

Hey, good to see y'all. You look good. My name is Matt Younger for those of you who don't know me. I'm the home groups pastor here, and we are going to be in Matthew, chapter 18. I did receive word right before I walked up here that there is a serviceman here working on the air conditioner, so that's good news. If it's not fixed by the time we're done, just maybe see it as a big open-air tent revival in August that doesn't have air conditioning. Maybe that helps give you some perspective and will help you get through it. Steve told me that for 20 years of his life this is how he preached, in open-door youth revivals, so I think there's something in him that really loves this kind of situation.

Matthew 18, verses 1-4: **"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, '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.'"** The New Testament, specifically Matthew, Mark, and Luke, give great detail about this story. Really, really good detail. It's kind of like Channel 5, Channel 8, and Channel 11 covering a story, because they all have a unique angle.

The placement of the story within the story of the Bible helps us as well. The placement of this story within the story is huge, because sandwiched in this story, on one side you have Jesus becoming all the more explicit about his coming death and resurrection, and then on the other side you have the Matthew 18-20 discourse which this begins, which is really all about the nature of God's covenant community. This is how we live. This is how the kingdom of God lives. This is the "one anothers" of the Scripture. Then Matthew 18, this chapter we're in specifically, is about the childlikeness of the believer. So there are a lot of things going on.

We read verse 1, and it says, **"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'"** The disciples really thought they were on to something. They really, really did. Jesus knew it had been going on for a while and it wasn't even close to being over. What happened was that Peter, James, and John were kind of pulled out as an inner circle, and Peter is the lead horse. So Peter is always getting asked the questions, and then James and John are kind of his boys too, and they get the nickname of the "sons of thunder." So you have the Twelve, and then you have the lead dog, and then you have his two boys, the sons of thunder.

Then in the chapter before, Matthew 17, they go up for the transfiguration. So what happens is they're on a mountain. Jesus says, "Y'all three come with me." The other nine stay behind. Jesus brings them high on the mountain, and then right before their eyes, Jesus' face is as bright as the sun and his clothes are as if they're bleached white and Moses and Elijah flank him on his side. The voice of God comes down that says, "This is my Son in whom I'm well pleased."

They leave the mountain. They're sworn not to talk about it. Then the other disciples are like, "What did you hear? What did you see?" They're like, "I don't know. We can't talk about it." So these conversations are brewing. They're stirring. These conversations about greatness linger. Suffice it to say they're politicking. This is about jealousy. It's a conversation about best-of standouts, like "Who's going to make the list?"

We're all about lists in Dallas. The *D Magazine* "Best of 2012" just hit the stands. We are really big on listing out almost everything that can make a list in Dallas. If it's super lawyers and breakfast places and doctors and suburbs, we're going to list them out and we're going to tell you the superlatives. We're all about the superlatives. While we're on coffee places, I'm going to go personally with Cultivar. It certainly doesn't hurt that they're connected to Good 2 Go Taco. Probably I'm going to go with my place down in the Bishop Arts District, Oddfellows, and then most certainly the Crooked Tree CoffeHouse. That's not because their owners come here, but that is a plus. So those are my three. I don't know where the *D Magazine* ranked them, but we're all about standouts here.

The disciples were too. In fact, they thought they struck gold. They really did. Because they knew their history and they knew that Jerusalem had always been a place that had been oppressed. It was always volatile there. So they know their history. They know Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah. They know everything he touches turn to gold. They know his influence is growing. Even though he doesn't like people he always puts his money where his mouth is in terms of a miracle, and he's confusing everybody, so they think they're going to get to ride the coattails of a king.

Immediately what's coming to mind is David who did the same thing hundreds of years before. They're thinking about the influence and the power of David, and they're thinking about a kingdom which certainly brings to mind Solomon who was the richest man they could ever conceive in their minds, and then even 200 years prior to, they're thinking about the Maccabees, which is this rebel army nicknamed "The Hammers." The Hammers that went into Jerusalem and took Judea back from the Seleucid Empire.

