

## **Making Sense of Life**

**Mark 10:32-52**

Pastor Andy MacFarlane

Over this past Christmas break, I took our boys on an overnight at a local hotel. The next morning we got up to find frost on the windows of our van. So after buckling the boys into their seats, I began to search for our ice scraper. Unable to find it, I had to resort to using a lid from a soft drink cup to try and scrape the frost off our windshield. Needless to say, it was a slow, frustrating process. And it was not for a lack of effort on my part. I tried one side; then I tried the other side of the lid. Then I tried doubling it over—but it just didn't seem to work out. I think I would have been readily dismissed if I had gone to Berry Plastics, the manufacturer and creator of this product, in anger and demanded a refund: "This thing is lousy in getting frost off of windshields!" They would have laughed at me and said, "That wasn't what we created the product to do."

Now, I believe we have been created by God to live a full and meaningful life. But if we're going to have the meaning and fullness God designed, we're going to have to live life the way He created us to live it. If we fail to live the way He created us, like my frost-scraping experience, life is going to be pretty frustrating. I think it's worth our while to know: How did God create us? And Jesus models the "why" of why God created us in our passage in Mark chapter 10, verses 32 to 52. We're going to look at this passage and ask the question: What were we created to do?

Our passage opens with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem to die for the sin of the world. It says this:

**They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him...**

(Mark 10:32, \*NASB)

It says the disciples were amazed. Those who walked with Jesus for years were amazed. So much so, they just stood back—the disciples in amazement; the rest of the crowd in fear—because they realized, *This Jesus is no ordinary person*. They didn't quite have Him figured out, but they knew, *He's no mere man*. So in verses 33 and 34, Jesus begins to teach about what's going to happen.

**...saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."** (vs. 33-34)

For the third time in Mark, Mark records Jesus teaching the disciples about His upcoming death and resurrection. And for the third time, the disciples don't get it. Look at the way James and John respond in verse 35:

**James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."** (vs. 35-37)

Jesus tells the disciples He's going to die. And just like they did in Mark chapter 9, the disciples are angling for position. Even though in Mark 9 Jesus responded to them by saying that greatness is found in putting others before yourself and taking on the role of a servant, the disciples have not internalized that message. Jesus is a stepping stone to get a position where they can exercise authority over other people. The fact of the matter is they are using Jesus.

The typical human response when we are being used by another person or people is to cut that person or people out of our lives. In his best-selling novel, *The Testament*, John Grisham tells the story of Troy Phelan, a wealthy dying man. As he's dying, Phelan is aware that his ex-wives and their children are waiting for him to die so they can get all his money. In his anger he concocts a plan that will leave them out of the will and leave all the money to a little known child who is a missionary in Brazil. Phelan's plan involves writing a will which voids all other wills and then he jumps over a balcony to commit suicide. Listen to his thoughts right before he commits suicide: "A dying old man should not hate, but I cannot help it. They are a miserable bunch, all of them. Their mothers hate me, so the children in turn have been taught to hate me. They are vultures circling with clawed feet, sharp teeth, and hungry eyes, giddy with anticipation of unlimited cash." Do you hear him? He says he cannot help hating. So his last act is pay back, and man, it feels good to cut them out of the money. The rest of the novel is the resolution of the will in court and the search for the missionary in Brazil.

Like Troy Phelan, Jesus, too, is at death's doorstep. And like Phelan, Jesus also is being used by some people who are close to Him. But rather than cut the disciples out of His kingdom, Jesus continues to serve them. He uses this as a teaching opportunity. This example of the incredible forbearance of Jesus is just one of the reasons we sing, "I'll stand in awe of You"—because Jesus has every human reason to cut us out. But do you know what He does? He bears with us. Someday when we meet Him face-to-face, our words will be few and we're just going to stand in awe.

