



# Our Way of Life

Sermon Transcript  
November 13, 2016

Kingdom Community: Maintain Unity  
Matthew 18:1-35

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 13, 2016 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Pastor Michael Conserva. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

## Sermon Text

Matthew 18:1-35

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”<sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them<sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,<sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,<sup>[a]</sup> it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

<sup>7</sup> “Woe to the world for temptations to sin!<sup>[b]</sup> For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!<sup>8</sup> And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.<sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell<sup>[c]</sup> of fire.

<sup>10</sup> “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>12</sup> What do you think? 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?<sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.<sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my<sup>[e]</sup> Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.<sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.<sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.<sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed<sup>[f]</sup> in heaven.<sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.<sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.<sup>23</sup> “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.<sup>[g]</sup> <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.<sup>[h]</sup> <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.<sup>26</sup> So the servant<sup>[i]</sup> fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.<sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,<sup>[j]</sup> and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’<sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.<sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what

had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,<sup>[k]</sup> until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

## Introduction

We are in a five week sermon series called *Our Way of Life*. We are looking at our 4<sup>th</sup> in the series. We have seen that, It is a practical series, because we examine what it looks like to follow Jesus. It is a unifying series, because this is what we are, hopefully, doing together. It is a biblical series, because the end goal of our ministry is to make disciple-makers. So you ought to be asking the 'rabbi question,' who is walking in my dust? Finally it is a gospel series, because this way of life is a response to what God has graciously done for us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Here it is; By God's grace and through faith in Jesus Christ I have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transformed to the kingdom of the beloved Son in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore, as sons and daughters, servants and stewards in the Kingdom of God, I will embrace the following way of life.

### Kingdom Life

**Affirmation:** I will proactively love God and love others.

**Practice:** Pray the Lord's Prayer

### Kingdom Power

**Affirmation:** I will daily ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

**Practice:** Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly

### Kingdom Now

**Affirmation:** I will live with the conviction that God is at work through my life.

**Practice:** Live as one who is sent: *Good Works, Good Will, Good News*

Today we are examining **Kingdom Community**

**Affirmation:** I will maintain unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Practice:** Devoted to a shared life together: *Family, Worship, Community*

Read Matthew 18 - Kingdom Community: Maintain Unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Someone has once said: “To live above, with saints we love will certainly be glory. To live below, with saints we know—well that’s another story. Someone has accurately defined humility as ‘that grace that, when you know you have it, you’ve lost it.’<sup>1</sup>

In our Kingdom Community, in our relationships, we desperately need the teaching of Matthew 18. If I had to point to the one character trait that we need in order to live in community, devoted to a shared live together, whether it is your family life, your worship life, your church life, in community with one another, it is **humility**.

Normally we read chapter 18 as a bunch of disconnected stories and teachings that we often hear quoted, sometimes out of context. Jesus talks about the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, warnings against temptations, the parable of the lost sheep, the correction of a brother or sister, and then lastly, another parable of forgiveness. Jesus says some grandiose things. For instance...

- *unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 18:3)*
- *And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. (Mt. 18:9)*
- *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (18:19)*
- *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. (Mt. 18:35)*

Chapter 18 must be seen and read as a whole, because at the beginning of chapter 18 the disciples ask this magnanimous question about, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ (Mt. 18:1), and from that question the whole chapter flows around the theme of Christian Humility. Chapter 19 says, Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from ‘Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.’ So this physical transition helps us to know that Jesus is moving from one theme in chapter 18 to a new one in chapter 19 and following. So Jesus’ teaching in chapter 18 must be read together under one unifying theme of Christian Humility if we are to truly understand the point of Jesus’ teaching.

So everything in chapter 18 is about life in the Kingdom of Heaven under the reign of Jesus Christ and living in Christian Community. So you see humility, which allows us to maintain unity, is one of the keys to living in the Kingdom.

### **Little Children—Humility**

*“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 18:3-4)”*

This is part of the upside down nature of Jesus’ Messianic Kingdom, which turns upside down all of our value systems. So in the community of the servant king you gain honor by serving others, and instead of getting revenge you forgive and do good to your enemies. In Jesus’ kingdom you gain true wealth by giving your wealth away to the poor. To follow the servant Messiah you must become a servant yourself. So Jesus’ answer to who is the greatest is tied to this idea of Jesus’ upside down nature of the Kingdom of Heaven and He says you must become like a child and humble yourself as opposed to what the disciples were thinking about becoming great and being proud. Greatness and concern for your position and status are the wrong attitudes to be approaching the Kingdom of God. Instead is it humility. Humility must be the guiding principle. The Christian life is to be a life of humbleness.