They're going, "Man, Jesus is on to something and we are riding his coattails. We're going to play a part, and the Messiah is going to obliterate Rome. We're going to have palaces and servants and a life nearly opposite the one we have in our blue collar existence." It was their shot at praise and honor and fame, to

walk the streets of Jerusalem, to be noticed, to make the list, to have the superlative, to don the garments of royalty, and to absorb the praise of men. The disciples were ambitious for distinction. It was fueled by an inner dialogue that consumed their minds. So this is an argument about jealousy and status. They loved the sound of their own names.

When I was in eighth grade, I strung together a few pretty good football performances. Coppell Middle School East, Broncos, if that means anything to you. The *Coppell Gazette* came out, and lo and behold I had made "Player of the Week." So there was my picture, and underneath they captured it just like I wanted. It said, "Player of the Week, Coppell Middle School East, Matt 'The Hedgehog' Younger." That was the nickname my coach had given me. I thought it meant because I was a feisty little creature who was low to the ground and always close to the pile. It probably had something more to do with my hair. The hedgehog is very close to the porcupine family, if you can make that connection.

But I remember looking at that even in eighth grade and going, *Hey man, I like this. I like this. This is my name in the paper.* There was an infatuation. This is what the disciples are dealing with, this narcissism, this love of their own name. Jesus has had enough, and Luke tells us that Jesus perceived their hearts and he asked what they had been arguing about the whole day. So he goes and asks them, "What have you been arguing about?" Then Mark writes that when Jesus asked, they didn't answer. So God in front of them, "Hey, what were you guys arguing about?" Nothing. They don't tell him anything.

So Jesus gets a little kid, and he says, "Sit down. I have something to say." They gather around him and we read verse 2: **"And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them..."** You have to remember that kids in the first century weren't Instagrammed; they weren't dolled up and put on Facebook. You never got picture messages of little kids, as wonderful as those are, and as much as I love seeing pictures of my daughter Caroline, who turns 2 in September, all the time. They just didn't do that back then.

To quote an author, "In that time, children were a token of insignificance. They had no importance in Jewish society," he says, "not taken seriously except as a responsibility, one to be looked after and not to be looked up to." So Jesus is about to respond to this self-consumed, self-promoting conversation he has heard all day, and he has their attention. He puts a child in their midst and then Mark tells us (and I love this) that he takes this child in his arms. He's in the teaching position. He's like, "I have something to say."

Then in verse 3 he says, **"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** He doesn't answer their question. Do you see that? He's going, "No, no, no! No, no, no!" His tone is sharp, and the reason I know his tone is sharp is because he uses a double negative. Double negatives never work in the English. You don't not never do something, or whatever I just said, but in the Greek a double negative is a very emphatic way to get your point across.

Jesus' point is sharp, and he's critiquing these guys. He's saying their question assumes they get it, but Jesus is saying, "Unless you become like a child, you're not even going to enter the kingdom." He neglects their question because he has a more important one to ask. He's contrasting their temporal view of the kingdom with his eternal coming of the kingdom. So he peels back the onion. Jesus is always doing this. He's always, always doing this. He's always peeling back the onion. He's always going as deep as he needs to go to your heart to get the point across. He says they're asking the wrong question.

This is where Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us tremendous insight into this story, because they each accentuate the same thing prior to this story, namely that Jesus had become all the more explicit about what was coming for him. Luke, chapter 9, verse 22. I'll read it to you. He says, "**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.**" Then in Mark, chapter 9, Mark emphasizes this isn't even the first time Jesus has said this. He says, "**The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.**"

Then we pick up further detail. Luke says about this that Jesus says, "Let this sink into your ears." Then Matthew tells us that after hearing this, the disciples are greatly distressed. It's stressing them out. Jesus is saying, "The Son of Man is going to die. He's going to go into the ground. He's going to come out," and both Luke and Mark tell us the disciples are afraid to ask him what he means by this. They know it has to be consequential.

Everything Jesus says is consequential, but it's stressing them out. They don't want to ask. They just want to keep rolling. The "check engine" light is on, but they're paying no attention to it because they don't want to sit under; they don't want to wrap their minds around what Jesus means by this death and resurrection talk. They're too busy daydreaming about status and superlative. Jesus' response as he holds this child close to his heart is, "You are self-absorbed. You don't even know what my kingdom is about."

