

Small Group Guide

Who Is The Greatest | Mark 9:30-50

SERMON OVERVIEW

Pastor Erica traces a recurring pattern through Scripture -- from the Garden of Eden to the Tower of Babel to the disciples arguing on the road to Capernaum -- revealing how the human tendency to grasp for personal greatness stands in the way of full participation in the kingdom of God. Drawing from Mark 9:30-50, she calls followers of Jesus to a cruciform life: one that lays down the cause of its own name in submission to the name above all names.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A pattern runs throughout Scripture: see, desire, take. It begins in the Garden and repeats itself in every generation, including our own.
 - Proximity to Jesus does not guarantee proper perspective. The disciples walked closest to Jesus and still argued about who among them was the greatest.
 - The greatest obstacle to experiencing the fullness of life in God's kingdom is often our covert efforts to secure the greatness of our own name.
 - Jesus does not ask us to lay down our lives without first showing us the way. He went to the cross before us, not only for us.
 - In the kingdom of God, greatness is not measured by power, prestige, or effort. It is measured by submission to the way of the cross.
 - The cruciform life is not passive resignation. It is an active, daily exchange -- trading the bread of anxious toil for the bread of life.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening (Choose one to get the conversation started)

1. Pastor Erica opened with a story about accidentally walking onto a track and causing a false start. Have you ever unintentionally disrupted something important? What happened?

2. When you were growing up, how did the people around you define greatness? Where did you first learn what it meant to be "the best"?
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Going Deeper

3. Pastor Erica describes a pattern woven throughout Scripture: see, desire, take. Where do you see this pattern showing up in your own life, even in small or subtle ways?
 4. In Mark 9:33-35, Jesus asks the disciples what they were arguing about on the road, and they go silent out of embarrassment. Why do you think it is so difficult to admit when we are competing for recognition or status -- even within a community of faith?
 5. Pastor Erica says: "Most of us don't build up our own names and grasp for greatness because we're arrogant. We build it because somewhere along the way we become convinced that no one else would protect us." How does that reframe the way you think about your own defensiveness or desire for recognition?
 6. Jesus warns in Mark 9:42 that causing one of his "little ones" to stumble is a serious matter. Pastor Erica connects this to spiritual elitism -- the idea of adding conditions to what it means to follow Jesus. Where have you seen this show up in church culture? Where might it show up in your own life?
 7. Pastor Erica describes the Greek word *hupotasso* -- to order oneself beneath another -- and connects it to Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5 about mutual submission. What would it look like practically for your group, your household, or your workplace to operate out of this kind of mutual ordering?
 8. She says: "Right theology operating outside of the way of the kingdom moves us away from relationship and it shifts our words from truth telling into a clanging gong or a cymbal, just a bunch of noise." Can you think of a time when you held a correct belief but applied it in a way that pushed people away rather than drawing them toward Jesus?
 9. Pastor Erica draws a distinction between Jesus going to the cross for us and Jesus going to the cross before us. How does that distinction change the way you understand what it means to take up your cross and follow him?
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Reflection and Honest Inventory

10. Pastor Erica closes with a series of direct questions. Take a moment with these as a group:
 - Where are you defensive?
 - Where might you be causing others to stumble?
 - Where are you placing your name, your desires, or your way above the name of Jesus?
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The following are personal and communal practices to carry into the week ahead.

Identify your tower. Spend time in quiet reflection asking the Holy Spirit to reveal one area of your life where you are laboring toward the greatness of your own name. It may be your reputation at work, your standing in your family, your image on social media, or even your identity within your church community. Name it honestly before God.

Trace the pattern. Look back at a recent conflict or moment of defensiveness. Walk it through the see, desire, take framework. What did you see? What did you want? What did you reach for? What would it have looked like to respond differently?

Practice hupotasso this week. Choose one relationship -- a spouse, a coworker, a friend, a fellow group member -- and look for one concrete opportunity to order yourself beneath them. That might mean listening without redirecting the conversation, letting someone else receive credit, or choosing not to have the last word.

Memorize or meditate on Philippians 2:5-11. This is the passage Pastor Erica quoted at the close of the sermon, describing how Jesus, though equal with God, made himself nothing and took on the nature of a servant. Let that portrait of Jesus reshape your picture of what greatness looks like.

Pray the closing prayer together. Pastor Erica closed with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to do a searching work. Consider praying it together as a group, or individually throughout the week, asking God to reveal where the cause of your own name is competing with the cause of his.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Pastor Erica said: "The stories we believe move us to either take up our cross or take up the cause of the greatness of our own name."

As you leave your time together, consider what story you are living inside of. Is it a story where your name is the one that must be protected and elevated? Or is it a story where you are a participant in something far greater -- the kingdom of God, built around the name that is above every name?

That is the invitation. Not to erase yourself, but to reorient yourself -- toward the one who humbled himself, was exalted by the Father, and beckons us to follow.