

28.64b “Who Is Greatest?” (Matthew 18:1–6; Mark 9:33–41; Luke 9:47–50)

✓ “Check” it out: opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher, not the student. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and/or visual aids found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check also “Activities” and “Handwork” below for additional suggested items.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *humility*: a modest or low view of one's own importance
- *to convert*: to change or turn
- *to receive*: to take, accept, welcome
- *a millstone*: each of two circular stones used for grinding grain [see picture below]

Scripture: (ESV)

Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 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 around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Mark 9:33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

38 John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” 39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Luke 9:46 An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. 47 But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side 48 and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

49 John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” 50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.”

Introduction/Review:

Some exciting things had happened in the region of Caesarea Philippi and Mount Hermon, the area claimed by Satan and his demons. What was the first thing? [Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John.] Then what happened? [Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus about His soon “departure.”] When they

descended from the mountain, what did Jesus and the three disciples find? [A father with a demon-possessed boy.] Jesus healed the boy, and all were astonished at the majesty of God.

Story:

Jesus and His disciples left this place and walked on down to Galilee and to their home base, the town of Capernaum. ✓ In Peter's house Jesus asked, "Fellows, as we were walking here, what were you discussing?"

The answer? Silence. [Teacher, move your eyes side to side as if looking at other disciples.] The tension of guilt was strong in the room, for the real answer was this: they had been discussing who among them was greatest.

The greatest

Finally, someone broke the ice, and the disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" You see, they thought Jesus' kingdom would soon be set up here on earth, for Jesus was the King. Hadn't He as much as said so when He and Peter discussed the two-drachma tax? Didn't the approving crowds indicate a kingdom? Certainly, the disciples would have positions of authority in Christ's kingdom since they were closest to the King. The question was, "Who will have the greatest position?"

What competition we have here! Involved with thinking someone is better than another is the fact of demeaning others—offending them.

The least

Jesus, of course, knew the reasoning of their hearts. He sat down and, calling the twelve to Him, said, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

Let's stop a moment and think about this statement. It might be expressed in other ways, like "The way up is down," or "He that exalts himself will be humbled, and he that humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; Luke 18:14).

Consider a present-day example. Where would a place of honor be if we were to attend a banquet, say, at school? The head table. Imagine thinking you were important enough to be at the head table only to learn that your supposed place was actually reserved for someone else. How embarrassing to have to move to the last place left at the children's table!

I heard of a man who once thought he was going to be honored as "Man of the Year" by an organization. Before the announcement of the name, this man assuredly began to make his way to the stage to accept the honor. I suppose he felt totally ashamed when another man was named. I think I would have crawled back to my seat or out the door.

Jesus was saying we must not be proud, seeking notoriety for ourselves or thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). Do we turn up our noses at people we consider to be beneath us—maybe those who are slovenly or seemingly stupid. Rather, we need to look at every person as someone made in the image of God and to desire that perhaps each one will be saved by the grace of God—maybe through our witness and concern for them. Humility is a prime Christian characteristic. The disciples needed to learn to let God exalt the ones He chooses.

A child

To illustrate His lesson on humility, Jesus called a child to Him. He took him up in his arms and then put the child by His side in the middle of the gathering. He said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." What does this mean? If we are to be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot come to Him full of ourselves. We must come with nothing to offer, receiving His gift of salvation as a trusting child would receive it.

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said. Most children are humble, teachable, and without pride and ambition. In this way the disciples must become like

children. “They must lay aside their ambitious views and their pride, and be willing to occupy their proper station—a very lowly one” (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/matthew/18.htm>). The reward for such a person is great—greatness in the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus said, “He who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

Another aspect of becoming like a child is seen in the words, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” In other words, whoever receives and loves with a spirit like this child who is humble, meek, and unambitious, that is a real Christian (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/matthew/18.htm>). Follow the progression: receiving a child in Jesus’ name is equal to receiving Jesus Himself; one who receives Jesus also receives God the Father. This is not to say that an unsaved person who is kind to children becomes born again by receiving a child.

