

Walking in Our Divine Assignment: How to be Successful

INTRODUCTION

I'm going to talk about walking in our divine assignment. Every believer has been given an assignment in his or her life from the Lord. He or she has been given a ministry. Now when I think of ministry, I don't mostly think of an outreach from a church org chart. I'm talking about our assignment in life that involves being a witness for the Lord, serving and encouraging in every station of life: much more than just the traditional idea of ministry.

GOD INVITES EVERY SINGLE BELIEVER TO BE GREAT IN HIS KINGDOM

I have written here in paragraph A that, "God invites every single believer to be great in His kingdom." Jesus said this in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:19. He says, "Whoever does and teaches the commandments of God shall be called great in the kingdom of God" (Mt. 5:19, paraphrased). Whoever does and teaches the commands shall be called great in the kingdom.

Now we can't repent of our longing to be great, because we were created and designed by God with this longing in our spirit. When some people hear about greatness, they think, "Oh no, I want to be humble." And so they want to repent of this, but we can repent of pursuing it the wrong way. But we can't repent of the longing itself, because God put it in us.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GREATNESS

Paragraph B. Now there's a lot of pain, a lot of confusion, a lot of disillusionment related to what greatness is and what success in life is. If we get wrong ideas about what greatness is and how we're to pursue it, then we get a whole lot of pain and confusion in our lives about it. And so it's critical that we understand what the Bible says about this subject, and that we approach it in a biblical way.

"WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT"

Paragraph E. In Matthew 25:21, Jesus gives us one of the clearest definitions of greatness found anywhere in the Bible. He makes this statement which is absolutely loaded. He says, "'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Mt. 25:21).

Now the biblical definition of being great is found in doing God's will, obviously, but we will all stand before the Lord on the last day, and Jesus is giving us insight into how we're to live now, and in the very process of doing that, He defines what success is, and He outlines in this sentence what our life goals are to be.

Let's look again at verse 21. On the last day, our hope is that He would say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Now each of these words is filled with meaning. We'll look at them all in paragraph F. To be good means that we have set our goals in alignment and agreement with the Word of God—that our goals are right and our motives are right. And Jesus affirmed this to the man on the last day. He said, "You were good."

Now we don't just one day wake up and our goals are good and our motives are good. These three virtues that Jesus describes here, "Good," "faithful," and, "servant," are intentionally pursued and sought after. We're to

make them an object of pursuit, but the Lord has every intention of giving us the grace to walk out these three virtues if in fact we seek and want them. And they don't come automatically; they come as the fruit of an intentional, diligent pursuit.

And so, again the first virtue is *good*. The idea is that our goals and our motivations are in line with what the Word of God says. And, to put it in its simplest form, that would be the two great commandments: to love God and to love other people. Being good is not naturally one of the primary goals of our life. We can choose to be good, and then we lose sight of it. Then we sign back up and we can choose it again. We lose sight of it; then we sign back up again. So virtue number one is to be good.

The second virtue—because there are three of them that He lays out here—is to be faithful. Now to be faithful means to be diligent. And it's not natural to be diligent, anymore than it is to be good; none of these three virtues are natural. They're pursued; they're sought after. We ask God for help as they become a focus in our life, as we're diligent with the work that God has given us. Now diligence, or faithfulness, means to follow through. We've set our intentions to do good, but now we have to follow through. We have to add diligence, faithfulness to it. I find that once I get the goals clear, I'm going to walk in love for God. Then the next challenge is the follow-through, to stay with it. That's what diligence means, and that's what faithfulness means: to stay with it in the face of pressure, to stay with it in the face of temptation, difficulty, mundanity, to stay with this spirit of diligence. It really takes the grace of God, but we have to seek it in order to walk in that grace. It doesn't happen automatically.

