

1. The Least of These—Luke 9:46-47 (There is an unmistakable and undeniable consistency seen in the ministry of Jesus—he was always drawn to what he described as the “least of these.” In our text he uses a child to embody this idea and proclaim that anyone who welcomes the child actually welcomes him. And in answering this disciples debate about who is the greatest—or as we would put it, whose number one—it is again to the least of these that Jesus turns. Then he goes even one step further—if you want to be great be least. Not what the disciples expected to hear—nor us for that matter. This is just not how they or we have been conditioned to think.)
2. (No, we naturally gravitate to who is first, not who is last: to winners, not losers; to success; achievement; recognition; talent; beauty; celebrity and wealth. Those get out attention. That is what we want. Yet here is Jesus saying something quite opposite—in his kingdom values are different. The last—like a little child—are elevated. The first are not. He had other conversations about this) Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13-16; 20:20-28 (But he lived it as well. He went out of his way to minister to blind people, lepers, adulterers, Samaritans, prostitutes, so-called, “sinners and tax collectors”—all on the fringe; despised or forgotten. One text really sums it all up)
3. Matthew 11:4-6 (Here in answering the question about his identity posed by disciples of John the Baptist, he self-identifies in such a way that leaves no doubt. In his kingdom the last come first—the marginalized, the ignored, those on the fringe, the lonely, the forgotten and overlooked, the poor, the hurting, the bullied, the exploited, the oppressed, the awkward, the one sitting by themselves, the hopeless, the friendless—there were his people. The best way to get this point across is perhaps to show it—**VIDEO CLIP**)
4. (And now he looks to us, his disciples, and says, make them your people too) Matthew 25:31-40 (Whew—I don’t know about you but this reading and this entire concept hits me in the gut. I am a product of my social conditioning and celebrating winners has much more appeal to me. On top of that—explain the enneagram and my number 8—I am just naturally not inclined to even notice the least of these—**tell Joe retreat story**. Of my number it is said that unless you are of value to me in accomplishing my goal—you are “invisible” to me. So that is me—not intentionally. I am a doer and a fixer and unless you can help me, then just get out of my way—that is my first instinct anyway. But here Jesus is saying to me—**you know those invisible people; they are with me and not just that—they are me!** Boy does this hit me hard. Does this ever convict me! So what do I need to do about it?)
5. Becoming the Least
 - a. I must empty myself of all pride, pretense, conceit, and ego—Romans 12:3 (do not think more highly of myself than I should and stop being so self-absorbed)
 - b. I must completely humble myself in God’s sight—James 4:10
 - c. I must completely re-order my life according to kingdom values—Matthew 5-7 (SOM)
 - d. I must actually give a cup of cold water to the thirsty (stop thinking of myself; see the invisible; have the courage to step out and minister to them; overcome my social conditioning and in my busyness stop for the blind man on the road as I place the kingdom’s value on them and not the world’s)
6. “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”—Matthew 18:3