

The Pathway To True Greatness

How does society evaluate greatness?

By the degree of service a person receives.

The more important a person is the greater number of servants they have.

Secretaries, gardeners, employees, cars, washing machines, video cameras, TVs, etc.

Matthew 28:18 [NIV] *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

This makes Jesus Christ the greatest human being to have ever lived.

What was His concept of greatness, that He expressed in His own life?

Luke 22:24 [NIV] *“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.”*

The disciples of Jesus Christ has their own personal ideas of greatness, that conflicted with that of Jesus Christ.

Luke 22:25-27 [NIV] *“Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, **the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.** For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? **But I am among you as one who serves.**”*

Jesus Christ who was by far the greatest tells them that He came to serve.

Luke 22:27 [NIV] *“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? **But I am among you as one who serves.**”*

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth He will serve those who have learnt to serve now.

Jesus Christ is the greatest human being that will ever live, because He is the greatest servant who ever lived.

What are the “stepping stones” to greatness?

A right motivation

Do you realise that some people serve others only to get something from them for themselves.

- a) Some people just enjoy serving, it brings them pleasure. It is **not** wrong to enjoy serving, but we need to understand we could be doing it **only** for the pleasure it brings us.
- b) Some look on serving others as an “*exercise in righteousness.*” It makes them feel good, they feel they are pleasing God, and therefore feel superior to others who do **not** serve.
- c) Some people simply serve to get a position of prestige, to impress others, to be well thought of by others.

Such people are really only serving themselves not the other person who needs their help.

Matthew 6:1-4 [NIV] *“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have **no** reward from your Father in heaven. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

What then is the right motive for serving?

Simply stated, an outward concern for others, away from self.

Philippians 2:20-21 [NIV] *“I have no-one else like him, **who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.** For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”*

Talking about Timothy who served others not because it was his job, but because he cared deeply for other human beings.

Romans 9:1-3 [NIV] *“I speak the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For **I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,**”*

Here was a sacrificial love for others that was beyond the natural human capacity for love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 [NIV] *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing.** If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, **but have not love, I gain nothing.** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

Whatever the act of service, many are listed in this scripture, if it is **not** done for the right motive, love for the person receiving this service, *“we have gained nothing.”*

Romans 12:9-21 [NIV] *“**Love must be sincere.** Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **Share with God’s people who are in need.** Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: **“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

A long list of love in action, that is love translated into acts of service.

When we serve other people we have to ask ourselves the question “am I serving to really help the other person or just to boost my own ego?”

What then is true service, the pathway to true greatness?

John 13:1 [NIV] *“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. **Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.**”*

Jesus Christ gives us a graphic example of what real service is. In the face of imminent painful torture and death, Jesus' concern was for the welfare of others.

John 13:4-8 [NIV] *“so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, **he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” **Jesus replied, “You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”** “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”*

This was not a “put on”, but a genuine act of concern for the comfort and welfare of His disciples.

Note the disciples did **not** really understand what Jesus was doing.

It was **not** until after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that they understood what Jesus had done.

Why was this?

Only when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit could they love other people as God loves us, in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love...”*

A God-given love through the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Greek word translated “love” is “*agapé*” meaning a spontaneous love, irrespective of the rights or response of the person receiving this love. **A sacrificial love where the selfish desires are sacrificed in order to show this love to others.**

Without the Holy Spirit joining with our “human spirit” we cannot generate love such as this.

This is a love that motivates us to **give ourselves** in service of our fellow human beings, **not** for what we **get** but what we can **give** in happiness and fulfilment to others.

2 Timothy 4:16 [NIV] *“At my first defence, no-one came to my support, but **everyone deserted me.** May it not be held against them.”*

Here was an example of supposed Christians who lacked “*agape*” love in their lives.

Today even a carnal willingness to serve other people is fast disappearing.

Matthew 24:12 [NIV] *“Because of the increase of wickedness, **the love of most will grow cold,**”*

A society that is full of evil and violence causes us to become reluctant to serve other people.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 [NIV] *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be **lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of***

the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

The word translated “love” in the scripture is **not** “agapé” but a natural human love like that of brothers and sisters in the same family only.

A form of hypocritical “Christianity” with **no** indwelling of the Holy Spirit to show real godly love for other human beings.

True service is only the end result of being a vehicle in the hands of the Creator God, who is the source of “agapé” love.

1 John 4:15-16 [NIV] *“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”*

Only God, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can generate “agapé” love in us.

