

Bottom Line

After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?” But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.

Mark 9:33-34

It’s embarrassing when someone demonstrates he or she can read your mind. Most of us would rather not have our thoughts exposed. We’re not proud of our motives. We don’t want our intentions broadcast. The disciples had a problem—Jesus understood them. Just as he understands us.

Every tactic we use in human relationships to avoid the truth is absolutely transparent to God. The fact that God knows us that well isn’t amazing. After all, he is God. The fact that we still try to work our magic on him isn’t all that surprising either. After all, we are human. It is amazing though that God knows us as he does and still draws near to help us be better than we instinctively are.

The disciples were arguing about leadership. They were mind-wrestling over who could claim the top of the heap. They were all poised on the ladder to greatness, and thankfully we are not given the details on how ready they were to step on each other on the way up. Apparently the discussion ended in a draw.

Jesus’ question caught them by surprise. The subject of greatness suddenly didn’t feel right. Jesus broke the strained silence with a challenge. He gave them the ultimate measure of leadership: “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else” (Mark 9:35). Apparently the silence resumed. The disciples neither argued with him nor asked any questions. We don’t know how long this went on, but Mark records that Jesus spotted a little child in the vicinity

and decided to make an additional point while holding the child. "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me" (Mark 9:37). Are the two points connected? Perhaps Jesus was saying, "Do you really want to be first? Then start small."

As you go about your day, think about whom you serve. How aware are you of people who are not being served? Can you see those who are overlooked? In the end, what do you find most important: being called a leader or doing what a real leader does?

If our thoughts and intentions are to serve Christ, we don't have to worry about someone reading our minds.