But then comes a warning, a very strong caution: “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 around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” I say, “Amen!” What is worse than teaching an innocent child to do wrong? What is worse than withholding from a child the opportunity to hear God’s Word so that [s]he can come to Christ? Oh, how great will be the judgment of such an adult at the judgment!

The other man

At this time, another subject came up. John said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

✓ It looks as if John was jealous for Jesus and discrediting the man’s work because it wasn’t done in the company of Jesus and His disciples. But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.” He explains, “For the one who is not against us is for us.”

The key word here is *is*—“*is not against us; is for us.*” Only God knows hearts. Upon seeing someone doing a spiritual work, we can assume that one *is* genuinely “for” Jesus. Further investigation might prove that person to be in fact against Him. The judgment of charity—assuming the best—should be our first response.

In other Bible passages, Jesus speaks of those who are against Him. Indeed, that is the usual reaction to Christ. On the other hand, those who are for Him should be received. As Jesus said about those who appreciate Jesus, “Truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.”

God keeps the records. He knows who receives children and who has a child’s humble spirit. He knows those who are His own.

*“This was one mode of capital punishment practiced by the Greeks, Syrians, Romans, and by some other nations. The meaning is, it would be better for him to have died before he had committed the sin. To injure, or to cause to sin, the feeblest Christian, will be regarded by Christ as a most serious offence, and will be punished accordingly” (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/matthew/18.htm>).

Lessons from This Lesson:

- Be like a child—humble, sincere, trusting God.
- Be discerning, but also realize that there are Christians in other churches.
- Encourage children to follow the Lord.

Activities:

- Play dough: child; millstone

- Play act an arrogant and a humble person.
- Play act disciples arguing about being the most important in the kingdom of God. End by quoting, “Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
- Ask older students to share an experience of thinking to be great (in grades, sports activities, *etc.*) only to be humbled.
- Sing “Little Children” found below.
- Review questions: (Game: Print, back with paper towel, and cut apart the clipart pictures of the boy and girl. If a girl answers a question correctly, she puts up a picture of a girl; a boy puts up a picture of the boy.)
 1. About what had the disciples been arguing as they walked? [Who was the greatest.]
 2. To what town did Jesus come? [Capernaum.]
 3. How can you tell the disciples knew they had done wrong in arguing about being the greatest? [They were silent when Jesus asked them about their arguing.]
 4. Fill in the blanks: “If anyone would be _____, he must be _____ of all and servant of all.” [First; last.]
 5. Whom did Jesus put in the midst of the disciples? [A child.]
 6. What qualities of a child was Jesus commending? [Humility; no ambition for self; trust, lack of bias, simple, *etc.*]
 7. Complete this sentence: Whoever humbles himself like a child is the _____ in the _____ _____. [Greatest; kingdom of heaven.]
 8. What would be good for a person who causes a child to sin. [To have a millstone put around his neck so that he is drowned in the sea.]
 9. What incident did John report to Jesus? [That someone was casting out demons in Jesus’ name.]
 10. What did Jesus say to do about this person? [Leave him alone; one who is not against Jesus is for Him.]

Handwork:

- In the clipart of an adult and child found below, circle the person who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. [The child.] Color the picture.

Memory Verse:

