

Transcript of Sermon By
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 First Baptist Church
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**No Ordinary Relationships:
 Ambition, Control, and Greatness**

Mark 10:35-45

Meditation Text:

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking more of God and of others. [Through it] we are able to take our proper place in the scheme of things. Humility is not becoming a doormat; it is becoming a doorway. We enable others to enter into the joy of affirmation and the blessing of being served.

--Douglas J. Rumford in *SoulShaping*

The word *sports* comes from a Latin word that means *to distract*. It is not too difficult to see how this is. Across history, day in and day out, where life has been significantly harder physically, than what most of us have to deal with, in the grind of work and of war, there are always those who would find a way to establish some kind of competition where they could be distracted from whatever part of life was the most oppressive. It is no surprise that the golden age of baseball was during the Depression when people could forget about 25% unemployment and all the other things they had to deal with. They could go and watch the Yankees win again.

It is no surprise that in the mind-numbing, repetitive motion of the textile mills that the textile leagues became such an important part of life across the South. Also, after 9-11, everybody debated whether or not the games should go on the next weekend and, of course, everybody said the games must go on, but the truth being that I think we needed the distraction. We needed the distraction from what had been incredible tragedy, so the games did go on.

Thanks to radio and television, across the 20th Century, we have moved from sports being a distraction, to being a focus, to almost being a religion. It is practically tribal, isn't it? People paint their faces. In 20-below-zero weather, a group of men will take off their shirts, paint their bodies, and stand at Lambeau Field or wherever it is the coldest. We want to say, "Get a life," but they have their religion. It has gone beyond being simply a distraction to not only being the focus and religion of life but, in fact, to defining so much of the way we live today. It defines who we are. Have you ever stopped to think about how many metaphors we use every day? Someone gives a presentation and we say, "You really hit a homerun with that." Sports becomes

a way of understanding everything we do so much so that we think every part of life is competition.

Parents begin to debate what preschool to send their children to because they want to give their child the best chance to get into the college that they want to go to. It is interesting to listen to parents spar over SAT scores, etc. It is like Frazier and Ali all over again telling what their kids have done. Someone's child makes one score, and the next person's child scores higher.

Relationships have become a competitive sport. A person in a conversation who takes a breath first loses. The person who dies with the most toys wins. It is all about control, power, and ambition. While all of these things have good sides to them, if we relate to everybody at work with in terms of our ambition or we relate to everybody in the groups that we are involved in terms of power or we only relate to our families in terms of who is in control, life has become a competitive sport. If relations are a competitive sport, it doesn't work.

Have you ever known anybody who became the president of a club or some other organization and it went to their head? All of a sudden, they felt like they could tell everybody what to do and you think, "What is going on here?"

I heard the story of a young couple leaving a restaurant. The young man came out first in a huff. The young woman came out several feet behind crying and yelling, "You come back here and love me" as if somehow you could win that encounter and the relationship would be OK. The quest for relational dominance is not new. We have perfected it, but it is not new.

In Mark 10, Jesus is walking along the road, talking about what it meant for him to go to Jerusalem and to give himself up. Almost as soon as that comes out of his mouth, the two brothers come up and say, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask." If someone says that to you, you know that the request is going to be a doozy, don't you? No one comes up to you and says, "Now, I want you to do whatever I ask you to and you can't ask me what it is."

Jesus does not really give a straight answer. He says, "Go ahead. What is it?"

"Well, we want to be in charge. We want to sit on your right hand and your left hand, and we want to be the ones who get to decide what everybody else does. We want to be in charge of the disciples. We want to be in charge of the kingdom."

Jesus says, "It is not really mine to give that but I can promise you that it won't bring satisfaction."

He tells them that in the world, in the ordinary way of doing things, people want to be in control. But if you stop and think, they are asking in relationship to being a follower of Jesus Christ, in relationship to being a part of the kingdom of God. Jesus says to them, "Do you really think that this is the way God's people gain satisfaction in relating to one another?"

