

# True Greatness

**Youth issue:**  
Popularity and competition

Focus Scripture  
Mark 10:35–45

PURPOSE To discern our place in God’s big picture.

## Lesson Preparation

- ❑ Read Mark 10:35–45 and the biblical background for October 17.
- ❑ Set up worship table with green cloth, Bible, candle, offering basket, and Unit 2 logo (#13).
- ❑ **Option A: (Introducing)** Bring a sheet of newsprint and a marker.
- ❑ **Option B: (Introducing)** Make copies of the activity sheet “Optical Illusions.”
- ❑ Bring copies of the Bible. *Optional:* Make copies of the activity sheet “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: True Greatness.”
- ❑ Choose the option(s) you wish to use for Integrating the Theme and make the necessary preparations.
- ❑ Print the closing prayer on newsprint.
- ❑ Check the birthday list.
- ❑ Pray for the young people as they wrestle with “being Christian” in a culture that values and rewards individual greatness.

1



### Opening

Invite a child to **light the candle** saying, “We light this candle to remind us that God is always with us.”

**Greeting, Birthdays, Offering**

**Prayer:** O God, we see that ours is truly a small world. What one person does affects someone else. Help us to reflect your vision of wholeness for creation in all our actions. Amen.

2

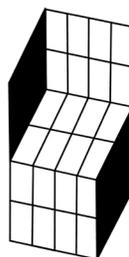
### Introducing the Theme

#### Option A: Positions of Importance

*(Invite youth to brainstorm some positions of importance in our society. Record ideas on a sheet of newsprint.)* Whom do we consider great? What “great positions” in our society do people aspire to hold? (e.g. president or prime minister, millionaire, famous actor, astronaut, business tycoon, super model, Olympic gold medalist, rock star) Who were the most important people in society in Jesus’ day? Did Jesus and his followers occupy positions of importance in their society?

#### Option B: Optical Illusion

*(Hand out copies of the activity sheet “Optical Illusions.” Take a few minutes to experiment with the examples. Invite everyone to share their reactions.)* Did you see the “hidden” images right away (or not at all)? Is it difficult or frustrating adjusting to see in a new way? Jesus spent a lot of time talking about God’s Realm to others, explaining that it wasn’t like the earthly kingdoms of their day. Sometimes it was difficult for his followers to see and understand, much like the experience we’ve just had with these optical illusions. Today’s passage is about an experience that may have helped the disciples “see” what Jesus meant.



# 3

## Exploring the Theme

### Learning by Repetition

(Recall the September 19 lesson where disciples argued about who was the greatest. Hand out Bibles. Turn to that passage in Mark 9:33–37 to refresh their memories.) What had Jesus said about greatness? (vs. 35) Today’s passage is also about “greatness.” It comes in the next chapter of Mark. Some of it may sound very familiar.

### The Request of James and John

(Turn to **Mark 10:35–45**. Ask volunteers to read the parts of James and John, Jesus, and the narrator.)

- What did James and John think Jesus’ kingdom would be like? (vs. 37)
- What were James and John asking for? (e.g. positions of importance, a reward)
- Why do you think the other disciples were angry with James and John?
- How did Jesus react?
- What did Jesus say about authority and greatness in this passage?
- What does this repetition suggest about the disciples’ understanding of greatness after their earlier argument on the subject? (e.g. that they hadn’t understood, that they still needed to be helped to understand that God’s way is different than the way the general society sees things)
- What “big picture” did Jesus suggest the disciples were not seeing? (vs. 45)
- What did Jesus mean about drinking the cup he must drink and being baptized in the way he must be baptized?
- Do you think the disciples understood the implications of this?

Note: the biblical translation *The Voice* has many passages, such as this one, arranged for dramatic reading. It can be found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

- What happened to James and John after Jesus died?

(Turn to Acts 12:1–2 and read the story of what happened to James, who became the first martyr among the 12 disciples.) The Bible does not tell of John’s death but scholars believe that it was similar to James’ death, and before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

### Our Desire for Greatness

- Have you ever experienced Christians competing for greatness like James and John did?

Describe the situation.

- Are you a competitive person?
- When is competition okay and when is it hurtful?
- Do you think being a disciple (or “follower”) today involves sacrifice or hardship? In what ways?
- Are there any rewards?
- What does our society value and lift up as greatness?
- What’s hard for you about being a disciple? If true greatness is serving others, how can our gifts be used to serve others?
- How can they be used to help God care for our world? (Take time to explore this in depth.)

(Look at the Unit 2 logo.) What symbolism do you see in it that relates to what we have been discussing?

**Option for further discussion:** Hand out copies of the activity sheet “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: True Greatness” and read the article together. Then discuss the questions at the bottom of the page.

# 4

## Integrating the Theme

### Option A: Fishbowl

**In advance:** Read over the resource sheet “Fishbowl Discussion.”

Read a scenario from the resource sheet “Fishbowl Discussion.” Invite youth to discuss it using the fishbowl technique. For a small group use the “Talking Stick” discussion process (see *Youth Teacher’s Resource Sheet*). Try to have everyone share in the discussion. Model and encourage “active listening.”

