

Study Guide

Series: How Do You Measure Your Life?
“By Who and How You Serve”

Monday - Matthew 12:14-23. Jesus' enemies were plotting to destroy him. Jesus just went elsewhere and continued to serve and heal. Matthew quoted Isaiah 42:1-4 to describe Jesus' approach: “He won't argue or shout, and nobody will hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bent stalk, and he won't snuff out a smoldering wick, until he makes justice win.” We might think that's no way to make justice win. But people respected Jesus, even asking if he might be “the Son of David,” a title for the Messiah. Just before today's reading, Matthew tells us about the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. How did Jesus' way of dealing with his foes live out the attitude Isaiah said God's servant would have? Have you ever seen a situation where it was more effective to withdraw or speak gently, rather than trying to loudly prove a contentious point? As Matthew wrote his Gospel, early Christians were actively preaching to Gentiles. What are some ways you can live out Christ's life, making “justice win”, so that “Gentiles (whoever is their equivalent in your world) will put their hope in his name”?

Tuesday - Matthew 20:20-28. James and John (and probably their mom) thought they'd get their bid for power in before the other disciples. “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said. In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no status seeking. In my Kingdom, we serve. We have a good idea (as James and John did) what power, privilege and importance look like. Down deep, most of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. But Jesus' view was succinct and direct: “that's not the way it will be with you.” Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve, even to the point of giving his life. In what specific ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life?

Wednesday - Matthew 23:5-12. In Jesus' day, as today, many leaders sought exalted, lofty titles. Scholar William Barclay wrote, “The Pharisees liked to be addressed as Rabbi and to be treated with the greatest respect. They even claimed ... greater respect than that given to parents, for, they said a man's parents give him ordinary, physical life, but a man's teacher gives him eternal life.” By contrast, Jesus said his Kingdom was not about high-status titles, but about greatness in serving others. Scholar N. T. Wright noted that the Pharisees were not just religious, but also political and social leaders. He asked, “What are today's equivalents? Some might be the leaders, elected or unelected, in our wider societies, who ... rejoice in their ‘celebrity’ status, make grand pronouncements about public values while running lucrative but shady businesses on the side, use their position to gain influence for their families and friends, and allow their private interests secretly to determine the public policy of their country ... What matters is the huge and humbling principle of verses 11 and 12.” How easy or hard do you find it to lay aside human ideas of greatness in favor of Jesus' definition of greatness as service? Does verse 9 mean it's wrong to honor your earthly father? No—Jesus often used a teaching style called “prophetic hyperbole,” overstating to make a point. Here he probably referred to men who demanded the title of Elijah and other “fathers” of the faith. When have you noticed in yourself a desire to make yourself feel more important by demanding your “rights” of a role, status or title?

Thursday - John 13:3-17. Jesus didn't just talk about service; he modeled it. On the night before he was crucified, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. It was shocking, because washing guests' feet was usually the lowest ranking slaves' work. Then Jesus told the disciples they were right to call him "Teacher" or "Lord." His lesson for them (and us) was that by acting as a servant, he did not abdicate leadership, but redefined our ideas of glory and power. His life was guided by God's standards, not earthly ones. John, a very precise writer, quoted Jesus saying, "I give up my life, so that I can take it up again" (John 10:17). He used the same Greek words to describe Jesus "taking off" and "putting on" his robes before and after he washed the disciples' feet. In what ways was Jesus' an acted-out parable of the way he would give himself for us on the cross? Have you ever had an experience in which acting humbly toward someone else felt almost like dying? "Washing feet" was a practical act in a dusty land where people wore sandals. What are some practical ways you can serve another person that will tangibly make their life better? Who is God leading you to bless with a concrete act of service?

Friday - Matthew 25:31-46. After talking about the Temple's destruction and the end of the world (in sometimes puzzling terms), Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment. His story about the judgment clearly conveyed his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom people, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people whom Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." There's a Christian song that begins, "I met Jesus today, and I really must tell you, he didn't look at all like the pictures ... He was a hungry child, a sick friend of mine, a stranger who needed a coat." In Jesus' story, both those accepted and the ones who were turned away were surprised. They expected to meet Jesus in "religious" places, with choirs and lights, not in the streets among the needy and poor. But Jesus' story said we should notice all people in need of help, and treat them as if it were Jesus himself in need. In what ways can you sense God reshaping your attitudes toward "the least of these" in your community and the wider world?