

Semicontinuous
Job 38:1–7 (34–41)
Ps. 104:1–9, 24, 35c

Complementary
Isa. 53:4–12
Ps. 91:9–16
Heb. 5:1–10
Mark 10:35–45

Greatness Redefined

Goal for the Session *Adults will explore Jesus' description of greatness and commit to ways to follow him.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 10:35–45

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” C. Clifton Black

Originally the market compensation required for release or “redemption” of property (Exod. 21:8, 30; Lev. 25:47–52; Num. 3:45–51), “ransom” emerges in the Bible as a vital religious metaphor for the reclamation of God’s people (Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Isa. 43:1–7; 44:21–23), especially through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23–25a; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; 1 Pet. 1:18–19). Jesus freely offers his own life for the release of a murderous captive (15:6–15). The depth and power of that tale is matter enough for easily befuddled disciples to ruminate.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James J. Thompson

Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many. His sacrifice on the cross becomes the ultimate paradigm of servant leadership and self-sacrificial love, and we are called to emulate this example. But self-sacrifice must not become self-denial as an end in itself. Self-sacrifice for a disciple of Jesus Christ must be in the service of something higher than the self. The promise of the gospel is that in the sacrifice of self for others, not only will a higher and better self emerge, but the reign of God will continue to unfold. Self-sacrifice thus does not mean self-mutilation or self-extinction; we are not called to disappear. Vanity and ambition are vices, but so are timidity and sloth.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” by David B. Howell

When we have “dealt with our issues” and overcome the insecurities that drive us to greed and coveting, we, like Jesus, can be in a position to serve at least some of the time and not be served all the time. Transformation happens through servanthood. When the man with many possessions (Mark 10:17) asks about eternal life, Jesus invites him, “Follow me.” Following Jesus in a life of servanthood transforms us unto eternal life. When John appeals to Jesus to stop the man from casting out demons, Jesus responds, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me” (Mark 9:38–39). Following Jesus, even in unorthodox ways, can lead toward wholeness. Servanthood is a means to grace.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

Jesus’ words may also be read as an extraordinary promise: “You will not always be driven by your fears and your need for security. Rather, you will be empowered to take up your cross and follow me. You will be faithful disciples even to the end.” Here is the great promise for the church. We need not always live in fear; we need not continually seek our own security. Rather, we have Jesus’ promise that we can and will live as faithful disciples as we seek to follow him. It is an extraordinary promise made to such a fumbling, stumbling group of disciples—then and now!

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 10:35–45

Focus on Your Teaching

How would your adults describe a great person? Generally, the media and secular society use the word *great* to describe people with a lot of power—the CEO of Apple or other Wall Street leaders, high-ranking military or political figures. Some might mention leaders who have had a powerful, positive impact on their lives—former teachers, coaches, or pastors. Even then, these people generally yield considerable power. In today’s focus scripture, Jesus teaches a very different definition of greatness and invites people to follow him in this manner of being great.

Eternal Creator, work in me to be a good leader of this group. Help me focus and plan this session so that others may learn your ways. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- markers
- communion cup
- bowl with water
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 25, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: paper, pens, Bibles, newsprint, marker
- option 2: Prayer of Saint Francis, newsprint, marker, index card, pens
- option 3: pens, paper

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, write separate headings atop three sheets of newsprint: “A Great CEO,” “A Great Political Leader,” “A Great Church Leader.” Display these before participants gather. Set out markers near the prepared newsprint. Place a cup and the bowl of water on a table at the front of the room. If using option 2 in Responding, download a copy of the Prayer of St. Francis from http://prayerfoundation.org/prayer_of_st_francis_instrument_of_peace.htm and make copies for participants. For option 3 in Responding, locate a sample obituary from a local or online newspaper that mentions a person’s leadership qualities.

As people arrive have them write qualities they associate with a great CEO, political leader, and church leader on the prepared newsprint. Compare answers briefly and tell the class that today’s focus scripture explores Jesus’ definition of a great leader.

Say this prayer or one of your own:

We gather in your presence, great and gracious God. Move and work among us as we explore your Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Before reading Mark 10:35–45, assign character roles to four volunteer readers: James, John, Jesus, and narrator. Have these characters gather at the table set with the cup and bowl of water. Invite all other participants to remain seated and assume the role of the other disciples. Have the volunteers read aloud Mark 10:35–45 in the style of a reader’s theater. After the reading:

- ✠ Invite each character to retell the message of the text from their character’s point of view.
- ✠ Invite the other disciples to tell what they think Jesus’ message is.
- ✠ Invite observations about the characters’ differing viewpoints.

A similar story is found in Matthew 20:20–28 and Luke 22:24–27. Matthew and Mark include requests for seats of greatness beside Jesus. Matthew has the mother of James and John making the request. In Luke, there is a dispute over which disciple will be greatest.

Sloth is not just laziness. Early theologians identified the sin of sloth as being indifferent, bored, or spiritually sluggish in the face of spiritual good. The one who does not care cannot accept the gifts God offers and cannot be moved to care for others.