A FAITHFULNESS ATTAINABLE TO WEAK AND BROKEN PEOPLE

Now the good news is this: that even the best of the faithfulness we offer to the Lord over the years is flawed, just as our love is flawed. But the Lord understands the human frame, and therefore His evaluation is human-friendly. It's a faithfulness that's attainable to weak and broken people. The point is, it's doable. I so appreciate the way that God edits our life through the grace of God. I mean, don't you appreciate that when He evaluates your life, He has that editing process called "the grace of God"? Faithfulness, diligence, sticking with it through the years, is essential, but it's not so out there that no one can attain to it. It's within reach of people like us. So it's a human-friendly definition of faithfulness and diligence, but again, it isn't natural. It has to be pursued.

The third virtue that Jesus outlines is the virtue, number three, of being a servant. Now being a servant speaks of the willingness to deny our own personal agendas and actually to serve the agendas of other people. Over the years I've heard the statement, "Well, those guys just have an agenda."

I say, "Every human being has an agenda. It's intrinsic to being human." If you're waiting to relate to those who don't have an agenda, you'll never, ever relate to anyone. Yes, they have an agenda. But having a servant spirit means that we actually deny our own agendas. Not all of them, but there are times where we do that in doing the will of God, and we actually serve the agendas of other people in a way that doesn't come back and touch us in our life circumstances. I mean, we really serve them for the sake of serving them.

THE ASSIGNMENT IS SMALL, AND THE ASSIGNMENT IS DIFFICULT

These are the three virtues here in paragraph F: to be faithful, to be good, and to have a servant spirit. We're not going to read the parable, but basically, Jesus defines two challenges. He says, "Pursue these three virtues," and He's calling us to pursue them in the context of two challenges. And the first challenge is that our life and our

ministry and our assignment are small. That's a challenge, because people basically want a big impact and a big ministry and a big assignment. But it's small.

And the second is in verse 24, which you can read on your own. The second challenge is that the assignment is difficult. The man who buried his talent was disobedient. He complained to the Lord that it was too hard: "What You gave me to do was too hard. You're a hard man. It was too difficult; I didn't want to do it" (Mt. 25:24, paraphrased).

And so the Lord gives us this challenge in life to develop these three virtues, good, faithful, and servant, but in the context of two challenges: when things are small and when things are hard.

Paragraph G. Top of page 2. Here's the stumbling block to pursuing this greatness. Because the greatness is found in walking in the grace of God to be good, to be faithful, and to be a servant. That's how the Lord defines greatness. That's where greatness is attained: by walking in the anointing of God, the grace of God in our character to choose good, to be diligent with it, and to walk in humility in context of the good that we have chosen.

Now the stumbling block here, in paragraph G, is that it's in the context of smallness and difficulty. I've told the Lord over the years, "Lord, I'll be diligent and humble after it's big and easy." And by nature we're willing to be diligent if what God gives us is big, if it's important, if others recognize it and affirm it. Then we'll really be diligent. But it's hard to be diligent with an assignment, with a ministry that no one else even knows exists, that no one else appreciates; where the only One who actually sees it is the Lord. Now when our assignment is small, it's really easy to lose diligence and to become passive. But the issue is this: that for 99 percent of the people, the assignment is small. And so that's where the challenge is: to continue in diligence and humility with the smallness and the difficulty.

Now again, I've told the Lord, "Make it big and I'll be diligent and humble. Make it easy and I'll really go hard after it."

But the Lord's answer is the opposite: He sets us in the perfect situation in our life, in a context that would form us for greatness in the age to come. He says, "I've given you the exact assignment that's tailor-made for your giftings, for your personality."

God has given each one of us very specifically a certain set of abilities and capacities—mentally, physically, emotionally, financially. Every person has a specific assignment that's based on the capacities that God has given us in those ways. Now, that assignment isn't ours just so we can impact other people, though it is for that as well. But that assignment is also the perfect setting for us to be formed so that we can enter into the full capacity and destiny of our greatness in the age to come. When a lot of folks think about their life assignment, they only think of how it impacts someone else. But the truth is that your unique assignment in life is also the training ground to form you. It isn't just how you'll touch others, but it's how God touches you in the context of that exact situation.

