

Measuring Up
Mark 9:30-41
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Almost every time we visit my parents my mom gives me some yellowed files or beat up toys that I had when I was growing up. Several years ago I came across some old report cards. I knew I didn't have the best grades but I had forgotten how bad they really were. My lowest grades in Junior High were in Band and Spanish – I haven't made much improvement in language or the arts over the years. In High School it was Spanish and Zoology that caused me much distress.

You might get a kick out of one of my report cards from college. In one semester, my lowest grade was in Public Speaking! Some of you are not surprised by this one.

Since my Spanish in High School was “muy malo,” I decided to take Italian in college. That was a huge mistake. I realized I was in trouble when the professor told us after the first day of class he would not speak any more English. Everything would be in Italian from that point on.

I languished with this language, getting a “D” for the semester. The next semester I had a TA (Teaching Assistant) who wouldn't speak English either (what's up with that?). But then something very exciting happened. The TA's went on strike! That meant I didn't have to go to class. We were supposed to keep up with our work but I didn't crack a book for weeks. When the strike was over, I went back to class and ended up with an “Incomplete” for a grade. The next semester I actually got an “F.”

I felt like a failure, and wanted to bail on college. I hung in there, eventually getting saved and then after four years at the University of Wisconsin, transferred to Moody Bible Institute, where my grades were much better (that's probably because they didn't offer Italian). Those feelings of failure, however, stayed with me for a long time, and came back to the surface when we were missionaries in Mexico, and I couldn't learn Spanish.

Have you ever felt like a failure and just wanted to quit? Does it feel like you're just taking the same class over and over, wondering if you'll ever pass the course?

We left the discouraged disciples last week in a house where Jesus told them that they were powerless in the valleys of life because they were prayerless. Jesus huddles up with the disciples many times to impart truth, like a teacher with his students. They call him “Teacher” but they’re having a real difficult time learning the truths that He wants them to grasp. They would be embarrassed to show us their report cards.

The disciples had to repeat some classes because they just couldn’t get it. We’re in Mark 9 again this weekend. We’re going to first review a couple verses in chapter 8 and then bounce over to chapter 10. In each of these passages the Teacher teaches a lesson and his students totally bomb the class.

- **Class #1:** Let’s go back to Mark 8:31-32: ***“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.”*** Do you see the word “**teach**” here? He very clearly taught them that He would suffer, be rejected, be killed and rise again.

One of his students doesn’t care for this lesson because in the very next verse we read: ***“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”*** Things don’t go so well with Peter after he opens his mouth.

- **Class #3:** Now jump ahead to Mark 10:33-34 where we see the Teacher essentially teach the same content in class #3, only this time, He gives more details: ***“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”***

The students flag this class as well according to the very next verse: ***“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’”*** Their response is unbelievable! In the face of the greatest example of sacrifice and servanthood ever, these two brothers demand that Christ cater to their needs. I’m glad that attitude is not existent today, aren’t you?

- **Class #2:** And in our passage for today Jesus gives the same lesson to his students in class #2. Look at Mark 9:30-31: ***“They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.’”*** This class begins on the road as they pass through Galilee. The idea is that they are not lingering, not taking in the sites. The disciples have no time to post selfies near the Sea of Galilee because Jesus doesn’t want anyone to know where they are.

Again we see the themes of him being delivered, killed and rising from the dead on the third day. By the way, death *and* resurrection are always linked together. Death is not the end. We could call this the curriculum of the cross and while the class is not extensive, it is certainly intensive.

