

**Forward in Greatness**  
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How many of you want to be great? I know a lot of you are hesitant to answer because you think it's a trick question! So - here's the dictionary definition of "great" to help you out: Great means "first rate, very good, outstanding, remarkable."

If you don't want to be great that means you want to be second rate, not very good, mediocre, unremarkable. I don't believe many people want to live a second-rate unremarkable life.

I sure don't believe that God wants that for you. In fact, I believe God has created you for greatness. Deep inside you there is a God-given desire to make a difference. So – believe it or not – God wants us to be great. In fact, I'll show you in a minute where Jesus told us how to be great. Now – how many of you want to be great?

We are in a sermon series called Forward and the title of my sermon is Forward in Greatness. The world's way to achieve greatness says, you need to do whatever it takes, step on or over whomever it takes, promote yourself however it takes, and give yourself to your job for whatever time it takes. But God's ways are not our ways.

I did a study on greatness this week and saw that Jesus gave us three keys to greatness in God's kingdom. Matthew 5:19 says:

*Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

One way to be great in God's kingdom is to do and teach God's word. Matthew 18:1-4 says:

*The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

The second key to greatness is to become childlike. Not childish – but childlike. There's a difference.

The third key to greatness is found in Mark 10 where the disciples were arguing about position in God's kingdom. In verses 44-45 Jesus said:

*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

Notice that Jesus did not say we should not desire to be great.  
He did not say greatness is bad or wrong.  
He does not condemn those who desire to be great.  
Instead, He tells us how to be great.  
He says, "If you desire to be great, here's what you do."

### **1- To be great in God's kingdom, we must first become servants.**

This does not come naturally to us because we are born selfish. A newborn baby does not come home from the hospital asking, "How can I help around the house." A baby's world revolves around themselves and their needs. That's okay for a baby – but not so great for a 30-year-old still thinking the world revolves around them. Not wanting to help around the house. They don't want to serve – they want to be served!

And there are many people in the family of God with that same attitude.  
They don't want to serve. They want to be served.  
They don't want to give. They want to receive.  
They don't want to minister to others. They want others to minister to them.  
They don't want to help around the house of God.  
They want everything to revolve around them.

But to grow up, you must become like Christ. To grow up, you must put away childish ways and become God-centered and people-centered rather than self-centered. To grow up, you must become a servant.

Serving is not natural to us so we need a good reason to motivate us to serve. Our motivation for serving must be to serve God and obey His word in the power of the Holy Spirit. If you are not serving as unto the Lord, you'll never be able to do it for very long. Because, if you are just serving people, they will eventually do something to cause you to not to want to serve them anymore!

Here's how you know if you have the heart of a servant: by the way you react when you're treated like one. Do you get an attitude when someone treats you like a servant?

How many times have you thought or said, "I work my fingers to the bone for this family or this company or this church, and what thanks do I get?" Is that the way it is? Your service was for thanks?

I've learned that true servanthood begins where gratitude and applause end. True servants serve for the sake of serving – no matter who sees, no matter if they are thanked – because they know God sees and God will reward.

## 2- **Jesus is our example of how serving leads to greatness**

If you're not sure how a true servant thinks and acts, the Bible gives us the perfect example of a servant: Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:5-9 says:

*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. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name...*

Why did God exalt Jesus? Because He humbled Himself and became a servant. And if we want to become great, we must first become a servant. Before we can become great, we must become more like Christ!

It's interesting how much time and energy we spend trying to make ourselves something, but Jesus made Himself nothing.

We want to promote ourselves; but Jesus humbled Himself.

We want to fulfill ourselves; but Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father.

We want to be served; but Jesus became a servant.

And Jesus showed us how a servant acts. On the night He was betrayed He got a towel and a basin and washed His disciples' feet – which was one of the lowliest acts of serving imaginable. John 13:3-5 tells us how Jesus was able to take the role of the servant.

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around 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 around Him.*

Jesus could take on the role of a servant because He knew who He was. He had nothing to prove to anyone. He knew where He was from and He knew where He was going.

When people who don't serve or minister – it's usually because of 1 of 2 reasons: either they see serving as something beneath them or they see ministry as something above them.

But Jesus showed us that:

A servant puts others before themselves.

A servant sees needs and meets needs.

A servant does not care about who gets the credit, but what gets done.

A servant cares more about doing what's right than their personal rights.

## 3- **We are saved to serve**

Some people say we are saved to go to heaven. Others say to not go to hell. I understand both of those things are true in an eternal sense. But were you saved for anything in the here and now? I believe God saves us for a purpose more than where we spend eternity.

You were not saved just to go to heaven! You were saved to serve. Galatians 5:13 says:

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

God did not put you on earth to live a self-centered life. He put you on earth to serve. In fact, I believe God created you to make a difference on this earth with your life. How do you make a difference? The same way Jesus did. Mark 10:45 says:

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

Jesus came to serve. Not to be served. Do you want to be like Jesus? Then SERVE SOMEBODY. DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEBODY.

Too many people think I've got to have a big name or a big ministry to make a difference, so they do nothing. What a lie of the devil. We are all called to be ministers. Whenever you use your talents, your abilities, your experience, your time, your energy to help somebody else and you do it in God's name; that is serving. The Bible has a word for that. It's called 'ministry.'

