

WHAT'S YOUR PLACE

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:35 (NIV) *“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’”*

Today, we're going to learn about a profound teaching of Jesus found in Mark 9:35. It will not only challenge your understanding of greatness, but it will also ask you to adopt a life of humility and service. The account in Mark 9 says Jesus and His disciples had been traveling through Galilee. And His disciples had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest among them. After listening to them, Jesus took the moment to teach them an important lesson about true greatness in the Kingdom of God, because greatness in this world is measured by power, wealth, and status. So, He turned that idea upside down and told His disciples that to be first, you must be last and be the servant of all. With that radical teaching He redefined greatness, which is not about being served. It's about serving others.

Jesus Himself was the greatest example of this throughout His ministry. He always put others before Himself. Jesus consistently put others first by His actions and His teachings. He emphasized that by serving others rather than being served. He said, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:45) And the ultimate example of putting others first was His sacrificial death on the cross. He laid down His life for humanity, saying, *“There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.”* (John 15:13) Jesus washed his disciples' feet, something usually reserved for servants, to teach them about humility and service. He said, *“Since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet.”* (John 13:14) Throughout his ministry, Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and taught about love and compassion putting the needs of others before his own. Even when he was tired or in need of rest. And Jesus taught the principle of treating others as you would like to be treated. It's known as the Golden Rule: *“Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”* (Luke 6:31)

All this highlights how Jesus always focused on the well-being and needs of others throughout his life. His life was a testimony to the strength of servant leadership where the goal is to serve others. That differs from traditional leadership which focuses on the exercise of power by one at the top of the chain of command. Servant leaders put others first! They help others grow and succeed. They try to understand and identify with others. It involves listening and respecting the beliefs and feelings of others. Servant leaders are committed to the personal growth of others. Have you heard how many times the word “others” has been said? Servant leadership helps overcome personal challenges. It helps achieve wholeness. It's called healing! A servant leader understands how their actions affect others. And that helps others make better decisions and create a better personal environment. So, instead of relying on authority alone, servant leaders use encouragement to try to influence others to follow their lead. They bring the big picture into focus. They think beyond day-to-day realities.

Linda taught first grade. One day she told about one of her students on the first day of school. Ryan had been in kindergarten and used to going home at noon. But now, Ryan was in the first grade. It was noon. And he was getting his things ready to leave for home when he should have been heading to lunch with the rest of the first-grade class. Linda asked him what he was doing. "I'm going home," he replied. Linda explained that he was now in the first grade, and he would have a longer school day. "Go eat lunch now," she said, "and then you'll come back to this room and do some more work before you go home." Ryan looked up at her in disbelief! Hoping she was kidding. But because of her seriousness Ryan put his hands on his hips and said, "Who signed me up for this program?"

And as believers, it's easy to feel a little like Ryan. When you think about the Christian life, the requirements can be unnerving—"Surely the Lord doesn't expect me to forgive seventy times seven." "Surely, he doesn't want me to turn the other cheek when someone hurts me." "What does he mean, *“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”* You may want to say, "Who signed me up for this?" Well, it's all about putting Jesus' teaching into your life every day. And there are several ways to do that. Look around for opportunities to serve others in your community. Your church. And even in your own family. It doesn't have to be big. Small acts of kindness can make a big impact. Small acts of kindness can have an enormous impact on both the giver and the receiver. A sincere "Thank you" will always brighten someone's day. Whether it's about their smile, their work, or what they are wearing, a kind word goes a long way. Simply holding the door open for someone shows consideration and respect for others. Expressing gratitude through a handwritten "Thank-You" note can make someone feel appreciated and needed. Paying for the coffee or meal of the person behind you in line is an unexpected act of generosity that can inspire others to do the same. Offer to help a neighbor with yard work, or other things like going to the store or taking them to their doctor. Being there for neighbors creates a sense of community.

Sometimes, the best way to show kindness is to simply listen to someone who needs to talk. And smile! That can be contagious and lift the spirits of those around you. Kindness creates trust and strengthens bonds between people. Remember, no act of kindness is too small. No matter how small, it can make a big difference in someone's life. Jesus promised in John 12:26, that those who serve will be honored by God. He said, *“My Father will honor the one who serves Me.”* And they said, *“Master, what are You talking about? When did we ever see You hungry and feed You, thirsty and give You a drink? And when did we ever see You sick or in prison and come to You?” Then He will say, ‘I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was Me—you did it to Me!’”* (Matt. 25:40) And the reward for your service will not necessarily be in this life. But in the life to come!

The life to come is often described as a place of eternal joy, peace, and rest. Serving others in this life can be seen as a way to prepare for your next life by sharing now in that eternal joy. Jesus often spoke about storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. (Matthew 6:19-21) And the ultimate reward for a life of service and faithfulness is eternal life with God. That promise is the cornerstone of Christian belief found in John 3:16. Say it with me. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

You can read in the Bible where Jesus promised that those who serve others will be honored by God. For example, in Matthew 25:21, the faithful servant is told, *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”* Matthew 6:19-21 says, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and bugs do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.”* Then read John 12:26. *“Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me.”* And in Matthew 25:21: *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

So, serving others brings rewards, both now and in the life to come. It improves your earthly life with fulfillment and stronger relationships, while promising you eternal joy and recognition from God in the next life. This really should encourage you to live a life of service and kindness, now! Know that your efforts have lasting importance, and that true service comes from obedience. A TV news camera crew on assignment in southern Florida was filming the widespread destruction after Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. Hurricane Andrew is still one of the most destructive hurricanes in U.S. history due to its intensity and its widespread destruction. Hurricane Andrew led to changes in Florida building codes and disaster preparedness plans to better withstand future hurricanes. In the devastation and debris stood one house. Still on its foundation, the owner was asked, "why is your house the only one still standing?" He replied "I built this house myself. And I built it according to the Florida state building code. When the code called for 2x6 roof trusses with tie-downs, I used 2x6 roof trusses with tie-downs. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane."

The blueprint that man used bore remarkable results. And when the right blueprint for life is used, remarkable results follow. We all have blueprints - plans and strategies for achieving what we want in life. Plans for success. What blueprint are you using to build your life? It better be your Bible for you to have the desired effect. Try putting aside your pride and your ego. Recognize you're called to serve others. And, as we leave here today, take with you the words of Jesus in Mark 9:35, *“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”* Try to be a servant in all that you do, by following the example of Jesus, your Lord and Savior. If you do, you will find true greatness in the eyes of God. Pray. Ask for guidance on how to serve others. It will help keep you focused and will provide you with understanding and inspiration for what you need to do. By being purposeful in your life, you can have influence in the lives of others and experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from helping those in need.

. . . . Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the example of Jesus, who showed us the true meaning of greatness through His life of service. Help us to follow His example by serving others with humility and love. And may we always seek to be last, so that we may be first in Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.