Jesus here uses the little child as an object lesson on humility that comes from their vulnerability. The humility of a child consists of their inability to advance their own cause apart from the help and resources of a parent. A child really can’t do anything for themselves and if left alone will die.

So of course the question then is, What is humility? It is certainly not having a modest view of oneself. Nor is it a self-abasing attitude. So what is it?

Well if we go to the scriptures, it tells us the following...

*Rom. 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

*Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

*Luke 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*

*2 Chr. 34:27 Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.*

Condensing all that down, Tom Holladay describes true humility in his book, The Relationship Principles of Jesus. He writes,

- Humility is not thinking less of myself;
- Humility is not putting myself down;
- Humility is not denying my strengths;
- Rather, true humility is:
- Humility is thinking more of others.
- Humility is lifting God up.
- Humility is being openly honest about my weaknesses and needs.

In short, humility is seeing that without Christ I can do nothing, but in Christ I can do all things. People with humility don't think less of themselves, they think of themselves less. Augustine declared, "If you ask me in regard to the precepts of the Christian Religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, Humility." And that is what chapter 18 is all about, a declaration to the people of God that living in the kingdom of God is founded and dependent upon humility, which allows us to Maintain Unity in Kingdom Community.

In fact, it is because of humility, the thinking of others more than oneself, that Jesus urges the believer to take drastic steps in their own life to strive against sin. *but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea* (Mt 18:6). We often think that is harsh and an overstatement and so we miss the connection it has to the statements that follow about cutting off one's arm that sins or gouging out one's eye and to the statement before it calling us to humility. These drastic measures towards personal sin are to be viewed within the context of living in Kingdom Community. Because we desire to lift others up, because we desire to see others strengthened and served in the kingdom, we are urged and invited to do extreme things

in order to keep others from picking up a sinful habit in our life.

One of the first things humility must do is deal with its owner deeply, radically, unrelentingly in the areas of sin. Humility calls one to a thorough cleansing of all of their life in order to be of true service and help for others. So in the realm of Christian Living, my first questions are:

- Are you concerned for how your life is affecting others?
- Have you/Are you dealing with every area of sin in your life to the fullest extent within your power?
- Are you humble enough to admit that those sins you coddle or commit in secret are actually affecting others in ways you aren't even aware?
- And Are you willing to deal with those sins for the sake of your brother or sister, so that they won't be led astray by your life?
- Jesus has just said that we are to be concerned about not causing others to sin, but then he goes into great hyperbole about caring for our own personal sin in order to save our brother or sister. And that my friends, requires great humility to look deeply at your soul, *in order to have plank removed from your own eye* (Mt 7:3).

### **The Lost Sheep—Concern for Others**

*“What do you think? 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.” (Mt. 18:12-14)*

The second thing Jesus relates humility is welcoming the lost into the kingdom. In order to demonstrate the importance God attaches to little children, the Lord gave the disciples an object lesson. Suppose a man who owns 100 sheep suddenly discovers one is missing, will he not leave the 99 and search for the one until he finds it? In the same way God (your Father in heaven; cf. Matt. 18:10) is concerned about these little ones (cf. vv. 6, 10) and does not want to lose any of them.

Humility rejoices when lost people are found, because they recognize they once were in the same predicament and were it not for the grace of God they would still be in that state. As the old adage says, But for the grace of God there go I.

The humble person in the kingdom lives in such a way that all people are welcomed and embraced despite who they are or what they have done. That's the gospel. I love what Tim Keller says about the gospel. 'The gospel says that you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more love and accepted that you ever dared hope.' Of course that doesn't mean that a person's sin is embraced, but what it does mean is that lost and sinful people are loved, safe and secure in the presence of God's people. So true humility is concerned for the one lost sheep. So with that in mind, ask yourself these questions.

- Are there those you look down upon?
- Are there those you detest and think are beneath you?
- Is there someone in your life who is unworthy of salvation?
- Who are the poor and decrepit souls that are ostracized?
- Have you considered your own impoverished state apart from Christ?
- If so, how could you look down on another?
- How could you not rejoice at the redemption of the lost?!

### **Forgiveness—Maintain Unity**

The third thing Christ ties humility to is a practical concern for the life of erring brothers and sisters and forgiveness. *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."* (Mt 18:15). That takes humility. It takes a person who is able to speak in a manner that exudes love and concern, compassion and care.

But there is also a corollary here, it takes humility to be able to have one's sin addressed privately and to repent. The whole process of church discipline as some have called Matthew 18:15-20, is predicated upon humility. The goal is reconciliation and restoration so that it never has to come to the greater body of Christ. But when we fail to exercise humility, the declaration from heaven is *'unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Mt. 18:3). The call to treat one who refuses to listen to the church as a pagan or tax collector (Mt 18:17) is a call to a recognition that heaven's decree concerning the unrepentant is clear and unmistakable: *'But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed'* (Rom. 2:5).