**EASY
PREP**

Point to the cup and bowl of water and have the person who read Jesus' lines read verses 38–40 again. Remind participants that the disciples had no idea what would eventually happen to Jesus and to them. Neither did they know about Jesus' last supper and death. Ask:

- ✧ What significance do the disciples see in the cup and baptism symbols?
- ✧ What do you think Jesus was thinking as he spoke with them?
- ✧ What does Jesus mean when he says it is not his right to grant seats of privilege but for those for whom it has been prepared. Who are those people?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Context of Mark 10:35–45), and have participants read it for themselves. Ask:

- ✧ What kind of Messiah is Mark presenting in Jesus?
- ✧ What understanding of greatness does Jesus give?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 10:35–45). Invite a volunteer to read the “Where?” excerpt. Have the group name positive and negative examples of self-sacrifice from biblical, historical, fictional, or contemporary settings. Ask:

- ✧ What makes the differences between positive and negative self-sacrifice?
- ✧ How is Christian greatness counter to society's definition of greatness?
- ✧ In the last sentence of the excerpt, four vices are named. How do you see evidence of them in today's world?

To transition to Responding, read the “Now What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Ask:

- ✧ How does this promise relate to vanity, ambition, timidity, and sloth?
- ✧ How does this promise free Christians to follow Jesus?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Job Description: Disciple** Participants will develop a job description for a modern disciple based on Jesus' description of greatness and the ministry of your congregation. Distribute paper and pens and form pairs. Tell the pairs to write a job description detailing the role of a disciple based on Mark 10:35–45. Include information such as:
 - ✧ characteristics of those who fill the position,
 - ✧ primary objectives of the position,
 - ✧ major areas of responsibility,
 - ✧ specific activities or responsibilities.

Gather participants and invite the pairs to read aloud their job descriptions. Plan to display these where others in your church can see them. Alternatively, work together to create a combined job description incorporating details from each of the separate submissions. Write the combined piece on newsprint to display for the congregation.

2. **Greatness Redefined** In this activity, participants will read and discuss the Prayer of St. Francis with an eye for redefining greatness as Jesus lived it. Distribute copies of the

prayer. Take turns reading the prayer aloud, having one person read a line, followed by the next person reading a line, and so on until the whole prayer is read.

Invite participants to recall examples from Jesus' life and ministry that exemplify various lines in the prayer. List the examples on newsprint. Discuss:

✧ What actions can be taken to follow Jesus' example of greatness?

Distribute index cards and pens. Have individuals commit to one action that follows Jesus' model of greatness.

Form pairs to tell one another about the commitment each has identified. Talk together about strategies for following through with the commitments. Have participants take their cards home as a reminder of their commitment to action.

- 3. Write Your Obituary** Participants will try their hand at writing their own obituary. Explain to participants that they will get to write an obituary for themselves of the type that they hope someone else will write for them when they die. The obituary should mention their qualities of Christian discipleship. Read aloud an excerpt from the sample obituary that you brought that mentions the person's service to others.

Distribute paper and pens. Have participants work individually to write what they hope will be said about their Christian discipleship. Have them read back over what they have written, noting the ways they currently live as a disciple. Encourage them to identify ways to strengthen their discipleship and service. Following are some questions to prompt their thinking:

✧ What roles have you played in leadership?

✧ When were your most exciting or satisfying moments as a Christian?

✧ Who are your faith mentors and why?

CLOSING

Recall the activity in Gathering, inviting each participant to name a quality they associate with a great disciple. After each participant has spoken, offer this closing charge to the group:

Hear these words of Jesus:

Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.

Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Go and serve God as you serve one another. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 25, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Option 3 in Responding for October 25 suggests inviting a speaker. If you choose this option, invite the speaker and provide information about the group, the focus scripture, and how she or he fits into the session. You may choose to shorten Exploring to allow time for the speaker's presentation and conversation with the group.

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October 18, 2015
Greatness Redefined

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING on the **WORD**
CURRICULUM

Adult
Resource Sheet 2



Context of Mark 10:35–45

The disciples' request follows Jesus' third prediction of his passion (10:32–34). Each time he does this, three things happen. First, he predicts his impending death and resurrection. Second, the disciples fail to grasp the importance of Jesus' words and what his death will mean for them. Third, Jesus corrects them and offers lessons on discipleship.

Jesus' closest followers could not, or would not, accept the news of Jesus' suffering and death. Initially, Peter rebukes Jesus for his prediction (8:32). In the second of Jesus' predictions, the disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying, but they are afraid to ask him about it (9:32). In perhaps the most audacious response to Jesus' prediction of his death, James and John ask Jesus to grant them seats beside Jesus in his coming glory (10:37).

The disciples' misunderstanding is met by clear instruction from Jesus regarding the self-sacrificing service of discipleship. In chapter 8, Jesus addresses the crowds, inviting those who follow him to deny themselves and take up their cross. In chapter 9, Jesus' prediction is followed by conversation among the disciples about who is the greatest among them. Jesus challenges their self-importance by teaching that his followers must be willing to be last of all and servant of all. The prediction in chapter 10 is followed by an assurance that Jesus' disciples will drink from the same cup that Jesus drinks. Jesus' followers will know the same baptism that Jesus knows. Like Jesus, his followers will be great to the extent that they are servants and slaves of all (10:43–44).

By including these patterned predictions three times, Mark drives home Jesus' message: his death is imminent. Yet death is not the end for Jesus or for his followers. Jesus will rise again. Those who commit themselves to follow Jesus will continue to serve God in Jesus' name. Their work will not be for personal glory, but for continuing the kingdom of God made known in Jesus.