



*Children of His Kingdom*

## **GOD'S WAY to GREATNESS**

### **LESSON 3 // THE POWER OF INFLUENCE**

Children are great imitators. It's amazing how much a child picks up from their environment and how quickly they emulate and reflect the behavior and attitudes they are exposed to. This power of influence can be used to mold a child's spirit and life patterns in a righteous and healthy direction or in the opposite direction.

In Matthew 18:1-9, Jesus teaches His disciples about becoming "like little children" in His kingdom and influencing children. It all begins with a question about greatness in the kingdom:

**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."*

Humility is clearly a key to becoming great in Jesus' kingdom (verses 1-4). Welcoming other "children" in His name is also important (verse 5). But we fall short in our pursuit of greatness if we don't understand the power of influence. Notice how the Lord addressed this in the following verses:

**Matthew 18:6-9 (NIV)** *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.<sup>7</sup> Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!<sup>8</sup> If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.<sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.*

We can influence others—children as well as adults—positively or negatively. How can we be sure to have a positive influence that honors God and points people to Him?

#### **1. Be aware of and avoid the potential to negatively influence others.**

God cares about the spiritual influence you have on others, particularly the "little ones" who believe in Jesus (verse 6). These include young children as well as older children and adults who believe in Christ.

Jesus says that we can actually cause these "little ones" to "stumble." The Lord is making us aware of the potential we all have to negatively impact others in a serious way that could lead them into ungodliness and destructive behaviors. We must acknowledge this reality and set our hearts and minds to avoid anything that might have this effect.

Notice the practical instructions the Apostle Paul gave us about avoiding negative influences in our relationships:

**Ephesians 4:25, 26, 29, 31 (NIV)** *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor ... <sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. ... <sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths. ... <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

Lies, anger, unwholesome talk, bitterness, slander and malice are seeds of destructive influence. We must consistently rid ourselves of these seeds and refuse to sow them in others.

## 2. Proactively seek to positively influence others.

To be great in Jesus' kingdom, we need to be positively influencing others toward Him. This happens as we:

- *Deal radically with sin in our own lives.* Jesus makes it clear that our potential to negatively influence others toward sin calls for radical action. Cutting off a hand or foot is not the point; it's the sinfulness in our hearts that the Lord calls us to ruthlessly cut out.

**Colossians 3:5 (NLT)** *So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.*

- *Set an example for others in the way we live.* Dealing with sin in our hearts paves the way for submission to God in our daily lives. As we choose to honor and obey Him, we influence those around us for His kingdom.

**Matthew 5:16 (GNT)** *In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.*

- *Encourage others by the way we talk.* The wrong kind of talk can turn people away from Jesus and the gospel. We should be sharing life-giving words that build up and reflect a spirit of trust in God and His Word.

**Ephesians 5:29 (NIV)** *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

We're accountable for our influence on others! As followers of Jesus, let's realize the seriousness of this, deal effectively with our own sin and make a positive, eternal impact for Christ.

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Colossians 3:5. What do you learn from this verse about dealing with sin in your life?
2. In what ways can you set an example that will have a positive impact on those around you?
3. Read Ephesians 5:29. How can you apply this verse in your relationships? What difference can this make in your influence on others?