

## **Called to Greatness – Humility and Earnestness**

*Main point - To achieve greatness, we must walk in humility. Only then can we have the proper view of ourselves according to God's perspective and how it fits into God's plan.*

Good morning! I'm so glad and honored to have the privilege of speaking with you this morning.

God has stirred the pot here at ACC. It has been happening for sometime as God has breathed new life into this congregation, has caused leaders to rise up, and has brought numerous mature believers into the mix. He has caused the leadership to look at how we can better fulfill the mission and calling of the church which is "to make disciples".

One of the things Kirk talked about a few weeks ago was that the church needs to be made up of missionaries. Not ones that travel abroad, though some will, but ones that live their everyday lives like missionaries here; seeing opportunities at their jobs, in the stores, in their neighborhoods to share the good news.

God has a calling on each of us and that is good news! But it also means that none of us are called to just come to church and be blessed. I want to encourage us this morning that each of us is called to be great in the kingdom of God! I believe that God is calling all of us to be great. Not just a few, or the leaders, but every believer is called to be great. You are called into his kingdom for a purpose and a reason and we should not stop short of pursuing greatness for the Lord.

Now not everyone is great by the world's measure.

You may think that you are nothing special or that you are just along for the ride, but no matter who you are God wants to move in you and through you for his glory. I titled this talk "Called to Greatness" with the subtitle "humility". You may be thinking, what was that? The reality is that unless we start with true humility and earnestly seek the Lord, we will never be great.

### **So how do we define greatness?**

God defines greatness not by the size of our accomplishments, but by the depth of our service.

*Mark 10:42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*

A key ingredient in true greatness is the attitude of true humility.

Who do you think of in history who exemplifies a godly greatness? Especially as it relates to the area of humility?

Some may first think of Mother Theresa...

- Sister Teresa became a nun at 21 and began teaching history and geography in Calcutta at St. Mary's, a high school for the daughters of the wealthy. She remained there for 15 years and enjoyed the work, but was distressed by the poverty she saw all around her.
- In 1946 (at age 38) Teresa traveled to Darjeeling for a retreat. It was on that journey that she realized what her true calling was: "I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve him among the poorest of the poor."
- It took two years of preparation before she was able to begin doing the work she felt compelled to do. She also prepared by taking a nursing course.
- In 1948 Sister Teresa set aside her nun's habit – adopting instead the simple sari and sandals worn by the women she would be living among – and moved to a small rented hovel in the slums to begin her work
- Teresa's first year in the slums was particularly hard. She was used to a life of comparative comfort, and now she had no income and no way to obtain food and supplies other than begging. She was often tempted to return to convent life, and had to rely on her determination and faith to get herself through it.
- One of her first projects was to teach the children of the poor – drawing on her experience with teaching the children of the rich. She didn't have any equipment or supplies this time, but she taught them to read and write by writing in the dirt with sticks.
- In addition to promoting literacy, Teresa taught the children basic hygiene. She visited their families, inquiring about their needs and helping provide for them when she could.
- Word began to spread about Mother Teresa's good works, and soon she had other volunteers wanting to help. By 1950 she was able to start the Mission of Charity – a congregation dedicated to caring for "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone."<sup>1</sup>
- She continued this work until her death at age 87

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legacy.com/news/explore-history/article/20-facts-about-mother-teresa>

Though humility might not be the first thing you think of when you hear his name, another great example of how humility made someone great is that of George Washington.

- Wealthy – practically a billionaire by today’s standards
- Tall and handsome, always well dressed
- Accomplished as a soldier, leader
- In Washington’s early haste to achieve greatness, he sometimes let his ambition outpace his virtue.
- “An essential part of his greatness was his effectiveness in winning the ongoing battle against his own flaws, chief of which was his urge to aggrandize himself at the expense of others.”<sup>2</sup>
- The less his ambition was about his own fame, the more he deserved the honors he received.
- Quickly he ascended in status, accomplishment, and rank. An important aspect was that his decisions weren’t just about his personal success, but also that of the whole nation. Keeping his pride in check was a matter of momentous consequence.
- Abigail Adams said that “if [Washington] was really not one of the best intentioned men in the world, he might well be a dangerous one.”
- Not once but twice, Congress granted Washington the powers of a dictator, yet he exercised the greatest restraint to remain submitted to the authority of the congress.
- Compare this to Julius Caesar, who saw himself as indispensable to Rome and sought and obtained the title of dictator for life.
- After the victory at Yorktown and the end of the war Washington’s first concern was that Congress would pay the army what they were owed, which he called a debt of honor.
- He retired voluntarily after 2 terms as president despite those who wanted to make him king of America. (There were no term limits at that time.)
- He knew his purpose was greater than himself!

So in these two great historical figures we see very different expressions of their callings, but both were humble and obedient servants of the Lord for his purposes. Mother Teresa lived a humble life among the poorest among us, and in so doing raised awareness of the world’s neglected population among a generation. Washington fought for and then preserved the ideas of constitutional liberty, first and foremost religious liberty, which enabled the rise of the greatest nation on earth. Regardless of your political views, America must be viewed positively in history as a nation that has promoted a freedom to lift generations out of physical poverty while enabling the proclamation of the gospel to relieve generations of spiritual poverty.

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<sup>2</sup> “Humility: An unlikely biography of America’s Greatest Virtue”, David J. Bob

## **What is humility?**

Humility is much maligned trait often thought of as weakness or low self-esteem, but it is nothing of the sort. Humility is about having a proper estimation of oneself in accordance with God's word.

*Rom 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

So humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking properly of yourself. Quoting C.S. Lewis, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

Humility exalts the mind by making it subject to God.