So the Lord puts before us these three virtues. Number one: He says, "I want you to choose good." Number two: "I want you to choose faithfulness or diligence." Number three: "I want you to choose a servant spirit."

Make these the goals that you pursue. And as you pursue them, I'll give you grace to attain these virtues in your character. If you attain them, I'll declare it to you openly on the last day."

Now He only declares us good, faithful, and servants because it's true, because it's been formed in the life of an individual who's intentionally sought these three virtues in his or her life. But again, the challenge is found in the fact that the context of our assignment is difficult and small. And this makes it far more challenging. And the reason the Lord does that is because, as we pursue these three virtues of goodness, faithfulness, and servanthood, in the context of difficulty and smallness, it forces our eyes to look upward, to live before God's eyes. Because it's hard and small and difficult, the eyes of men aren't looking at us. They're not recognizing or affirming what we're doing. The only way we can stay humble and faithful and diligent in the process is by the acknowledgment that God's eyes are connecting with us.

PEOPLE WHO ARE AIMING TO BE GOOD, FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Paragraph I. Some years ago, I really locked into this passage. I found this was a key to living a life of success. Because remember, it's success from God's point of view. Our culture tells us that success is the recognition we have or the possessions we attain before men right now. But beloved, that's not what the Bible says. The Bible makes it clear that success is when those three virtues are formed in our life to such a degree that in a spirit of truth on the last day, the Lord declares them to us because they're true about us. It isn't just being affirmative; He's actually speaking the truth about the way we lived on the earth.

Now, the good news about landing these three goals in our life is that it creates an anchor, so to speak, in our soul. Meaning, what are we doing in life? What is life about? What are we supposed to be accomplishing? When we lock in to these three goals, it gives us an anchor. It settles us, because we know these are what God wants us to go after. We know that these are the keys to our ultimate success, and they're actually a part of our identity in our relationship with the Lord. He wants us to view ourselves as people who are aiming to be good, to be faithful, and to have a servant spirit.

Now, we get this anchor in our soul when it's established in our heart.

In other words, we're clear about what we're doing on the earth. We're not just meandering around in life, trying to figure out something to do that's important. We know exactly what it is: it's developing these three virtues in our life.

These virtues aren't related to anything we can outwardly accomplish that others might see. In other words, you can develop these virtues and never have a ministry impact that anyone ever recognizes. But you can still develop these virtues in your life.

THE DIGNITY OF THE SMALL WORK THAT GOD HAS ENTRUSTED TO US

Paragraph K. Now, Jesus corrects the idea that our work only matters if it impacts many people. Let's read Matthew 25:21 again. "You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt. 25:21).

Ordinarily, we think that if big things are happening in our life, then our life is important. But Jesus cuts across this whole issue and says, "Even if you were faithful in a few, in a very few things, you have done well." In other words, that's the sphere He's given us. Almost everyone in history has only been given a few things by

the Lord: our sphere is small; our impact, our gifting, our influence is small. But that's not an accident. It was meant to be that way.

Let's read number one here under K. We have been given few things. It's the perfect will of God that most of us have only a small assignment. I'm talking about 99.999% of the human race. It isn't a penalty, but a strategic plan to position you in just the right way, yes, to make an impact on others, but also so that your heart might be formed in such a way that when it's all over and you stand before the Lord, you have greatness and success in your life. What the Lord is teaching through this parable is the dignity of the small work that God has entrusted to us. We must see the dignity of this work and how important it is to God. Because it moves Jesus so much that He actually rewards us for it. It moves Him enough that He actually gives rewards because of it.

Now there are only a few Billy Grahams in history. There are only a few men out there who affect thousands and thousands of people. And again, 99.999% of the human race is strategically given a small assignment by the Lord.

The reason it's important to identify this is so that we can refrain from perpetually looking for some unreal situation, living in discouragement and disillusion, and offended by the smallness of our life because it looks like God isn't being true to His word or has overlooked us. And so, it's not that we have big things, but He only rewards the little things; almost everything in our life is little, and we understand that the Lord rewards the little sphere.