### Option B: Church Structures

**In advance:** Check for information on church structure and organization. Contact your clergy or the chairperson of your church’s official board, session, or parish council for information on the administrative structure of your congregation. Or invite someone to present this information and explain to the youth how they can get involved.

Using the information you have gathered, look at your church’s denominational and congregational structures. Discuss where these reflect the model Jesus presented to the disciples in Mark 10:42–44.

**Option C: Holocaust Month Commemoration**

November is Holocaust Month. Commemorate this or the anniversary of Kristallnacht (Nov. 8–9) by planning a group event. Here are some suggestions:

- Hold a special worship service to commemorate Holocaust Month at your church.

- Attend a service at a local Jewish synagogue or invite a guest speaker from a synagogue to your group.
- Gather at a group member's home to watch a film about anti-Semitism, like *School Ties*, *Schindler's List*, *Miss Rose White* or a documentary film.

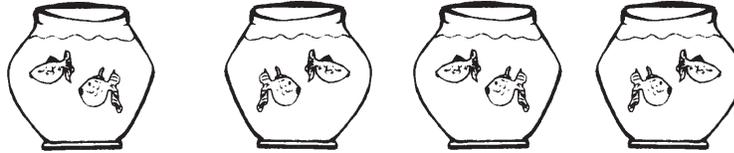
---

# 5

**Closing**

**Prayer:** Help us always to keep your big picture in mind,  
O God –  
your picture of a world at peace, a world of love,  
a world of hope, a world of caring.  
Help us share our gifts,  
and find our place in your wonderful world. Amen.

## Fishbowl Discussion



### Instructions:

Gather in a circle and ask 4 volunteers to begin the discussion. Invite them to sit on cushions in the centre (the “fishbowl”). Read aloud the following scenario and have them begin a discussion. Those on the outside of the circle can only listen, not comment. If someone wants to join the discussion they may tap the shoulder of someone in the centre and take their place. They shouldn’t tap the shoulder of someone who has joined the centre but hasn’t had a chance to speak yet. Encourage those on the outside to give the group in the centre a few minutes to discuss before replacing someone. When the discussion appears to be at a lull or conclusion, stop. Debrief using the questions provided.

Discuss the following quote from the Alliance for Non-Violent Action:

“One perceives with a strong sense of anger and sorrow the present growth in sales of war toys and video games. If our society supports this mass psychological ‘constriction’ of the young then no wonder we face the very real possibility of a nuclear war in the future. We cannot have children playing with these toys without knowing that it will have a profound effect on how they perceive the world around them.”

### Questions for Debriefing (after the discussion)

- How do you think war games (e.g. paintball), video games, or violent television shows/movies affect the way we view war and conflict? What messages about war do they convey?
- How do you think playing these games might affect people’s approach to war?
- What similarities do you see between the scenarios these games create and a “real war” situation? (e.g. the importance of appearing to be the winner, negotiations seen as “backing down,” war is profitable, technology makes killing almost “unreal,” wars are often about competition and aggression)

## Talking Stick Discussion

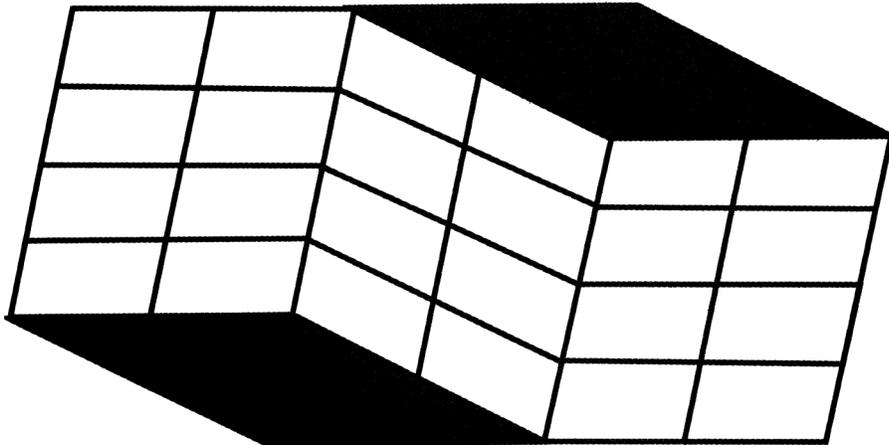
Use the same scenario, but use the following process:

The talking stick is used by many Native groups in their meetings. The rule is that the only person allowed to talk is the one who is holding the stick. No one else can say anything, including the leader. However, the person with the stick must pass it on as soon as they are finished speaking. Students may use hand motions to indicate a desire to have the stick, or the stick might be passed in order around the circle. Any interesting stick or object may be used.

