

## Luke 9:46-56

While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, <sup>44</sup> 'Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.' <sup>45</sup> But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

<sup>46</sup> An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. <sup>47</sup> Jesus, knowing their thoughts [Gk: argument of their hearts], took a little child and made him stand beside him. <sup>48</sup> Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.'

<sup>49</sup> 'Master,' said John, 'we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.'

<sup>50</sup> 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said, 'for whoever is not against you is for you.'

<sup>51</sup> As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' <sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then he and his disciples went to another village.

NIV-UK

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1

### **You are the greatest. Luke 9:28-56**

Greatness manifest. 9:28-36

Greatness displayed. 9:37-42

Greatness anticipated. 9:43-45

Greatness taught. 9:46-48

Greatness lived. 9:49-56

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2

### **This is going to be great! Luke 9:43-48**

The greatness of Jesus Himself. 9:43-45

I can recognise the greatness of Jesus in His actions. 43 "marvelling... did"

I can see the size of Jesus' power in His creation.

I can see the strength of Jesus' power in His cross.

I can see the scope of Jesus' power in His return.

I can recognise the greatness of Jesus in His words. 44 "Listen carefully"

His words of correction break down my sins.  
His words of instruction build up my mind.  
His words of direction reform my perceptions.  
I can recognise the greatness of Jesus in His relationships. 43 “disciples”  
He knows my past, and He forgives me.  
He knows my present, and He directs me.  
He knows my future, and He prepares me.

The greatness of Jesus’ followers. 9:46-48

Real greatness is attained without struggle. 46 “argument”  
Christ-like greatness comes without physical strength  
Christ-like greatness comes without intellectual persuasion  
Christ-like greatness comes without coercive influence  
Real greatness is attained without awareness. 47 “little child”  
Christ-like greatness comes with no worldly power  
Christ-like greatness comes with no worldly possessions  
Christ-like greatness comes with no worldly position  
Real greatness is attained without selfishness. 48 “My name”  
Christ-like greatness comes from a repentant heart.  
Christ-like greatness comes from a submissive mind.  
Christ-like greatness comes from a generous attitude.

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3

### **What I need to improve. Luke 9:43-56**

Improve my mind; improve my emotions. 9:43-45

I need to listen until I understand. 44-45 “listen... understand”  
I need to grasp until I am at peace. 45 “grasp... afraid”

Improve my heart; improve my perception. 9:46-48

I need to argue with the wickedness within me. 46-47 “argument of their hearts”  
I need to submit in humility to all around me. 47-48 “least is the greatest”

Improve my actions; improve my co-operation. 9:49-50

I need to celebrate the success of others. 49 “someone driving...”  
I need to remember the final purpose. 50 “is for you”

Improve my knowledge; improve my dedication. 9:51-56

I need to let go of the old ways. 54 “call down fire”  
I need to move on to new ways. 56 “went to another”

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4

### **Take a fresh look. Gain a fresh perspective. Luke 9:43-56**

Redefining the Gospel. 9:43-45

Gospel – God’s predetermined plan. 44

Gospel – Using death to defeat death. 44

Gospel – Bigger than I could ever imagine. 45

Redefining greatness. 9:46-50

Winners don’t self-promote. 48 “least among you all”

Winners celebrate everyone’s success. 49 “someone driving out”

Winners are team players. 50 “is for you”

Redefining generosity. 9:51-56

Give yourself to the plan. 51 “resolutely set out”

Give mercy to the undeserving. 54 “destroy them”

Give opportunities to the unsuspecting. 56 “went to another”

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5

### **God wants me to be great. Luke 9:46-48**

I have my ideas of greatness. 9:46

Human greatness causes conflict. 46a “argument”

Human greatness causes self-promotion. 46b “which of them”

God’s has His ideas of greatness. 9:47-48

Godly greatness causes openness. 48a “welcomes me welcomes the One”

Godly greatness causes humility. 48b “the one who is least”

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6

### **The welcome displays the wealth. Luke 9:46-48**

Kings display their wealth to their guests; ie. they display their own importance. There is a danger that we can abuse the greeting by going too far. It becomes dysfunctional if we become fawning or sycophantic. The principle is this: greet everyone as being equally valuable.

Everyone wants to be valued and appreciated. No one wants to be overlooked or through of as insignificant. Everyone wants a better future. So, the disciples discussion about their future importance was inevitable. But the discussion quickly descended into an argument about which of them would be greater; be better; or be more important.

They ended up with a bad argument about self-importance. Ironically, it began with a discussion about the good qualities of personal value and individual significance.

