

“When you catch and you are ready to shoot, what do your eyes lock in on as a target?” That’s a question for Steph Curry, one of the top basketball players in the world. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player. Two-time NBA Champion. Single-season three-point record holder.

“When I look at the rim,” he says, “I look at where the rim and the net meet. I want to look at the front of the rim, and just try to put that ball just over the front of the rim, with a little bit of touch, a little bit of arc, so in case I’m not perfect in swishing it, I give myself a good opportunity to get a soft bounce on the rim.”

When it comes to shooting a basketball, Steph Curry is a master. So... it probably wouldn’t surprise you to hear that he teaches a course on MasterClass, an online streaming platform that offers classes taught by talented professionals. And He’s not alone. Margaret Atwood the author of Hand Maid’s tale offers a class on writing. Former Popstar Christina Aguilera teaches music. Gordon Ramsay shows people how to make really good egg toast.

All are masters of their fields, offering their instruction through glossy videos. Some talk to the camera for a few hours, while others take a hands-on approach, leading workshops or demonstrating techniques. When Steph Curry shoots the ball, he hits nothing but net.

Apparently, MasterClass launched back in 2015 by offering just three classes: Dustin Hoffman on acting, Serena Williams on tennis, and James Patterson on writing. Since then, the company has grown exponentially and has now added more than 85 classes across nine categories. The program claims to offer a premium, high-level learning experience. Classes are taught by the very best in the world.

Tonight, as we explore the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s Gospel, you could say that Jesus offers a master class on discipleship, giving advice to James, John and his other followers. And what is even cooler is that he talks to them face to face as

they are traveling down a road, rather than through a glossy video on a computer or television screen.

When we first met James and John, they were fishing with their father Zebedee and were the first two Disciples to be called by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. The Lord even gave them the nickname the “Sons of Thunder,” so it probably isn’t all that surprising to hear that the two brothers, in wanting to be the best, approach Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” They want to be helped by Jesus, like students desiring to learn how to serve like Serena Williams, act as well as Dustin, or hold a note like Christina.

“What is it you want me to do for you?” asks Jesus. Apparently, it’s not clear if they want a lecture, a workshop, or a demonstration. So, they say answer him: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” These two brothers want to be seen as the very greatest of disciples, with places of honor at the right and left hands of Jesus in the kingdom of God. They are like the target customers of the MasterClass video series, people known as CATS: “curious, aspiring 30-somethings.” Yes, James and John are CATS.

But Jesus shakes his head and says to them, “You do not know what you are asking.” He knows that you don’t rise to the top by simply asking for recognition, or by watching an online video taught by a master. It takes more than a class to shoot a basketball like Steph Curry. “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink,” asks Jesus, “or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

According to New Testament professor PHEME PERKINS, “they are being asked if they can accept the same kind of suffering that Jesus now faces.” Both “baptism” and “cup” are metaphors for suffering, not for worldly success. Jesus is asking if they are able to join him on the path to the cross, and they reply, “We are able.”

Now, while we may admire the enthusiasm of James and John, their quick and confident response sounds quite naïve. Do they really think they will rise to the level of Jesus, like a MasterClass student expecting to be able to write like James Patterson? Jesus then speaks the raw truth to them: “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” Sure enough, James will be killed in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa, while John will suffer but survive as witnessed in the book of Revelation.

Then Jesus says to them, in reference to their original request, “to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” He cannot guarantee that they will rise to the top, any more than Steph Curry can predict the next MVP in Basketball. And when the other 10 disciples hear this, they begin to be angry with James and John.

At this point, Jesus offers the clearest guidance in his master class on discipleship, beginning with an explanation of how the rulers of the Gentiles are often tyrants: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.” Then he invites them into a workshop in which they have to roll up their sleeves and work as a servant: “But it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Finally, he ends with a demonstration, focused on himself: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In a way you might say that in Scripture we witness Jesus offering his followers Talks, Workshops, and Demonstrations, which are the three elements of his master class on discipleship. In fact, if Jesus were making instructional videos today, he would probably *talk* about how many leaders today still fight for dominance and power and act like tyrants when doing so. Jesus might also talk about servant

leadership, and about how servant leaders put the needs of their people first, helping them to develop as individuals who can do their very best. He might even lift up Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King Jr., as examples of servant leaders.

In a sermon based on this Scripture passage from Mark, King said that there is “deep down within all of us an instinct. It’s a kind of drum major instinct — a desire to be out front, a desire to lead the parade, a desire to be first.” King knew that this was human nature, and he felt it in himself. But he concluded by saying that at his funeral he would like somebody to say that he tried “to give his life serving others ... to feed the hungry ... to clothe those who were naked ... to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter.”

Most certainly I would imagine that Jesus would also invite us into a *workshop* on servant leadership, pushing us to find our greatness in our service to others. One of the key qualities of servant leadership is empathy, which is the ability to see yourself in someone else’s shoes. Such a quality is critically important whether you are serving on a church council, mentoring a teenager, serving a hot meal to a homeless woman, or having a conversation with a grieving church member.

Finally, Jesus offers us a *demonstration* of servant leadership through his actions as the Son of Man. He “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus always put others first: Feeding thousands of hungry people, healing the sick, and washing the feet of the disciples. Jesus even allowed himself to be lifted up, not on a high pedestal but on a cross, offering his body and his blood to bring us forgiveness and new life. “He himself bore our sins

in his body on the cross,” said his disciple Peter, “so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness.”

Feeding, healing, washing, and sacrificing. Jesus met the needs of others, giving of himself completely. In his words and actions, he offered an unforgettable demonstration of what it means to serve others. So...If you are curious about discipleship and aspiring to be a follower of Jesus, then reading the testimonies about his life and seeking to imitate the things that he did are part of the only master class you'll ever need. And thanks be to God for that. Amen.