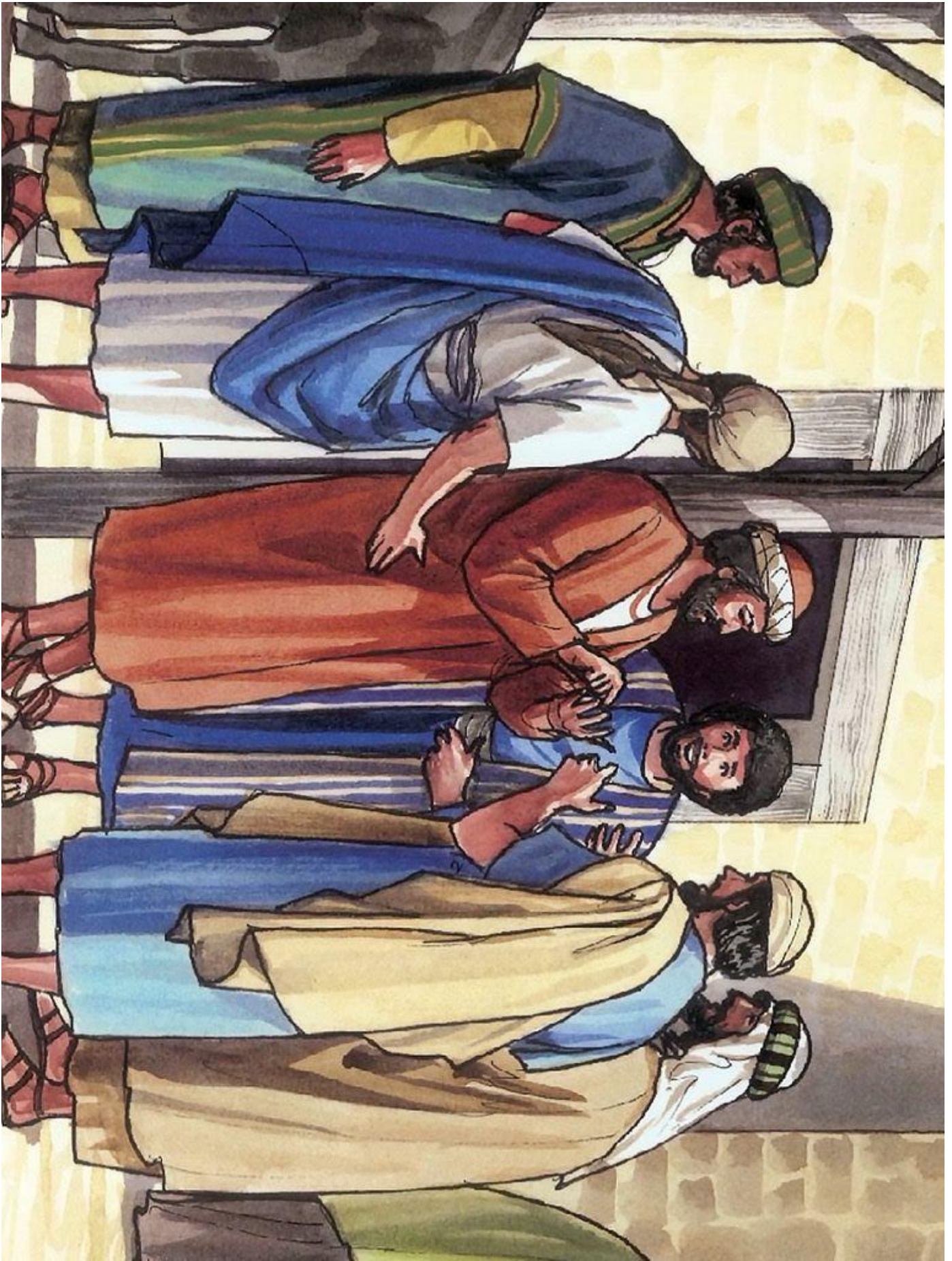
- Matthew 18:4—Whoever humbles himself like [a] child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

humility

to convert

to receive

millstone





<https://truthbook.com/urantia-book/paper-154-last-days-at-capernaum>





<https://commonmansbiblejourney.wordpress.com/2011/09/30/day-98-matthew-181-6-who-is-greatest-in-the-kingdom-of-heaven/>



<http://christswords.com/content/mat-186-whoever-shall-offend-one-these-little-ones>



