

The Path To Greatness
(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)
Michael R. Daily, December 2016

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Sometimes you will hear a speaker challenge you to “attempt great things for God”. Here is an example quote:

“We should attempt things so great that they are sure to fail unless God intervenes” – unknown

Where in the Bible does that command come from?

It turns out that it is not in the Bible! God never tells us to attempt great things for Him. Instead He tells us to obey His Word with zeal, regardless of the results.

(Revelation 3:19)

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

What does His Word say?

Mark 10:42-45

Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

But what does that mean to be slave or servant of all? How can you be a servant to 7 billion people?

What Jesus is saying here is that we need to be willing to serve all types of people. If we want to be great in heaven we must be willing to serve all the different types of people, without reservation.

Mark 9:35, 36-37

Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

³⁶ **Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”**

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He caught the disciples talking about who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus tells them that to be great in heaven you must be willing to serve any type of person. And as He is saying this, He is standing there with His hands on the shoulders of who? A child. Think about that. Two thousand years ago men did not serve women. It was unheard of. You didn't even serve your wife in public. You might serve your wife in private but you wouldn't tell anyone. Grown men serving women just wasn't done. Children? They were not even on the radar screen! So, Jesus is challenging the disciples with a new concept never heard before. If you, a grown man, want to be great in heaven you must be willing to serve any type of person, including children! Grown men serving children – that was radical! Are you willing to serve children in the name of Christ? How about the handicapped? Are you willing to serve people who are in a lower social class than you, or do you worry that if you are seen with them too long, people will assume you are also in that lower social class?

“To be a campus minister all you have to do is put your heart on the door step and let college students wipe their feet on it as they come in and out of your house”

- Roy Robertson, USN Fighter Pilot, then Campus Minister, then Missionary to China.

(Matthew 25:37-40)

Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? ³⁸ And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

But what does it mean to serve?

Serve: *to furnish or supply with something needed or desired; to wait on a customer in a store; to furnish a professional service to or be responsive to.*

We are commanded to serve God and other people.

Let’s look at the “service matrix” in the table to figure this out in more detail (draw it on the board).

First, does God have needs? No, but He does have things He wants us to obey Him in.

	Needs	Wants
God’s	N/A	Yes
My	No	No
Others’	Yes	No

(Philippians 2:19-21)

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one *e/*se of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

And although we have legitimate needs and wants, service is not about us. It is about God and other people.

In serving people, are we obligated to meet their wants? No. People have an infinite list of wants and not everything they want is a good or helpful thing. Jesus was the ultimate servant. Did He ever say no to people? Yes, He did.

John 2:23-24

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,

(Matthew 8:18)

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea.

(John 2:3-4)

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.”

Notice that Jesus didn’t always do things that people wanted Him to do. But He did things that they needed. Sometimes these things met physical needs, sometimes spiritual needs. He often did both at the same time.

People have two kinds of needs - felt needs and unfelt needs. What is a “felt need”? This is a need someone has that they are acutely aware of. For example, someone may have a shortage of food and they can feel it because they are hungry.

(James 2:15-17)

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

What is an “unfelt need”? It is a need that someone has but they don’t feel it. For example, non-Christians have a need to hear the gospel but many of them don’t know it or feel it. Many Christians need to be taught certain Bible truths, but they may not recognize that need before learning the truths.

(Matthew 5:19)

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Service is about helping people with both felt needs and unfelt needs. In both cases our motivation is to help them and do what is best for them. But we are not obligated to help them with their wants.

Servant-Leadership

The phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in “The Servant as Leader”, an essay first published in 1970:

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.”

“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”

1 Peter 4:10

As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Galatians 5:13

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not* *turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Your spiritual gifts have been given to you to enable you to be unusually effective at serving other people and meeting both their felt and unfelt needs.

Order is Important

It’s important to remember that we serve God first, then people. The Word of God and prayer, our relationship with God, has priority over other things. If serving people crowds these things out, we are on the wrong track.

Which church in Revelation had done this? The church at Ephesus – they left their first love.

(Revelation 2:1-5)

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

And what was the issue with Mary and Martha? Martha was too busy serving to spend time with Jesus, while Mary spent time listening to Jesus. Jesus corrected Martha, not Mary!

(Luke 10:38-42)

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up *to Him* and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

And in the Book of Acts, the apostles decided to not serve widows so that they could focus on the Word of God and prayer. They appointed others to meet the needs of the widows, but notice they did not allow meeting that legitimate need to push their time with God out of the picture.

(Acts 6:1-4)

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. ² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

I Timothy 4:6

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

The Path To Greatness

John 12:24-26

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

The first step is to give up on the idea that we serve based on what we want to do or need to do. Serving is about doing the things God wants us to do and helping other people by meeting needs that they have. If we are serving in order to meet some need that we have or because its something we want to do, that will not take us to a good ending.

