

What Is the Secret of True Greatness?

I need to admit something embarrassing: I've always wanted to be famous—to be great in the eyes of others. Despite the fact that I know many famous people live miserable lives, the longing has never gone away.

It first erupted in my early 20s, when I wanted to be a recording artist. Being born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee, it seemed like the perfect opportunity. I wrote songs, recorded them, and got a well-known producer to mix the tracks, but it didn't go anywhere. You can't find me today in the iTunes store!

Yet the ache to be famous still remained. It next surfaced in the ministry when I daydreamed of hundreds listening to me preach. Then it came out again in my work as a high school Bible teacher—wanting to be known as “The Teacher” by my students.

Finally as an author, I succumbed to the notion that having my books read by thousands was the greatest of all goods in life. I suspect every man has his own daydreams about fame and greatness.

I always knew this desire was at some level wrong, yet trying to push it down or ignore it never worked either. Then one day I read these words from Jesus: *“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all”* (Mark 10:43-44).

Here's the background: The disciples had been incensed over the request of James and John to sit at seats of honor next to Jesus. They all believed He would ascend to be the new King of a restored Israel, and they wanted a share of the greatness and power.

Imagine being close friends with a political leader or a famous movie star, and you can begin to feel the pull yourself. What is so instructive is that Jesus doesn't squelch the idea of greatness. He just points out a new route to it: by serving those around you. The desire to be first, to be great, is not criticized or suppressed. He just points out a different way—by taking the lowest position and lifting everyone else up.

In every man there is a seed of greatness, for we are made in the image of a great God, whose very presence is impact, whose very being is great. This is what the Bible calls glory, and the Hebrew word for glory means heavy or weighty. It's the glory we were meant to bathe in as men, feeling weighty, significant, and great.

But in our fallen state, we have lost that glory and now live in shame. Yet the longing for glory still remains in us—aching to matter, to be weighty enough to impact. We all wonder, *Does my life matter? Is there anything worthwhile noticing about me? Am I really significant or just invisible in the larger scheme of things?* Without an answer from the true Source of glory, the longing quickly mutates into an obsession with fame and status, a compulsion for rank and power, and a demand to be noticed.

But Jesus here gives us the true answer to our longing: we become great by honoring the greatness in everyone else.

Here there is such rest in the humble service of others, no longer jockeying for power, obsessing over our reputation, and constantly comparing ourselves with others. Augustine once noted that in going down through humility, we find ourselves going up into glory. We also become more like Jesus, for His unsearchable greatness lies precisely here: He honored the greatness in all of us by going down, all the way to the cross, and dying for us. We are worth that much to Him.

How do we start this journey to become truly great? We start by letting Jesus serve us as we allow ourselves to be quiet before Him. Here we will begin to feel noticed and affirmed by Him as His brothers, even great in His eyes. We will start to feel glory again, so we don't have to go around scavenging for it. Instead, we can now turn our hearts to others, serving them and making them feel great.

This was the secret of Jesus' greatness, surely the greatest man in history. It's the secret of our greatness also. {eoa}

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