Romans 5:5 [King James] *“... because the love of God [“agapé” love] is shed abroad in [Greek “en” meaning living within but also directed outward] our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.”*

John 7:37-39 [NIV] *“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. **Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.**” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

Jesus was expressing the same as Paul would later.

The Holy Spirit will **not** stagnate in us, He will only flow through us in the form of loving acts of service to others.

Let us pause to savour this great principle and privilege:

Since Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of the Father after His resurrection God has purposely limited Himself to expressing His great love for humanity through us, you and I.

Why?

To enable us to learn and experience serving others as God serves all humanity, with “agapé” godlike love.

Vital qualities of effective loving service

1. Service begins small

Humans naturally like to start anything with a “big splash” to impress others and boost their ego.

God shows us a different and better way.

Matthew 13:31-32 [NIV] *“He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”*

The mustard seed principle, this is the way that God is building His kingdom, His created family.

Zechariah 4:10 [NIV] *“Who despises the day of **small things**...”*

The context is Zerubbabel building the spiritual temple of God.

Luke 16:10 [NIV] *“**Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.**”*

God tests our handling small things before He offers us larger responsibilities.

This is a basic principle for any good management.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 [NIV] *“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) **He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.**”*

All of God’s ministers [servants] have to learn an attitude of service **before** they are given any responsibilities of leading God’s people.

2. Where does service begin?

With physical duties at home or at work.

Mark 9:41 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”*

Such a simple act of service is **not** overlooked by God.

Philippians 2:25-30 [NIV] *“But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because **he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.**”*

Dedicated service providing the physical and financial needs of the apostle Paul.

1 Kings 19:21 [NIV] *“So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then **he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.**”*

Elisha provided the physical needs of Elijah before he was given spiritual leadership by Elijah.

3. Behind the scene

Matthew 6:1 [NIV] *“Be careful **not** to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*

It is so easy for humans to just “*mention in passing*” the service we have been involved in.

We need to be eager and willing to do the type of job that is **only** noticed when it is **not** done.

Colossians 4:12 [NIV] *“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always **wrestling in prayer** for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”*

Prayer is an outstanding example in God’s eyes of serving behind the scene.

4. Not a respecter of people

We all enjoy serving people we like or important people in our community.

Real service is towards those who can never repay us for an act of service.

James 1:27 [NIV] *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to **look after orphans and widows in their distress** and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

Here we see an act of service to those who cannot repay us. God calls such service a true act of worship.

Humanly we avoid unpleasant situations such as death, tragedy in a family, disablement, we tend to feel awkward, **not** knowing how to approach such a situation.

Luke 14:12-14 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, **invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.** Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

Service must be people-orientated, and part of our normal “day-to-day” life.

Matthew 25:40 [NIV] *“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”*

When we read this statement in context we will see that this service had become so much a part of their way of life that they did not realise it was something special.

We need to keep our eyes constantly alert to those who could benefit from our help.

5. Sacrifice

Opportunities to serve seem to always come to us at the most inconvenient time.

We feel we are:-

“Too busy” ... “unable” ... “not right now.”

Philippians 2:5-7 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**”*

Jesus Christ is the supreme example of sacrificial service. He emptied Himself of His own desires and position in order to serve others, that includes you and I.

Self-sacrifice is a major key to effective service.

6. Above and beyond

There are three kinds of people in this world.

- a) Those who don't serve others at all.
- b) Those who serve others only when they "feel" they have a duty to do so "because of their position in life."
- c) Those who go "over and beyond" in serving other people.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 [NIV] "For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, **they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.**"

Begged to be able to help those in need even to their own hurt.

Luke 17:10 [NIV] "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

The profitable servant is the one who is **not** a "clock watcher."

Note this was said by Jesus Christ in the context of increasing our faith.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 [NIV] "Whatever your hand finds to do, **do it with all your might**, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."

The context is now **not** some future date, it is also with joy [see **v9**].

7. Service does not stop

Even when the response from those we are serving is **not** what we would like it to be.

Romans 12:20 [NIV] "On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Service that is done in "agapé" love never gives up.

The term "heap burning coals on his head" means that even the hardest, metal-like, attitude will eventually melt under an influence of loving, sacrificial service.

Galatians 6:9 [NIV] "Let us **not become weary in doing good**, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

The reward we will receive is to be given the opportunity to serve in a greater way for eternity.

Matthew 10:39 [NIV] "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and **whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**"

If we lose our life in the service of others, we find real life.

We all need to make these keys to service a part of our life now, and God will give us a great life of service in His eternal created family.

Loving service is not only a way to become great, it is being great.