So Jesus continues bearing with the disciples. Verse 38:

**But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"**

This is the implied condemnation of the proud pretensions of James and John. In the Old Testament the cup was a symbol of God's wrath poured out on human sin and rebellion. And for Jesus the cup means suffering divine punishment for the sin of the world. Likewise, baptism has a violent image associated with sorrow and grief. In Luke 12, Jesus spoke of His upcoming passion as His "baptism." But the disciples don't pick up on Jesus' use of the metaphor. So in verse 39, they glibly answer:

**They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."**

Jesus says to the disciples, "You will suffer—just as I have suffered." And it's a reminder to those of us who follow Jesus that there's a solidarity with Him. We live under His protection and favor. But we also will follow His example of humility, service, and suffering—in some cases, even to the point of death.

In verse 40, Jesus lets James and John know that the positions they want in the kingdom are not His to give:

**“But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”**

Jesus is saying that this prerogative of assigning places of honor belongs to the Father, and He will give those positions out to those He has prepared.

Now we might step back and think, *You know, this is only two out of twelve. This is just James and John who are self-absorbed and egotistical. But that’s not bad. The other ten, as far as we know, are okay...* until we read verse 41, which says:

**Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.**

They’re ticked that Jesus beat them to the punch! And so, as if Jesus doesn’t know it, He’s sure now that these twelve disciples have no idea about values in His kingdom. So He begins to teach them in verse 42:

**Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.”**

This is biting irony. This is exposing the hypocrisy of the disciples. Because in the disciples’ desire for position, rank, and precedence so that they might exercise authority over other people, they are no different than the Roman rulers they so despise.

But do you know what? The disciples’ hypocrisy is my hypocrisy. The disciples’ struggle is my struggle. And I suspect their hypocrisy and their struggle is yours also. In our workplace, in our neighborhood, and even in our church, we desire a place of rank or precedence that we might exercise our authority or influence for our own benefit—that we might exercise those things in our own interest.

Jesus says in His kingdom it’s a different deal. Rank and precedence carry a different burden. We exercise our authority for the benefit of other people. In verses 43 and 44 it says this:

**“But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.”**

The call in Jesus’ kingdom is to be a slave or servant. And in the context of what we’ve been talking about, it is important to recognize a slave or a servant does not direct his activities towards his own interests. He directs his activities towards the interests of another. So the call in the kingdom of God, when we get a place of rank and precedence, is to exercise our authority for the benefit of another person.

Several weeks ago I mentioned that Hope and I had eaten at one of Lincoln’s “best restaurants” and you may have been thinking, *Andy, are you a connoisseur of fine dining?* Well, the answer is emphatically no. I was permanently expelled from the fine dining club in December of 1993 when I waited over an hour in line to eat at McDonalds. That got me kicked out. I was in Moscow, Russia on our Christmas semester break. And after having lived in Siberia for three and a half months and eating potatoes and carrots and beats and bread and lard, I’ve got to tell

you a Big Mac seemed like a ribeye steak in my mind, and I was more than willing to wait an hour. While I was there, I got to talk to lots of folks—almost all of them were Westerners and most of them were predominantly Americans. One of the things I found out is that, at least to start in Moscow, McDonalds did not hire anybody over 25 years old. Now for many of us that seems like the basis of an age discrimination suit. But you see, McDonalds needed employees with a strong work ethic, and Russia and its economic system did not produce such people. McDonalds needed to transform its workers. McDonalds needed to change their values. And I guess they thought the young would be the easiest to change and to transform.

But as much as McDonalds needed to change the values of its workers, infinitely more do we need a transformation of values to be a part of God’s kingdom. Our world and its system simply does not naturally produce people that direct their activities towards the interests of others. Our world produces people that direct their activities in their own interests. And we need a change of values. We need a transformation.

Now here’s the difference between what we need and the workers at McDonalds needed. The transformation we need can’t be pulled off in human power. It’s not something that can be taught or learned. It is something supernatural. And it begins when Jesus comes into our life and changes our inner being. What He does is mold us in His image to that of a servant, that we might direct our activities in the interests of another person.

I must tell you, after waiting my 60 or 75 minutes and finally getting into McDonalds, I was impressed. The workers were very efficient in taking the orders and getting the food out. The tables were clean. There were people bussing the place. I thought, *This is like no restaurant experience I’ve had in Russia. Somebody has done an amazing work with the employees in this McDonalds.* It made quite an impression.