When I was in college... I went to A&M. I got a political science degree. My grandpa will tell you that that and \$2 will buy you a cup of coffee, so whatever he means by that, thanks, Grandpa. I winged most papers through college. It's okay. So did you. You winged most papers. Very rarely did I meet the person who two weeks prior to an assignment I was like, "Hey man, do you want to hang out tonight?" and they were like, "No man, I'm writing a paper due in two weeks." I mean, that just never happened.

But I was a paper winger. I'll just tell you that. I did okay. I did fairly in college. But this one time, I turned in a paper. It's for congressional politics. It's a graduate student and he's a pretty hard grader. I turned it in to him, get it back a week later, and on it (I don't even think it has a grade) it says, "Utterly

incomprehensible." Then he gives it back to me. I'm just looking at it going, *Man, needs improvement. Could have been a little more encouraging.*

Apparently there's this story (and I can't confirm if this is true or not) that one professor at A&M got a paper from a student once, or a test or something, and he graded it and he put a little arch on each of the four corners right there and gave it back to him. The student didn't know what that meant, so he brought it to him and said, "What is this grade?" The prof told him, "A zero that big can't fit on the paper." I don't know if that's true, but you get my point. Jesus is blowing up his disciples. He's like, "You just don't get it. Failed assignment. Let me lay it out for you here."

Jesus is saying, "You guys have it all figured out. You have all the details of your life figured out except the most important thing, and here's what you're missing, that I (talking about himself) walked away from infinite glory and infinite status to come down here and preach to you what you need to hear, and what you need to hear is that the Son of Man is going to die. You're so consumed with yourself, you're so consumed with your status, so caught up in how you're perceived, so bent on how you'll be remembered, that you're missing the love of God that is right before your eyes, the kingdom that is being fleshed out right in front of you."

The irony of this is that the disciples are doing the very things for which Jesus has decided to die. Their ambition for distinction, their cravings for glory, are an offense to the holy God who's standing right next to them, worthy of judgment. Jesus is a witness to the sins for which he will die. He's a witness to them, the sins that will cause him infinite pain. He's seeing them fleshed out right in front of him.

I feel like we have to cut the disciples some slack, because this good news story is happening right in front of their eyes. They're putting the pieces together, but it hasn't been fleshed out yet in the fullness of time. Jesus is saying he's going to die, but he hasn't died. He hasn't died. He hasn't been buried. He hasn't resurrected. The Holy Spirit hasn't fallen. The new covenant hasn't been enacted. The Scriptures haven't been finalized. The gospel hasn't exploded all around the world. They don't have 2,000 years of church history telling them about how faithful this God is.

They didn't have that, but we do. Two thousand years later we have all of these stories. We've heard the gospel over and over and over, some of us; yet we're still so consumed and ensnared on conversations about status, on our own ambition for distinction. We still are. Like Luther said, we're still curved inward. We don't want to think about what the death of Jesus means. Village Church Dallas Northway, look at me. We forget the most important of stories, the story Jesus is making explicit to his disciples and he's making clear to us today. It's the story of the cross, that he would have to die. So Jesus says, "You have to turn. You have to turn. Something has to change."

Then we look at verse 4, where he says, **"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** So now he answers their question. Now he says, "Okay, if you want to be great in my kingdom, humble yourself like a kid." So what's Jesus teaching us about this little kid? I was reading commentaries about this passage. Some were really helpful and some just weren't. They weren't helpful at all.

One commentary that wasn't helpful told me that what Jesus means by the humility of a child, the greatness of a child, is that he is espousing the innocence and the total lack of selfish ambition of a child. What was helpful for me in seeing that I don't think that's where Jesus is going is the fact that the Greek word here is *little kid*, which is somewhere between infant and toddler, which is exactly what I have terrorizing my home right now. Caroline Noel Younger. She turns 2 in September. She's not a terror; she's a delight. But she is a crazy girl too.