Once again, the Teacher is very clear in class because He longs for them to understand. In Luke 9:44, He adds, ***“Let these words sink into your ears.”*** He’s not really giving any new material either. But the disciples are rather dense. Listen to their response in verse 32: ***“But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.”*** The sense of the tense of the verbs is something like this: *“They continued to not understand and continued to be afraid to ask Him.”*

It makes sense why none of the pupils wanted to ask any questions. Peter remembered what happened last time when he opened his mouth and was called “Satan.” Maybe Thomas was thinking something like this: *“I’m not asking...I doubt that it would do any good anyway.”*

How many of you are teachers? My mom was a teacher and one of my sisters has been teaching for years. Teachers have a way of knowing when students are messing around and not paying attention, don’t they? They can tell when someone is sleeping, talking or cheating.

Here the Teacher calls out the disciples for talking in class. We see this in verse 33: ***“And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’”*** It’s quite possible that they are in Peter’s house, since the definite article is used – ***“the house.”*** We could say that Jesus is about to do some home schooling! I like that Jesus rebuked them in private and not out in public. That’s a good model for us, isn’t it?

Not only were the disciples afraid to ask questions, now they don't want to give any answers either. I'm sure their eyes dropped to the floor, hoping the Teacher wouldn't call them out by name. Look at verse 34: "***But they kept silent...***" This means they were sheepish and silent.

Two attitudes were keeping the dull disciples from getting the lesson...*personal status* and *group superiority*.

1. No Place for Personal Status. The second half of this verse tells us why they didn't respond: "***...for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.***" All the disciples were in a huge dispute with each other because they were all up in themselves. In that culture, rank, status, and power were huge. At meals and in all dealings there was a constant question about who was greater, who should sit where and who should be the most honored.

The sense of who's the greatest and the best is still prevalent, isn't it? After winning 5 Super Bowls, many are now calling Tom Brady the best quarterback ever. But he's not the first to win 5 Super Bowls because a man named Charles Haley also accomplished that feat. By the way, did you hear that Brady's Super Bowl jersey is missing? The Houston Police have put out a reward for its return because some in the media are reporting it has a value of \$500,000! I wonder if whoever took it has washed it by now?

Our culture constantly puts people on pedestals for being the greatest baseball player, the best basketball player, and the most acclaimed actor or actress.

As the disciples jockey for position, I wonder if the following dialogue took place.

- Perhaps Peter spoke up first, reminding them that he was the first to confess Jesus as Messiah.
- Or Andrew may have said, "*Not so fast 'bro (they were brothers). I'm the one who introduced you to Jesus.*"
- Maybe Judas spoke up and said, "*What about me? He trusts me to take care of the money!*"

Maybe Peter, James and John were strutting because they were up on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. It was C.S. Lewis who said that "*pride is the sin that made the devil the devil.*" God puts it like this in Jeremiah 45:5: "***And do you seek***

great things for yourself? Seek them not...” In 3 John 3 we’re introduced to a guy named “*Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first.*”

Verse 35 says that, “*He sat down and called the twelve.*” He didn’t sit because He was tired but because He was ready to do some teaching. This was a deliberate action to handle a delicate situation. Teachers sat when they taught, with the students fanned out in a semi-circle around him. When He sat down, the disciples knew they better listen up!

Jesus calls the class to order and begins the lesson: “*And He said to them, ‘If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.’*” This is another paradox taught by Jesus. If you’re serious about coming out ahead of everyone else, then get to the back of the line. If you want to be superior, then become a servant. This was totally counter-cultural and contrary to the human desire to be the first and the best. Jesus is saying that there’s *no place for personal status*.

The word “*servant*” here is the Greek word *diakonos*, which is where we get the word “deacon.” It literally means, “*in the dust laboring.*” A deacon is a servant, a laborer for the Lord. Edgewood has always had a gifted group of servants who serve as deacons. Here’s a picture of the eight guys who are “*in the dust laboring*” this year: Dale Steele (chairman), Jason Crosby (vice-chairman), Rocky Jones (secretary), Terry Hartley, Kim Hawkins, Larry Wilson, Chris Rogers and Steve Curry.

In true irony, Jesus is the greatest ever, not any of them. Jesus longs for us to know that greatness in the kingdom is not determined by status, but by sacrificial service. It’s been said that everyone wants to be a servant, but no one wants to be treated like one.