In the same way, when we live for others, when we direct our activity towards the interests of another person, it will make a great impression in our world. People will step back and say, “Somebody has done a work in that person’s life.”

So we move to verse 45, which I think is the ultimate, the extreme example of someone in authority directing his activities in the interests of others. It says this:

**“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**

I think you would agree with me that as the Creator of the world, Jesus is in the supreme position of authority. But when He came to His creation, He did not come expecting to be served; He came to serve. How? First, by dying on the cross for you and for me—paying our ransom that we would not be separated by God, but that we could have relationship with our Creator. He came to serve our interests.

And I would argue He served the interests of His Father. The night before His crucifixion He prayed, “Father, not My will, but Your will be done.” That is to say, “Not My desires, because in My desires I sure wouldn’t want to go to the cross. Not My desires, but Your desires.”

We started looking at this passage saying we want to minimize frustration in life and we want to maximize fulfillment in life by asking the question of our Creator, “What did You create us to do?” I think we’ve got an answer now. Following Jesus’ example, we were created to serve God and others. *Following Jesus’ example, we were created to serve God and others.*

That is the heartbeat of Lincoln Berean Church. We exist to serve God and to serve the people of the community and even the people around the world. One of the ways we are seeking to serve Lincoln is by planting North Pointe Community Church in north Lincoln. I know many of you have heard about this. We will launch this in September of this year, September, 2005. And the heartbeat of North Pointe Community Church is that we want to serve the people of north Lincoln. We've been talking about this for a year, asking people to pray about it. We're at the point where we need to ask people to consider being a part. We are looking right now to put together our core group that will form the nucleus of an outreach to north Lincoln. We want to believe God for 200 adults to be part of the core of North Pointe Community Church. In your bulletin you will see a commitment card. If you feel like God is leading you to be a part of North Pointe, would you fill this out? There are drop boxes by the exits, one in the Upper Room, and one at the Information Center. Fill this out and drop it in. Some of you are at the point where you are seriously considering being a part of North Pointe. There's an opportunity for you to check that on the card: "Seriously considering it; would you call me." Someone will call you to tell you more about what will be going on. Once you fill this card out we will get information to you.

Let me ask you to keep April 10 in the back of your mind. For on that Sunday we will begin meeting, and we will meet over a period of seven weeks—the core of North Pointe Community Church. We're going to meet to do two things. First, we're going to meet to pray. And secondly, we're going to meet to build our ministry teams. We need to build ministry teams in our children's ministry and youth ministry. We need to get our greeters, our ushers, our tech team, our worship teams, business teams, office help, etc. You see, Jesus clearly makes the case that service is important, and we want to pick up on that mandate. We're going to start with two worship services at North Pointe. We're going to do that for outreach purposes, but we're also going to do that so we can invite our core members to serve an hour and worship an hour. We don't want to burn anybody out. But we want to hold the banner of service high.

A number of wonderful people and couples have stepped up and said, "I want to be a part of this." And right now I'd like you to hear from one of those couples. Their names are Rick and Kelly Geiler; they served a number of years here in children's ministry. They felt God calling them into leading, and they're going to be in charge of our children's ministry. I would like you to hear a little about their story—about how God led them and called them to be a part of North Pointe.

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### **Video :**

**Rick:** The time Andy first approached us to serve in north Lincoln, we were excited to be able to take everything we've learned—all the experiences that we've had helping children—and take that to North Lincoln.

**Kelly:** We have three daughters: Madisen is 10; Malorie is 9; and Maggie is soon to be 8. We came to Lincoln Berean while I was still pregnant with Maggie, so we've been here for a little over 8 years. One of the things that is a very special memory for me in Hasidim or in children's ministry is when the children worship and sing. It oftentimes brought me to tears, because the leader would be up there singing and the children would be waving their arms or singing at the top of their lungs, and they're singing about our God. I wish I had had that when I was growing up, and I see the seeds that are being planted by these adults who are there investing their lives in these children.