The whole sphere of our life is little, but when we have this revelation, we can come to peace with the fact that it really is the will of God for it to be this way.

Now corporately, we make a big impact together. I'm talking about the Body of Christ in a city or region or nation. We could impact our generation together in a massive way. When I talk about small things, I'm talking about the individual ministry impact of specific people.

Paragraph 2. Jesus says, "I will give you many things for the small things." There's coming a great exchange when we stand before the Lord, where the few things are exchanged for the many things. Now our assignment in the age to come, in the millennial kingdom, isn't based on how big our impact is now. It's based on how big our heart is, how big our response to God is right now. I mean, you could have a ministry assignment or an assignment in life that's so difficult and so small, there's not one person who actually even notices anything that you do. But because the Lord does, it can be translated in the age to come, if we're good and faithful and diligent in it, into many things.

Paragraph L. Now He says, "I will make you a ruler in the age to come." This isn't poetic; it's literal. We can share in the government of the kingdom.

Now, an essential component to a life of success and greatness is understanding that there's a payday. There's a day of reward. Some believers think, "Well, I don't really need to know that," but Jesus felt that we did need to know it. This is an essential component, because smallness and difficulty make sense if Jesus' eyes are on us and we're diligent and faithful in the context of this. And then there's a reversal that comes later. Jesus is setting before us, in this passage, eternal rewards.

Now, some believers downplay eternal rewards. They say, “I don’t really care about that.” They think they don’t care, but if they understood rewards, they would. The reason they’re casual about them is because they don’t understand how relevant and how important those rewards will prove to be.

JESUS’ OPEN DECLARATION OF THE WAY WE LOVED HIM

Top of page 3. Jesus went on to say, “I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

He connects our reward in the age to come with joy: that we will have joy ruling in partnership with Jesus. We won’t be passive about our rewards; they will really matter to us. They will be a source of joy and heart engagement. They will touch us. They won’t be casual; they will be real and powerful.

THE PRIVILEGE OF WALKING IN CLOSE PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS

Now, this is what rewards really are. Rewards are not given for the sake of possessing the ability to strut in front of other people, or to demonstrate our superiority to others. We don’t get rewards so that we can triumph over others. What rewards really are is the privilege of walking in close partnership with Jesus. Our desire for reward is this: that we want to be with Him where He is. We want to do what He’s doing; we want to be partnering with Him. That is what rewards are really about. Rewards are Jesus’ open declaration about how He feels about the way you loved Him in this age. So He sets forth rewards before us in the age to come, but He ties them to the development of those three virtues, of choosing for our life activities which He calls good—which again, in one sentence, is loving God and loving other people. That’s the activity that the Bible defines as good. That’s the best thing. That’s the ultimate good: to love God and love other people. And again, that’s not a natural response. I mean, in theory, that’s what we’re all about. But it really takes signing back up for that and re-aligning our heart so that this can be the goal of why we’re on the earth. It’s not about getting more stuff; it’s not about having a bigger ministry. It’s about loving God and loving people. And that’s the virtue that Jesus is setting before the people: these virtues of being good, being faithful, and having a servant’s heart.

“FROM THE LORD YOU WILL RECEIVE THE REWARD OF THE INHERITANCE”

Let’s go down to paragraph O. Colossians 3:23-24 is a very important passage. Paul says, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23-24).

Now let’s break this down a little. He says, “Whatever you do.” It doesn’t matter where your assignment is, what stage of life, whether in sickness or in health, whether in poverty or prosperity; whatever you do. This isn’t just the breakthrough that comes after years of prayer. Whatever state you’re in, whatever situation of life God has you in, He has an assignment for you in that time, in that station of life. So he says, “Whatever you do. Wherever you find yourself in the will of God, do it heartily.” In other words, “Do it diligently; but do it as unto the Lord.” Do it because you know God’s eyes are on you. That’s what it means. “As unto the Lord” means in the recognition that God’s eyes are on you and you’re doing it before His eyes. That’s what it means to do something “unto the Lord.” It’s the recognition that you’re consciously doing it in the knowledge that He’s looking, and you’re doing it because He’s looking. That’s why you’re doing it.