Jesus, interestingly, does not rebuke them! He does not take their topic of who is significant and valued and make them feel small, nor does He make them cringe with shame. Instead, He redirects them. He turns the topic away from greatness and on to welcome. “Whoever

welcomes this little child in My name, welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me, welcomes the One who sent Me.”

Some people walk into a room and say, “Here I am! Surely you are glad to see me.” Others walk into a room and say, “There you are! I sure am glad to see you.” This second greeting is the model proposed by Jesus.

You and I are already important people with significant roles. We don’t need to self-promote. We need to pursue Christ-likeness. We do this as we value the people around us. And Jesus gives us a simple tool. It is welcome! Welcome says, “You are important. You are valued. You are significant. When we do that, we are meeting the most basic human need of the person we meet. Welcome take the attention off me, and lifts the other person.

More important: What welcome do I give to Jesus? Do I hold Him as significant, valuable, and to be honoured? Or do I treat Him as irrelevant, insignificant, and treat Him with indifference.

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7

#### **Dealing with difference. Luke 9:46-56**

Principle – works in theory. 9:48

Be God-like; He accepts me. 48 “welcomes this little”

Be Christ-like; He is a servant. 48 “least among you all”

Person – works on a small scale. 9:49-50

Be accepting of difference. 49-50 “not of us. Do not stop him”

Be optimistic of difference. 50 “not against you, is for you”

People – works on a large scale. 9:51-56

Be accommodating with difference. 53 “not welcome him, because”

Be flexible with difference. 56 “to another”

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8

#### **From management to leadership. Luke 9:46-56 – [Leaders](#) / [Business devotion](#)**

Management is by imposition. Leadership is by inspiration. 46 “argument”

Management is by self-awareness. Leadership is by self-unawareness. 47 “little child”

Management is by attaining. Leadership is by ascending. 48 “least is the greatest”

Management identifies the competition. Leadership identifies co-operation. 49-50

Management works to a budget. Leadership works to a strategic plan. 51 “Heaven”

Management pushes away blockages. Leadership seek alternatives. 52-56 “fire... another”

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9

## **Are you for us, or against us? Luke 9:46-56 – Leaders / Business devotion**

You are an individual leader. 9:46-50

Leaders listen, then choose the best perspective. 46 “argument”

Leaders look, then choose the best position. 47 “little child”

Leaders learn, then choose the best practice. 48 “welcomes Me”

You are a team leader. 9:51-56

Leaders operate to a strategy. 51 “time approached”

Leaders plan ahead. 52 “get things ready”

Leaders channel energy in helpful directions. 55-56 “rebuked... another”

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10

## **Where are you leading us? Luke 9:46-56 – Leaders / Business devotion**

Being a leader. 9:46-50

Look within. Opportunities already exist. 47 “child with Him”

Look without. Opportunities are being created. 50 “is for you”

Doing leading. 9:51-56

Move into new areas. 52 “into a Samaritan village”

Move into new attitudes. 55-56 “rebuked... to another village”

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11

## **Overcoming P-P-P-Problems. Luke 9:46-56**

Overcoming my pride problem. 9:46-48

My pride problem is when I struggle for recognition. 46 “argument started”

My pride problem springs from my heart. 47 “argument of their hearts”

My pride problem is solved with humility. 48 “welcome... least”

Overcoming my perception problem. 9:48-50

My perception problem is when I misunderstand grace. 49 “in Your name”

My perception problem is when I misunderstand team. 49

My perception problem is when I misunderstand resources. 50 “is for you”

Overcoming my prejudice problem. 9:51-56

My prejudice problem occurs when I emphasise difference. 52-53 “Samaritan”

My prejudice problem worsens when the Bible is a weapon. 54 “call fire down”

My prejudice problem lessens when I chose peace. 56 “went to another”

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12

### **Open hearted, but how open? Luke 9:46-56**

Hearts open to one another. 9:46-48

Our simple attitude to one another. "accept, honour, love..."

Our spiritual attitude to one another. "welcomes Me"

Hearts open to other believers. 9:49-50

The Shepherd has many flocks. 49 "not one of us"

The Shepherd has one flock. 50 "is for you"

Hearts open to outsiders. 9:51-56

Some will reject; be gracious. 53-54 "not welcome"

Some will be open; be generous. 55-56 "went to another"

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13

### **Blessed to be a blessing. Luke 9:46-56**

Blessing one another. 9:46-48

Lifting up one another. "accept, honour, love..."

Lifting up Jesus. "welcomes Me"

Blessing other believers. 9:49-50

Lifting up others. 49 "not one of us"

Lifted up by others. 50 "is for you"

Blessing outsiders. 9:51-56

Some will reject our lifting; be gracious.