How it got really crystalized is I'm sitting here working on my sermon, and she comes in and says, "Daddy, play! Daddy, play!" I said, "No, baby. We'll play later. I'm working on my sermon." She says, "No, Daddy, play! Daddy, play!" I said, "No, baby." Then she's like, "No, *we* play." I'm like, "Baby, we're going to play in time-out, because I'm going to finish this sermon." I mean, come on. Don't tell me a 2-year-old doesn't exhibit selfish ambition. They do. She's a sweetheart but... Suffice it to say, it was clear that's not where Jesus was taking it, I don't think.

While I don't think Jesus is praising the moral excellence of a child, nor do I think he's praising the ability for a kid to get work done, I *do* think he's emphasizing something pretty profound here. Here's what I mean. This is like clockwork. Each morning when I go into my daughter's room (it happened this morning) she sees me, she throws her hands up...every morning...as if to say, "Daddy, I need you. Get me out of this crib."

With all of her drama and with all of her 2-year-old-ness, she conveys remarkable humility. Caroline needs me. She needs me. She exhibits a beautiful trust, a vulnerability. She has a total inability to do most things, so she enlists my help all the time. If you've ever been around kids this age, how many times a day are they asking for your help? All the time they're asking something from you. All the time to get your attention they're saying, "I need your help. I need your help. I need your help." They're profoundly vulnerable at making their requests and their situations with which they need help known. She has no problem laying her life out there for me.

Beyond her vulnerability, I think Jesus is emphasizing there's a lack of concern for status as well. *The Dallas Morning News* put out an article this week about how Dallas is high on a list of metropolitan areas

divided by residential income segregation. Now Dallas was built this way, if you know anything about the discriminatory roots of our city. It was built out in a way that certain people, really affluent, influential, more wealthy people would live on this side, and then a blue-collared, lower socio-economic people would live on this side. This is decades and decades and decades ago.

That's not the point of this article, but his point is that since 1980, Taylor the economist tells the *Washington Post* that our country has increasingly sorted itself into areas where people are surrounded by more of their own kind. This is not an indictment on you or an indictment on the neighborhood you live in, because I know plenty of wealthy people who live in big old houses and they love Jesus and they lay down their lives for the gospel. This is not an indictment on you. You look at the way they spend their time and spend their cash, and you're just like, *Man, that guy has bought into the great gospel giveaway.*

But what this article seems to convey is that Dallas remains a status city. There's this allure that there are certain kinds of neighborhoods and certain kinds of people that if you can just reach in and be a part of it, it'll come with exclusivity. Then you'll be elite. Then you'll arrive. Then you'll have status. Status is just what the disciples wanted. So we continue to be upwardly mobile. That's our trend in this lost, vain pursuit of status.

The thing about a first-century child, and even my daughter Caroline, is that she has never complained about her car (I guess I should say *my* car; she doesn't have a car), she has never complained about the job I have, she has never complained about Dana and my cash flow, she has never balked at the preschool she goes to... I mean you put Chick-fil-A in front of that girl and she's as happy as you know what. She has never been like, "No, Daddy. Can we go to Three Forks?" Never.

There is a calling of Jesus here on his disciples to vulnerability and a lack of social concern, a death to the desire for status. He is blowing them up, and he has blown me up in this too. I have plenty of disciple moments. One I'd love to let you in on was my best friend in college... His name is Nathan, and he's just my best buddy in the whole world. Still is. In his last year at A&M, he started working with the basketball team. He's just one of those guys where you look at him and you're like, *Man, that guy has it.* He was making great connections. He was doing well. I mean, it wouldn't surprise anybody if in his mid-30s he's sitting NCAA March Madness and he's coaching some team. Like the hotshot young coach. He's just got that.

Towards the end of college, he gets married. He comes from a well-to-do and very successful family in Fort Worth, and his dad says, because he's about to get married, "Nathan, I'd like for you to come in and think about working for us. I'd like to offer you a position for the company to start you out. It's in sales." I hear this and I immediately go, "Nuh-uh. I know you better than anybody else. You don't need to settle for

that. You don't need to go to easy street. You don't need to take that gig. Come on, seriously. Nathan, that'll be a cakewalk. What you need to do is work and grind and work hard and make connections and dig and have five, six, seven, eight years of tough road, and then you become a head coach."