And you’re not doing it to men, which means our natural preoccupation is to be diligent when people approve, and when no one is looking, to be passive. That’s what it means to do it as unto men: that you do it according to how men are looking at you or not looking at you. And Paul is saying, “Disconnect from that way of evaluating

your life.” If people are looking and applauding, then people tend to be more diligent. If no one is looking and no one is applauding, then people tend to not be diligent.

Paul says, “Step away from that way of evaluating your life. Don’t do it as unto men. Don’t do it under the paradigm of whether men are looking or not looking. Don’t make that the determination if you’re going to be diligent.”

Now, of course, the only way we can do this is by knowing something: knowing that we receive a reward, an eternal reward from the Lord; knowing that the Lord is watching, and it’s moving His heart to such a degree that He’s actually going to reward us in the age to come.

Beloved, whenever the Lord gives us a reward, it means that His heart has been moved. And things that our heart isn’t necessarily moved by, move His heart. He’s moved when we choose good, when we choose diligence, and when we choose humility. That is what moves Him. He made it clear here in this passage. So Paul says, “Whatever you do, do it diligently,” or heartily. Do it before God’s eyes. Don’t do it according to how men are looking at you, knowing that the Lord is actually remembering, and He’s going to express the way He feels about it in the age to come by giving you a reward.

WE CANNOT REPENT OF THE LONGING TO BE GREAT

Let’s go to Roman numeral II. It’s very important to have right expectations and right definitions about success, because everyone wants to be successful. Again, everyone wants to be great, because God put that longing into our spirit. We cannot repent of the longing to be great. We can only repent of pursuing it in a wrong way. We can pursue it in a non-biblical way, and we repent of that, but the longing itself is put into us by God. Now the problem is, a lot of people have wrong definitions, wrong perspectives of how this really looks. I’ve watched it through many years of ministry. Young people are told to pursue greatness in their life; and they often misinterpret what it means to pursue greatness. They often misinterpret it to mean they’re going to have an individual ministry that’s really big, and a ministry that has great impact, and that’s their definition of doing great things, or being great.

The biblical definition is that we grow in the three virtues of being good, being faithful, and being a servant. That’s the biblical definition, with no regard for how big our impact is. As a matter of fact, Jesus said to the person He affirmed that his impact was very small. It was just the opposite.

People pursue greatness under the perspective of bigness, or they pursue greatness under the notion that they’re going to have big influence or big finance or a lot of favor. Now there are some to whom God gives that, but many don’t ever get into that realm of bigness. And I’ve watched this over the years: they’re in their twenties and they sign up for greatness, but they have the wrong definition. What they’re really signing up is for bigness now. And so they’ll pray; they’ll fast; they’ll be diligent; they’ll be as humble as they know how to be, because it’s only a matter of time until bigness comes. It’s just a matter of time, because they’ve got their Bible verses and their prophecies, and they’re in their twenties.

Now they’re in their thirties, but the bigness hasn’t come yet. “Well, I’m still young,” they say. They’re in their thirties. “Keep diligence, keep pressing.”

Now they're in their forties and now they have a dilemma. Because now they're starting to not believe that they're going to be big. Now their diligence begins to wane; their focus on goodness begins to be replaced with comfort. The difficulty is still there, so despair begins to move in. Because when smallness is before us, if we're not living before God's eyes, we end up living passively instead of diligently. And when it's difficult, we end up in despair.

Now again, when they're young, they're thinking, "It's only a matter of time, it's all going to lift."

But the Lord is saying, "Here's what greatness is, and I want you to grow in those three virtues." And your ministry may be as big as Billy Graham's one day, but that will not make you great. Very probably, your ministry won't be that way. Again, about a millionth of 1 percent of world history has a ministry like that. You may be a millionth of 1 percent; I'm not saying you're not. You might be, but that's not what will make you great. What will make you great is that you grow in those three virtues.

