

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-10 Personal Growth: Striving for Status

We all are human, right? And it is human nature to want to rise above our present status. We want to advance to a higher position than we have. This lesson will discuss striving to get ahead or the desire to be promoted. It is a third common personal growth issue you may encounter among people who come to you for counsel. Many have a desire to be in control. They may want to become equal with someone who has power, authority, or celebrity. Some have all it takes to be successful in their employment or position. Most people, however, will need the help of others to get there.

The story in this lesson is found in the Gospel of Matthew. He says that it was James' and John's mother who asked Jesus to elevate her sons. She wanted to help them if she could. As you listen to the Bible story, notice what she wanted. See how Christ responded to her request. Zebedee was a fisherman. The mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John, came to Jesus with her sons and knelt down to seek a favor from him. "What is it you want?" Christ asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus responded. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"Yes, we can," they answered (Matt 20:20-22).

Jesus was asking two questions: "Do you really know what you are asking?" and, "Are you prepared to go through what I am about to face?" He did not say that what they were asking was impossible. He did imply that they were not ready for him to grant their wish.

What were you thinking as you heard the mother and her two sons ask this favor of Christ? Did you think they were out of place for making such a request? What would you have thought if you were one of the other 10 disciples? Would your mother have done this for you?

A person can want something so much they ignore the fact that they are not ready for it yet, nor entitled to it. It will become your duty as a counselor to listen to such a person. They want your advice. Try to help them consider if they are ready for such a position. Often they will need help with the question: "Is this a position God is preparing me for now or for a later time?"

Christ responded to the two brothers and their mother: "You will indeed drink from my cup, and will face what I am about to face, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father" (Matt 20:23).

Often people will feel they have a right to a certain position or status but are not prepared for that position. Their reason for striving for advancement can be personal and selfish. They may

be seeking to glorify themselves. People who get a position they are not prepared for are often disappointed. They would be much happier in a position they were really prepared to assume.

Christ did not tell the mother and her sons that this was a foolish wish. He asked them if they were prepared for what was required for such a position. The remainder of the story tells us how the other disciples felt about their request: “When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.” As pastors we know that not everyone has to agree for someone to be appointed to a position. But if a person does not understand what the position involves, it would be a wrong one for him or her.

What does leadership require? All positions require preparation and sacrifice, both in the present and in the future. Jesus went on to explain to the Twelve that positions in God’s kingdom are filled by servants not rulers. He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:25-28).

There are many positions in the Christian world that are unfilled. There is a lack of laborers who have prepared themselves for the task and are willing to serve. A wise counselor should advise a fellow Christian who is seeking a position to become a servant and not a ruler. It may be even better for that person to be content where they are, doing what God has given them to do right now. The Holy Spirit will let them know when they are ready for another assignment.

This story gives us a good guide in counseling someone who feels they are being left behind. It also helps a person who feels they should have a position that someone else has. We notice in the story that the other 10 disciples did not feel their fellow disciples were fit for the position they were asking for. Or, maybe they felt they were just as qualified. And we notice that Christ made it clear that people in our churches and towns are not looking for someone to rule over them. They are looking for someone to help, serve, guide, and encourage them. We are instructed by the Scriptures to pray for laborers (servants), not for positions to open. The fields are white unto harvest; many laborers with the right heart attitude are needed.

As you serve as a Christian counselor, pastor, or leader, use this story of the two brothers making a request from Christ. If there is a position that needs to be filled, God will prepare a person for that position. He uses Christian leaders as witnesses of his grace and mercy. He wants them to help equip people for their roles in the body of Christ. Sometimes a person feels he is ready for a position, yet does not get that position. He or she can be assured that it is not where they can best serve God right now.

The **truth** this story teaches is that God’s plan is very simple. If you want to be first, go to the end of the line. If you want greatness, learn to serve others.

This story is **important** for anyone who has a role of being a counselor or giving spiritual advice and direction. You will not always say what everyone will agree with or understand. If your desire is to be God’s servant, you need to be aware that it may be a long and lonely journey of

service. It will require suffering to become the person God can use to fulfill his plan. But this journey you will not take alone. God is with you!

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. What did the mother and her two sons ask of Christ? [Pause]
A. If you said that the sons wanted to sit on either side of Christ in heaven, you are correct.
2. What did the other ten disciples think about the request of James' and John's mother? [Pause]
A. If you said, "They were displeased or angry at her request," you are correct.
3. What is God's simple plan? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "If you want to be first, go to the end of the line and become a servant," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story of the mother and her two sons as many times as is necessary to learn what was said. Repeat it to three or four people and discuss among yourselves the lesson it is teaching. Listen to people who are complaining about the position they are in or speaking of one they want to be in. You can encourage them by listening and offering comfort with a few solutions to their stress. Pray with them, asking for God's peace and contentment to fill their hearts.