

***I SHALL RAISE THEE UP***  
Ancient Principles for Lasting Greatness

Michael Holmes



## WHAT IS GREATNESS



*“They started arguing over which of them would be most famous. When Jesus realized how much this mattered to them, He brought a child to His side. ‘Whoever accepts this child as if the child were Me, accepts Me,’ He said. ‘And whoever accepts Me, accepts the One Who sent Me. You become great by accepting, not asserting. Your spirit, not your size, makes the difference.’” [1]*

**“Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.”**—William Shakespeare,  
*English poet and writer*

**T**he definition of greatness is as varied as the people who use it. One definition may be to rule a nation while another definition may be to be a good father, husband, worker, and responsible citizen. Who’s to say either is wrong? But in spite of the different definitions there is one thing that characterizes true greatness: service. **To serve is to be great.** Paul when he talks about greatness and service says, *“Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk*

*your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.*" [2] It is that helping "others get ahead" mentality that births true greatness. True greatness is not becoming great at the expense of others but rather at the expense of self; finding ways to serve the needs of people **and make them better**. We were all meant to be great because we were all meant to serve.

Of course such greatness comes at the expense of personal sacrifice, but when the history books are written, it's these people that stand out among the anonymous. It's these people that become examples to us. **There is only one problem with greatness**—and that is when a person decides to live **beneath** their definition. There's something wrong with having a level five potential but living at a level one or two. You were meant to be great!

There's a song that really emphasizes, in my mind, what true greatness is:

"If I can help somebody as I travel along,  
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song  
If I can help somebody from doing wrong,  
My living shall not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a good man ought,  
If I can bring back beauty to a world up wrought,  
If I can spread love's message, as the Master taught,  
Then my living shall not be in vain." [3]

### **Seeds of Greatness**

The great God Who formed you placed in you seeds of greatness—not the fruit but the seed. Whenever God gives anything He communicates it in seed form— whether it's a

talent, an idea, or even His Word. “*Here is another illustration Jesus used: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.’*” [4] **All great things begin in seed form.**

But understand this: even though God supplies the seed we’re all responsible for producing the fruit. Ultimately we’re all accountable for how we handle His investment! “*It’s also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master’s investment.*” [5] Notice it was the **servant** who went to work and “*doubled his master’s investment.*” The story continues with the first two being profitable and the master promoting them. But the third servant simply hid his master’s investment and gave it back to him—every cent of it! Needless to say the boss wasn’t thrilled with that: “*The master was furious. ‘That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least?!’*” [6]

Again, there are seeds of greatness inside of you and they need to be cultivated! Paul spoke about it when he said, “*We have this treasure from God, but we are like clay jars that hold the treasure. This shows that the great power is from God, not from us.*” [7] In other words, “There’s something in me, that’s so much greater than me, that I know it couldn’t be from me.” You were meant to be great!

### **Quantitative vs. Qualitative Greatness**

Greatness is broken down into two categories: qualitative and quantitative. It’s possible to be quantitatively great

and not qualitatively great, and vice versa. The differences are as follows:

- a. **Quantitatively Great—the external appearance of greatness.** In the eyes of many this would be money, prestige, power, and the like.
- b. **Qualitatively Great—the internal attributes of greatness.** These would be the character traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. [8]

It's possible for someone to have both, just one, or neither. In my opinion, its commendable if one aspires to possess both; however, if you had to choose between the two—be a person of quality. A person with more quality than quantity can still enrich the lives of many. A person with more quantity than quality is like a bounced check—they give the appearance of wealth but inside they're broke! In fact, God is more concerned about your inner person than He is your outer person: *“What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition. Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in.”* [9]

Stephen Covey breaks greatness down in a similar fashion: **primary greatness** and **secondary greatness**. Over the past few years the world has witnessed the devastation as honesty, integrity, and the like were substituted for quick gain, lying, and deceit. Covey in a recent interview, delved deeper into his definitions of greatness and the effect their neglect had on the world at large:

“Financial success—prestige, wealth, recognition, accomplishment—will always be secondary in greatness. Primary greatness is about character and contribution. Primary greatness asks, What are you doing to make a difference in the world? Do you live truly by your values? Do

you have total integrity in all your relationships? And when correct principles are not followed or ignored, the results can be catastrophic as we have witnessed the past year in the financial markets.” [10]

