



underthefigtree

BARUKH

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GROUPS

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The Siren Call of our culture: “Supersize! The bigger the better!” We want to supersize our fries, sodas, houses, and church buildings. From the latest tech toys to the latest fashion trends, we are enticed by a barrage of products that signal our status: “Look at me - I’ve arrived.” Regardless of the product peddled, what matters is to have the newest, the biggest, the fastest, the “most-est.” I recently had a conversation with a friend who was so proud of his new 51” LCD TV—until he saw his brother-in-law’s fresh 60” LCD. He was deflated.

Yet curiously, for all our appetite for the “biggest & most-est,” few are truly content. Driven by a passion to

be the most impressive, people spend their lives on the supremacy of self; yet this quest for more and better leaves a person feeling a sense of hollow isolation.

This week’s teaching is one that God has used to open my eyes to an enduring principle throughout Scriptures and time. We’ll discover that this quest for towering greatness is not a recent invention. Thousands of years ago, ancient Egyptians walked a similar path. As you peer into this ancient culture, and then consider the contrasting vision Jesus set out for his followers, I hope you’ll embrace God’s definition of greatness—the ability to stand in the shadows of those we seek to bless.





THE TEXT

Before you watch this session's video together, read the following passages:

Philippians 2:1–8

Mark 9:33–37

Matthew 25:37–45

THE TEACHING

Watch the video, “Barukh.” If time allows, we recommend that you (or your group) review the vocabulary words and background details below before continuing with the talking points.

VOCABULARY

hallel

praise, to shine forth (“Hallelujah” is derived from this word.)

yada’

praise, to point out (“Judah” is derived from this word.)

barukh

praise, to bend the knee (Also translated as “bless.” For example, see Psalm 103, which says “praise [or “bless” in some translations] the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me.”)





BACKGROUND INFO

The Pharaohs mentioned in this lesson's video—Amenhotep III and Ramses II—ruled during Egypt's New Kingdom period, approximately 1550 through 1070 B.C. Most scholars view this as Egypt's "Golden Age" of power and influence. Interestingly, it was during this period of Egyptian dominance in the ancient world that the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians. The New Kingdom period included the rule of other notable pharaohs Hatchepsut (Egypt's first female Pharaoh), her son Tuthmosis III (Egypt's greatest military leader), as well as Ramses II (considered Egypt's greatest pharaoh of all, who some scholars suggest as being the Pharaoh of the Exodus story).

The video teaching takes place at the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, situated on the West Bank of the Nile River, opposite the ancient capitol Thebes (now the modern city of Luxor). Each Pharaoh constructed his own mortuary temple, and Amenhotep's massive temple stands along the way to the famed Valley of the Kings, where New Kingdom period royalty were entombed. A mortuary temple was where the Pharaoh's body was prepared (i.e. mummified) for burial. After mummification, the body was taken by procession to the burial site prepared for that Pharaoh in the Valley of the Kings. The mortuary temple then became the place where Pharaoh would be worshipped and venerated posthumously for years to come. Amenhotep's imposing temple, the largest of all mortuary temples, served as a visual testimonial of his status, power, and influence to Egypt, and all to the world, for millennia to come.

Though not a mortuary temple but with a similar passion for grandeur, Pharaoh Ramses II ordered the building of Abu Simbel, a striking temple cut from rock. The structure was distinguished by four huge statues of Ramses seated, ranging from 60 to 65 feet tall. The temple was oriented so that the sun's light would fall along a shaft to illuminate Ramses II's face deep in the innermost shrine of the temple on just two days of the year—Ramses' birthday and the day of his coronation.

Centuries earlier, the Great Pyramids of the Old Kingdom era (2686–2181 B.C.) were built as royal tombs, with each pyramid constructed within each Pharaoh's lifetime. In addition to being massive structures, the Pyramids were perfectly oriented in the four cardinal directions—each side facing true north, south, east, and west. They were built out of huge limestone and granite blocks with some weighing up to 5 tons each. These blocks were floated down the Nile River from quarries upriver as far as Aswan, more than 500 miles away.

