



Parkway Fellowship

Seriously? • THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS • Luke 9:24; Matthew 20:16; Mark 10:43-44 •

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Main Point

If we want to become great we must instead become a servant of all.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some characteristics or traits of an unhealthy or improper social media presence?

Who is an example of someone that you feel has a healthy or proper social media presence?

Self-promotion is rampant in our society, which has become shaped by the desire for self and the promotion of ourselves above all else. Contrarily, the Bible tells us that if we want to become great we must instead become a servant of all. That's not exactly a picture of greatness! In fact, in order to be first we must position ourselves to be last, as well as "delight in weaknesses" because they make us strong. The oxymorons are quite confusing an immature Christ-follower, especially a new follower of Jesus. Today's discussion highlights the countercultural focus on "self" which must be present in the life of a mature Christ-follower.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ Luke 9:23-27.

What activities or attitudes are key to following Christ, according to this passage?

In your own words, what did Jesus mean by "take up his cross"? Why is doing so a necessary part of discipleship?

How might Jesus' command to "deny" self and "take up" our crosses daily contradict current cultural assumptions about how greatness is achieved in life?

How might our thinking about greatness need to change in order to honor Christ's command in verse 23?

Many people today assume that greatness is won through attaining positions of power and showing ourselves better than other people. Jesus, however, calls those who would participate in His kingdom to change their thinking. Denying ourselves daily means that we refuse to be the center and focus of our own lives. Instead, we must make Christ the center of our lives. Like John the Baptist, we must be able to say, Jesus "must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

Why do you think Jesus specifically commanded His disciples to take this action "daily"?

How does carrying a cross through life affect the decisions we make and priorities we have?

Truth has consequences, and Jesus' teaching about His suffering, death, and resurrection has implications for His followers. As followers of Jesus, we must deny ourselves. This doesn't mean we must have a low opinion of ourselves, but that we are not to be self-centered or selfish. We are to place God and His kingdom's priorities first in our lives. Jesus was shifting His disciples' thinking away from the assumption that success in the kingdom requires overpowering others. On the contrary participation in the kingdom of God requires disciples to daily humble themselves in the service of others and total commitment to Him.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ Matthew 20:1-16.

Why didn't the workers in this parable appreciate the generosity of their employer? Where was their focus?

Why is it tempting to compare what we get from God with what some else gets? What happens when we do?

Why might it be dangerous to demand that God give us what we deserve? How does such a demand demonstrate that we have misunderstood God's love?

Instead of marveling at the generosity of the master, the workers were too busy looking at each other to notice. When we start coveting the gifts God gives to others, we start complaining. Instead of being grateful for what God has given us, we start grumbling about what God has given someone else.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ Mark 10:35-45.

The brothers James and John asked Jesus for a special favor. What was it?

What do you think prompted their request? Why do you think it was important for James and John to know whether they could have the seats of honor in Jesus' kingdom?

What does Jesus' response to all of the disciples—those who asked for power and those who got angry at the request—teach us about relationships?

In these verses, Jesus shows us how God's view of relationships differs directly from that of the world. Jesus called for leadership from the bottom up instead of from the top down. The life of Christ is one of service, as He Himself modeled for us. He said those who want to be first or great, do so by becoming a slave. Believers serve at God's direction and work to advance His cause, rather than serve out of their own motives. Throughout His ministry, Jesus modeled humble service to others without any attempt to lift up Himself. Furthermore, Jesus willingly offered up His life to set people free from the devastation of sin. Thus, through self-sacrificial service, Jesus advanced the lives of others. If we hope to glorify God in our relationships, we have to work to put others before ourselves. No one wins in a power struggle.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what ways can we help each other take up our crosses and grow in humility?

What does the generosity of the master teach us about the love of God? Why is it important for us to focus on loving God as we serve others?

Pray

Praise God for giving Jesus up on the cross to pay for our sins. Pray that Jesus' act of self sacrifice would not just be something we appreciate but that it would change the way that we live, and the many oxymorons we study will have the same effect.

Commentary

| Luke 9:20-27

9:20. The Greek word for Messiah translates the Hebrew term that also is translated Messiah. Literally meaning "anointed one," the term was sometimes applied to priests in the Old Testament. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in the Scriptures. The title "messiah" was familiar to Jews as referring to the long-expected deliverer who would establish the kingdom of God on earth. Most Jews anticipated this kingdom would be the nation of Israel rather than the larger kingdom of God that in reality Jesus came to introduce.

