

SCRIPTURE OUTLINE

Text: Matthew 18:1-5 (NRSV)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² He called a child, whom he put among them, ³ and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Verse	Comment/Application
1 "Who is the greatest...."	The disciples were arguing over position in the kingdom.
2 "He called a child, whom he put among them/in the midst of them"	Jesus takes the child to the CENTRE to answer the question. A perfect object lesson. The child was previously on the outer – the child's position has been altered.
3 "Unless you change and become like children"	CHANGE: become humble, trusting, simple faith LIKE CHILDREN: come to the centre where I can teach you
4 "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest..."	An illustration of the upside down Kingdom of God. Greatness requires humility.
5 "Whoever welcomes one such child welcomes me"	To welcome one who was considered lowly is to show the DEEP HOSPITALITY of the Kingdom. This is how God has welcomed us. In this Jesus is also made welcome.

Comment for further application:

Today as we pray for young people to be *Right At the Heart* of the family, community and God's kingdom, we also need to consider what this will look like – how this will take shape.

Even as Jesus longs for individuals to be *Right at Heart* of the work of the Kingdom, we each need to choose to be *Right at the Heart* of God's activity in the world. As we pray for each young person today, we are charged to actively welcome them into our Corps and communities.



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SONG SELECTIONS and WORSHIP HELPS

The following will help you plan your Sunday worship meeting. It includes:

- Songs from The Salvation Army songbook (old and new)
- Suggested meeting elements

Songs that will support today's theme:

Song Title	Old Song Book Number/Tune	New Song Book Number/Tune
The Lord is King! I own His power	867/20	625/13
Father, we for our children plead	791/95	751/78
Who can sound the depth of sorrow	New song	1004/933
Children, sing for gladness	835/211	916/193

Suggested Meeting Elements:

Opening Song

Introduction to Theme (Matthew 18)

Video Clip ("Today")

Children's story

Interactive prayer Stations (repentance, thanksgiving, supplication)

Bible message

Response: Corps Prayer and Action Plan

Closing Songs

In addition to these elements, Corps could include their regular announcements, tithes and offerings and other cultural elements specific to their context.



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CHILDREN'S STORY FOR USE IN WORSHIP SERVICE

AIM OF THE STORY: To highlight the meaning of being in the **CENTRE**

Ask the congregation:

I wonder what you think the difference between 'being in the middle' and 'being in the centre' is. (Call for responses)

Choose one or two points:

Use examples of being in the *middle*

- You are the middle child in the family
- You sit in the middle seat of a bus. That can be quite annoying because you cannot see the view
- You are in the middle of a crowd where you can't see anything
- You are in the middle of reading a good book and are called away

Now, use an example of being in the *centre*

- When you are in the centre you have a 360 degree view and can turn and see everything that is going on. You become the central part of the circle.
- You are the centre of attention, when you are blowing out candles on your birthday cake. Everyone is looking and focused on you.
- To be in the *centre* of something is of key importance and has great value

Interaction example:

- Ask seven young people to stand in a line next to each other. Choose the person standing directly in the middle (three either side).
- Comment how the middle person can't really see everything else going on in the line.
- Ask the same people to stand in a circle with the same middle person now in the centre of the circle.
- What has changed? (Being in the **CENTRE** has changed their perspective)

Teaching Points:

- When you are in the *centre* of things you know what is going on.
- You may be part of a corps, family or community where you are involved and you are in the *centre* of the group as you know what is going on. You are in the heart of things.



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- Being in the *centre* is similar to being “among” something. When you are in the centre something you place yourself where you can be attentive and participate.
- There is a story in the Bible about Jesus using children as an example for how we should trust in Him. In the story he brings the children among the people. The story is in Matthew chapter 18 and it goes like this:

Story (Paraphrase from Matthew 18 and Mark 8)

- Jesus’ disciples were arguing, they wanted to know, ‘Who was the most important person in God’s kingdom? They spent some time arguing amongst themselves. They all wanted Jesus to like them the best and they started thinking that they had to do something to make themselves special to Jesus. They thought that if they were the brightest or nicest, Jesus would like them the best.
- They were too busy arguing to remember that no matter how good you are, or how nice you are, or how rich you are or how good looking you are or how important you are, it doesn’t make any difference to God. Jesus had been showing people for a long time that God’s love is a gift and that it is a free gift. All you have to do is ask Jesus to be your friend.
- So while Jesus’ disciples were busy arguing, some little children were playing near Jesus and he called them over. (Encourage the children to picture the children arriving to see Jesus with their parents, or some arriving with their friends, some walking up to Jesus, some even could have come to Jesus skipping.)
- Jesus’ disciples tried to send them away. They told the children that he didn’t have time for them because was too tired and busy. But how wrong were they because Jesus always had time for children.
- Jesus told them, ‘Don’t ever send them away! ‘Bring the children to me.’
- These children were so excited, they ran straight up to Jesus and let him pick them up in his arms and embrace Him. Then they may have sat on Jesus lap and he may have listened to all their stories and had a chat to them.
- Children loved Jesus, and they knew they didn’t need to do anything special for Jesus to love them. All they needed to do was to run into his arms. And so that’s just what they did.



