

## Life Lessons from the Psalms

### Choosing Great Over Good

#### *What Would You Consider a Great Life?*

Over ten years ago a group of men from Warm Springs Church drove down to Southern California to attend a church growth conference led by the renowned Pastor Rick Warren. Pastor Rick had achieved world-wide fame for his best-selling book, The Purpose Driven Church. We didn't make the trip to have some bonding time as men. It wasn't so that we could take in L.A. and enjoy the sights. We went for one purpose. We felt that Warm Springs Church was a good church that we all loved but we wanted it to become a great church. We hoped that the advice Rick Warren had and the strategies he used could help us lead Warm Springs Church into the future. We did not want to be a good church but rather a great church. Greatness is not for everyone, and most would prefer not making the changes necessary in life for greatness. You might be sitting on the fence and question whether greatness is attainable or if it is worth the effort. You may even wonder what sort of greatness you should chase. In this message I will share a way of thinking about greatness from a Biblical perspective as well as three broad categories for you to choose to begin going after greatness. Our big idea is simple. Choose great over good whenever you can.

Psalms 86 is in a sense God's resume. It provides us with a perspective on God that sometimes we overlook. **Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.** (Psalm 86:8-10 NIV) What a beautiful take on the Lord we have come to love and serve! What stands out is the acknowledgement of how wonderful and magnificent God is. But consider this. If God is great and we are made in God's image, it would seem that there is greatness to us also. Obviously not at the level of our Lord, but greatness, nonetheless. Why then not pursue greatness rather than be satisfied with goodness only? God clearly does not settle for goodness in Himself...He does what is great. Why should we, as His children be satisfied with good when greatness is possible?

Let's consider examples of the contrast between goodness and greatness in the Bible. Orpah, loving her mother-in-law Naomi and weeping over Naomi leaving Moab was good! Ruth, the other daughter-in-law of Naomi refusing to let Naomi leave on her own and in fact embracing the Lord God Naomi worshipped was great. **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.** (Ruth 1: 16 NIV) David's brothers, when they joined the army of Israel and King Saul and took their places on the frontlines, that was good! However, when David challenged the giant Philistine Goliath and fought him in front of the Israelite army, that was great. **David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.** (1 Samuel 17: 45 NIV) King Hezekiah, refusing to surrender to the huge Assyrian army that surrounded Jerusalem was good. King Jehoshaphat, leading the tiny army of Israel in battle against the vast combined forces of the Ammonites, Moabites and the Edomites having at the front of his army nothing but musicians and singers praising the LORD in worship was great! **Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever."** (2 Chronicles 20: 20-21 NIV) When Martha managed the organization of a feast for Jesus and His disciples, that was good! But when Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened carefully to every word He spoke, that was great! **"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."** (Luke 10: 41-42 NIV)

There are those who might argue over good and great, what is good versus what is great, but generally we know greatness when we see it. The standard of excellence is set when we decide if Christ is Lord or not. If He is our Lord, then everything we do is done for Him. **Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,** (Colossians 3: 23 NIV) So whether you are cooking or brushing your teeth or working on an assembly line, the quality of your effort is a statement of how much you value God every time. We rarely think this way but it is only because we struggle to keep Christ as the center of our lives. Devotion to Him comes and goes based upon the

degree to which we keep our mind on Him. There are three clear areas where God expects greatness of us and they are beautifully described in the Bible by Jesus. First you are to be a great servant. **Not so with you. Instead, 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.**" (Mark 10: 43-45 NIV) Being a servant is more than a full-time job and greatness in God's Kingdom is determined by how well you serve others. If our standard here is Jesus, which clearly it is, then the limit to how far you go on this is the full measure of your life. Moses is a legend, not because of the power he attained but by how terrifically he served both God and the Hebrew people. One particular aspect of this comes to mind. In his 80s, Moses met with the people of Israel morning to night to settle disputes and explain God's law to individuals. In fact it got to be so much that Moses's father-in-law had to get him to slow down. **Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.** (Exodus 18: 17-18 NIV) Moses was a great servant!

Second, develop great faith in Christ. A Roman centurion came to Jesus begging Him to heal his servant. When Jesus offered to go to the centurion's home to work that miracle, the centurion insisted that Jesus not make the trip. He knew that all Jesus had to do was say the word where He was and the servant would be healed. **When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.** (Matthew 8: 10 NIV) Why can't you shoot for that sort of faith? Of course it is possible. The centurion did not have all the resources you have at your disposal. He didn't have the Holy Spirit living within nor the Scriptures that give a full picture of what Jesus Christ has done. You have the great filling of God enabling you to go much higher in your faith than the centurion thought possible. Here is a glimpse at how your faith could look if you pursue great over good. A believer prays for each person she sees when she goes about her day. If she comes upon someone who seems upset or sad or afraid, she prays for that person. This believer is convinced that when she prays for someone, God will bless that person and bring hope and peace. You could be that one, combining faith and love together every opportunity you get. Paul insists that of all the things you might do in life, putting faith and love together is your top priority. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** (Galatians 5:6 a NIV) Increase the audacity and boldness of your praying and watch your faith in Christ grow and the power of your prayers increase.

Third, make great prioritizing. Look for the pearl of great price. Jesus said this. **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."** (Matthew 13: 44-46 NIV) Make it a priority each day that God's Kingdom is the first thing for you. Before you get far in the day, let Christ know you care most about what matters to Him, and you want to seek the glory of His Kingdom. Then do whatever you know the Bible wants done. God will lead you. I love the account of the two unnamed disciples who were walking on the road to Emmaus when all of a sudden a stranger came alongside them and chatted with the two. This was of course the first Easter Sunday, and it was only much later they realized it was Jesus going with them. Why is that not you? You go about your day and if you are alert to the ways of God, you may realize it is Jesus with you in what you are doing. Here is our Big Idea. Choose great over good whenever you can. And remember, you are not alone. God is working in you and through you as you go along.