DISILLUSIONMENT SETS IN WHEN WE PURSUE THE WRONG IDEA OF GREATNESS

Paragraph B. So I've watched over the years: people have been told to pursue greatness, and they think it means bigness. Bigness doesn't come. Ten years turns to twenty, twenty years turns to thirty of pursuing bigness. Despair and disillusionment begin to set in. Diligence and humility and the seeking of goodness go out. They begin to live for comfort; they begin to live for entertainment. I know so many believers who were on-fire in their twenties, and now, when they're in their fifties and sixties, they're just coasting. They're living on fumes. Where is the diligence of those early years? Where's the humility? Where's the pressing for goodness?

"Well, I still love the Lord in my own way." And that's because they signed up for the wrong definition of greatness. And when it didn't happen, disillusionment set in.

"HOPE DEFERRED MAKES THE HEART SICK"

Paragraph C. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick," is what Proverbs says (Prov. 13:12). Hope speaks of our expectations. If our expectations aren't biblically sound, and they don't happen, we become disappointed. Our heart is sick. And when our heart becomes sick, we draw back. And again, I've watched this happen for many, many years. Many people do this. It takes time to do it. It takes time before the negative disappointment sets in. And it's because what they were aiming for was the wrong target. They were aiming to be successful, but it was the humanistic, cultural definition of success, not the biblical definition of success. And I've found that if I can keep my heart locked into growing in these three virtues, then I can be more preoccupied with the grace of God in growing in these three virtues. Then, in growing in my ministry, I can actually handle my ministry without being disconnected from the Lord.

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF YOUR MINISTRY; IT'S THE SIZE OF YOUR HEART

What do I mean by that? Many folks, in the midst of the pains and rigors of ministry, or even the growth and trouble of the ministry, find that it's all such a burden to them that they can't even connect to the Lord in the way that they did in their earlier days. But if I can keep growing in these three virtues as the definition of success and the goal of my heart, then I can have that anchor in my soul. I can have a focus; I can stay in the right path.

When I stand before the Lord one day, He's not going to ask me how big IHOP-KC was; He's going to ask me how big my heart was. He's going to say, "How big is your heart? That is what I care about. How much of

goodness, faithfulness, and servanthood did you grow in?” That’s what He wants to know from me when I stand before Him; not how big our conferences were or how many books I sold.

Top of page 4. I’m not only thinking of the young people; but the young people are kind of like wet cement. They’re in the early years where, if they define success wrongly, it sets them in a completely wrong path. And most people do define success wrongly. It really matters that we define this correctly and we have the right areas of focus in our life. And I just laid them out here, according to this passage. They’re very simple.

Paragraph B. Doing good: the two great commandments. It’s all about developing a vibrant spirituality, and a focus on a connection in our hearts with God. This is all pretty straightforward; you can read that just for the sake of the definition. Really, it’s a reminder of what we’re about.

Second focus: building godly relationships. This is at the very heart of doing good: relationships with God and other people.

Paragraph C. Being diligent, or faithful, in the preparation of our work in the Lord, in our life assignment, and in our skill developments. The Lord wants us to be diligent in these things, even more than in having a big impact. I don’t measure my impact. I focus my energy on being good, on being diligent, and on being a servant; not on measuring how many people out there are paying attention to my ministry here. Because the Lord will take care of that, and that doesn’t even come into the conversation when I stand before the Lord. So that isn’t even a big point for me.

Again, when I stand before the Lord, He’s not going to ask me about how big my ministry was; He’s going to ask me how big my heart was. And it’s the same with you.

Paragraph D. I’m bringing this to a close, and I’ll give you the rest so you can read it on your own. That’s the reason I gave you the notes. The other point of focus is to develop a servant spirit. So these are the areas of our focus: having a heart connection with God, building godly relationships, walking in diligence in your assignment, and having the spirit of a servant. These are things that God wants us focused on, and I find that for many believers, they’re of secondary focus. But the Lord wants these to be the primary focus in our life and in our ministry and in our calling.

Amen. Let’s stand. Let’s talk to the Lord, realigning our heart in these directions.