He goes, "No, I really think I could do something with this sales job." I'm going, "No," and I told him this. I'm just going to quote myself. I said, "You're not going to be a self-made man." I told him that. "You're not going to be self-made. You're going to look back at your life with regrets of just letting all of these things pile on." So for about a year there was just this awkward, bitter tension kind of thing going on between he and I. Our friendship was off, and I always had some kind of snide remark, or even more I didn't want to talk about what he was doing. Then when I was around other friends where he wasn't there, I was just... If I was around I was going to talk about how dumb Nathan was.

So it's sitting here consuming me, and my friends who love me start saying, "Matt, it kind of sounds like you're jealous." I'm going, "Are you kidding me? Jealous? Jealous of him? I'm in seminary. I'm not about status. Pastors don't want nice things." I'm like, "It's him. Why would he take that easy...?" Then they start coming after me and saying, "I think you're jealous." Like Fort Knox, nobody was getting into my little world, and I had all of my reasons, until the Lord was so kind one day. I don't remember the day, but I do know there was a day when he sat me down and just said, "You are wrong on so many levels. On *so* many levels you're wrong, and you need to repent and you need to ask forgiveness."

So I called Nathan and said, "Hey, I've been a jealous fool for a long time. Because first of all, there's no such thing as a self-made man, and secondly, I was jealous of the status you had, of the opportunity that a father who loves you and was blessing you and putting before you... I was jealous of this opportunity that you were going to get to walk into, and I wanted you to have to grind it out with the rest of the world." That's what I told him. I was like, "I need your forgiveness, because the problem is that I want the same thing, and I knew you would step into a life and be able to acquire things I wanted for myself in my young 20s too."

He forgave me like the good brother he is, and just to finish the story, he has been overwhelmingly successful in this role. He has killed it. He has grown this company. He's all about the gospel. I mean, just in his job the gospel oozes out of him and his company. Then even beyond that (he wouldn't let me tell you this but I'm going to) he has been a blessing to my family. He has just blessed us. I can't tell you... He has blessed us. So we're just going to call that my bad. All right?

Sitting here thinking about this story and how I was caught up in jealousy and my own desire for status, how I too, like the other disciples, was saying, "Why does Peter always get picked to answer the questions? Why did you give John and James the nickname 'sons of thunder'? Why does he get this awesome job?"

Where's *my* awesome job?" I was jealous. I was jealous and concerned with status, and then I wasn't vulnerable because I wouldn't let anybody in my world, so I wasn't applying the gospel to my life either. So the Lord was kind to crush me in that.

I told you the placement of this story in the gospel narrative was important, because on the one side we have him talking about his death and resurrection, and on the other side, in Matthew 18-20, we have how we are to live in covenant community with one another, and then in Matthew 18 we have the specifics of our childlikeness. Verses 3-4, we enter the kingdom as children; verses 5-9, we're protected from sin like children; verses 10-14, we're cared for like children, and he keeps going.

Jesus is rebuking his disciples to be humble like children, but he's also holding this child close to his heart. That's the picture I want you to have, because Jesus sees his disciples and he sees us at our worst. He sees his disciples at their worst. They're not even done yet. If we continue this story, the night before Jesus is betrayed, the night before it all goes down, his disciples come to him and say, "Hey Jesus, we know it's about to get crazy, but real quick, who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They just don't get it.

Then James' and John's mom pulls a fast one on him, almost like crazy soccer mom, and she walks up to him and says, "Hey, can you just let a poor old lady know, are my sons the greatest in the kingdom?" This conversation lingers. It keeps going. Jesus sees us at our worst, and yet he keeps teaching, and he keeps talking about his death and resurrection. Amidst these nearsighted conversations about greatness and status and failure to notice how heartsick the disciples are and we are, he keeps teaching about the kingdom, and he puts this kid in his lap.

