



Leader Notes:

Introduction/Icebreaker:

- Ask the group a version of this question: Who was/is the greatest _____?
 - *Tailor the question to your group. If you have a lot of guys in your group you may want to ask who the greatest running back was. If you have a lot of women in the group who like music you might ask who the greatest female pop singer was. Don't be afraid to ask both of these questions to the group if you have both kinds of people.*
- Allow them to discuss this for a bit.
- Then ask them **who is the greatest in the room?**
 - *This is the segue into the study. In Matthew 18:1 the disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Their hope was to hear one of their names. In essence they were asking him, "Where do we rank?"*

Sermon Discussion:

- Ask the group:
 - "Was there anything in today's sermon or service that stuck out to you?"
 - Was there anything that grabbed you?"
 - Was there a particular point in the sermon that hit you?"
- *You don't have to ask these questions exactly, but a version of them. This gets your group thinking about the worship service, and this will help them develop the habits of engaging more actively and listening more intentionally during the service and sermon. Allow discussion on their responses.*

Scripture Discussion:

- Read the Scripture: Matthew 18:1-6; 10-14
 - *There are two components to this week's study.*
 1. We need to have humility and exhibit faith like children.

2. We need to protect children.

In the first part, we'll discover that children are trusting and vulnerable. In the second part, we realize that their vulnerability leaves them in need of protection.

*Spend time discussing either or both of these components of the study. Tailor the discussion and the focus for your particular group. Remember to be aware of the clock and respectful of their time. The transformational learning component will likely occur more in **discussing** these matters than in arriving at exact answers to them. Because of the nature of this study, there are a variety of applications members could leave with.*

Study One:

- Have the group look at verse 3, “Unless you become like little children, you will not enter heaven.” WOW! That’s a bold statement regarding our salvation. Let’s explore this...
The “you” here is plural, so we could translate it unless you all change...
- Here we see a call to change. Why might Jesus instruct everyone around him to “change to become like little children?”

(Look at the question that the disciples asked about greatness)

- This begs the questions:
 - What does it mean to be like a little child?
 - What are the characteristics of little children that Jesus is probably referring to here?

Some of the qualities to which Jesus was probably referring: kids are quick to trust, quick to forgive, they have a natural innocence, kids have a curiosity about and appreciation of the world around them – they are easily “wowed”, kids have a tremendous sense of confidence in adults and God (those people bigger than them)

In that culture, children were not despised, but neither did they have any rights. Children were essentially powerless. Parents and children in that culture shared a loving relationship, but the children were much more limited in their freedoms than what we would commonly experience in our culture today.

- Ask the group:
 - How do we cultivate these qualities in ourselves?
 - How do we become like children?
A possible answer to this is that it requires the abandonment of certain qualities associated with adulthood, like skepticism and cynicism. It may require that we admit that we don’t know everything and thus we utilize more faith in our approach to life.
 - Why can it be difficult to humble ourselves like children?
Possible answer: Look again at the question the disciples had asked – who is the greatest? Our natural inclination is to seek greatness, not meekness. We desire to be

known and recognized, elevated and exulted, not humbled and unnoticed. We live in a culture that largely mocks humility and champions self-promotion.

- Describe a time when you've had childlike faith?
- How might Jesus' teaching here have shaken up the people around him?

Possible answer: Jesus was a teacher, a rabbi. They might expect him to "say be like me." But instead he points to one of the lowliest positions in their society, to a person with no rights, no privileges, no prestige, no power, no status, and says "be like this child."

Application:

- What is an area of your life where you currently need to have faith like a child?
- What will you do to change to become like a child?
- How will you pursue the kind of humility Jesus instructs us to have in this passage?

Study Two:

CAUTION: This is a challenging discussion. The subject matter this week is of a sensitive nature to some. Be careful to keep the discussion turned toward what is happening in the world, what God's attitude is toward sin, and how God may call us to get involved. You will likely want to avoid allowing the discussion to turn toward times of abuse that may have been experienced by members of the group. If you detect that a member has struggled with this, gently console them and offer to discuss it with them later in private. If someone surfaces a painful experience and needs counsel beyond what you are comfortable or capable of giving, contact Fitz (fitz@wschurch.org) or Stephanie Dugan, Director of Community Care (StephanieD@wschurch.org), or call the church office at 793-2800.

