

Break Out of Mediocrity

When my husband and I went out to dinner recently, we were served by an extremely helpful waitress. This woman seemed to anticipate our every need; she even suggested an item that was not on the menu.

Throughout the evening, she served us with both joy and efficiency. She made our evening so pleasant that the next time we went to that restaurant, we requested her as our waitress.

In a society in which mediocrity has become the standard, she distinguished herself by her excellence.

In the same way our waitress rose above the crowd, believers in Christ should strive to shine as lights in the world's darkness.

Unfortunately, too many believers are content to just get by; they don't try to reach for the greater things God has for them. They're satisfied to live mediocre lives.

Jesus spoke against this kind of mediocrity in Matthew 5:46-47 when He said: "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?" (NKJV).

Anybody can love someone who loves him. The question Jesus asked was: "What do you do more than others? Where do you exceed expectations?"

Our call as believers is not only to love others but also to love others more than the world expects. It's when we take the extra leap to love and forgive our enemies—not just our friends—that we step out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary.

Reaching for More

The Bible is full of stories of people who chose to live their lives at more than a mediocre level.

Moses is described as a man who was more humble than any other man on the face of the earth. Nehemiah is described as a faithful man who feared God more than others did.

John the Baptist is described in Scripture as more than a prophet. And the Bible says that Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness more than His companions.

All of these were “more than” people—people who would not, could not be satisfied with the ordinary or the usual. Consequently, each of them was used by God in an extraordinary way.

Joshua 7 tells the story of the Israelites going off to conquer the city of Ai after their great, supernatural victory in the city of Jericho. In the afterglow of Jericho, they felt confident that Ai could be defeated with a minimum of fighting men.

But there was something they didn’t know. At Jericho, a man named Achan had disobeyed God’s directive to destroy everything in the city. He had kept for himself a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold, thinking no one would know.

Isn’t it silly to think we can hide something from God? Because of Achan’s hidden sin, the Israelites were routed when they went up against the men of Ai. Approximately 36 Israelites died as they fled before a weaker enemy.

Distraught after the defeat, Joshua wept before the Lord. Then he cried out a question: “Why couldn’t we have settled on the other side of the Jordan?”

“Why couldn’t we have been satisfied with just enough? Why did

we have to take a risk for something more?"

The answer is actually quite simple: It wasn't in Joshua's spiritual nature to settle. Though Joshua's carnal nature would have been content with a level of mediocrity that required less effort and sacrifice, he was, deep in his spirit, a "more than" person.

The Bible says that whenever Moses worshiped at the tent of meeting, Joshua would linger in the presence of the Lord long after Moses left (see Ex. 33:11). Joshua wanted more of God. He could never have settled on the other side of the Jordan because there was still more land to be conquered for the Lord!

"More than" people cannot resist the challenge of increasing their territory. Remember The Prayer of Jabez? The widespread acceptance of that little book by Bruce Wilkinson showed that its message struck a chord deep in the hearts of believers.

Many of us began to pray diligently for God to increase our territory. But perhaps we didn't really understand what we were praying.

To increase your territory, you have to take it from the enemy. You have to fight for it! You can't settle for the status quo.

God's kingdom is an ever-increasing kingdom. The very nature and essence of His kingdom requires increase.

For us, the people of God, the challenge to enlarge the place of our dwelling and expand to the outermost bounds is intrinsic. It's who we really are! As Romans 8:37 says, we are "more than conquerors."

God has placed the desire in our hearts to excel, to increase our territory, to pursue something greater. And when we do that, we become more like Him.

After all, He is Jehovah-Jireh, the God who is more than enough. His love for us is extravagant; He lavishes us with His grace and mercy; He calls us to abundant life. He desires to bless us more than we could ask or think.

Big Dreamers

Of course, frustration can plague those who desire to exceed expectation. When “more than” people dream, they dream big dreams. Oftentimes they do not see the complete fulfillment of those dreams.

