

Studying a Biblical Text

Bible Reading: Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, asking, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" So Jesus called a child to come and stand in front of them, and said, "I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child. And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me"

1. What is happening in the reading? Try this:

- ◆ Identify the characters by name.
- ◆ Identify the words and phrases that seem significant to you.
- ◆ Identify the emotions or feelings that are expressed by the characters.
- ◆ Identify the plot and theme of the reading.
- ◆ Consult a commentary that will help you discover if there are any important details that a 21st century reader would likely miss. For example, the word that Jesus would have used for child is synonymous with the word slave. Jesus is not instructing his followers to become childish; he is telling them to become humble, powerless and dependent. This childlike or slave-like disposition, not arrogance or selfish ambition, is the path to Christian greatness.

2. How is the happening in the reading present in today's world? Think about:

- ◆ Newspaper stories about murders that are committed for personal or financial gain
- ◆ Corrupt politicians who are more concerned about selfish desires than service
- ◆ Television programs that glorify selfish ambition at the expense of harmonious relationships
- ◆ An unbalanced competitive spirit that compels some people to cheat to get to the top

3. How is the happening in the reading present in my life? Examine this:

- ◆ What characters do I like/dislike in the reading?
- ◆ Why do I like particular characters?
- ◆ Why do I dislike particular characters?
- ◆ How do I see what I like and dislike in my own personality?
- ◆ How do I compete with others in my life?
- ◆ What is my definition of greatness?
- ◆ Am I willing to be dependent upon others? Why or why not?
- ◆ Am I willing to hand my life over to God in the way that a young child must be dependent upon a parent? Why or why not?

The critical task here is to discern how the Word of God that you discover in the Bible is also calling you and guiding you outside of the Bible in your daily life. When we develop an understanding of the Word of God in the Bible, we are then in a privileged position to seek out and follow Jesus, the living Word, with more confidence in our daily experiences. The Bible helps us to clarify in our minds the identity of Jesus so that we will recognize him when he presents himself to us in every moment of every day.