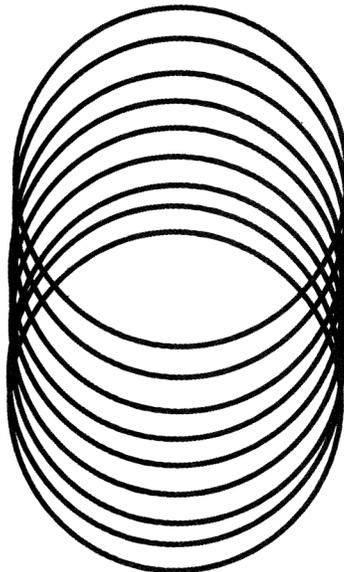


# Optical Illusions

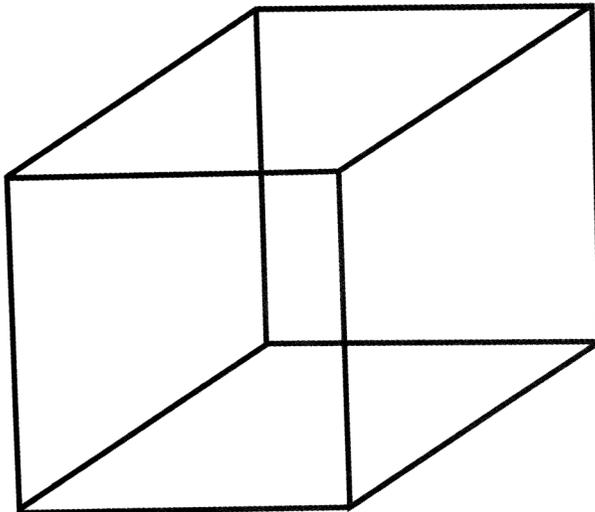
Look carefully at these objects. There is more than one way to see each of them.



1. Are the extra flaps/sides above the box or facing you?



2. Do you see into the circles from the right or from the left?



3. Do you see this cube from one end or from below?

## Dietrich Bonhoeffer: True Greatness

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau (then a German town, now Polish) in 1906. His family moved to Berlin in 1912 when Dietrich's father was appointed professor of psychiatry and neurology at the university, the leading position in its field in Germany. Dietrich was raised in an affluent, academic environment. He became a pastor in 1927 and a lecturer in theology at the University of Berlin in 1931. When Adolf Hitler began his rise to power, Bonhoeffer was one who watched with concern. In 1933, the same year Hitler came to power, Bonhoeffer published an article condemning the Nazi treatment of the Jews.

Hitler disliked Christians, saying, reportedly, "You can do anything you want with them. They will submit...they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs..." and when he became Führer in 1933, he began a campaign of persecution against the German Christian Church. Bonhoeffer became part of a small group, known as the "Confessing Church," which protested against the perversion of the Church's teaching by the Nazis (who used it to justify their persecution of Jewish people). With the Nazi State soon controlling universities, publishers, and schools, Bonhoeffer believed there was a need to train young men for the church "without Nazi contamination," so he founded an illegal seminary of the Confessing Church in 1935. During this period he wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*.

As Bonhoeffer continued his work for the Confessing Church, he spoke out repeatedly against the discrimination and persecution of the Jews. Although he knew that anyone who dared to "interfere with politics" was a target of the Nazis, Bonhoeffer continued to speak out and he implored other Christians to do the same. But after the horror of the Kristallnacht (Crystal Night), when synagogues and Jewish businesses were burned and looted, the Confessing Church lost the courage to make any more public statements. In 1939 Dietrich, who was facing the prospect of being called up for military service, left Germany for America, where he hoped he could carry on the work of his church. Almost immediately, he regretted his decision. He felt he would have no right to participate in the reconstruction of his country if he did not share in its tribulation. So he returned to Germany.

Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, who was the personal assistant to the minister of justice, had become

involved in a military plot to overthrow Hitler. He had confided in Deitrich, making him an accessory to treason – a crime that carried the death penalty. Upon returning to Germany, Bonhoeffer himself became involved in the Nazi resistance movement, working as a civilian employee of the Abwehr (intelligence bureau), relaying news about the resistance to London and carrying information back to Germany. On one of his trips to Switzerland, he was able to take a small group of Jews to safety. Plans were made to assassinate Hitler and although Bonhoeffer was horrified at the thought of murder, he knew he could not stand by to witness Hitler's annihilation of so many people. In 1943 an Abwehr conspirator was arrested and, under torture, revealed the names of members of the resistance. Bonhoeffer was arrested on April 5, 1943 and taken to Tegel Prison where he too was tortured and interrogated. From prison he wrote many letters and papers that have since been published, attesting to the strength of his convictions and his faith. Bonhoeffer was eventually taken to the Flossenburg concentration camp and sentenced to death. He was hung on April 9, 1945, a few days before the camp was reached by the advancing American liberation army.



### Questions for discussion

1. Hitler described Christians as "submissive as dogs." How do you think this relates to Jesus' commandment to his disciples that "if one of you wants to be great, they must be the servant of the rest"? How would it seem that Bonhoeffer interpreted this passage?
2. Mark's gospel was written for a people who were being persecuted for their beliefs, who were in a real sense "drinking the cup" Jesus drank. How might this passage have been comforting to them? How might this passage have been comforting to Bonhoeffer, and other Christians, during the war?
3. What similarities do you see between Bonhoeffer's story and the story of James and John?