It's interesting that the New Testament word for minister is the same as the word serve. Now – I realize our first ministry is to the Lord. I know we ultimately serve God, but –

#### **4- One of the main ways we serve God is by serving other people.**

Hebrews 6:10 says:

*For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and how you have shown your love to Him by caring for other believers.*

We love and serve God by loving and serving people. And contrary to popular opinion, everybody is a minister. Not everybody is a pastor, but everybody is to serve using the abilities they have. Now there are different ways of serving. Some serve tables, some serve the word, but all serve. According to Ephesians 4:11-16 our job as leaders is –

*...to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of*

*God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

The job of the 5-fold ministry – including pastors – is to equip God’s people to serve. God’s church grows when every part does their part!

When God’s people do their part - the church is built up and believers grow up! You will never achieve the greatness God intends for you until you begin serving! And the church will never achieve the greatness God intends for us until you begin serving!

Lack of serving will stunt your growth and the church’s growth!  
Serving is an expression of love for God and people.  
Serving is an act of worship.  
Serving is one way we become more like Jesus.

So – how do we serve God by serving people? First, we serve the word. The most important thing we can do for anyone is tell them about Jesus!

The next greatest thing we can do for people is to pray for them. Most people in America are open to prayer and I believe God loves to show Himself strong by answering our prayer on behalf of unbelievers. Praying for others can open doors to share Jesus with them.

We can serve people by investing our time in them. Time is a valuable commodity in our culture – so when you spend time with someone – it means a lot to them and shows you care.

We can serve people by building them up with our words. Most people are used to being put down – so it means a lot when someone praises them and encourages them.

We can serve others by meeting practical needs. We can serve others by inviting them to church. We can also serve at church. God has gifted you for a ministry in the church. Not just me or the staff or the leaders – but you. And many people are waiting for you to become the person God created you to be!

I want to teach you today about The Principle of the Chain. This principle states that between Jesus and a person who needs Jesus is a chain. Every link in that chain represents someone who served in some way that led that person to Jesus.

We tend to think they came to Jesus because someone preached. But I want you to see that there is more than 1 link in that chain. Someone prayed, someone witnessed, someone invited them to church. And when they got to church - someone greeted them, someone ushered them, someone taught their children, someone was on the praise team, someone cleaned the church.

There are a lot of links in that chain and every link is important!

A lot of what we do in life doesn't really matter. It isn't going to matter next week much less next year or in eternity. But any time you're serving in Jesus' name, no matter how small, it matters. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says:

*Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort.*

In God's eyes, there is no little service. He said, "Even if you give a cup of cold water in my name to a child, that counts."

All service matters. You see the fact is with our limited perspective, we can't see how our small acts have big consequences, but they do!

Years ago two teenage boys tried to come into a church service that was packed out and they couldn't find any seats. So they turned around and decided to leave. But one usher said, "Come on, guys. I'll find you a seat." And that usher personally escorted them down to the center and found them two seats.

That night both of those boys accepted Christ and became Christians. One of them was Billy Graham who has now led millions of people to Christ. Do you think that usher is going to get any credit in heaven? I'll say! We have no idea of the significance of small acts of service.

So never belittle the little because it's all important. Real servants do every task with equal dedication because they know it all matters – whether it's seen or unseen.

Have you ever wondered why you're here at GFC? I'll tell you why. God did not bring you here just to sit and soak and enjoy. He brought you here to serve here.

I make no apology in saying to you that 1 of the most important things you'll ever do with your life is serving God in ministry. It's far more important than your career, than your hobbies, it's more important than everything else you can think of because they aren't going to last. But this is. You were put here on earth to serve.

So, here's the question. How will God use you?

When you invest time in the church – you reap a harvest in eternity.

When you invest money in the church – you store up treasure in heaven.

When you invest your talents and abilities in the church – you serve God and you serve people and God invests back in you!

Serving affects our lives and the lives of the people around us. When you develop the heart of a servant, it results in greatness in your life and in the lives of others.

So I want to challenge you to start serving and you will become great in God's kingdom.

God's ways are higher than the world's ways!  
The world says that to move up you must walk all over people.  
But God says to move up you must lay down your life for people.

The world says that to move up you must sacrifice your family.  
But God says to move up you must sacrifice yourself for your family.

The world says to look out for number 1.  
But God says look out for others.  
The world says, "Destroy your opposition."  
But God says, "Love your enemies."  
The world says, "Promote yourself." But God says, "Humble yourself."  
The world says, "Rule others." But God says, "Serve others."

This is how great our God is!  
When you humble yourself – God will exalt you!  
When you lift others up – God will lift you up!  
When you bless others – God will bless you!  
When you give to others – God gives to you!  
When you serve others – God promises to make you great in His kingdom!  
That's how you do what the Psalmist said – "Serve the Lord with gladness!"

I'm asking everyone to respond to this message today by doing this:  
We're asking you to pray about how you can serve God and serve people.  
We're asking you to use your God given gifts to help others.

Now – you might not know all the opportunities to serve here.  
Or – you might not know your spiritual gifts.  
But we can help you with those things.

You can go to our website and find a spiritual gifts test.  
Ministry opportunities are also on the website and our church app.  
For more teaching on using your gifts to serve – go to Right Now Media and watch Matt Chandler's series: Gifted for Love.

We're asking you to be like Jesus, to be a servant, to put others first.  
That's how we touch heaven and change earth!  
That's how you go forward in greatness in God's kingdom!