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- After Jesus had spent some time with each of the children he placed the children **in the centre** of his friends, he placed them in the centre of them and told them that no matter how big you grow or how old you get, you should never get so old that you lose your child's heart, you should never lose the child's way of fully trusting in God. He told his friends that they needed to be more like these children as they are the most important in my kingdom.'

Comment on the text

- In this story Jesus made sure that children were not overlooked, he didn't push them aside. Jesus knew how important children are and he showed his disciples how important they were to him. He acknowledged that children have a faith that is full of trust in God.
- Jesus still loves to place children in the centre of everything He is doing. This means that being in the 'centre' means Jesus wants to include children just like you in everything. Jesus also wants you to include him in what you are doing. He wants to be in the centre of your lives whether it is in your family, at in your community or anywhere his Kingdom is being built.



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PRAYER ACTIVITIES FOR WORSHIP SERVICE

You may offer ALL OR ONE of these prayer activities for your congregation.

Repentance

For this activity you will need

- The scripture verse written and placed within the space. *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'* (Ezekiel 36:26, NIV)
- Enough stones for each person to take one home
- A bucket/tub of water

Aim: To give the congregation opportunity to repent for any wrong doings against children

- Set up the stones on a table next to a bucket/tub of water
- Read Matthew 18:5-7 (RSV or NIV)

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes"
- Using the verse from Ezekiel 36:26, encourage the congregation to repent for the times that they may have caused a child to stumble in their faith or excluded them from their corps, or not given children a place in the heart of their family, community or corps.
- Remind them of Matthew 18: 5-6 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.'
- When we disobey God our hearts become like stone but God gives us new chance when we repent and he gives us a heart of flesh, a sensitive warm heart that loves and is kind.



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- God promised the Israelites when they were scattered among many countries that he could bring them back to their land. As God promised the Israelites, he promises that he can restore our hearts of stone by giving us a new hearts of flesh and a new spirit within.
- After each person has prayed silently, encourage them to choose a stone and wash it as a symbol of God's promise of giving us a clean heart of flesh. Take a stone home as a reminder to encourage them to place children in the centre of their family, community and Corps. Remind the congregation not to overlook children because they are of great value.

Thanksgiving

For this activity you will need

- Twigs, wood, leaves
- Basket to hold leaves
- Strips of paper
- Pens/Pencils
- Bowl

Aim: For the congregation to give thanks for the children in their family, Corps, villages, suburbs and communities

- Build the shape of a tree on the floor or table using the twigs and wood supplied. Ask a child to hand out a leaf to each person present. Explain that each leaf represents a child and that as a tree needs to breathe through its leaves, the body of Christ needs children to breathe and grow.
- Ask each person to place a leaf on the tree. As the leaves are placed on the tree ask each adult to thank God for each child.
- Write the names of the children on strips of paper and place them in a bowl on the mercy seat or holiness table. Encourage adults to take out a slip of paper and pray for that child during the following week.



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Supplication

For this activity you will need

- Copies of scripture verses to give to children.

Aim: For the congregation to spend time together praying for each child

- Remind the congregation that it is every person's responsibility to disciple children and we should not overlook them.
- Place the children in the centre of a circle made up of adults from your corps. Have the adults hold hands and pray for each child. Ensure that all children are prayed over. Promise in your prayer that you will not overlook the children and always remember that they are right in the heart of Kingdom of God.
- Choose appropriate scripture verses and give each child a verse that they can take home as a promise that they will always be in the heart of the corps and God's Kingdom.
- Allow time for each member of the congregation to think about their own relationship with God. Remind them of the verse from Matthew 18 which speaks of 'True Greatness'.
- Remind the congregation that unless they turn and have faith like a child, they will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.



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How to use the CORPS PRAYER and ACTION PLAN

1. Use the ACTION PLANS as a prayer activity at the END of the worship service. It would be most suitable as the response time, after the bible message.
2. Display a copy of the ACTION PLAN on multi-media/screen if possible.
3. Display copies of the plan on tables or walls around the worship hall (vary to suit the size of the congregation).
4. In GROUPS, invite the congregation to move towards the tables or walls and write an IDEA or WAY young people can be more central in the three areas discussed today (family, community, kingdom).
5. Encourage PRAYER around these ideas (in small groups) as you do this. You may wish to have the piano/organ/band providing music to assist as this is taking place.

After the DAY OF PRAYER

Collect the ACTION PLANS and collate the prayers.

Corps Officers may wish to take them to the Corps Council, Senior Pastoral Care Council or prayer team for ongoing prayer and discussion.

These prayers and ideas may form ways that young people in the Corps can be more central in the life and ministry of the corps and community life.



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Our Corps Prayer & Action Plan

Write in the space below your PRAYERS and PLANS for how young people can become CENTRAL in the life of the family, community and God's kingdom.



Family



Community



Kingdom

**“Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”
And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them.
(Matthew 18:1-2, RSV)**



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