

Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose a bunch of buffoons to be his disciples? Jesus handpicked these twelve to carry on his ministry and spread the most important message of all the world. Yet, we see time and again all their weaknesses and failures.

Previously in this chapter of Mark 9, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain to reveal his divinity, face to face, known as the Transfiguration. Jesus' ministry on earth had come to an end, and he was now having some alone time with his disciples on their way back to Capernaum. Jesus' next journey would be to the cross, so he wanted to have some quality time with his disciples to continue teaching them about what was coming next.

As we see in this passage, Jesus explains again that he would be murdered, but he would rise again. But, they still don't understand and are afraid to ask. Instead of drawing closer to Jesus and confessing their fear and understanding, they get into an argument with each other about who is the greatest among them.

They lived in a very competitive, hierarchal culture, just like we do, so it's no wonder they start trying to figure out the pecking order in their group. It doesn't help that Jesus transfigured to Peter, James, and John. This may have caused some thinking that they were favored or better than the others.

It could've also been a defense mechanism. They just couldn't process what Jesus was about to go through, the pain and suffering he would endure. They just couldn't go there emotionally – about the loss they were about to experience. So, they pick a fight with each other as a distraction.

Once they arrive back home in Capernaum, Jesus goes back to his teaching moment that he wanted to do on their journey. Now that they were in a safe place, he asks what they were discussing on the

road. The silence was deafening. There was probably some damage control going on in their minds. How did he know? Did he overhear us? Did someone tell? He knows our thoughts. Or, maybe they were afraid again to confess or ashamed of their behavior. Or, they may have just felt safe enough to be vulnerable with Jesus and sit in silence before him.

Jesus tells them what to do if they want first place – they must “take last place and be the servant of all” (v.35). To illustrate this, he takes a child into his arms and welcomes the child. Children had a very low social status and even considered their father's possessions. Jesus very tenderly shows their place is not determined by the world's standards. It's not about their desires to be better than someone else or their ability to win or out skill someone else. To be first in God's eyes, they must turn around and look at those behind them.

We're going to watch a short video that you may have seen floating around social media in the last year. The title is \$100 to the winner of the race:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z1D2_KWCbU

We are all running in this race called life, as the narrator said. Many of us have been given more opportunities to get a head start simply by the social standards we live in. If we use those to get ahead and win, we are only thinking about ourselves. Jesus said to think about those behind us or below the standards. Notice their needs and help them. Look for ways to serve those who are in the back of the race simply because of their social status.

Being last and servant of all means thinking of others and their needs before our own. Being a servant to all helps others around us who can't use their own voice, skills, and abilities to meet their needs. When we turn around and look, we see ourselves as last and as servants, and others

get to experience the love of God through us.

In the book *Anatomy of Peace*, it suggests that there are two ways of being in this world. We can have either a heart at peace, where we see people as people, or we can have a heart at war, where we see people as objects. When we see people as people, we embrace all of their humanity. We recognize their uniqueness, flaws, and qualities, just like ours. When we see people as objects, we de-personalize them and reduce them to a category or a stereotype. We use them as a way for us to get ahead or see them as an obstacle of getting what we want.

In this book, a group of parents have dropped off their troubled teens at a Phoenix treatment center. While the kids are preparing for a sixty-day wilderness excursion, their parents have agreed to spend two days in a workshop setting. During this workshop, two of the counselors tell a story about how they convinced one of the teens, Jeannie, to enter the program on her own. When her parents brought her to the center and told her why they were there, Jeannie took off running. She didn't even wait to put on shoes. The two counselors ran after her. After she had been running on the Phoenix pavement and jumping walls, the counselors noticed Jeannie's feet were bleeding. They asked if they could call someone to bring her shoes, but she said no. One of the counselors took off her own shoes and offered them to Jeannie, but she took off running again.

The other counselor took off his shoes as well, and they both ran barefoot after Jeannie for about three hours. Jeannie finally saw a friend of hers who pointed out that the two counselors were running barefoot just like her. This act may seem crazy, as it did to Jeannie's father, who couldn't see why anyone would run barefoot on the Phoenix pavement for 3 hours. But,

this act was a way for the counselors to join Jeannie in her world. It made them the same. There wasn't a power dynamic between them, and that made a difference to Jeannie.

When the counselors saw Jeannie as a person, not just another troubled teen, and were willing to put themselves on the same level, as last, Jeannie was moved by this act. Her heart at war became a heart at peace. The counselors served Jeannie by joining her in her journey and helping her when she could not help herself. Even with their hurting, bleeding feet, the counselors were in first place this day.

I think the disciples would've done the same thing if put in this situation. They get a lot of bad press with their buffoonery at times, but Jesus chose them because they are mirrors for us. We can see ourselves as disciples when we see they struggled with the same fear, doubt, and lack of understanding as they did. Jesus forgave them and continued to teach them just as he does to us.

Gracious and Loving God,

We can't help but want to be in 1st place by the world's standards. Getting recognition for our achievements feels good, and we often let it go to our head. We don't see others behind us and focus only on our selfish needs and desires. We fall into the trap of thinking we deserve our success. We feel entitled because of our hard work. Help us to turn around and look at others. Show us their needs and how we can serve them. Close the gap between us and them. Join us together on the same level, so that we can all have hearts at peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.