

*Where we start . . .*

Have you ever received an award? If so, when did you receive it and for what did you receive it?

What was the last awards show you either attended or watched? (Oscars, Emmys, etc.) What was being rewarded?

*What we read . . .*

We tend to like “winners;” we honor those who are the head of the class, the top of the heap, the prominent leaders. And that longing is felt, even among Jesus’ closest followers. You can pick up on that in reading Mark 9:30-37.

What was Jesus clearly teaching His disciples (9:30-31)?

What might account for the disciples’ inability to grasp what He was telling them?

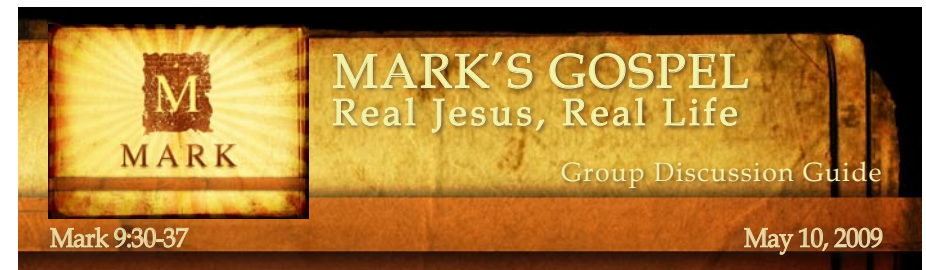
What were the disciples most concerned about? What were they arguing about?

How does Jesus address their desire for “greatness”? What criteria does Jesus use to measure greatness among those who follow Him?

*Why this matters . . .*

What is the challenge, to you personally, in pursuing “greatness” on the basis of “lastness” and servanthood?

Think of one or two specific relationships in which you are currently experiencing some tension or stress. What do you think would change in those relationships if you adopted the goal of pursuing “last place” and set your agenda on being, fundamentally, a servant?



*Where we start . . .*

Have you ever received an award? If so, when did you receive it and for what did you receive it?

What was the last awards show you either attended or watched? (Oscars, Emmys, etc.) What was being rewarded?

*What we read . . .*

We tend to like “winners;” we honor those who are the head of the class, the top of the heap, the prominent leaders. And that longing is felt, even among Jesus’ closest followers. You can pick up on that in reading Mark 9:30-37.

What was Jesus clearly teaching His disciples (9:30-31)?

What might account for the disciples’ inability to grasp what He was telling them?

What were the disciples most concerned about? What were they arguing about?

How does Jesus address their desire for “greatness”? What criteria does Jesus use to measure greatness among those who follow Him?

*Why this matters . . .*

What is the challenge, to you personally, in pursuing “greatness” on the basis of “lastness” and servanthood?

Think of one or two specific relationships in which you are currently experiencing some tension or stress. What do you think would change in those relationships if you adopted the goal of pursuing “last place” and set your agenda on being, fundamentally, a servant?





*Diving in . . .*

We come to what may be a familiar passage to many; Jesus' words about "being a servant" are widely known. What will be essential is that your group understands what was driving the disciples, how Jesus addressed that drive, and why Jesus' call to "lastness" is the right measuring stick for greatness among Jesus' friends and followers. We don't want to parrot the words but to grasp the challenge of Jesus' call.

*Discussing . . .*

The opening questions really just highlight our culture's (and, perhaps our own) passion for "winning." Most people are enamored with winners, with those in first place, with the top of the leader board. (Have you ever heard anyone bragging, "Hey, everybody, I came in 18th!"?)

That hunger for recognition and priority of place was something the followers of Jesus felt, as well. We get that sense as we listen to them argue with one another as recorded in our passage this week.

Jesus explained (for the second time; see 8:31) that He was going to be given over to death. The disciples didn't understand this and were afraid to ask. Why didn't they understand? Perhaps because the idea of a dying Messiah was just too far out of the picture for them. Why were they afraid to ask? Perhaps because of the rebuke Jesus raised at the foot of the mount of transfiguration (9:19). Perhaps because when Peter responded to the first pronouncement of suffering by Jesus he was rebuked (8:33).

But, in this immediate context, perhaps part of the explanation of their obtuseness is that they were concerned with their own "greatness." Such concern for "first place" would hardly lead them to think or understand dying! (It might well be that they at least "got" that Jesus might die leaving open the question of who would then step up to lead this little group and, thus, ushering in the question of greatness.)

When we turn to Jesus' response to their arguing there is something that we must not overlook. Read carefully what Jesus says to them. He does not rebuke them for wanting to be great; He doesn't chastise them for their desire for significance or "first place-ness" in His kingdom. There is a kind of eagerness for place that must be appropriate, even as there is an eagerness

for prominence that would be wrong. And here, Jesus' concern appears to be establishing the right criteria for greatness and not to dispose the disciples of their desire for greatness.

As Jesus goes on to explain, greatness that He affirms is measured by two qualities: "lastness" and servanthood.

This idea of "lastness" clearly collides head on with what most people long for. Most would hardly insist on being moved to the end of the line. Children don't race into the playground at recess crying, "Last!" as they make their way to swings. Nobody seems to plan and strategize how to get demoted at his or her place of employment. But because Jesus entered our world and took upon Himself the place of one who would be treated as "least," "lastness" takes on huge, new significance. Caring nothing about one's standing or priority over others is, in fact, the measure of real greatness in the fellowship of Jesus.

There are a variety of words that could be used to refer to some kind of serving. The particular word that Jesus uses here speaks of service as personal devotion; service arising from earnest desire to be of genuine benefit to another. This is not the service of a slave (who menially acts without any reflection on his or her heart or demeanor) or the service of a hired hand (who renders service in return for payment).

When Jesus turns His attention to the child He brings into the circle of His disciples, He is not calling them to "child-like" (although He does address that sort of idea elsewhere in the Gospels). Notice that He is not insisting that His disciples be "like a child" but to "welcome one such child." Jesus is, in fact, modeling in simple fashion what He is seeking to teach them.

In Jesus' day and age, children were of little value; they were viewed as having little to contribute to family or society (until they grew of age and could do something meaningful). In one sense, they were "tolerated" until they grew up to "amount to something." So what is the point Jesus is making in embracing "one such child" and encouraging the disciples to live with that kind of demeanor? It would seem that Jesus is underscoring that real serving and real "lastness" must not be looking for what the return will be on the service. Even someone without means or ways to reciprocate or compensate for the service rendered should be served "in Jesus' name" (that is, because we name Him as our Savior and friend). If our service never moves us out of "last place," if we are (like a good waiter or servant) not even noticed as we go about our serving, so much the better. Because this kind of living is the kind of life Jesus was living out.

He spoke of His death; He was shortly to be treated as if He were the "least," having spent His days serving all who came to Him in need. Jesus was the living example of real greatness, and that is why He calls us to that same kind of life. What will that challenging call look like lived out in *your* life this week?