

Leave no One Behind

I have never served in the military. However, I have observed that there is a tie that binds soldiers together. In many ways, they become like family to each other. They live together, train together, eat together, and at times they may even fight with each other, but they know that no matter what happens to them out on the field their brother or sister has their back. There is one principle that is embedded deep in them: **"Leave no one behind."** The principle is that should a fellow soldier die in combat, his or her body would be recovered at all costs. If you are captured by the enemy, your fellow soldiers are out there trying to get you back.

"Leave No One Behind." As noble as that principle is, it's an idea that did not originate with any branch of the U.S. Military. It is a principle that extends a lot further back than the age of the United States. In many ways, it is a principle that originated with God and it extends all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Almost immediately after sin entered this world, God put a plan in place that was intended to say that he wanted to **Leave No One Behind**. He loved his creation. He loved Adam and Eve. He loved all the descendants that came after them. God wanted his people back. He will love his people so much that he will go to any length to win them back, including giving the life of his Son. God desires to **Leave No One Behind**.

That's really the point of this text in front of us. These words are familiar to many of us. We often use these words as words of **policy** in a church. They are used as words that lay out a **process** in the church to deal with those who have sinned. But these words are much more than words of policy. They are words of **love**. They are words that are spoken by a loving God who wants his people back to be with him. They are words that express the thought that **Leave No One Behind**. God's desire is simple: He **"wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** (1 Timothy 2:4)

To understand the words of our text, we need to go back to the beginning of chapter 18 of Matthew, the disciples come to Jesus with a simple question: **"Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"** The rest of the chapter is Jesus' answer to that question. First, he has a child stand in front of them and says: **"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** God's love doesn't stop with children.

God is always looking for the lost. Jesus goes on to illustrate that truth by telling the parable of the lost sheep. A man had 100 sheep. One of those sheep gets lost. What does the man do? He leaves the 99 and goes looking for the one that was lost. When he finds that one lost sheep, he is happy. God has that same feeling about us. Matthew continues: **"In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."**

You see how the verses, before our text changes, everything? Our God is a God who loves the lost. Our God will go to all lengths to **leave no one behind**. That's really the point of Jesus' words: **"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."** Matthew 18 isn't so much about **"church discipline"** as it is to gather people in Jesus' name.

God wants us to be a part of his family. Jesus pulled out all the stops to bring us back to God through faith in him. He came and he suffered more than we can ever imagine. He gave his life in a horrible way to make people part of his family. He wants us and the lost to belong to his family. What would you do if you knew that someone in your family was going a horrible direction in their life? You would try to stop them from going that direction. You would do whatever it takes.

This isn't easy to do. These words of Jesus are hard to carry out. Yet, God wants us to reflect the same love that he has shown us. He wants to protect us. Jesus knows how hard Satan will work to drag us away from him. God warned Cain

before he killed his brother: **“Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you.”** Sin desires to have us. The truth is that sometimes it does have us. We sin. We sin against each other in church, in our homes, in our workplaces, etc. When that happens, God says to us: **“Go!”** Go and win your brother or sister back. Assure them that even though sin desires to have us, God desires to have us even more.

As we follow these words of Matthew 18, Jesus wants to re-assure us that he is with us. **“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”** God stands at your side as you put his Word into practice. Jesus is there forgiving sin and giving salvation. He is with us when we go missing in action. He is there assuring us that he wants no one left behind. He wants to take all the sins off of our backs and put them all on the back of his Son, Jesus. When Jesus died, he said *It is Finished*. Every sin was paid in full. Every sin is forgiven in total. Every sin no longer remembered. There is no sin that you carried into church today that Christ did not die for. God has kept his promise: He will remember our sin no more.

Leave No One Behind. There is an incredible tie that binds soldiers together. Even greater is the tie that binds us together in Christ. Our God has loved us more than we can ever imagine. May the Lord help us as we carry out this task together. In Jesus’ name, we ask it. Amen.