As the Master Teacher, Jesus uses a living object lesson in verse 36 to punctuate His point: “*And He took a child and put him in the midst of them...*” Luke 9:48 tells us this is a “*little child.*” The word is infant or toddler. Now in our culture, we’re drawn to little children but in that culture, young kids were marginalized, ignored and at the bottom of the social ladder. It was adults who mattered the most, not kids. It’s interesting to note that in Aramaic, which is the language that Jesus spoke, the word for “child” and “servant” is the same.

After getting their attention, we read what happens next: “*...and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,*

and whoever receives me, receives not me but Him who sent me.” By holding this little one, Jesus is modeling what it means to “**receive**” one who is forgotten and ignored, much like the preborn today. By the way, there’s a bill under consideration in Springfield (HB 40) that will permit tax funding for abortion under Medicaid and through state government insurance policies. I encourage you to speak up for those who can’t speak for themselves.

Would you notice that the word “**receive**” is used four times? To receive means, “*to grant warm hospitality or the welcoming of a guest.*”

A child needs to be served but can’t serve in return – those of you with young kids know all about that, don’t you? Too many of us serve only those who can do something for us in return. In order to welcome someone who is ignored we must be humble. Specifically, when we value and honor and welcome a child, we are doing so to Christ Himself. And when we receive Christ, we are receiving the Father who sent Him.

I celebrate how God is using the servant leadership of Suzy Crosby as the director of our Nursery Ministry. Are you aware that comparing Christmas 2016 to Christmas 2015, we saw a 44% increase in the number of children in the nursery during the early service and an increase of 244% in the later service!

Our weekend services and Growth Group hour are averaging 29 children in the nursery! During the Growth Group time from 9:30-10:30 we’re averaging 9 children, which is great because that means more young families are taking advantage of a group to help them grow. Our Saturday night nursery is also growing and we could use some more servants. I’m told that we have up to six newborns during the 10:45 service! If you’re interested in making a difference serving in Jesus’ name, make a note on your Connection Card.

One of our newest Go Team partners is *Safe Families for Children*. Jessica Trowbridge and Laurie Carleton attend Edgewood and are part of the leadership team for *Safe Families*. Laurie serves as the Family Coach Supervisor and Jessica is the Program Coordinator. Pastor Dan, our Missions and Celebrate Recovery Pastor, is going to ask Jessica a few questions so we can hear how God is using this ministry that receives children in Jesus’ name. Listen carefully to see how God might want to use you to receive a child and help a family in the process.

Safe Families is all about helping families in vulnerable life situations to be safer for their children.

→ Safe Families Interview

Jesus doesn't want His followers to be all up in *personal status* and He also doesn't want us to come across with any *group superiority*.

2. No Place for Group Superiority. Look at verse 38: ***“John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’”*** It's a bit surprising that John, known as the one “whom Jesus loved,” would speak up at this point. But we also need to remember that he was one of the “sons of thunder.” John doesn't like the fact that someone who is not part of his group is having some spiritual success. It's rather ironic, isn't it? The nine disciples failed in their attempt to cast out a demon and here he is trying to stop someone who is casting out not one, but several demons!

One day a lady criticized D. L. Moody for his methods of evangelism. Moody's reply was, *“I agree with you. I don't like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?”* The lady replied, *“I don't do it.”* Moody retorted, *“Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”*

What's really going on here is that John is exhibiting an attitude of superiority toward someone who is not in his group. This shows the narrow exclusivism of those who thought they were the closest to Christ. In short, John is jealous that someone else is having spiritual success in Jesus' name.

Brothers and sisters, we need to develop a kingdom focus, not just a church focus. I'm trying to meet all the pastors I can in the QCA so I can celebrate what God is doing in other churches. I attend the monthly Quad Cities Association of Evangelicals meetings where we worship together and learn together. This week we'll hear from a professor from Moody address the topic, “Raising Gender Confident Kids in a Gender Confused World.” She'll also be speaking Thursday night at the Prayer Center. There's information in the bulletin about this.