The binding and loosing or Matthew 18:18 isn't some cryptic power we possess, rather it is God's explicit and clear declaration that sin cannot be tolerated among God's people



and those who refuse to flee from sin are not and cannot be considered a part of God's people. It is God's way of helping believers to recognize humility in the lives of his sheep.

But it is also a call to pray for the lost soul in whom humility is not present. The promise (Matt. 18:19) "*Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven,*" is not a carte blanche invitation to ask for anything you want. Rather, it is an invitation to ask for the repentance of a brother, the conviction of sin for a sister, or whatever else would bring them to a state of humility and need for their savior, all in the context of humility.

- Does humility reign in your life such that others could approach you about your sin and you would respond graciously?
- Are you concerned enough for others and desire their growth in salvation and the faith so that you would be willing to approach one in need of help?

Both of these questions are rooted in humility – thinking more of others, desiring God's exaltation and expressing one's need of the savior.

And that leaves us to the final way that a Christian can and must live out humility, this time in the context of forgiveness. Peter thinks he is being really generous when he suggests forgiving 7 times, because even the rabbis of the day only required 3 or 4 times to forgive a sinner. Peter doubled that and thought he was really going after kingdom ethics. But Jesus answers him with these words, "*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times*" (Mt 18:22).

How does this relate to humility? Simply put, Jesus is calling one to lay down their rights and take up their cross. In humility, he is asking people to recognize the difference in the wrong they incur from others versus the wrong they have done upon God. In fact, the parable of the unmerciful servant which follows is one being forgiven 10,000 talents and then refusing to forgive the 100 denarii is a call to consider the offense one has caused and been forgiven by God. The question about how many times to forgive and the ensuing story are purposely designed to place Peter and all like him in the position of the debtor owing God 10,000 talents, and the one they are struggling to forgive is the person owing them only 100 denarii.

To believe and live out the meaning of this story requires humility. It requires a proper esteeming of one's own sin and position before God. It requires a comprehension and acceptance of the gospel story of grace, which again requires humility, because it places

one in the unique spot of realizing that there was never any payment large enough that could be made for the forgiveness of sins, apart from the unilateral acting of God to remove that offense.

And when one has comprehended and embraced this truth, who are we to fail to forgive a brother. The one, who has sinned against us, has sinned not primarily against us, but against God Almighty, and his verdict and his verdict alone is what must stand. There is no room in the Kingdom Community for un-forgiveness; we must forgive our brothers and sisters from our heart (Mt 18:35). Forgiveness requires humility to spring up from deep within the soul so that it can be granted to others.

So it is my hope that you have seen why humility is the one quality most needful in every relationship we have. It is a quality, which subdues us in the presence of God and allows us to receive the gifts of God. It is a quality, which causes us to take seriously our sin and its effects on others. It is a quality which causes us to love others freely, challenge and be challenged in our inconsistencies and most importantly to forgive as we have been forgiven – bountifully, exceedingly, generously and lavishly. Humility is the key to all Christian living. Without humility we can't maintain unity in Kingdom Community and be devoted to one another.

## **Conclusion**

By God's grace and through faith in Jesus Christ I have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transformed to the kingdom of the beloved Son in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible Project: Matthew 1-14 <https://jointhebibleproject.com/#all-videos>

<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Wilkins: *NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe: *The Bible Exposition Commentary Vol. 1* (Victor Books, 1989)

<sup>4</sup> "All For Christ—A Pastor's blog" [www.hopeinchristchurch.wordpress.com](http://www.hopeinchristchurch.wordpress.com)

<sup>5</sup> Accordance Bible Software

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What would you change about yourself if you could?
2. Have each person in your group share one testimony or instance about how one of the practices of Our Way of Life is affecting their own life personally.
3. As a group, recite the 4 affirmations together. (see Sermon)

### Diving Into The Word

4. How would you describe true humility according to scripture? (see verses in the sermon transcript)
5. Read Matthew 18:1-6. Why is humility so important in Matthew 18 and how does it relate to verses 6-7 in Matthew 18?
6. Glance through Matthew 18, What can you glean from Matthew 18 to resolve interpersonal conflict with a brother or sister in Christ? What about those outside of the body of Christ? (See c.r. Eph. 4:1-6, 4:15, 4:32)
7. Read Matthew 18:21-35. What is the parable of the unforgiving servant intended to teach us?

### Taking It Home

8. Is there anyone in your life who has sinned against you? How would you approach that person, especially in the church? Or is there anyone in your life whom you have not forgiven or are having a hard time forgiving? What steps can you take to work that out in your life?
9. How can you apply the value of maintaining unity in your family, worship or community group life?