We could probably all think of a hundred examples of how someone has abused another person's willingness to serve, but the truth is the way to no ordinary relationship is not to seek

out how we can be above somebody else, not to seek out how we can win, not to seek out how we can be in control but to seek out how we can serve.

As a response to this sermon series, someone sent me an e-mail this week that contained an article in response to the sermon. In the article, the author had written this line about how she and her husband had come to be distant. She said, "I realized that in taking care of ourselves, we had forgotten to take care of each other." That is the way it works out. When all we are thinking about is ourselves and how I can get what I want out of this, we forget to take care of each other.

A wise person told me many years ago, when speaking in terms of marriage, that whenever there is conflict or stress in a relationship, when someone is trying to win, either the relationship wins or the relationship loses. This would be true for good friendships, for relationships between brothers and sister, and between parents and children. If you are having an argument and you feel like, *I won that one. I got that. I told them*, then the relationship loses. What we need to think of is serving the relationship. I think a word that goes along with this is humility. If we are following the example of Christ and if we want a relationship that is above the ordinary, then in humility, we simply have to serve one another. Quit looking to see how we can win the argument, and get the last word in and all those sorts of things. We need to see how we can serve one another.

I feel like I should come up with something creative that no one has ever said before, but the truth is this is all simple stuff to know, hard stuff to enact. I came across a list of 50 steps to humility, 50 steps to knowing how to serve one another. We could probably poll ourselves today and all come up with a list. Here is my list:

1. Listen more. I have to admit that one of my pet peeves in life is an interruption. I do not like to be interrupted and I kick myself every time I interrupt someone else. I think, *What was I thinking? Why wasn't I listening to let the other person express what they wanted to express?* Listen and pay attention.

2. Give credit to others. We have all dealt with people who want all the credit. We have all dealt with people who want to take for themselves and make sure everybody knows what they have done. Thank other people for the things they have done and how they have contributed.

At the Great Date Night, our leader was talking about being grateful, and what a tremendous relationship builder it is to express everyday to the people we love something we are grateful for.

3. Admit our own limits. Which one of us knows everything? Have any of us ever said, "I will never do that. No child of mine will ever do that." That is one that will come back and bit you really hard. We need to be humble enough to recognize that we don't know it all and that we don't know all the circumstances. We don't know what has happened in another person's life. We need to recognize that maybe we should be patient or maybe we should not make such strong pronouncements.

4. Do one thing every day that serves the other person. Isn't that like Jesus? What would our relationships be like if we did one thing every day that served the people we are the closest to and the people that we love the most? Can you imagine how the relationship would grow stronger?

As simple as these things are, they are not possible if all we are thinking about is how to take care of ourselves, how to get what we want, and to make sure that we have the last word. The only way is in the spirit of Christ who came, not to be served, but to serve, to try to do what is right by each other.

My son-in-law has a T-shirt that says, *I am no Rocket Surgeon*. You can figure that out. *I am no Rocket Surgeon*. These are things that we all know and that we have all experienced in life when people have done them for us and when we have done them for others. The relationships have grown and become stronger, but this is not the ordinary way things take place. Too many times out in the world, it is *Look out for No. 1. If you don't toot your own horn, nobody else will*. But Jesus says, "Not so with you."

The request of James and John is going to set them apart from the others, don't you think? The other disciples are all going to be ticked off. "Who are they to think they could ask for this?" In order for the disciples to be the unit that Jesus wants them to be, they have to serve one another. They have to pay attention. They have to listen. They have to stop interrupting. They have to be grateful, to give credit to one another, to avoid those blanket pronouncements that always put somebody off or leave somebody else wanting to say, "I told you so." Those things are never helpful. We need to remember that either the relationship wins or the relationship loses. I know all of us can think of times when we won and the relationship lost.

This is the way of Christ who wasn't thinking about himself, who was tempted and given opportunity to walk away from the cross but chose that path as the way of making sure that our relationship with God is everything that we need and everything we ever wanted. The same principle could be true between each of us—if we were not here to be served, but to serve.

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