

LifeGroup Study

Date: September 24, 2023

Text: Matthew 18:15-20, Romans 13:8-14

**Theme: Believing Is Seeing!
Love's Vision**

Belong The good ol' days... how often have you looked back? Was life easier before the Communication Age? Today, it feels like our lives move as fast as technology advances—at the speed of light. We are available 24/7 and have the ability to touch anyone anywhere in the world at almost any time. Now that we have the technology, do we have the time? Do we focus on the here and now or are we pulled in so many directions that we just can't concentrate on anything or anyone? What is this doing to our relationships? Do we take the time required to think through relationships gone astray? Or do we just toss those relationships aside and move on to the next urgency in our lives? Have we given up on building a strong community of faith due to the pressures of our modern world? We can learn from the timeless lessons of Jesus, through the writings of Matthew and Paul, of the importance of living in a Christian community, with compassion, a renewed focus on building and keeping strong relationships, and forgiveness. In today's reading and throughout God's story we learn that the past does not have to predict the future; a lesson that applies to us and helps us to mend and grow loving relationships with other Christians.

Pray... Jesus, we acknowledge our sinfulness, our need for repentance, and your grace that provides restoration. Allow us an opportunity to help grow your community as we are one with you in Christianity. Be with us today as we discuss your Word. Help us open our hearts to those we need to forgive and allow us to see others as you desire us to see them. We are all so much the same, let us see how much we have in common with those we cast away so that we can pull them close to us with love. You give us hope and the promise of eternal life. Jesus, it is in your name we pray. Amen.

Believe In today's reading Jesus provides very direct teachings on forgiveness. Seeing is believing—love's vision shines through Jesus! He leads by example. His trusted disciple Paul was once Saul, an unscrupulous tax collector who persecuted Jesus and his followers. We can change, so can others who believe. We have to remember that there is always hope for restoration.

Read Matthew 18:15-17. Jesus provides very direct teaching on how we need to live in a community of Christians. We must repent our sins and forgive the sins of others.

•*Speak to a situation when a fellow Christian sinned against you. Have you forgiven the person? If not, how can you heed Jesus' Word and restore the broken or strained relationship?*

Read Matthew 18:18. Our relationships between those who have

sinned against us from inside or outside the Church community may differ. What we must remember is that we are not to judge sinners; Jesus will judge us all.

- How can we forgive those who sin against us?*
- How can we stop placing judgment on others?*

Read Matthew 18:19-20. Jesus teaches us of the amazing power of our Church community.

•*Think of relationships in your life that you need to strengthen. Share your needs with each other so that you can lift those relationships up in prayer as you end today's session.*

Now we move to Paul's Book of Romans where he teaches us what it means to be a Christian.

Read Romans 13:8-11. A beautiful command and a desire most of us hold: to love all people.

- How can we love those who have acted recklessly against us?*
- How can we overcome the hurt we feel when others sin against us?*

Read Romans 13:11-14. Jesus' death and resurrection took place approximately 25 years before this writing. Paul refers to the day of resurrection as the beginning of a turn toward a future time, the day we all await when Jesus will come with love and protection, putting an end to evil.

- Are you ready? Our biggest day could be tomorrow!*
- If you do not feel ready, what can you do to ensure you are with God?*
- Outward actions, "...clothe yourself with the Lord, Jesus Christ," matter as much as our inward thoughts. How can we follow Jesus' teachings to show others what it really means to be a faithful, loving, forgiving Christian?*


Become Close your eyes and focus on someone who has sinned against you. See yourself at a time when you sinned. Look to Jesus to ask for forgiveness of your sin and to help you see the person who sinned against you as you see yourself: forgiven. Jesus asks us to love others; now see yourself loving the person you must forgive; keep this vision of love in your mind's-eye. Ask Jesus to help you see this resolved relationship. Commit to contacting the person with whom you need to reconcile. When you do, refer back to this vision of forgiveness. If you need more help, try reading Acts 9 to see how Jesus forgave and converted Saul to Paul. Seeing is believing! Let Jesus' loving forgiveness guide you.

Pray... Jesus, help us to start each day anew! Teach us how to love and to forgive others with all the grace that you provide. Let us forgive fellow brothers when they act against us. Help us lift up the people who we need to forgive (*pray about each person and relationship you discussed earlier*). Let us always see ourselves as we see others, in need of forgiveness. Forgive us for our wrongs. Jesus, you give us hope and the promise of eternal life; help us heed your Word as we commit to building stronger relationships in growing your community. Amen.



Deuteronomy 6:7 is a call for parents/grandparents/adults to talk about faith issues throughout the day. We have a chance to be facilitators of intentional connect conversations with our children. Here is what the verse says about faith matters...

“Impress them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” -Deut 6:7



Mealtime
...when you sit at home...
A little thought/talk time for mealtime when you are sitting together.

Verse:
Love your neighbor as yourself.
-Matthew 22:39

Finish one of the phrases:
-I am a good neighbor when I...
-I am not a good neighbor when I...
-I ask Jesus to help me when...
-If Jesus were here with us...he would say...

Prayer:
Dear Jesus, thank you for your love. Thank you that you love me so much even when I don't love my neighbors the way that I should. Help me to love the way that you love. I love you, Jesus. Amen!



Drivetime ...along the road...

Here is a little intentional connect time for your car ride.

Key Verse:

Talk about whatever is bothering you, no matter how small. (1 Peter 5:7)

Questions:

- Where is one place you would love to go?
- What do you think travel was like when Jesus lived on earth?
- Who are your neighbors?
- Who are your brothers and sisters?
- Why is it good to talk with your family?