Another word which we don't hear much is magnanimity, which is to have the right estimation of one's worth even when one's worth is great. George Washington displayed this in that he wasn't afraid to take on the job of leading the armies of the revolution or being our first president. But yet he also understood that to create something bigger than himself, it had to be about more than himself. He knew that what they were trying to create was a system of government that was more than just the leaders themselves.

A quote from *Humility: An unlikely biography of America's Greatest Virtue*, David J. Bob:

"Someone truly great will not be a glory-hog. And no one truly great can claim that he did everything in his life all on his own. On the contrary, the truly great person will be a servant. No less committed to excellence in everything, and still dedicated to the highest achievements, the magnanimous man as servant can accomplish even more than when he tries to do it alone."<sup>3</sup>

## **How do we identify pride?**

So let's talk a moment about the opposite of humility, which is arrogance or misplaced pride. Arrogance distorts our view of ourselves, making us out to be more than we really are in our own estimation. We live in very arrogant times. Technology makes us feel powerful, but it is sort of an illusion. Media and advertising convince us that we are all deserving of royal treatment.

Jesus said

Luke 14:11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus tells us that humbling ourselves is a an active process, something that we need to take care to do. Becoming arrogant happens gradually, and must be guarded against.

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<sup>3</sup> "Humility: An unlikely biography of America's Greatest Virtue", David J. Bob

Arrogance deadens the conscience. It must be guarded against with true humility and true compassion.

Steve Gallagher details 7 manifestations or expressions of arrogance. Perhaps one or more of these will be identified in you.

1. **A haughty spirit** – Do you often think you are better than others? Smarter, harder working, more talented. The more highly we think of ourselves, the farther we distance ourselves from God. Remember that the Lord will not endure a haughty spirit.

*Ps 138:6 Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.*

2. **Self-protective pride** – Are you defensive or easily offended? Do you put up walls to keep from being hurt? This type of self-isolation is a form of pride and self-reliance because you are trusting in yourself and not trusting in God to use even your hurts for the good.

*James 4:6 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

3. **Unapproachable pride** – Do you hate to be corrected? Or do you welcome the input of others? We must view correction as beneficial rather than an attack. Mother Teresa suggested that you should be thankful for a rebuke, even when it is wrong.

*Prov 9:8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.*

4. **Know-It-All pride** – Are you gifted, knowledgeable, able to do anything? Do you feel like it is easier to do things yourself rather than ask someone else? The danger here is you begin to discredit others and think they have nothing to teach you. Humility builds a team even when you don't think you need others.

*1 Cor 8:1 Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*

5. **Self-Exalting pride** – Do you like to be the center of attention? Being noticed? Getting lots of likes on your social media posts? Is it important for you to know that people love you? You need to learn to quietly work for the Lord and let him do the promoting.

*Prov 27:2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.*

6. **Unsubmissive pride** – Do you think you could do better if you were in charge? Do you always question authority? Do you think you should only hear from God

directly and not from man? We need to remind ourselves that God has placed those who are in authority over us and submit to them.

*Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

7. **Spiritual Pride** – Are you poor in spirit, or holier than thou? Do you see yourself as spiritual compared to the carnality around you? This kind of pride is very sneaky and I've seen it trip up many.

*Rom 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

*Rom 12:16 Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.*

## **Learning to walk in humility**

**God will sometimes take away those things which give us pride. He will make us empty from our accomplishments, or our status or position.**

Personal comments...

But God is quick to forgive and heal when we turn to him. God is very interested in our personal holiness. He is inclined to knock down our pride in order to help us find the true life that comes from humility in him.

**How do we combat the natural, human fleshly tendency towards arrogance?**

1. **First we need to remind ourselves that God is the creator of all things.**

*Ps 95:6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

2. **Realize that one day everyone will bow before the Lord.**

*Romans 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*

3. **Recognize God guides and saves the humble.**

*Psalms 25:9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*

*Psalms 18:27 You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.*

4. **Remember God esteems the humble who tremble at his word.**

*Isaiah 66:2 Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. 3 This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*

**5. Make a conscious effort to put others ahead of ourselves.**

*Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

**6. Follow the example that Jesus has given us, who willingly laid down everything to obey his Father to serve and to save.**

*Phil 2:5-11*

*5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

*6 Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

*7 but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death-  
even death on a cross!*

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

This of course should be our biggest motivator. That God himself was willing to give up every right and comfort afforded him to humble himself for our sake.

**Humble people among us**

Think of some of the people God has put in our congregation and how their humility has been essential to where we are today.

**Kirk and Paul.** 8 or 10 years ago, Kirk knew that God was calling him still to be a lead pastor. He knew he needed to launch out again to pursue the vision he was given by God to plant regional churches in this area. But he did not allow the greatness of this vision to embolden him to force his way back as the lead pastor of ACC, which was being lead by Paul. So he sought the Lord and looked for what God would have him do. Paul had known he was called to lead ACC for a time, and he knew God was moving him on. He

didn't let his own status factor in to his decision, but graciously stepped aside so Kirk could take over. And those who know the whole story know Paul has had a topsy-turvy last several years, and now to hear he has in his heart to lead the new church plant and help to raise up an establish a younger leader...wow. Both of these men are great, but without a true heart of humility, none of this could have happened.

**Traits: ability to understand the times and situation they are in and make difficult decisions with ease.**

Final word – we must seek the Lord with an earnest and humble heart. God is calling us to be great. For all of us that means being willing to humble ourselves and be obedient to the calling God has on our lives. You might be someone who is not exceptional by the world's standards, or you may be someone with many gifts and abilities. Regardless of who you are take it serious the calling God has on you to greatness in the kingdom of God. Humble yourself and seek the Lord, become the great man or woman of God you are called to be.