But he also knows we don't just turn on a dime. Like the persistent summer heat in Texas (wow, is that a good analogy right now), the disciples and us love the sound of our own name. It's in our DNA. So what does Jesus do about it? That's the question. What does he do about it? Well, he knows something about being a vulnerable, dependent child himself. John 1 tells us he came from the bosom of his Father, a place of intimacy, leaving infinite delight, he left all the status of heaven, all the perpetual place, praise, and glory of a perfect place, and then he embarks on the "Plan" to leave the status and enter our world amidst self-consuming conversations. He wouldn't be deterred. Then he sets his face like flint towards the cross.

Why? Because he came to do the will of his Father, and he knew his death fulfilled this long-awaited promise that God would rescue his children from many failed attempts to find meaning outside of him. In the greatest act of humility, Jesus, a child of his own Father, would open up the door to truest possible fulfillment, not based on temporary distinction and promotion and neighborhood or anything else like that, but the eternal kind of distinction that comes with being a restored son of God, and he would bring us

back to the eternal glory of a son. He would die as a substitute. He would enter a place behind a curtain where Hebrews tells us he would purchase status and glory and peace and joy.

The author of Hebrews tells us about this promise that it is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, because he loves you so much more than you'll ever know. That's why he continues. This is why Jesus keeps talking about his death and resurrection. This is why he holds this child so close to his heart, because he foresees in this story that his self-sacrifice will unite his soul to his disciples forever, and this is how we can see ourselves as the child in his arms and still hear the critical things he needs to say to us, because he loves us. He loves you. Jesus can be critical of your life and hold you near to his heart. How does this work? Romans, chapter 7, verse 18. This is Paul talking.

**"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"**

This is Paul the apostle, wise and esteemed, the author of two-thirds of the books of the New Testament. This is Paul in the middle of one of the most famous letters ever written, personally divulging, "I keep screwing up! There are things I want to do that I'm not doing. There are things I don't do that I want to do. I keep screwing up." But he says, "Thanks be to Jesus who will deliver me from this sin," because he's thinking about what was accomplished in the death of Christ. He knows that Christ's death secured for him an eternal deliverance from sin, and he also knows what he says in the chapter before, that it's the means by which he puts present sin to death.

Listen to the heart of a child in Paul. He says, "I need you, Jesus. You can help me. Help me." Look at the childlikeness of Paul. He lays out his heart before the Lord and before the Roman church. My question is, can you...? Village Church, guys, friends, I love you. Can you do this? Because I know you struggle with status. I know you struggle with ambition. I know you struggle with ambition for distinction. You love the sound of your own name, and even beyond that I know you struggle with being vulnerable and being dependent and being given to the Lord. I know you struggle with honesty and cultivating honesty about where you are in your life.

Has anything like Paul said ever come out of your mouth? It's so basic to Christianity and yet so difficult for us to do. Do you evidence childlike humility rooted in Jesus? Do you let people into your world? Are you

burdened? I know some of you are burdened by years of self-absorption and past sins. Do you see that Christ is and was well aware of all of them, but the gospel says your trust in his death and resurrection wipes that slate clean? You are free to boast in the cross, the ugly, beautiful cross that saved your soul.

So this passage sets the table for Matthew 18, and Matthew 18 is all about forgiveness. I told you, it's the "one anothers." It's how we exist in the covenant kingdom. It's about forgiveness and engagement and possessions and what we do with possessions and marriage and giving and all these kinds of things, and it seems to be that Jesus is saying that childlike humility is foundational to all of our interactions, that you don't just enter the kingdom of heaven like a child, that you *flourish* in the kingdom of heaven like a child.

That's what he's saying, that this is maturity, that even as you grow older, the more you mature in Christ the more given to the Lord you'll be like a child. That's what he's saying, that childlikeness is how we interact with one another and how we interact with the world, everything we do together rooted in a greater dependence on the Lord. This is the kingdom fleshed out right before us.

About three months ago, I shifted over from recovery groups to be the home groups pastor. I lost a bet. No, I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I love home groups here. I love being your pastor. I lead a phenomenal team, Mason King and Liz Pace, home run leaders, very gifted, if you've ever gotten the chance to hang around them, and I love being your pastor. One thing I can tell you is that we are all about groups here at The Village Church. We're all about groups. Home groups aren't the only avenues of discipleship, but man, they're like the boulevard. We want our people to be in little pockets of community all around the metroplex. This is how we do kingdom community, in home groups.