Luke 16:10-11

"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much."¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

The quality of the job we do in little things will determine whether or not we are ready for more responsibility. If we are faithful in the serving opportunities we are given, then God can give us more. If not, there is no reason to expect God would want us to do more.

"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble" - Helen Keller

As we demonstrate faithfulness in our serving, God will move us along until we get to the area He wants us to serve in as we finish our lives. This area will be different for each of us based on our design and purpose.

Hebrews 5:1-4

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;² he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;³ and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

As you serve with faithfulness and wholeheartedness God will invite you to the next task. The invitation usually comes in one of two ways. First, people will approach you and invite you to do something that meets a need that is not otherwise being met. Sometimes, God will show you a pressing need that no one is addressing and He will give you a strong sense that He wants you to pour your resources into meeting that need.

If you were to go back to that first day when Billy Graham stepped onto the path of greatness, what would you have seen him doing? You would have seen him working with youth.

If you were to go back to that first day when Dawson Trotman (founder of the Navigators) stepped onto the path of greatness, what would you have seen him doing? You would have seen him helping mid-school boys learn how to memorize scripture.

If you were to go back to that first day when Bill Bright (founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) stepped onto the path of greatness, what would you have seen him doing? You would have seen him working with college students at UCLA.

They didn't start out to attempt a great thing for God. Their focus was to obey God and serve people with zeal. As they continued to do so with faithfulness, God moved them on to other things.

And what is the end result?

Hebrews 11:32-34, 35-38

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

As we serve God and others faithfully, God moves us along to serve in other ways, eventually doing great things for God. But wait, we haven't finished the passage. Lets continue with verses 35 to 38.

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Destitute: *lacking something needed or desirable; lacking possessions, resources; suffering extreme poverty*

In the eyes of God, both types of Christians will be great in heaven. Those who did great exploits of faith and those who were imprisoned, put to death, and forced to live in extreme poverty. In both cases they obeyed God with zeal and entrusted themselves to Him.

Conclusion

The path to greatness is not about attempting great things for God. It is about serving God's wants and people's needs faithfully and letting God decide how He wants to use your life for His glory and purposes.

Appendix – “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God”

William Carey (1761 – 1834) is considered to be the father of modern missions having spent 41 years in India with his wife and children.

He is well known for the quote: *“Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God”*

Although William Carey did many good things in service to God which we praise God for, this does not mean that everything he said and did was good and right.

King David was a man after God’s own heart who wrote portions of the Bible and was, in many ways, a good example of a godly man. On the other hand, King David was also convicted of adultery, first degree murder, and tampering with evidence. He also was not faithful to apply God’s commands for parenting in his family. We praise God for the good things God did through King David, but that does not mean that everything he did was good and right.

William Carey’s wife, Dorothy, struggled with mental illness and had other difficulties. Missiologists have struggled with Carey’s decision to begin a missionary career in the light of Dorothy’s attitude and lack of preparedness for missionary service. She did not feel called as a missionary nor did she desire to leave her familiar context. She had only just learned to read. It is unlikely that a contemporary missionary society would have accepted Carey’s domestic situation. An argument can be made that Carey may not have taken proper care of his family.

The point is that it is easy to accept a quote from a hero of the faith without asking where in the Bible it says that. Since even great men of God are fallible, we must always review the Bible to make sure what they are saying is really true and from God, and not just something that sounds good and is appealing to us.

This is why we always go back to the Bible as our source of truth and the final authority in our lives.

Missiology: the area of practical theology that investigates the mandate, message, and mission of the Christian church, especially the nature of missionary work. It is a field of study incorporating theology, anthropology, history, geography, theories and methods of communication, comparative religion, Christian apologetics, education methodology, and interdenominational relations.

Appendix – Additional Verses On Being Great In God’s Kingdom

Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.” 22 But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.” 23 He said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.” 24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Acts 19:13-16

But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.”¹⁴ Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Luke 4:42-43

When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. 43 But He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.”

Matthew 23:11-12

But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

I Corinthians 3:4-8

For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

I Timothy 1:12-13

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Luke 22:25-27

And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’” ²⁶ But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Ephesians 6:5-8

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;⁶ not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.⁷ With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Acts 20:27-30

For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Luke 6:22-23, 35-36

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.²³ Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Matthew 18:1-4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,³ and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I Corinthians 10:31-33

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.³² Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the *profit* of the many, so that they may be saved.

Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;⁴ do not *merely look out* for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Galatians 1:10

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

I Corinthians 4:1-2

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *The Path To Greatness*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Revelation 3:19*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Mark 10:42-45*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Philippians 2:19-21*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 2:3-4&23-24, Matthew 8:18*

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JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *The Path To Greatness*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *James 2:15-17*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 5:19*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Peter 4:10*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Galatians 5:13*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Revelation 2:1-5*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 10:38-42*

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JEREMIAH 15:16

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 6:1-4*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Timothy 4:6*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 12:24-26*

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QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *The Path To Greatness*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 16:10-11*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 5:1-4*

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