Some will be open to lifting; be generous.

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14

### **Body building. Luke 9:46-56**

Building up one another. 9:46-48

Who am I building up? 46 "which of them"

Where am I building from? 47 "of their hearts"

Why am I building up? 48 "welcomes Me"

How am I building up? 48 "the one who is least"

Building up other believers. 9:49-50

Affirm those who build me up. 49 "we tried to stop him"

Accept those who build me up. 50 "is for you"

Building up outsiders. 9:51-56

We are building on a firm foundation. 51 "resolutely set out"

We are building despite opposition. 53 "did not welcome him"

We are building our own salvation. 55 “rebuked them”  
We are building our own education. 55 “went to another”

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15

### **Fewer problems, more solutions. Luke 9:46-50**

My problems are bigger than I imagine 9:46

I will be greater because I've already been gifted. No, I'll be greater because I've got more problems to overcome. eg. handicaps, disabilities, limitations

Christians still have problems, but God wants to minimise them

My problems are mostly in my attitude, and often in my words

Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus

God's solution is bigger than I imagine 9:47-48

Jesus wants to be my resource and strength "in my name"

Jesus wants to be in partnership with me "welcomes me"

Jesus is not in the child but in the welcome I give

Jesus wants me to be like him "least among you... is the greatest"

God's team is bigger than I imagine 9:49-50

There are people outside our group that follow Jesus

There are people outside our group that are more effective than us

There are people outside our group that benefit us

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16

### **Move on to a better place. Luke 9:49-50**

When the Forwards are playing well, and the team is making great progress; the Backs don't say, "Hey, stop playing so well. You're making us look bad." That level of small-mindedness will ruin the whole team. Success in one part of the team helps the whole team succeed.

Move on, from conformity to flexibility.

The disciples make the mistake of making themselves the benchmark. The measure they used to determine who and what could be done, "because he was not one of us." Conformity will always be less effective than flexibility. Have you noticed: God does not make clones; He makes individuals. Godly leadership does not complain, "I don't like his style." It questions, "How can we make better use of his style?" We move on from conformity to flexibility.

Move on, from hindrance to helpfulness.

"Don't stop him." There is enough need. There will always be enough for all of us. Godly leadership moves from saying, "I'm in charge. It's my way or the highway!" Instead, we are on the lookout for those who are trying; especially those who are successful.

Move on, from divisiveness to discernment.

“Whoever is not against you, is for you.” At every point where someone is different from you, they are able to add to you. Don’t be so selfish as to think that you should get something from the other person. Instead, think of what bigger and better things you could achieve together. Our differences give us a broader base. The more diverse we are the more successful we can become, but only if we act in unity.

(Move on, from competition to complement)

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17

### **Strategic planning. Luke 9:51-56**

Jesus had a clear, open, transparent plan. Others were invited into it. When it was rejected, he did not punish, but offered the opportunity to others.

Success only happens when there is a plan 9:51

Plans only work within a timeframe 9:51a "As the time approached..."

no deadline = no decision. Galatians 4:4

probably set an unrealistically short timeframe

Plans only work when there is a purpose 9:51b "...for him to be taken up to heaven"

reason / vision / destination / a point to all this change & discomfort / worth it / better

Plans only work when there is commitment 9:51c "...resolutely set out"

Plans only work sequentially 9:51d "...for Jerusalem."

Jerusalem, cross, empty tomb were only way points to be achieved and passed

Success only happens when there is total engagement. 9:52

Engagement begins with initiating action "he sent"

Engagement begins with education / information "he sent messengers"

Engagement begins with inclusivity "...who went into a Samaritan village"

Engagement begins with forward planning "...on ahead ...to get things ready for him"

Success only happens with built-in flexibility. 9:53-55

only God sees the future perfectly, and behaves consistently

out of the planning stage and into execution, things always go awry

It takes time to get everyone to agree emotionally 9:53

"But the people there did not welcome him" Your plan, not my plan! What's in it for me? Why was there no wide-spread ownership? Because...

It takes time to get everyone to agreed intellectually 9:53

"...because he was heading for Jerusalem." I'm Samaritan. I want a Sam-centred plan! People are basically selfish

It takes time to build teamwork 9:54

When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"

Jesus' own leadership team adopted tactics that were 'us versus them', we have to get rid of them, my way or the highway, blunt instruments



Change happens from the top down 9:55

"But Jesus turned and rebuked them" Jesus disciplined his leaders, not the Samaritans. If people haven't changed, it's not their fault. Leaders take responsibility to improve communication strategy (intellectual) and generate enthusiasm (emotional).