- Verses 5-6 caution against causing children to sin, while verses 10-14 are a call for us to shepherd children. *It's important for us to have a basic understanding of the role of a shepherd in those days. The job of a shepherd in the first century was multifaceted: he was in charge of tending to the needs of the sheep, protecting the sheep, and leading and guiding the sheep. So here God is charging us with these responsibilities regarding children.*
- Discussion Questions:
 - In what ways do we see people causing children to sin in our culture?
 - In what ways do we see people harming children in our culture?
- A more difficult question for us might be, how should we respond if we witness someone harming a child?
- **Scenarios:**
 - What should we do if we see a parent allowing their child to play endless hours of video games with no exercise?
 - What should we do if we see a parent smacking their child in a grocery store?
 - What should we do if we witness a parent verbally abusing their child in public?
 - How should we respond? When should we get involved? What does it look like to be a shepherd in these scenarios?

The discussion in this section will naturally be a bit more subjective, but should be informed by Biblical principles. Deciding when it is appropriate to interfere in someone's parenting is difficult. When does it become clearly harmful to the children? Common sense, humility, decency, and gentleness must merge with boldness and a sense of justice in these matters. The previous questions, and the ones to follow, are not so much asked in order for us to arrive at specific answers, but more so to get us wrestling with the fact that there is a great amount of injustice in the world. Without being aware and alert we will not likely be prepared to answer injustice with justice.

- Many people are unaware of some of the more shocking ways that children in our world are being harmed. Share the following statistics:
 - More than 20,000 images of child pornography posted online every week (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 10/8/03).
 - Approximately 20% of all Internet pornography involves children (National Center for Mission & Exploited Children).
 - 100,000 websites offer illegal child pornography (U.S. Customs Service estimate).
 - As of December 2005, child pornography was a \$3 billion annual industry ([Internet Filter Review](#)).
 - *WORLDWIDE* Number of abortions per year: Approximately 42 Million
Number of abortions per day: Approximately 115,000
 - *UNITED STATES* Number of abortions per year: 1.37 Million (1996)
Number of abortions per day: Approximately 3,700
 - 52% of women obtaining abortions in the U.S. are younger than 25: Women aged 20-24 obtain 32% of all abortions; Teenagers obtain 20% and girls under 15 account for 1.2%. (All abortion numbers are derived from pro-abortion sources courtesy of The Alan Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood's *Family Planning Perspectives*.)
 - Sex trafficking is a massive global enterprise based upon force, coercion, and deception. Traffickers transport or detain their victims for the purpose of exploitation and profit through acts of sexual violence. This trade in rape for profit victimizes thousands of women and children every year.
 - Worldwide, there are nearly two million children in the commercial sex trade. (UNICEF)
 - There are an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 children, women and men trafficked across international borders annually. (U.S. Department of State)
 - Approximately 80 percent of human trafficking victims are women and girls, and up to 50 percent are minors. (U.S. Department of State)
 - According to the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, an estimated 20 million people were held in bonded slavery as of 1999.
 - Approximately two-thirds of today's slaves are in South Asia. Human Rights Watch estimates that in India alone there are as many as 15 million children in bonded slavery.

“All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.”

Application:

- Describe what you feel when you encounter these statistics.
- If you are a parent, how are you shepherding your children? (especially protecting them and guiding and leading them)
- What are some practical ways parents can protect their children from some of these dangers?
Possible answers: inform their kids of the dangers, model the right way to live, be involved in their children's lives, don't allow children inappropriate amounts of freedom at too young an age...
- How might we get involved in the struggle against some of ways children are harmed (abortion, sex-trafficking, slavery, child pornography)?
Possible answers: speak up and generate more awareness; contact politicians who can make a difference; contribute time, money, and energy to agencies and programs fighting for justice (International Justice Mission, National Right to Life, etc...); support adoption programs and agencies (Bethany Christian Services)...

Prayer Time:

The easiest way for us to get involved in the struggle against harming children is for us to pray. We need to be people who pray for the children we know, especially those in families where the parents do not know Christ. We need to pray for the children involved in child pornography, sex trafficking, and slavery. Spend some time as a small group praying for these things...