

“So You Want To Be The Best?”

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

Graphics: discipleship, videos

Big Truth: Discipleship is servant leadership, which finds greatness in service to others. Jesus — an expert in the field — invites us into a workshop on servant leadership, not through a high-tech video stream, but through words and actions. If you’re curious about discipleship, this is the master class you’ve been looking for

Focus Phrase: Greatness in God’s Kingdom is servant leadership.

1. Introduction

- A. What do NBA All-star Steph Curry, actor Dustin Hoffman, tennis player Serena Williams, celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey, and author James Patterson all have in common? Is it fame? In some ways, maybe. Is it age? Nope. Is it where they live? No, they live all over the world.
- B. What they all share in common is the fact that they all have an online channel on the show MasterClass.
- C. MasterClass launched in 2015 by offering just three classes: Dustin Hoffman on acting, Serena Williams on tennis, and James Patterson on writing. “Since then, the company has grown exponentially,” says The Atlantic magazine, “raising \$135 million in venture capital from 2012 to 2018. It has now added more than 85 classes across nine categories.”
- D. MasterClass claims to offer a premium, high-level learning experience with classes taught by the very best in the world.
- E. If you want to know how to shoot a basketball like Steph Curry, just tune into his channel and in no time you’ll be sinking threes from beyond the arc.
- F. If you want to be a better writer, James Patterson can help your craft.
- G. If you want to learn how to act, then Dustin Hoffman is your man.
- H. All are masters of their fields, offering their instruction through glossy videos. Some talk to the camera for a few hours, while others take a hands-on approach, leading workshops or demonstrating techniques.
- I. And, of course, the service has a fee. But, the promise is that you will be GREAT, if not the BEST, when you complete the MasterClass...taught by masters in their fields.
- J. In Mark 10, Jesus has been and continues to offers a master class on discipleship - what it means to be a follower of Jesus and what the disciples are to be doing.
- K. Jesus and the disciples have begun their journey to Jerusalem, which was interrupted in last week’s scripture by a rich man who wanted to know what he

had to do to inherit eternal life. After that man went away sad, Jesus and the disciples began to walk the road to Jerusalem.

- L. In our scripture text for today, Jesus needed to give some advice to James, John and the others. But instead of some glossy video presentation on how to be a better disciple, Jesus talked with them along the road. And IF they were ready to pay attention to learn from the Master, their lives would be changed...and so can yours today.
- M. Let's pray and then we can go to the Master Jesus himself, not to learn a new skill or sport, but to get a new life. It's not about being great or being the best, but about serving...and to give up your life for others.

N. PRAY!

- O. Mark 10, starting in verse 35... if you're ready, say, "Let's go!"

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 10:35-45

- B. James and John were two brothers who really wanted to be the best. So, they came forward and said to Jesus, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." They wanted to be helped by Jesus, sort of like students desiring to learn how to serve like Serena Williams, act as well as Dustin Hoffman, or deejay like Questlove.
- C. Note, however, the words they used: **WE** want you to do for **US** what **WE WANT**. They were focused on me, my, us, we. And they were making a statement to Jesus...a command of sorts, really.
- D. I'm sure Jesus, in his mind, was thinking, "Oh, this ought to be good..."
- E. Patiently and calmly, though, Jesus asked a simple question of these two, "What is it you want me to do for you?" It's not clear if they want a lecture, a workshop, or a demonstration.
- F. Interestingly, next week, we'll hear the same question from Jesus to a blind man named Bartimaeus. Y'all come back for that, ya' hear?
- G. But in THIS case...James and John said (again - not asked, but requested), "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." They wanted to be seen as the **very greatest of disciples**. They wanted places of honor at the right and left of Jesus in the kingdom of God.
- H. "Grant us the place of honor..." Now, to be fair, we all aspire to be with Jesus. James and John simply wanted to show Jesus how much He meant to them.
- I. And, yes, they were, indeed, part of Jesus' inner-circle with Peter. They were ON the Transfiguration Mountain with Jesus, and Elijah and Moses. They were there when Jesus healed the man's son when they came down.

- J. But they were ALSO there when the disciples were arguing on the road about who was the greatest. This was probably just the next attempt to prove WHO was the greatest!
- K. But Jesus shook his head and said to them, “You do not know what you are asking...” In essence, Jesus was saying that they couldn’t rise to the top by simply asking for recognition...or by watching an online video taught by a master. It takes more than an online class to shoot a basketball like Steph Curry.
- L. “Are you able to drink the cup the I drink,” asked Jesus, “or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”
- M. According to New Testament professor PHEME PERKINS, “they are being asked if they can accept the same kind of suffering that Jesus now faces.” See, because both “baptism” and “cup” are metaphors for suffering, not for worldly success. Jesus was asking if they were able to join him on the path to the cross, and they replied, “We are able!”
- N. And while we certainly have to admire the enthusiasm of James and John, their quick and confident response sounds quite naïve. Do they really think they will rise to the level of Jesus...like a MasterClass student expecting to be able to write like James Patterson?
- O. Jesus then spoke the raw truth to them: “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” Sure enough, we know that James would be killed in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa, while John would suffer but survive (you can read that in Acts 12).
- P. Besides, Jesus said, it wasn’t up to him who gets what place in the Kingdom. He can’t guarantee that they will rise to the top, any more than Steph Curry can predict the next MVP.
- Q. And when the other 10 disciples heard this, oh boy! They got angry with James and John. Why? Not because they thought James and John should be more humble...no! They were angry because each one thought HE should be right or left, honored by Jesus.
- R. At this point, Jesus offered the clearest guidance in his master class on discipleship, beginning with an explanation of how the rulers of the Gentiles are often tyrants: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.”
- S. Then, he invited them into His workshop - where they’d have to roll up their sleeves and work as a servant (diakonos) and slave (doulos): “...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be **slave** of all.”