When I served as a pastor at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, I noted that Oral Roberts had a sign on his desk that read, “Make no small plans here.”

I marveled at the grace God gave him to build a university and a hospital with the help of God’s people. He was a simple man of faith who believed in a big God.

Some of Oral Roberts’ dreams have yet to be fulfilled. But thank God he decided to dream big! As a result, God has been able to do many great things through his life and ministry.

Three qualities distinguish “more than” people such as Oral Roberts from the rest of the crowd:

“More than” people are people of action. This world is full of dreamers who are observers. But you must take action to bring your dreams to fulfillment.

During nearly 25 years of ministry, I have had numerous people give me suggestions for “good” things we should be doing as a church. Interestingly enough, their suggestions have almost always resulted in more work for me or my staff—while requiring nothing of them.

I love to dream with dreamers, but there comes a point at which you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and work to become part of a dream’s fulfillment.

“More than” people love to dream it and do it. They look for opportunities to do ordinary things in extraordinary ways.

Several years ago I was part of a planning committee for a women’s retreat. I was excited about the opportunity to impact women for God.

After a few weeks, one of the women resigned from the committee, saying: “All I want to do is have a meeting. Shirley wants to have a production! This is too much work.”

I know there are times when activities need to be streamlined and simplified. But I’ve often found that God is in the details.

One of the projects I suggested was to print a scripture on individual ribbons to give to each woman. Yes, printing and preparing the ribbons did require more work—but after the retreat, many women said that this little gift was one of the most significant blessings they received that weekend.

“More than” people have a can-do attitude. Our God loves to use impossible situations to prove His power and strength. He is constantly looking for people He can entrust with the impossible.

The story of Gideon is a perfect example. Though we tend to think there is strength in numbers, God’s view is completely opposite.

When a large army of Midianites threatened Israel, the Lord said to Gideon: “‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying “My own hand has saved me”’” (Judg. 7:2).

Through a series of qualifying tests, God reduced Gideon’s army from 32,000 to 300—then sent him off to fight. Gideon’s army was severely outnumbered, yet God led them to victory.

Like Gideon, “more than” people have learned that their strength does not lie in their own ability, but in the supernatural ability of God. Their attitude is, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

They are can-do people because they know God is a can-do God.

“More than” people have an all-or-nothing nature. Once when Jesus was teaching in the temple, He observed a poor widow putting her meager offering in the temple treasury. Knowing that she was giving all she had to give, He commended her before His disciples (see Luke 21:3-4).

Certainly, the rich people in the synagogue gave their offerings in greater quantity, but this woman gave hers in greater quality. Throughout the Scriptures, this kind of wholeheartedness is the mark of a “more than” person.

Abraham left everything familiar to follow God to a new land. He even put his son Isaac on the altar out of radical obedience to God’s word.

Ruth gave up everything to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi. The disciples left their livelihoods to follow Jesus.

All of these “more than” people had an all-or-nothing nature when it came to the things of God. Their hearts cried out with the psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Ps. 103:1, emphasis added).

A Place of Greater Faith

The question Joshua cried out to the Lord after the defeat at Ai is the same question many of us ask: “Why can’t we just settle for less, live in mediocrity and be satisfied with what we already have?”

Our answer is the same as Joshua’s: It’s not in our spiritual nature to settle. God has placed in us a desire for greater things—a desire that reflects His own character.

As Ephesians 3:20 says, God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (NIV, emphasis added).

Increase and enlargement call us to a place of greater faith. Let’s take that step and become “more than” believers.

The kingdom will be established as we take by force all that belongs to our God.

Read a companion devotional.

Shirley Arnold and her husband, Steve, are pastors of TLC Family Church in Lakeland, Florida. They have also established The Spirit Life School of Theology, The Secret Place Associated Network of Ministries and The Secret Place Training Facility. She is the author of several books and ministers in churches and conferences around the world.