Then beyond that, because I've had an eye into both worlds, there's this popular misconception about recovery over against home groups. The misconception is that recovery is a little bit more dirty and that home groups are a little bit more clean. So when you go to recovery, you're really just trying to deal in your honesty. You're trying to get real. You're trying to struggle. You're trying to just get all that cleaned up so you won't have to do it anymore.

The funniest thing about that is all we've ever tried to do in recovery is give you a season of working through where you've historically struggled, and train you for the rest of your life to cultivate dependence and honesty and all of these things in home groups and beyond. All we've ever hoped to be is a shot in the arm, just a season to get you back on the road of doing community with one another.

Part of my vision for home groups, guys, is that childlike humility and lack of concern for status and dependence and givenness to the Lord would mark our home groups. Honestly, that they would just be a little more rough around the edges, just be a little bit more given to talking about where we really are and

how we're really doing, and that we would be constantly remembering the life and the death and the resurrection in group.

And when we need help in our hearts we'd be proud to ask for help; that we would cultivate that dependence in the rhythm of home group; that we would cultivate confession and dependence and see that those are not just relegated to ministries like recovery, and that we would be confident in our union with Christ so we'd be willing to take and give critique well because we know we have right standing with the Lord.

Practically this means three things. If you're in a home group now where this isn't the norm, be you a home group leader or just a home group participant, I'm asking you to have the courage to lead out. I'm asking you not to wait any longer for somebody to ask you how you're doing. I'm asking you to have the courage to lead out. *You*. I'm talking to you and I'm asking you to have the courage to lead out.

In this service I can kind of talk to both worlds. Older peeps in here (and by older I mean like 30 and above; that's kind of a Village joke), you have... Jesus is calling people of all ages to childlike humility and dependence. That's really the point of this text. We see that whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So your life, till the day the Lord calls you home, is constantly marked by humility. I'm asking you, older people, to hear me when I say that you have no idea how life-giving a prospect it is when you let younger people into your world.

I had a year with Bill Seal here, and my best times with Bill Seal were not him talking about how he was the CFO of a company that made plastic bottles for Pepsi, and it wasn't learning about all of his business savvy and shrewdness, even though if you ever want to bring a guy with you to buy a car that's the guy. He just has it. My best times with 64-year-old Bill Seal were him bringing me into his life and saying, "This is what I've learned out of 40 years of failure. This is where I am historically weak as a husband. This is where I need to grow. This is what I haven't done well." It was like sitting under the gray hairs of Solomon to hear Bill speak about his weaknesses.

Then lastly, maybe this week... If you're not in a home group, there are two options right now. Recovery group is on Wednesday night from 7:00-9:00. Get there. It's a great place. Then also we'll have a Group Connect September 30 for you to get into a home group. That day will be here before you know it. If you *are* in a home group, I'm asking you this week (some of you guys will meet later on tonight) when you meet in your home group, this week break up into guys and gals for an hour or so, however long it takes, and just start having these conversations with one another. Let the people you run with know how you're doing, where you struggle with status, where you struggle with being vulnerable. Let them into your world. There is a unique kind of healing that comes through this exercise.

I love you guys. It is a joy and a privilege to be your pastor. I want you to know that. I just love running with you. I hope this is a shot in the arm for home groups, and I hope the Lord works among us through this. So let me pray, and then we'll take Communion together.

Father, thank you for the goodness that you have given us in Christ, our faithful example, a child of the King, a child who laid down his life. Thank you that you laid down your life for us, and that you were given to your own Father. Thank you for patterning that example for us. My prayer is that you would drive that into our lives, Lord, that we are free to be honest, we're free to acknowledge where we need help. I pray this would mark our groups in a way that it really never has, Lord, that there would just be a revival amongst our home groups of people who are just given and dependent to the Lord. Only you can do this by your Spirit. I'm asking you to do it. In Christ's name, amen.

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