Prayer:

God, thank you for being with our conversation. We pray that you would bless our travels and help us love all those we meet along the road of life. In your name we pray. Amen!



Nighttime

...when you lie down...

An evening devo time.

Question:

What is one thing you are looking forward to tomorrow?

Read:

Mark 1:35, Matthew 15:29 and Luke 6:12

What do these verses have in common? (solicit answers)

A: Jesus took time away to spend with God.

Say:

It is important that we take time like this to spend with God. God wants to be our best friend and to be a friend takes time and commitment.

Share:

Share with one another... your highs (thumbs up) something you liked about the day and your lows (thumbs down) one thing that wasn't so great.

Night Time Prayer:

Dear God, help us to realize that you are there for us each step of the way. Your love will never change. Help us to love our neighbor. Amen!

Parents are the #1 influence in the lives of their children. 6:7 is a tool to help families engage in those meaningful conversations. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Kodiak AK

Morningtime

...when you get up...

Prayer is not about a formula. Many times children pray only at specific times in their day (i.e. mealtime and bedtime). The morning is a wonderful time to sing songs of praise and thanks to God and to pray for the day ahead. Praying for our children and with our children in the morning is a great way to put God at the center of your day!

From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

Ps 113:3

ConnectTip:
As you ask questions of the children don't be afraid of a little silence in waiting for a response.

Daily Walk on the Rock

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Text: Matthew 18:15-20, Romans 13:8-14

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Day 1: Monday —Letting Our Lights Shine

Read Matthew 5:16, 44; Mark 12:28-33; John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; and 1 John 4:9-11, 19-21. What is to be the hallmark of one who follows Jesus? Is the call to love the Lord, love fellow believers, and love others outside the faith (even our enemies) easy? Does this mean we must all think alike or that we wink at sin? Pause and consider how our witness to the world is tarnished when we neglect to demonstrate love, compassion, and forgiveness. Talk to Jesus about what this means in your life and relationships. Tell him you want his love to shine in you.

Day 2: Tuesday —Read in Con-text and Note the Bookends

Our Matthew 18:15-20 text deals with conflict detrimental to the faith community. However, before we read or study the text, let's note its context. Read the texts/parables (*Matthew 18:12-14, 21-35*) that form the bookends to the verses addressing how to handle problems with a fellow believer. What do you learn about how God views people/sinners in these bookend texts? How has God shown love for you (*Romans 5:8*)? Now prayerfully read Matthew 18:15-17. What is the goal of the confrontation(s)? When you must confront someone, do you do so with a heart of love and the goal of restoration and reconciliation? Ask the Spirit to make you teachable.

Day 3: Wednesday—Sin Is Real and So Is Grace

Jesus isn't naïve, nor is Matthew, who records the discussion about issues in the church. There will be sin and conflict, even in the faith community. Read Matthew 7:1-5; 18:15-17. How do we reconcile these texts? Is there a difference between judging a person and discerning a sin that creates a real problem in the church or between believers? Why is it important for the health of the church that we are circumspect in keeping an issue private and in, initially, going alone to approach another about his/her sin? Consider also that this text is not about addressing trivial issues, yet there are times when we must live Ephesians 4:15-16. Pray you will live truth, love, and grace.

Day 4: Thursday—Hope for Tax Collectors, Gentiles, and Sinners (Like Us)!

Life in the church must be rooted in humility and devoid of self-righteousness (*Luke 18:9-14; Philippians 2:3-5*). Reflect on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, as you read Matthew 18:15-22.

How might the boundaries set in Matthew 18:17 become a bridge to reconciliation and restoration? How does Jesus view tax collectors, Gentiles, and sinners (*Matthew 8:5-13; 9:9-12; 21:31-32*)? In Scripture, we see that sincere faith, genuine repentance, and a heart turned toward God are vital. Pray you will have a heart turned toward God and others.

Day 5: Friday—Two or Three What are the promises and the conditions in Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 18:18-20? Do you delight in Jesus' promise to be with us as we gather in his name? Is the phrase 'in his name' important in understanding verses 18 and 19? In Bible times, names were more than markers of one's identity; names were reflections of one's character, one's very essence. What insights do you glean about using/praying in Jesus' name as you read John 14:13-14; 15:16-17, Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:24-26; 1 John 5:13-15; and Revelation 19:11-16? Tell Jesus you treasure being able to pray in his holy, precious, powerful name. Ask for greater understanding.

Day 6: Saturday—Connected to the Vine

The Epistle lesson for the week is Romans 13:8-14; as you read it, consider how it complements the truths taught in Matthew 18:15-20. Psalm 133 and John 17 also speak about the importance of healthy, loving relationships among those who trust in the Lord. Love is to be the standard and hallmark of Christians; we are to love our fellow believers, and we are to allow the love of Jesus in us to spill over and bless the world in his name. But we are so very human; how is this life of love possible? Paul says we must clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (*Romans 13:14*), and Jesus tells us we must abide in him. Pray as you read and meditate on John 15:4-6.

Day 7: Sunday—"If We Are the Body"

Jesus is honest with us; there will be conflict in the church (*Matthew 18*), yet he prays for unity among his followers (*John 17*), and he challenges us to live lives of love and grace through his presence in us and for God's glory (*Matthew 5:16; John 15:4-6, 8-13*). Paul shares similar thoughts in Colossians 3:12-17. Pondering Mark Hall's lyrics, pray about how you will live this life of love: "...if we are the body, why aren't His arms reaching, why aren't His hands healing, why aren't his words teaching? And if we are the body, why aren't His feet going, why is His love not showing them there is a way? There is a way...Jesus is the way!" (SWECS Music).