9:21-22. Jesus was not ready to present Himself openly as the Messiah (v. 21). In popular Jewish views of that time, Messiah was expected to overthrow Roman rule and, in a wave of popularity, take over as king of

Israel. Contrary to this, Jesus' mission was to suffer and be rejected by the Jewish leadership before being killed and raised from the dead. This was the first of several predictions by Jesus of His death and/or resurrection (v. 22).

9:23. But confession in word must be validated by the confession of life. To be a true disciple of Jesus requires self-denial. The cross was the most painful and humiliating form of execution of the Roman era. Thus, to take up one's cross daily is to expect painful situations every day because of allegiance to Christ (v. 23).

9:24-25. The principle that one must lose one's life to save it as opposed to living only for this world is Jesus' most common refrain in the Gospels (v. 24). To follow Him, we must lay down our devotions to this world and live for Christ and His mission. No matter how wealthy a person is in this life (gains the whole world), he will be bankrupt eternally if he dies without Christ (v. 25).

9:26-27. Conversely, to be ashamed of Christ and His words indicates unbelief, which will bring eternal judgment at His second coming (v. 26). It is also possible for believers to temporarily cower in fear around unbelieving peers and act "ashamed" of Jesus, as Peter did in his denials of Christ. In such cases a believer may suffer loss of heavenly reward, but not suffer eternal punishment. The statement in verse 27 refers to the next event in the book—the transfiguration. Some standing here indicates Peter, James, and John, who were with Jesus at His transfiguration (v. 28). See the kingdom of God apparently means that the glorious appearance of Jesus (vv. 29,32) was a preview of the coming kingdom.

The concept of the kingdom of God includes the entire realm of God's rule. It does not refer to an earthly kingdom, although this truth does not diminish the reality of Christ's earthly reign at His second coming. The single requirement of a kingdom is there must be a king. The reign of God as King, since He is sovereign over all creation, is not limited to those who give permission to His reign through trusting Christ. However, people who yield to Jesus as Lord enjoy being part of His kingdom, both now and in eternity.

Matthew 20:1-16

16:1. The "Pharisees and Sadducees" disagreed on major theological and political views. They unite only because of their joint opposition to John the Baptist and Jesus (3:7).

16:2-3. Jesus' opponents could skillfully read signs for the coming weather but they missed the more obvious signs (Jesus' miracles) about the coming kingdom of God.

16:4. Jesus' description of Israel's religious leaders is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32:5, where Moses rebuked Israel for rejecting Yahweh. Jesus thus compared Israel's rejection of God with its rejection of Himself. By doing this, He equated Himself with God. The context of Deuteronomy 32:5 uses meteorological

terms like heavens, rain, dew, and showers (Deut. 32:1-2), and Moses elsewhere calls “heaven and earth as witnesses” against rebellious Israel (Deut. 4:26; 30:19). Jesus used a meteorological illustration in order to tie in the Old Testament text. On the “sign of Jonah,” see note at Matthew 12:39-40.

16:5-7. The disciples should have collected leftovers from Jesus’ feeding miracle in order to sustain them on their next journey. Their failure to do so may have been an act of carelessness, but it may also indicate that they expected Jesus to perform signs and wonders at every turn, as did the sect leaders (vv. 1-4). The verb “had forgotten” (Gk *epilanthomai*) often implies willful neglect (Ezek. 23:35). “Yeast” was a metaphor for something seemingly insignificant that could have enormous influence (see note at 13:33). It could be used to indicate positive influence, but here it is used negatively. “The Pharisees and Sadducees” disagreed about many doctrines, so reference to their common teaching likely meant their joint skepticism regarding Jesus’ messiahship.

16:8-12. The disciple’s memory of Jesus’ feeding miracles should have been enough to sustain their faith. Their constant desire for miracles paralleled the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ demand for a “sign from heaven” (v. 1) and demonstrated that they were people “of little faith.”

16:13. Two cities in ancient Israel were named Caesarea. Caesarea Maritima was located on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. “Caesarea Philippi” was an inland city located approximately 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. This was the site of worship for a nature god known as Pan and the home of a temple dedicated to Augustus Caesar. That Jesus’ identity as Messiah was announced here demonstrates that Jesus’ kingdom is superior to Caesar’s and that He is likewise superior to all idols and mythical gods. On the meaning of “Son of Man,” see note at 8:20.