Begin with the early adapters. 9:56

"and they went to another village."

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18

### **Better than 'Plan A'. Luke 9:51-56**

Have a plan and an adverb for your action. 9:51

Poor managers stick to nouns, eg. budgets, targets, quotas. Good managers deal with verbs, eg. achieve, accomplish, complete. Leaders deal in adverbs. An adverb takes mere actions (verbs) and pumps life into them: "resolutely!" It can be just one word, eg. quickly, overtly, meticulously, frequently. "Resolutely" certainly wasn't the only adverb attached to Jesus' actions, but it was the one that was appropriate for this task.

Sure, adverbs are undefinable and flexible, but that is why we need them. Heart and soul can't be reduced down to something you can measure. Passion is not quantifiable.

Have a plan and make preparation for your action. 9:52

We all know the old adage: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." We have no shortage of plans. In fact, we've got plans, objectives, aims, goals... We know where we want to go, but we have unrealistic expectations of how to get there.

I have a friend in senior management in Microsoft. He says everyone wants projects delivered: on budget; on time; and on quality; and usually in that order of priority. His reply is that the best you can hope for is 'two out of three', but most projects can't even reach one of the three!

Jesus appointed a Forward Project Team to go ahead of Him and the main team in order to prepare the way for when He and the rest of the disciples would get to that point. Our task is not only to know where we are going, but also how to get the rest of the team to that same place.

Have a plan and a contingency for your action. 9:53-56

Jesus had a good plan. But it failed completely! The local stakeholders; the Samaritans, liked the parts of the plan that gave them high levels of involvement, but they didn't agree with the final outcome which they saw as leaving them behind. Without their engagement, Jesus needed a contingency plan. He ended up going the long way around. We all like to think our plans will be stunningly successful. The reality is the fallen world works against us. The way to beat disappointment and depression is to be flexible. We have to be disengaged from our plans and see them as mere tools. If Tool A; Plan A, doesn't achieve the goal, then let's have Plan B close at hand.

Let's stick to our adverb of heart and soul, but attached it to a new plan every day.

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### **Other possible titles**

When the battle lines are drawn.  
Friend or foe?  
Choosing sides.  
You're either with us, or against us!  
O, you're different!  
Domino effect.  
When the battle lines are drawn.  
Any place – except last place.  
Powerful paradox.  
Allow the King back on His throne.  
Almost right is still all wrong.  
The blessing of failure.  
When power is a problem.  
The least is the most.  
Let's go there together.

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### **Music and songs**

#### Songs about humility

Lord, show me what it means to have a humble heart  
Purify my heart, 657  
When I survey the wondrous cross... pour contempt on all my pride.

#### Songs about accepting others

Thank You Lord for my special friends

#### Songs about strength

As for me and my house, Ot 84  
Thank You for the trials, Ot 53  
Tower of strength.

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### **Quotes and illustrations about humility**

Is. 66:2, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

Psalms 149:6, "For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation."

Prov. 11:2, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom."

Pride does not go before a fall! "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble / when I'm perfect in every way / I can't wait to look in the mirror / 'cause I get better looking each day / To know me is to love me / I must be one [heck] of a man / Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble / but I'm doing the best that I can. (Mack Davis, "Oh Lord, It's Hard To Be Humble")

At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is our greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend. John Stott

"Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." – John Acton, English Historian

*Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss

In the Charles Dickens' novel, *David Copperfield*, we are introduced to the villain, Uriah Heep. He has a phrase that he uses repeatedly: umble (humble). When Uriah Heep first meets David Copperfield, he says: "I am well aware that I am the umblest person going." He loves to tell about having an umble mother; living in an umble abode; and having picked up so much umbleness at school. Ironically, he has a great pride in his humility!

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### **Thought starters for personal reflection or group discussion**

1. What makes a building "amazing"? What is the most amazing building you have been in?
  2. Philippians 2:1-11 is an important text. Within that context, v3 sets out a contrast. In what ways are these characterists, opposites; and what is there relationship to building up?
  3. Luke 9:47 names "the argument of their hearts" as the cause of the problems. Why is it the heart, not the mind nor events, that is the cause of problems? Is Jeremiah 17:9 fair?
  4. Jesus said people not in our congregation are "for us" v50. How are they for us; and conversely, how are we "for them"?
  5. Jesus was not welcomed, v53. The disciples had a response, v54. But Jesus had a double response, v55 & 56. Why were His responses necessary, and better?
  6. Philippians 2:12 tells me what I am to do, and the attitude with which I am to do it. Why is that attitude important?
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