- T. Then he ended with a demonstration, focused on himself: "...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."
- U. So, we start with two disciples - who represent ALL disciples, really - requesting that they - mere men - be the greatest among disciples in God's Kingdom. We end with the greatest among all men in God's Kingdom - Jesus - taking the lowest place, even giving up His life, so that the lowest men could be lifted up in God's Kingdom. And He was inviting them to join him.
- V. The pathway is not from where you are, to the top, but from where you are, to the bottom, and then being lifted up by Jesus to something more than you could ever imagine.
- W. Jesus talked about it. Jesus invited them into the workshop with him. And then Jesus demonstrated what He meant. *Talk. Workshop. Demonstration.* Three elements of a master class on discipleship, offered by Jesus.

3. Application

- A. Let's see what Jesus wants to say to US today to get some application...
- B. First, what TALK is Jesus speaking into your heart?
 - i. If Jesus were making instructional videos today, he'd probably talk about how many leaders today still fight for dominance and power and act like tyrants. Jesus might talk about servant leadership, and about how servant leaders put the needs of their people first, helping them to develop as individuals who can do their very best. He might even lift up Mother Teresa, or Martin Luther King Jr., as examples of servant leaders.
 - a. In a sermon based on this Scripture passage from Mark, Dr. King said that there is, "...deep down within all of us an instinct. It's a kind of drum major instinct — a desire to be out front, a desire to lead the parade, a desire to be first." He knew that this was human nature, and he felt it in himself.
 - b. But he concluded by saying that at his funeral he would like somebody to say that he tried, "...to give his life serving others ... to feed the hungry ... to clothe those who were naked ... to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter."
 - ii. You have the opportunity each day to learn the language of servanthood. Instead of using words like "I" and "me", and making requests to have someone serve you, increase the amount of times you spend using words that focus on others. Maybe, the best thing would be to not use words at all and show your loved for someone else by being a drum major for peace, justice, love.

C. Then, enter Jesus' WORKSHOP

- i. Jesus would also invite you into a workshop on servant leadership, pushing you to find your greatness in service to others.
- ii. One of the key qualities of servant leadership is **empathy**, which is the ability to see yourself in someone else's shoes. Whether you're serving on a ministry team, mentoring a teenager, serving a hot meal to a homeless person, or having a conversation with a grieving church member, empathy is critical.
 - a. "Empathy is a key aspect of leadership," writes Jennifer Stasak. "It's easy to get hyper-focused on tasks and the work that we do. Work is important and accomplishing goals is, too! But if we're not careful, we can begin to see people as problems to be solved instead of human beings to be loved."
 - b. She's right, isn't she? If we focus too much on our tasks, we see people as problems to be solved instead of human beings to be loved. Put people first and be the "slave of all" (v. 44). Be empathetic, which means that you see people through the eyes of Jesus.
- iii. For this week, try to look at every person you see in the eyes and think, "That person is loved by God and God calls me to love that person, too." You may not know them, or their struggles, but when you enter their world, they become more than a stranger to you. Start right here at church as you leave today. Look 'em in the eyes.

D. Then, learn from Jesus' DEMONSTRATION

- i. Finally, Jesus offers you and me a demonstration of servant leadership through his actions as the Son of Man. He, "...came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."
- ii. Jesus always put others first: Feeding thousands of hungry people, healing the sick, and washing the feet of the disciples. Jesus allowed himself to be lifted up, not on a high pedestal, but on a cross, offering his body and his blood to bring us forgiveness and new life.
- iii. (1 Peter 2:24 says:) "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross," said his disciple Peter, "so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness."
- iv. You've talked the talk. You've watched the Master at work. Now go and do likewise. Go out into this crazy world and demonstrate the servanthood of Jesus.
- v. It'll look a lot like giving up yourself for the sake of someone else. Stop holding on so tightly to who you want the world to see and increase the amount of time you spend praying for, thinking about, listening to, and serving others.
- vi. It'll cost you everything...and that's a good thing.

4. Conclusion

- A. Feeding, healing, washing, and sacrificing. Jesus met the needs of others, giving of himself completely. In his words and actions, he offered an unforgettable demonstration of what it means to serve others.
- B. If you're curious about discipleship and aspiring to be a follower of Jesus, this is the only master class you'll ever need.
- C. So, you want to be the best? Well, Jesus wants you to. In fact, Jesus is inviting you to be the best. The only catch is that the best in the Kingdom is the one who is on his or her knees with Jesus, washing feet, making a meal, giving what you have, and loving.
- D. John Wesley said, "We worship ourselves when we pay that honor to ourselves which is due to God only. Therefore, all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone." Sermon 44 'Original Sin'
- E. Jesus' question to James and John was, in essence, "are you able?" Not only to suffer well, but are you able to get low with me to talk the talk and walk the walk with me?
- F. Church, Jesus wants you to say Yes to Him. He wants disciples who are ready to get their hands dirty for and with Him.
- G. Are you able?
- H. Let's pray...