Why such HUGE structures? To the ancient Egyptians, pyramids and temples were bold statements! Bigger was better, for it reflected power and prestige: No other people had the resources or engineering to match such feats. From the Old Kingdom pyramids to the New Kingdom temples of Amenhotep and Ramses, we can still see lasting examples of ancient Egypt's desire to demonstrate their strength and domination.

THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 What parallels do you see between ancient Egyptian culture and the world we live in today? In the video, George describes *barukh* (“to bless/praise”) as meaning literally “to bend the knee” and thereby make someone *bigger*. In what ways is the concept of “*barukh*” a countercultural idea? Can you recall a time when someone “bent their knee” and blessed you in this way?
- 2 Is it entirely wrong to be ambitious and want to increase—to acquire another degree, a better job, a new car? Could it be that it’s not so much the desire itself but one’s motive and how one goes about satisfying those ambitions that is at issue? Can you think of someone in the Bible who God blessed and “made bigger”? Can you think of someone who made themselves bigger, apart from the blessing of God? What are the key differences between the two?
- 3 Read, consider, compare, and discuss **Psalm 115:1–8** and **Matthew 25:37–45**. Isn’t it interesting how God created us to be image bearers and how, by our lives, we instinctively image the deity we serve? Who do we look like? One sage taught “Basin Theology” and said, “All theology can be summarized by two basins: the one that Pilate used to wash his hands of Jesus and the one Jesus took to wash his disciple’s feet.” Share your comments.
- 4 **Mark 9:33–37** contrasts the disciples’ argument over greatness with Jesus’ tender interaction with a child, pivoting on the words: “Anyone who wants to be first (literally: prominent) must be last (literally: least important, lowest in status), and the servant of all” (vs. 35). **Philippians 2:1–8** tells us that Jesus did “not consider equality with God something to be grasped” and that he “made himself nothing” (literally: he emptied himself). In what ways did Jesus demonstrate this selfless capacity to bless others by making himself small— or emptying himself? How do you feel about imitating Jesus’ example of giving up privileges you deserve for the sake of blessing others?
- 5 Jesus teaches that “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (**Matthew 20:16**). What is great about being last (small)—and small about being first? Check out **1 Peter 5:5-6**; why do you think God “opposes the proud” and values humility so highly? What is it about this character trait that makes God smile?
- 6 End your discussion today by reading **Hebrews 11:36–38**. Has this kind of faithfulness died out in the modern world, or can you still see examples of it today? How does one cultivate the faithful character demonstrated by these biblical heroes while living in today’s culture?



“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4



THE TASK

Take a moment to reflect. Are there areas of your life where you’ve been making yourself “bigger” by making others “smaller”? Perhaps you’ve been stockpiling savings for a bigger home or vacation while ignoring the financial needs of your church family or mission project. Or maybe you’re driving your children to be successful (big) as you see it, rather than guiding them along the path God has. Or perhaps you’re climbing the corporate ladder on the backs of co-workers—attempting to make yourself “big” and them “small”. All the while your family is falling apart at home.

Ask God to help you take an honest look at the momentum and fruit of your life. Let him show you where you’re striving for “bigness” has been conflicting with the way of Jesus. After all, “What good is it for a person to gain the whole world [be big], and yet lose or forfeit his very self?” (Luke 9:25).

Now, consider one way you could intentionally “bend the knee” (bless someone) the week ahead. How can you make someone “bigger” by denying yourself, by becoming “smaller” for someone else? For example: rather than trying to outdo your brother-in-laws 60” LCD you decide not to buy the 80”. Instead, you buy the 42” and donate the difference to the area homeless shelter. Is there one meeting you could skip or reschedule in order to spend time with your hurting spouse? Maybe you could give up one of those training runs this week in order to help a coworker move, even if it does end up slowing your race time?

How could you “bend the knee” in order to bless, i.e. make someone bigger outside yourself? Share this personal challenge with at least one other person, either a member of your group or a trusted friend. Agree together that every day the following week you will “make someone bigger.” When you next get together share your experiences and enjoy the smile of God.

