



**Life Group Sermon Study Notes**  
**“Circles: Who’s In Your Circle?”**  
**Sr. Ps. James Lowe – September 13, 2020**

**Warm Up (10-15 minutes)**

**Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.**

- If you could eat only one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- What’s something in your house you want to get rid of but can’t?

**Word (10-15 minutes)**

**Sermons can be heard online at [www.bethelworld.org](http://www.bethelworld.org)**

**Matthew 16: 18-20**

*<sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

**Looking for Power**

The capacity or ability to direct or influence circumstances is what we call power and we all want it. There is an everyday struggle to maintain our lives in a way that we deem acceptable. Then there are times when major altering events – like COVID, sickness, and financial hardship – add to the struggle. We can often feel powerless or tempted to abuse power.

Every culture has its thoughts on how to gain power and often it appeals to those of the status quo and leaves others out. The Bible gives a narrative that anyone can have power from God that comes through Christ. This is a remarkable claim: that young, old, rich, poor, and all ethnicities have power in Christ. We are connected to the ultimate power source that changes our view on what it means to have power and what to do with it. We must be diligent to learn his way of operating in power.

## **Kingdom of Heaven**

Our focus passage Matthew 18: 18-20, is placed in the larger context of Jesus disciples asking, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This question reveals an inclination to think of greatest in terms of power over others and circumstances. Jesus responded by saying to enter the kingdom of heaven takes humility – willingness to not think on one’s importance but the interest of others.

“Kingdom of heaven” is a term used throughout the book of Matthew to give context to the spiritual realm over which God reigns as king, and the fulfillment on earth of God’s will. It’s here where the legal term, “bind and loose” is used to explain the authority the disciples had to forbid and permit the actions of the community. It also came with the warning to not abuse their power and lead people into sin. Stanley Saunders, a New Testament professor puts it this way, the authority given in the kingdom of heaven is that of defending the interests of the least ones in our midst, as well as to create the space and conditions for forgiveness and restoration to flourish. When this is the objective, we can trust God to be involved.

In Christ the playing field is being evened out. When we do things according to the character of Christ, we can expect it to have a positive and lasting impact in our lives and the world. Jesus stresses the importance of surrounding ourselves with a circle of people who will hold us accountable to letting go of offense and seeking the welfare of others for the sake of the kingdom.

### **Discussion (10-15 minutes)**

**Choose one of the points below, and discuss how the lesson applies to our lives.**

- Share a time when you knew you were powerless to change the circumstances of a situation that mattered deeply to you. How did you relate to God during that time?
- How has being connected with other believers challenged you or encouraged you in your everyday decision making?

### **Prayer (10-15 minutes)**

**Pray for any of the following, as well as other requests you may have.**

- Thank God for the power that we have as believers when we come together.
- Ask God for the mindset to seek the welfare of others.
- Ask God for a conviction to trust his ways of operating with others.