### **You Become Great for Others**

The Bible says, “*David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom **for His people Israel’s sake.***” [11] You were meant to be great, but know this: that greatness is not for you—it’s for those around you. When God truly raises up someone He does it for the sake of others. The Queen of Sheba understood this. She heard about the wisdom of King Solomon and went to see if the reports were true. When she herself heard his wisdom, saw the palace he built, his wealth, his servants, and the worship services she was breathless. “*She said to the king, ‘It’s all true! Your reputation for accomplishment and wisdom that reached all the way to my country is confirmed. I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it for myself; they didn’t exaggerate! Such wisdom and elegance—far more than I could ever have imagined. Lucky the men and women who work for you, getting to be around you every day and hear your wise words firsthand! And blessed be God, your God, who took such a liking to you and made you king. Clearly, God’s love for Israel is behind this, making you king to keep a just order and nurture a God-pleasing people.’*” [12]

The talents you have, the tests you’ve been through, and the resources you’ve been given were never meant just for you. Life was designed in such a way that whatever we give away we gain more of and whatever we hoard we lose. Solomon spoke about this when he said, “*There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered*

*himself.” [13] People of greatness understand that they’re born for others—their greatness lies in helping others to become great. They “die” so that others can live. Jesus said, “Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.” [14]*

**If You Don’t Understand the Lesson, You Won’t  
Pass the Class**

**“Hear me brothers and sisters, He is not a respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of principles. It doesn’t matter who you are, God is no respecter of persons but He is a respecter of principles. And if you don’t learn the principles regardless of who you are as a person He will keep sending you back to the first grade until you master the principle.”—T.D. Jakes [15]**

Imagine a school in which God is the Teacher of every grade and every subject. In this school are students from all around the globe—all cultures, colors, races, sexes, languages, and the like. He doesn’t give out variations of grades (no A’s, B’s, or the like) just a green P (Pass) or red F (Fail). Any student who doesn’t pass His class doesn’t go to the next level or grade. The next level represents greater knowledge of the subject and as a result greater responsibilities. Some students in His class are older than the rest because of being forced to repeat the class. Despite the calls from parents, the uproar of the community, and the anger from the students themselves He has refused to just “pass”

them through. “Until they truly learn My lesson,” He says, “they will never pass My class!”

### **Tim and Billy**

The classrooms are similar to each other: giant blackboard in the front, teacher’s desk on the right, 28 identical desks grouped in rows of 7, lockers in the back for students, a larger locker for the Teacher, a row of windows on the left, a clock above the lockers behind the students, and a big wooden sign above the blackboard with an inscription: **to know something is to do the thing one knows**. The Teacher would often point to the sign and say to the class, “If you learn this and apply it to My lesson you’ll have learned My lesson.”

Now in one particular classroom there are two boys who have repeated the grade a multitude of times: Timmy Teachable and Billy Satisfied. They both came into the class at the same time and because the two have spent considerable time together they’ve become good friends. They’re also the silent laughter of the class (silent because they’re much older than everyone else...and as a result much stronger). It breaks the Teacher’s Heart to see them come back year after year especially since He knows the potential in each of them. But though His heart breaks with compassion His rule remains inflexible: pass and you’ll be promoted—fail and I’ll see you here next year.

At the beginning of this particular year Tim meets with Billy:

“Billy, I’m tired of this. I’m tired of failing this class,” Tim says. “We know His lesson inside out and I can’t understand why we’re not passing.”

“Yeah I know. Why doesn’t He just pass us already...I’m tired of being here. He just likes to see us suffer. It’s His fault why we’re still here.”

“Nah...that can’t be it...you know He’s not partial. Maybe...maybe...it’s something wrong with us.”

“Us?? Nah man! Something’s wrong with Him. I even went to ask Him what’s going on. All He kept saying was ‘Billy you have so much potential...it breaks My Heart to see you here’ blah, blah, blah. Then He said something... what’d He say again...He said ummmmm...Oh yeah... ‘live what you learn and you’ll learn what you’ve lived.’”

“What was that last one?” Tim asked with piqued curiosity. “‘Live what you what?’”

“Why what happened??” Billy asks curiously, unable to see the truth before his eyes.

“Just say what He said again!”

“He said, ‘live what you learn and you’ll learn what you’ve lived.’”

“Billy, I think that’s it!! Maybe...He doesn’t want us to just know the lesson but to *know* it,” Tim said. He’s still unsure of what he’s stumbled on but he knows it’s something. “Like I said....maybe the problem’s not with Him... maybe it’s with us?”

“Tim, the only problem we have is a Teacher who doesn’t want to pass us,” Billy said flatly. “Nothing’s wrong with us, we know what He’s teaching, we can handle the added responsibilities...although I’m not sure if I want to...He just doesn’t want to pass us.”

“Listen why don’t we try to work harder?” asks Tim with a gleam in his eye. “Let’s ask those who’ve passed what they did, what He wants, and let’s just do it!! It may, you know, be a bit harder but I think if we really focus on it, work on ourselves, try to practice what He’s teaching...I think we can get it done. Come on man, I think we can do it.”

