food? When every person you met was an opportunity for genuine friendship? For some of us, such blissful childhood memories might feel distant. Sadly, for others, such memories might be nonexistent. But the joy of childlike innocence and simplicity isn't out of reach for those who're willing to embrace the mind-set of a child in their relationship to their heavenly Father.

While the world encourages us to rush past such innocence and simplicity toward “greater” things, Jesus taught a completely different attitude. In Matthew 18:1–14, the focus of this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Jesus displayed the value of children in God's heart as well as the example of children for God's people.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Life Lessons We Learn from Children

Matthew 18:1–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Write your own prayer to God, your heavenly Father. Thank Him for welcoming you as His child and ask Him to instruct you from His Word during this time.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Matthew's gospel focuses on five major discourses, each of which is a dense forest of theological truth with every leafy branch offering fresh insight into heaven's King and kingdom.

Matthew 18 contains the fourth discourse. It invites us into a way of community life vastly different from the kingdoms of this world. What question did the disciples ask in [Matthew 18:1](#) that sparked the fire of this discourse?

Deep down, each disciple's real question was, "Is my picture at the top of the kingdom of heaven's wall of fame?" As was often the case, Jesus responded to their question with a surprising, perplexing, challenging answer.



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Observation: Children and the Kingdom

As we observe the biblical text, we often look for repetition. Repetition is important because it conveys emphasis. Read *Matthew 18:1–14* and take note of all the times Jesus repeats “children” or “little ones.”

The Greatest—Matthew 18:1–5

According to Jesus in *Matthew 18:4*, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

What key characteristic do children have that Jesus valued?



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Matthew 18:1–14

Because children cannot contribute to society as a mature adult can, many within the Roman Empire, including some Jews, considered children a burden, insignificant, and even subhuman. Others viewed them as nothing more than property owned by their parents. This led to a great deal of mistreatment and abuse of children.

With that background in mind, consider Jesus' radical words in this account. He used one of the lowliest members of society to highlight the vast difference between worldly significance and godly significance.¹

How We Handle Children—Matthew 18:6–9

In *Matthew 18:6*, who are “these little ones”? What is the consequence for causing a little one to sin?

What drastic measures does Jesus encourage His disciples to take regarding their sin? Why? See verses 8–9.



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The Parable of the Lost Sheep—Matthew 18:10–14

In *Matthew 18:10–14*, how does the shepherd respond to the loss of his sheep, and how does he react when he finds the sheep?

From the subjects of greatness to children, from millstones to shepherds—what a whirlwind of teaching! So how do all these subjects fit together, and how do they relate to us who belong to the community of the great King today. To answer those questions, we'll need to move into interpretation.



Interpretation: What Can We Learn from Children?

Using your *Bible study tools*, describe what Jesus meant by the word *humility*. You can also reference pages 71–72 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.² Why does Jesus place such high value on this attribute?

That's the whole point of this. Stop being concerned about who is number one among you. Life isn't about that. Let's learn from this child. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Life Lessons We Learn from Children

Matthew 18:1–14

Regrettably, the world tends to see children from the Roman Empire's perspective rather than from Jesus' point of view. What principles do we see in this passage about the harsh ways people treat children compared to how God calls us to treat them? See pages 73–74 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 16–28* for some guidance.

All three sections of Matthew 18:1–14 (1–5, 6–9, 10–14) logically and thematically connect to convey transcendent truths. Jesus intended to reveal these multifaceted truths when He taught, even if the disciples didn't realize it. Briefly express the key truth of each section and describe how they logically and thematically connect with one another.

How brutally the world treats children! And how viciously we can act toward our brothers and sisters in Christ! Our Lord leads us toward a higher and better standard: *humility*. It truly is otherworldly.



Correlation: The Shema

God has always highly valued children, and He has placed special emphasis on teaching them about who He is, what He's done for His people, and how to follow Him. He even wrote His care for children into Israel's law during the time of their exodus from Egypt. Children represent the next generation of God's people, so it is imperative that they know Him from a young age.



Life Lessons We Learn from Children

Matthew 18:1–14

The Jews had a tradition of daily reciting a passage from Deuteronomy called “the Shema,” which functioned to remind them of their essential identity as the people of God.³ The Shema’s direct exhortations revealed the importance of children belonging to God’s community.

Read aloud the Shema, as the Jews would have done (*Deuteronomy 6:4–9*). What does the Shema say about children? What lessons can Christians learn from these principles today?

From the very establishment of God’s people, He has displayed the tender heart of a loving Father toward children—and so should we.

Application: Loving Children and Practicing Humility

How we treat children matters, and Jesus calls us to transcend the norms of our world. Instead of devaluing children, let us delight in them. Instead of neglecting them, let us cherish them. Instead of offending them, let us offer them praise.

Think about the children God has placed in your life. What steps can you take to show them the heart of Jesus and help them grow to walk in loving relationship with Him?



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Matthew 18:1–14

We're all sinners, desperately in need of Jesus the Savior. Thankfully, though, we're all equally important to God, and the gift of redemption is available to everyone. To confess, "I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. I need grace. I need Jesus," requires great, childlike humility—which paves the only way to God.

In what areas of your faith do you sense God encouraging you to put on the attitude of a child, show humility, and trust Him? Write your reflections below.

Let's let humility run its course, keep Christ first, and let the rest of the things that happen, happen. Let's keep our ego out of it and keep our will on hold, out of the way. Here's a little child who can teach us this. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, that You are my Father and that I am Your child. Help me to remember this truth every day so that I can show the childlike innocence and humility that You desire from me. I confess that I have not always treated the little ones around me with the love that You have shown me my whole life. Remind me of this love today. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. The Greek verb meaning "to humble" (*tapeinoo*) primarily is a term of space, and it often describes the act of lowering something. When this literal sense is presented figuratively, it describes humility—someone lowering his or her own social status consequently to elevate the status of others.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.
3. The word *shema* comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to hear" or "to listen." The Shema gets its name from the recitation's pointed first word: "Listen, Israel!"