**Rick:** We spent a lot of time one time talking about who was going to be the Messiah—who was the One? And we spent time talking with the kids about who the leader would be that would

come. We went through Moses; we went through the Patriarchs; we went through the Judges. And anyone of them could have been the One—but then they all died. We finally got to Jesus, and during the process one of the boys came up and whispered, “I know who it is!” I said, “Don’t tell.” And he said, “It’s Jesus!” I said, “You’re just going to have to wait.” So we went through the whole process and we got through, and Jesus died. A lot of the kids were disappointed—but then Jesus was raised again. That same little boy came up to me and said, “I knew it! I knew it!” He had guessed it early on. The exciting thing to me was a month ago watching that same little boy, who is now older, be baptized in the baptism service along with the adults. His walk had started there and he found out who Jesus was and now he’s found Jesus. So those are just moments that excite me and make it all worthwhile.

**Kelly:** I remember when we were pretty new to the church and oftentimes they would refer to “people loop.” I would look up at the banner and I would see the banner with the loop and try and picture where I was on that loop, and where I had entered. As they would talk about it occasionally year after year, or month after month, I would refer back to that and think, *Okay, now where am I in that people loop?* And I could tell that I was teaching, or I could tell that I was receiving, or I could tell that I was giving to others. But there was one point where I realized not too long ago that I was ready to be sent out. So when the challenge came to reach north Lincoln by planting a church, that was a new thought for me. But I thought, *I believe that we’re ready to go.*

**Rick:** As an architect and as a builder, I’ve got a passion for building things. I’ve learned how to build buildings—how to build big things and little things—but they all start with a foundation. In the passion that I have for doing that, I’ve found that God has allowed me to use building not only things for kids to enjoy and imagine in, but helping them build a foundation for their life. To me it just all connects to see one of the children being built up into that structure that God wants them to be—that He created them to be.

**Kelly:** The people who have invested in south Lincoln and Lincoln Berean—they invested in my life, and now I want to invest in someone else’s life. And we feel called that we’re supposed to take this to north Lincoln now. We are excited. We have a passion for children. We have a passion for building relationships.

**Rick:** And we’re excited to take what we’ve learned and the training that we’ve had from the people that we’ve walked with over these last 8 or 10 years. We’ve had lots of good people working with us—lots of people helping us learn the ropes—and we’re just excited to be able to take the same things that we’ve been doing, the same fun that we’ve been having with the kids, up to north Lincoln to North Pointe and be a part of that experience. Our passion is to keep building things and keep building kids’ lives and keep doing that, so we’re excited.

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Whether or not God calls you to be a part of North Pointe, the mandate and the call to service is clear. If we haven’t seen it enough, Jesus lives it out yet one more time for us in our passage starting in verse 46:

**Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.” Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you**

**want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road. (vs. 46-52)**

We need to remember that Jesus is leaving Jericho to go to Jerusalem. And don't forget He's going to Jerusalem to die. In a matter of a few days He's going to hang on a Roman cross for the sin of the world. If anybody has a right to be self-absorbed, if anybody has a right to say, “My circumstance is so bad I can't care about other people”—it's Jesus right now. He has the opportunity, because there are people who are trying to silence this guy. He could have passed him by.

But that's not what He does. He says, “Tell him to come here.” And look at the question He asks in verse 51: “What do you want Me to do for you?” We could rephrase that question and say, “How can I serve you?” And with his response, Bartimaeus shows that he believes Jesus is the one who can give him back his vision. So in response to his faith, Jesus serves him. He gives him back his sight.

The mandate is clear. God created us to serve Him and to serve others. We live in a world that is trying to get the most out of life. I would say we can get the most out of life by living it the way the Creator designed us to live it.

So when it comes to service, are you seeking out service opportunities? Or are you passing them by, like Jesus could have easily done as He left Jericho on the way to Jerusalem? As we think about service and our need to be involved in service, let me ask you to think about a couple of things. First, do you have a place of service within our body? If you're going to North Pointe, come join us April 10 and we'll talk about that. Many of you are going to stay here, and it's a big church. You wonder, *How do I break in?* Let me recommend the Connections Class to you. This class will do some diagnostics and assess your passions and gifting. They're very aware of the service needs here, and they will connect those passions and gifting with a place of service within our body.