“Do extra work?’ ‘Work on ourselves?’ I’m not sure if I’m with that. I mean I don’t like this whole thing...but that just seems like too much. Nah, I’m not with it. I think I’m just gonna complain some more, maybe get my folks involved, you know maybe they can push His Hand a bit. Maybe I can just get the answers from one of the smart kids?”

“Please Bill we can do this man! We can do it together!”

“Listen Tim you do it your way and I’ll do it mine.”

And with that Tim is true to his word. He starts by asking those who’ve passed what they did. At first he expects no one to help—he was willing to deal with a couple of rejections, but is shocked to find that those he asked were more than willing to help! They saw his eagerness and sincerity and wanted to assist. They remembered what the Teacher told them when they passed. As Tim grew in knowledge his habits changed. Everyone in the class begins to notice the difference in Tim including Billy.

### **The Grade**

It’s now the end of the year, and the Teacher hands out the grades. His practice has always been to hand out the grade and ask the student to leave. He knew giving it in the class would tempt those who passed to look down on those who failed, and those who failed to envy those who passed. After some time the only two students left in the class are Tim and Billy. The Teacher stands up from His desk, walks over to them, and addresses them both:

“You know how I’ve labored with both of you to learn My lesson. I know both of you have potential, talents, dreams, and so forth but **no one** graduates from My class just because they have potential. Only by learning what I teach will anyone pass My class.” With that He hands both

of them a folded sheet of paper, turns around, walks to the door, and motions with His Hand, “Good day gentlemen.”

The two boys glance at each other, get up, walk down the row of desks, walk past the Teacher, walk into the hall, and hear the door close behind them. It’s the last day of school so the hallway is practically empty except for a few students walking towards the exit.

“I can’t take the suspense anymore,” says Billy. With that he opens his paper and finds a red “F” in the middle of it. He reads the comments from the Teacher—the kind he’s received year after year: “‘smart...potential...learn My lesson and you’ll pass this class’ blah, blah, blah. Oh well, the work’s too hard in the next grade anyway, too much responsibility. Who needs it?! Open yours Tim!”

Tim looks at the paper and his heart flutters as he opens it. In the middle of it is a big green “P.” He reads the Teacher’s comments to himself—‘great improvements...I knew you could do it...you’ve learned this lesson...don’t forget to serve...be ready to share the truth with those who want to know....congratulations.’

Billy is shocked as he looks at the passing grade! He looks at Tim, looks at the paper, grabs it out of Tim’s hand, reads the comments, and looks back at Tim. “What? You passed? No, that’s a mistake! You cheated didn’t you? Yeah, that’s it you cheated!! That’s not fair!!” By this time the hallway is deserted and all they hear is the echo of Billy’s last comment.

“I didn’t cheat, Billy.” Tim started. “I simply learned what He was trying to teach us. I...we...could’ve learned this years ago, but we refused to be taught. I just didn’t want to go back in that class again.”

“No you cheated, that’s the only way you passed. You think you’re better than me now don’t you? Don’t you?!”

“I’m not better than anybody and I didn’t cheat,” Tim said a little more angrily. Realizing his tone and seeing the

despair in his friend's face he brings it down a notch, "Look Billy, I'll be more than willing to show you what I did, so you can get out too. If I can do it so can you."

"Nah that's ok," says Billy as he hands back the sheet of paper. "I don't need to go to that next grade anyway. I'm used to it here. Besides I'll find new friends. I don't need to hang out with cheaters anyway." Billy breaks away from Tim and with a quicker pace walks toward the exit.

"Please Billy," Tim pleads. "I'll be more than happy to help you."

"Thanks but no thanks." Without even looking at Tim, Billy gives a wave with his hand. "Catchya later, cheater!"

Billy never did graduate from that class and never did understand what the Teacher wanted. He made new friends and together they found multitudes of people to blame for where they were. Tim, on the other hand, continued his ascent and went on to do greater things. What Billy failed to realize was that the Teacher wasn't looking for knowledge of the lesson plan, but obedience to it. Both Tim and Billy knew what the Teacher taught but only one was willing to apply what he learned. And so it remains: to pass His class is to learn His lessons through obedience.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*"How excellent are the Lord's faithful people! My greatest pleasure is to be with them."* [16]

- 1.** What is your definition of greatness?
- 2.** Who can you help make better? Who can you serve?
- 3.** What is stopping you from cultivating your seeds of greatness? Fear? Doubt? Indifference?

- 4.** Are you focused on being quantitatively great or qualitatively? What is the proper perspective to have?
- 5.** What lessons do you need to learn to pass the Teacher's class? What has stopped you thus far?