

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

In the parable of the sheep who was brought back to the fold, Jesus said, “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matt 18:14). You treasure those who believe in Christ, and you watch over them in love. I praise you today as the God who seeks for the sheep who have gone astray and rejoices to find and bring them back. Praise the Lord!

Today in Your Word

It’s disturbing to realize that the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest soon after Jesus told them about his coming passion. Jesus was thinking of suffering and death; the disciples were thinking of prestige and position. Jesus spoke of laying down his life; the disciples spoke of gaining future power. As an object lesson, Jesus called a little child and set him in their midst. “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3). Jesus was not calling them to childishness of thought, but to humility of mind, for children are not caught up in debates over greatness, nor do they have lofty dreams of power. This teaches me that greatness is defined in terms of humility. The model for true discipleship is the simple humility of a child. In the same way that a child exemplifies a lack of pride and concern for status, I must put thoughts of greatness aside and labor to serve others. Jesus’ rebuke reminded John of the disciples’ recent encounter with a man who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. John asked about the incident, wondering if they had been right to stop him. Jesus told John that the kingdom was not restricted to the small group who followed and lived with him. Those who believed in him and acted on his authority were “for us” (Mark 9:40). Furthermore, the disciples must not cause “one of these little ones who believe to stumble” (Mark 9:42). They would be better off dead than doing that! This teaches me that if I have a sectarian spirit and hinder a believer who isn’t part of my group, I harm the kingdom of God and run the risk of your judgment. Jesus followed his warning about causing others to stumble with a warning about causing yourself to stumble. ‘It would be better,’ Jesus said, ‘to cut off your hand than for it to be the cause of you being cast into hell.’ (Mark 9:43). Jesus was *not* encouraging self-mutilation; he was telling his disciples to be ruthless with sin. I must heed this warning, for if I allow sin in my life, it can cause me to fall away and be lost forever (Heb 3:12–14).

Reflection

When Jesus wanted to illustrate forgiveness, he told his disciples about a man who had been forgiven a great debt. He wanted them to understand that they should forgive others *because you had forgiven them*. When I refuse to forgive, I despise your forgiveness and belittle your love. Is there anyone I need to forgive?

Request

Father, give me a deep sense of how much I have been forgiven. Put a love in my heart for those who have wronged me, and give me the grace I need to be willing and eager to offer them forgiveness.

Thanksgiving

Thank you for forgiving me more than “seventy times seven” (Matt 18:22). Your love and kindness is without limit, and I worship you for the wonderful gift of your Son! Hallelujah!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: “[The Rescued Lamb](#)” – Joel A. Erickson.

Meditation Verse: Luke 9:62.