16:14. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries recognized His prophetic role. Herod suspected He was “John the Baptist” resurrected (14:2). Some of Jesus’ miracles were similar to those of “Elijah” (cp. 1 Kings 17:9-16 and Matt. 14:13-21; 1 Kings 17:17-24 and Matt. 9:18-19,23-26), leading people to believe He was the fulfillment of Elijah’s promised return (Mal. 4:5). Like “Jeremiah,” Jesus was a much-rejected preacher of judgment.

16:16. Although Matthew called Jesus “Messiah” earlier (1:1,16), this is the first time the disciples called Him this. Peter used the title “living God” to contrast Yahweh with lifeless pagan deities, such as the false god Pan who was represented in a nearby pagan temple.

| Mark 10:35-45

10:35. The insensitivity of James and John in this verse prefigures the insensitivity of the three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane when they could not stay awake while Jesus was in great agony. It is clear from their words that they did not recognize that Jesus would die; they were expecting him to inherit his kingdom. Some interpreters believe they spoke from faith, because they believed Jesus would die but would overcome

through his resurrection. In this case, they wanted to be a part of his kingdom when he came back victoriously. This interpretation does not fit with the rest of Mark's Gospel or with the general disbelief of the disciples.

10:36-37. Jesus, however, did not rebuke them, but invited them to tell him the desires of their hearts. They were asking for seats of high honor, ruling positions. Although they believed that Jesus would eventually conquer, they misunderstood what kind of kingdom Jesus had come to establish through his suffering and death. To balance this, however, we must remember that James and John loved Jesus and were loyal to him. Although they misunderstood his words, at least they promised they would be with him.

10:38. Again, Jesus did not rebuke them, perhaps because he knew of their love for him. But Jesus asked them if they were prepared to suffer as he would suffer. Jesus asked them, as he asks all disciples, to count the cost (cf. Luke 14:27-33). In the Old Testament, "the cup" signified divine judgment on sin. By "his cup," Jesus was probably referring to the divine judgment poured out on him on behalf of all humanity. This phrase further points out the disciples' lack of understanding.

10:39-40. Whether or not they knew what they agreed to, Jesus told James and John they would share his sufferings. James was martyred when he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2), thus becoming the first apostle to be martyred. Although tradition says that John was the only apostle not to be martyred, he was persecuted for Christ and eventually died in exile on the island of Patmos. Jesus' reply that their request was not his to grant shows his reverent submission to his Father. In all matters, he submitted to his Father's will.

10:41. Mark's statement about the other disciples that they became indignant is an obvious understatement. Their anger and resentment was probably not because of their concern for the Lord. They were probably thinking of their own positions. How did the other disciples hear about this incident? Did James and John tell the others? Were they overheard? Did Salome brag to others in the group that her sons would receive special privilege? While all these may be possible, the Bible does not specify how they knew.

10:42-44. Jesus called the disciples together. They had been with many other people, but Jesus pulled them away to teach them, as he had done so often in the past. This act reminded them that they were to live in unity. His words underscored the need for this. A good example of Gentile lordship can be found in Daniel 4. King Nebuchadnezzar believed that his kingship gave him the right to claim the status of God: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (v. 30). God took away his authority and he lived as an animal, "until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (v. 25).

This is why God did not want King David to take a census (2 Sam. 24:1-17). God wanted his ruler, the shepherd placed over the sheep, to put his trust in God, not in the number of warriors. Such things are characteristic of unbelievers. At the time of Jesus, Gentile lords (such as the Caesars) loved to equate themselves with gods. They placed their likenesses on coins to remind people of their self-proclaimed

divinity. They did not rule their subjects with benevolence, but they required them to bow down and worship them. Do not be like these Gentiles, Jesus told his disciples. He repeated essentially what he had been saying for the last two chapters of Mark: To be great, you must serve.

10:45. In this verse, Jesus delivered the stunning summary of all his teaching on servanthood in the Gospel of Mark. He gave the disciples the supreme example of servanthood: himself. And they had seen him serve. They had seen him touch the unclean. They had seen him heal the multitudes. They had seen him feed thousands. Before it was over, they would see him wash the grime from their feet. They had seen the only one who truly deserved to be called “Lord” place himself in humble service to others.

If we remember where Jesus came from, we can see how absurd this must have sounded to them. Jesus had ten thousand angels at his disposal. He was the Creator of everything that exists. He was in eternal fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He shared their glory and splendor. And yet he gave it all up and was born in a stable to a poor teenager in order to draw all people to God.