



Scripture: Matthew 20:20–21, 24–28

Big Idea: We will use our power not to control, but to serve.

Goal: To understand how Jesus viewed power and used power.

Does anyone remember being the “line leader” in school? It might have been in preschool or elementary school. (Do they still have line leaders in middle school?) A teacher would assign a different kid to stand at the front of the line to lead other students to their destination. Whether it was to recess or art class, but the line leader job was a coveted position.

Why? Because you get to be first.

If a teacher were to say to the class, “Line up,” without assigning a line leader, it becomes a chaotic mad dash to the front of the line. There’s pushing, shoving, and “butting in” line. Toes are stepped on, bodies are bumped, and hearts are broken. That might be a little extreme, but you get the point, and you remember how it goes.

Things don’t really change when you get older. You may grow out of being the line leader, but there’s still a desire to be first. It just takes on different forms.

Like calling “shotgun” to sit in the front seat of the car. It’s just a different version of being first. But did you know there are actually rules for calling shotgun?

[Author Note: This is for fun and some crowd interaction. You might want to make slides for each rule, for the group to see. The full list of rules can be found at shotgunrules.com.]

For example ...

Rule #1.1: You must say the word “Shotgun.”

Rule #1.3: You must be outside to call Shotgun.

Rule #1.6: Shotgun may be called for one ride, one final destination where everyone gets out. It does not have roundtrip coverage.

Rule #2.1: You must have your footwear on to officially call shotgun. If you call shotgun without shoes on, you must leave your shoes behind.

Rule #2.4: If you go on a hike or do an activity outside, you must be able to see the car to call Shotgun.

Rule #2.6: If you manage to sit in the Shotgun seat before someone calls it, the seat belongs to you.

Those are so good, right? Have you ever had a moment when you called shotgun and there were only two people riding in the car? Shotgun is a game of being first. Calling it first. Getting there first. And debates often arise over who really said it, or who got there first. Isn't it ridiculous that some people will actually fight over the front seat? It's like fighting for the front of the line.

There's something special about being first. But it's not just being the line leader or calling Shotgun. Some people couldn't care less about those things. Instead, they want to be first in their class, or first choice for a date, or first place in the race, or first chair in the band, and so on. There's an expression: “If you're not first, you're last, and second place is the first loser.” Our culture places a high value on being first.

It's easy to become obsessed with being first. It's almost as if our culture, our nation, and our world are built on being first.

- There are the Billboard top 100 songs.
- There are the GRAMMYs, the Oscars, the CMAs, and the ESPYs that give out awards for top album, movie, singer, and athlete.
- There is an abundance of reality show competitions from *Survivor*, to *The Voice*, to *American Ninja Warrior*—all with the goal of being first.
- Not to mention trying to have the most likes, followers, or subscribers on social media—or at least more than another person.
- E-Sport tournaments crown the best video game players.

[**Author Note:** These examples might be best presented in image form as you list them. You can find images online, just be mindful of copyright parameters.]

All of these determine a winner, someone or something in first place. Shotgun. The line leader. In a world fixated on being first, life can feel like an unending race or competition. Striving for the front of the line or the

Shotgun seat. In a world that constantly emphasizes who’s in first, it’s easy to believe that’s what matters most.

Over the next four messages, we’re going to discuss the different ways that being first affects our lives. It’s more than standing at the front of the line or at the top of the charts—it shows up in how we use our power, words, energy, and influence. It expresses itself as who’s the strongest, who’s the prettiest, who’s the smartest, who’s the coolest. It affects our understanding of what it means to be a person.

Does striving to be first make our relationships better? Does it make our schools better? Does it make our world better? Is there a way to live without being obsessed with being first, that is actually better than being first?

The obsession with being first is nothing new; it’s been around for thousands of years. Civilizations and nations and tribes have been fighting for first place, not on the football field, but on the battlefield. The history of the world is full of kings, queens, emperors, and rulers who wanted to be first. As it is now, it was then. Being first seems to be the way of the world.

We will talk about Jesus a lot over the course of these messages. He was a real person, living in a real place, during a real time in history. If Jesus is just a name to you, these messages will help you understand who He is and what He was all about. We’d also love to help you find out more about Him, as well. Just let me know after this talk, and I’d be happy to talk more about it.

Jesus lived on the Earth when Rome ruled the known world. The Roman Empire spanned parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia. It existed for 500 years before it was eventually overthrown by another empire. They didn’t remain the most powerful empire forever, but in Jesus’ lifetime they were the power that ruled the world.

[Author Note: Show a picture of a map of the Roman Empire between the years of 27 BC and 476 AD. Free images are available at https://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Empire/ (make sure to check the permission terms).]

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