

Defining Moments Week 5

Teachable Moments

This is the fifth and final week of a five-part series we've been calling Defining Moments.

In the course of this series, we've been saying for most all of us, when we evaluate a single experience or even a season of our life, we don't judge the experience as a whole, but rather, we tend to judge and evaluate experiences based on specific *moments* that come to stand for the whole.

Moments matter because they come to stand for how we view the world. Moments matter because they form a kind of lens through which we understand ourselves, our world, our place in the world, our relationships, and God. Moments matter, and some moments matter *more*. Defining Moments are brief intense experiences, so brimming with meaning that they bring definition and clarity into our lives that we did not previously have.

Defining Moments matter. They help us to identify where we are and where we are going, especially when it comes to our faith. God uses moments in your life to connect you to his purpose and plan for your life. God uses Defining Moments to help you understand yourself.

In this message series, we looked at seizing defining moments in which God wants to do something new in our lives. We reflected on the importance of learning to listen to the Lord in order to experience the defining moments God had in mind for us. We discussed defining moments of growth which happen outside our comfort zone.

By the way, if you missed any or all of this series, you can always catch up online. Go to our website, click on weekend messages.

As we wrap up, we're going to look at a defining moment that we can create for others. No matter who you are, where you are in life, what position you hold or what you do, there are people who you influence. They look to you to understand what is valuable and important - if you are a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle If you are a manager, owner, or director of anything, a teacher, a trainer or a coach, an advisor, attorney, administrator, a health care provider, a retailer. High school students, younger kids look up to you. That's why we encourage our high schoolers to serve in our children's ministry. The elderly among us hold the

privileged ability to influence us with the wealth of their experience. Those who are sick or suffering can fill the role in an especially powerful and even noble way. No matter who you are, you can influence people around you. And some moments are just made for it. We refer to these as *teachable moments*.

A teachable moment is an opportunity that arises to impart or impress a valuable lesson. You can't really *plan* for a teachable moment, but you can *prepare* for it. That's what we are going to look at today. To do it, we're looking at an episode early in Jesus' ministry. Jesus orchestrates for the disciples a moment to help them see who He is. It is an insight he wants us to experience as well. We find this story in the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus and a few of his disciples come to Capernaum, which is the town that becomes Jesus' home base for his ministry. And on a Sabbath, they entered a synagogue and Jesus taught. There was only one temple, which was the center of worship in Jerusalem, where the faithful went to offer sacrifices once a year. Synagogues were like a local church where God's word would be read aloud on the Sabbath and the local rabbi would teach or preach. So, Jesus enters the synagogue and assumes the role of a teacher, probably at the invitation of the leader of the synagogue. We do not know what Jesus taught, but we do know the effect his teaching had on the congregation.

The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. **Mark 1:22**

Mark contrasts Jesus' teaching with those of the scribes. Who were the scribes? This is long before the printing press, so the scribes transcribed the scriptures, what we would call the Old Testament, to be used in local synagogues. Obviously in their position, they got to know scripture better than everyone else. But by Jesus' day they had become legalistic interpreters of the scripture and the law found there. Jesus elsewhere accuses them of intolerance and also hypocrisy as they had a tendency to insist on the letter of the law for everyone else while letting themselves off easy. Also, their teaching could be contradictory, and confusing to the average man in the street. Jesus on the other hand taught clearly with authority. He knew what he was talking about not just because he knew what the Scripture said, but because he lived it out perfectly as the Son of God.

His authority was so commanding that people were amazed. The gospel tells us 35 times that in encountering Jesus people were amazed. It was the most common response he seemed to evoke. Then Jesus does something even more amazing.

Mark writes, *In the synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit, he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come out to destroy us? I know that you are the Holy One of God."* Mark 1:23-24

This is a spooky little scene. An unclean spirit refers to the demonic possession of someone attending the service that day. And if you don't think anyone in church could ever have a little devil in them, *you haven't spent enough time around church*. So, this spirit cries out to Jesus. And his question is a kind of rhetorical question. This demon recognizes that Jesus has come to destroy and conquer evil in the world. He has come as the Holy one of God.

It is interesting that in the Gospels, that demons show up all the time, and they recognize Jesus' true identity as well as his source of authority. At the same time a lot of the religious people miss it all together.

Mark continues, *Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him.* Mark 1:25-26

Jesus commands the demon to leave and he leaves. The demon submits to Jesus' authority.

All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." Mark 1:27

This was an amazing moment for the people in attendance. This kind of thing didn't happen every day at synagogue. In this moment the crowd recognized that something new was happening. Jesus had orchestrated this teachable moment to make an impression on this group of people that this was a *new day*, that God was doing *a new thing*.

Jesus had given the man with an unclean spirit a new life by driving an evil spirit out of him. In that moment, the crowd realized that Jesus was different from every other religious leader. He could not only introduce them to *new possibilities* and *new ways of living*, but he could also provide the power to make it happen.

What about you? What values or priorities do you most want to impress upon the people you influence? And have you been intentional about that? The people who are under your authority or in your sphere of influence look to you to understand

their priorities in life. But, at some point *your time of influence* will change in each season of your life: Your employees will move on; your class or team will move up; your kids will move out and go to college. (*but don't be sad because then they'll come back again and live in your basement until they're 30*)

When these individuals look back at their time with you, they will remember a few key moments in which you taught them...something... positive or negative. Hopefully, it will be a lesson in what you value. They'll remember a time when you sacrificed money or popularity or comfort so that you could defend the values you hold. They'll remember the times when they saw you passionately, purposefully defend your priority.

While you can't plan for teachable moments, you can prepare for them. Then be on the lookout for circumstances and opportunities that provide teachable moments. We do this by knowing what is most important, by staying focused on the main thing. And what is the main thing? Ultimately, it's that you let Jesus be your Defining Moment and allow him to have authority in your life. Allow Jesus to be the focus of what you care about most, and then make sure that is reflected in your priorities and choices in your everyday life.

Moments matter because life comes down to a series of moments. And in each one of them, let Jesus amaze you with his power.