



Children of His Kingdom

# GOD'S WAY to GREATNESS

## LESSON 1 // BECOMING CHILDREN OF HIS KINGDOM

God calls people to greatness. We see this from the beginning when He made man and woman in His image, blessed them and commanded them take charge of His creation (Genesis 1:27-28). Throughout His Word, the Lord invites us to pursue His great promises and purpose for our lives (2 Peter 1:3-4).

While we should desire to be great, it's important to understand how God defines greatness and instructs us to pursue it. Jesus gives us valuable insight about this in the following passage:

**Matthew 18:1-5 (NIV)** *At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.<sup>3</sup> And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."*

Jesus speaks specifically here about greatness in the kingdom of heaven. What do we learn from these verses about God's way to greatness in His kingdom?

### 1. We must become like little children to enter God's kingdom.

The first step toward greatness in God's kingdom is to enter the kingdom. Jesus told His disciples that this can only happen if they "change" and become like "a little child."

A related story from Mark's Gospel helps us understand what He was addressing:

**Mark 9:33-37 (NIV)** *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"<sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,<sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."*

In essence, Jesus was saying to His disciples, "This display of controversy has revealed a condition of your heart that not only disqualifies you for greatness in the kingdom, but also threatens your entrance into it."

The ability to enter the kingdom requires a conversion (Matthew 18:3, NKJV, says "unless you are converted..."), a change of heart. We must return to a heart condition that is childlike—vulnerable, open, innocent, trusting, giving and unpretentious.

We must have a childlike trust in Jesus, believing in Him alone as Lord and Savior (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10). This is the only way we can enter a relationship with God that brings us into His kingdom. Jesus described it as being “born again” by the Spirit:

**John 3:3, 5b (NIV)** *Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. ... <sup>5</sup> no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”*

## 2. We must become like little children to be great in God’s kingdom.

Once we have come into the kingdom, we have a clear picture from Jesus of what it looks like to aspire to greatness:

**Matthew 18:4 (NIV)** *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Being great in God’s kingdom does not mean that we aim to be regarded as “higher” or more important than others. Instead, we are to take the “lowly position” of a child. This means that we:

- *Humble ourselves.* The Greek word *tapeinoo* speaks of humbling or lowering yourself.
- *Consider others more important than ourselves.* This is the opposite of selfish ambition. It represents a heart that desires the best for others rather than what’s in it for us.

**Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

- *Love God and love others as we love ourselves.* Humility positions us to love God and others, even as we recognize how much God loves us.

**Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)** *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” <sup>31</sup> The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.*

God’s pathway to greatness begins with a surprising first step—you must become like a little child! The Lord knows that childlike humility opens the door for you to experience His best as part of His kingdom, and to bless others as He works in and through your life.

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Mark 9:33-37. What is the difference in these verses between the disciples’ approach to greatness and Jesus’ call to greatness?
2. Read Matthew 18:1-4. What did Jesus mean when He said you must become like a “little child”? How should this make a difference in your life as a follower of Jesus?
3. In what areas of your life is God calling you to become “great” (for example, becoming a great friend, spouse, parent, leader, servant, etc.)? What is one step you can take to move forward in this?