<https://precepts.wordpress.com/2009/04/22/luke-17/>

Be Like a Child

Unambitious for self

Trusting

Simple

Humble

Unbiased

28.64b

Little Children

Poem from an old Bible story book

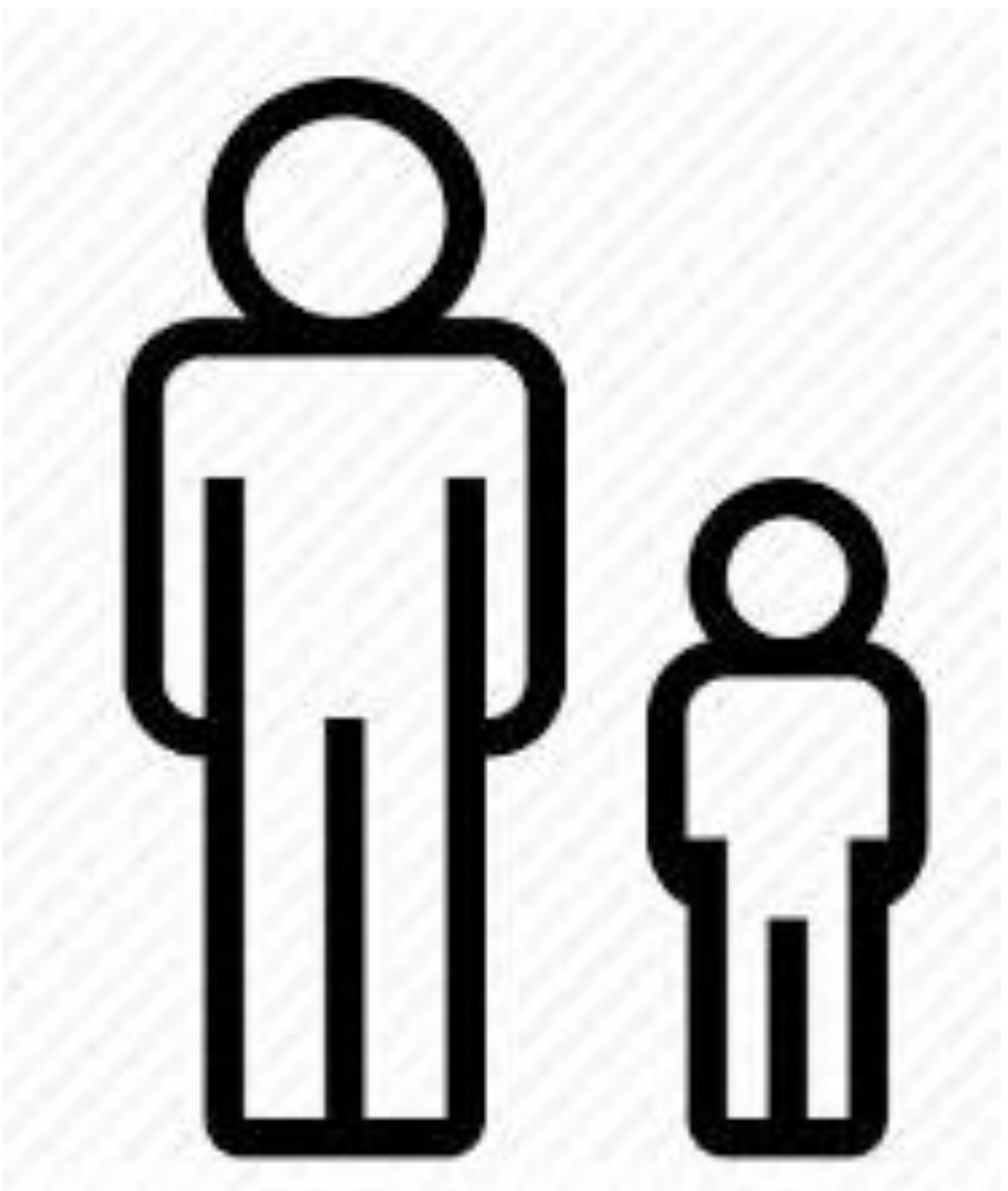
Marilyn Alexander

The dis - ci - ples asked Je - sus a ques - tion. "Who is the great - est of all in the
5 whole wide king - dom of heav - en?" And Je - sus an - swered their call: "Un - less
9 you are like lit - tle child - ren, And hum - ble your - selves with - out pride, You
13 can - not get in - to the king - dom; The sim - ple and meek go in - side."

The musical score is written on a single treble clef staff in a 6/8 time signature. It consists of four lines of music, each with a measure number (1, 5, 9, 13) at the beginning. The melody is simple and uses a mix of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes. The piece ends with a double bar line at the end of the fourth line.



<https://clipartxtras.com/categories/view/7b65eec891b84aec77a0813e2a0e2e6667c44ab0/child-body-clipart.html>



Circle the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.