And I love seeing how churches get together to make a kingdom impact. Three years ago, Edgewood partnered with four other churches to raise \$260,000 to rebuild Calvary International Revival Church, a church made up of refugees from 5

countries in Africa. I love that we're joining scores of other churches in our support of Safe Families for Children, Youth Hope, One Eighty (we'll hear more about this ministry next weekend), Pregnancy Resources, and World Relief.

Just this week Pastor Dan met with a pastor in Bettendorf who is considering starting Celebrate Recovery. We're going to do all we can to help him do this because that means that more people will find freedom from life's hurts, habits and hang-ups.

Here are some principles that have helped me in this regard.

1. **We don't have an exclusive lock on truth.** I love being a Baptist but that doesn't mean we're the best or that we're spiritually superior to others. If someone is a follower of Jesus Christ, then he or she is my brother or sister. We're on the same team. Differences don't have to divide us.
2. **Edgewood can't reach everyone.** It's tempting to think that the Quad Cities is saturated with churches that are getting the gospel out. Not so much. In a [Barna study](#), our community is #27 on the list of America's top churchless cities. Are you aware that there are about 200,000 people in the QCA who don't go to church? Even if we could reach everyone, we don't have enough space.
3. **We don't have to condone everything another church believes.** Doctrine *does* matter which is why I won't partner with some churches, ministries, or events. Having said that, I don't have to agree on every fine point of doctrine before I can celebrate what God is doing. Warren Wiersbe writes, *"It never ceases to amaze me how God blesses those I don't agree with!"*

I'm helped greatly by something the Apostle Paul wrote in [Philippians 1:15, 18](#): ***"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will...only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."***

Pastor Brown was fond of saying, *"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."*

Moses had to deal with the overly zealous and jealous Joshua when he wanted Moses to stop some prophets who weren't part of his group. Listen to what Moses

says in Numbers 11:29: “*Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!*”

Here’s what Jesus says to John in verses 39-40: “*Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us.*” Those doing miracles in the name of Jesus are not foes of His followers.

Jesus gives another illustration to his followers who are still too full of themselves in verse 41: “*For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*” The giving of water to someone parched with thirst induced by the burning heat in Israel was a practical act of hospitality. We know from Matthew 10:42 that this is a cup of “*cold*” water. In that day, no one could go to the fridge and get a bottle of water or grab some ice cubes. To give a cup of cold water required sacrifice as one would have to travel to a spring far away or locate a deep well somewhere.

When we receive a child or give a cup of water we are demonstrating humble service and doing it for Christ. The smallest acts of hospitality in Jesus’ name will be rewarded. Let’s make sure we’re not all about our *personal status* and that we root out any sense of *group superiority*.

Check out this helpful quote: “*There is nothing God cannot do if we keep our hands off the glory.*”

Here are three action steps...

- **Be anonymous**
- **Do the monotonous**
- **See the obvious**

A number of years ago I came across a video that put things in perspective for me. Check it out.

→ **Play “Get Service” Video**

Are you aware that you can’t serve in the name of Jesus unless you’ve been saved by Jesus? There’s no way to root out the attitudes of *personal status* or *group superiority* without receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Invitation

In 2004, Steve Kroft interviewed Tom Brady after winning his third Super Bowl. Here's what Brady said back then: *"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think...it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. And what else is there for me?"*

KROFT: *"What's the answer?"*

BRADY: *"I wish I knew. I wish I knew."*

The good news is that we can know. We all get "F's" on our Report Card but Jesus scored an A...His grade is applied to our GPA! His perfect score is credited to our report card! And once we're saved we can then see others like He does, and in the process, live out our purpose for His glory.

Closing Prayer