Let me ask you about service in one other venue. Outside our body—in your neighborhood or in the workplace—could you make a call this week with a neighbor or co-worker to set up coffee or lunch? We live in an incredibly detached and lonely society. Could you serve another by taking the initiative? Could you offer someone a ride? Or to babysit their kids for a couple of hours? Would you seek God this week for one practical service opportunity outside our body? Let's live out God's mandate for service that we might max out on life.

I confess I've never watched the show *The Apprentice*. Apparently it is the story of 16 business people who vie for a highly coveted position with Donald Trump. In the one episode I read about, Trump faces two of his apprentices at the opulent board table. One is Kwame, a polished Harvard MBA, and the other is Troy, a business-savvy risk taker, without any college education. Trump turns to Troy, and in his gruff manner says, “Troy, in reality, what we're dealing with here are multi-billion dollar companies. The consequences of hiring a live wire like you could be costly and devastating. So I have to say, you're fired!”

How different the scene is in the opulent board room of heaven, where Jesus calls to us and says, “What we're talking about here is something much more valuable than multi-billion dollar companies. We're talking about eternal souls. And the truth of the matter is you are in process; you're rough. And having you as part of the mission, as part of the team, could be costly and

risky. But I say to you, you're hired! Go out and follow My model. Serve Me by serving others and watch how I use your service in the process of building My kingdom and in the process of changing lives.”

One more time we ask: What were we created to do? Following Jesus' model, we were created to serve God and others. *Following Jesus' model, we were created to serve God and to serve others.*

*Our Father in heaven, we are grateful for the example of Jesus. And Lord, our desire is to live life to the fullest as You created us. But, Lord, in our flesh we are people that live to serve ourselves. We direct our activities and our own interests. Jesus, would You change us? Would You shape us and mold us in Your image—that of a servant—that we might direct our activities towards others? Father, do what we can't. We ask it for Your honor and glory, in the name of Jesus, Amen.*

\*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
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## Study Questions

*The Good News About Jesus According to Mark*

### Making Sense of Life

Mark 10:32-52

Pastor Andy MacFarlane

#### Opening Discussion

1. When have you felt most fulfilled in life? What was so fulfilling about that time in your life?
2. When have you been most frustrated in life? What was so frustrating about that time in your life?

#### Bible Study

1. Read Mark 10:32-40. Why do you think the disciples were amazed by Jesus? Why was the crowd fearful of Jesus?

How do you explain the request of James and John in verses 35-37 in light of Jesus' teaching in verses 33-34? If you had been Jesus, how would you have responded to James and John? How does Jesus respond to James and John?

In verse 38, what do the "cup" and "baptism" represent? Do you think James and John understand the significance of these terms? Why or why not?

2. Read Mark 10:41-44. Are you surprised that the other ten disciples were upset with James and John? Why or why not?

In verse 42, how are the disciples like the rulers of the Gentiles? What is so ironic about Jesus' equating the disciples to the Gentile rulers (the Romans)?

Have you ever found yourself taking on the characteristics of people that you despise? How did you respond when you became aware of your hypocrisy?

According to verses 43-44, what is to characterize the use of authority in God's kingdom? How can we change from exercising authority for our own interests to exercising authority for the interests of others?

3. Read Mark 10:45. What most stands out to you about Jesus' model of servanthood?
4. Read Mark 10:46-52. Where was Jesus headed when He encountered Bartimaeus? Given His circumstances, do you think He was tempted to ignore Bartimaeus? Why or why not? Why do you think Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

## **Application**

1. What can you do to thank Jesus that He used His position of authority to serve you by dying on the cross?
2. In what areas of your life – work, family, or neighborhood – do you have authority or influence? Are you using your authority to serve your own interests or the interests of others?

What steps can you take to use your authority to further the interests of a friend, client, co-worker, and/or family member?

3. Are you involved in an area of service within the body? If not, what is one area in which you can serve? If you are not sure, sign up for the next Connections Class.

What is one way you can serve somebody outside the body of Christ this week?