



So You Want to be the Greatest **Part 1 – The Fast Track to Greatness**

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I don't know about you, but this time of the year is kind of jarring for me. December was all about others and family and giving and it seems January 1, we switch to this it's all about you. You see it. All the ads are "New Year, New You." A lot of pastors today are even doing messages like "Become your best you, be a better you, be you." The focus makes this big change.

Some of you went back to work this week and your inbox was homework assignment after homework assignment and you have a lot to do. We make a lot of changes. As we think about self, probably the first thing that comes to mind is the few pounds that we've added over the last few weeks. I don't mind sharing with you that I've put on a couple pounds through December. That's why I'm wearing a jacket this morning. I put on a vest and even that didn't work, so I said, "I will wear my winter coat."

I about fell out of my chair this week when I was watching a charismatic preacher praying, dancing around the stage, congregation fully into it. In the middle of her prayer, she said, "And, Lord, we pray for the belly fat!" I thought I didn't hear her right; she didn't put belly fat into her prayer. Then she said, "And we pray that it just falls away!" The whole place went nuts. I fell out of my chair. Really? Praying the Lord will remove your belly fat? Let me tell you, I believe in the power of prayer, but I declare to you today the Lord wants you to diet. We believe in the power of diets. And all God's people said... Amen. And we believe in the power of exercise. And all God's people said... Amen. Her prayer should have been, "And, Lord, help us stay away from the Krispy Kreme. Lord, help us walk away from the buffet!" That's what needs to be happening more. I'm preaching to myself this morning.

Then finances. Get better with your finances. We go through all of this and I'm thinking about what our kids are watching as the focus shifts from give, give, give and others and what we can do to reach out to the community. Now, January is getting everything back in order and become my best self. I'm not talking about self-care. Self-care is good to help us provide and do well in the community, but when you start to think about yourself too much... This is our concern, when the focus is on you too much, that's the goal.

At the end of last year, we focused a lot on evangelism and sharing your story and sharing your faith. Then we moved into Christmas and we looked at the purpose of the church being worship. We're kicking off 2019 with this series, *So You Want to be the Greatest*, talking about serving and looking at what Jesus says it takes to be the greatest and it comes through serving.

We don't want our kids to become too much. We actually have terms for the person who thinks about themselves exclusively and all the time. We have this term: diva. A diva is a self-important person who is temperamental and difficult to please. Maybe you've had a friend or a family member that started making it all about them. It's just a derogatory term we might throw at a person, but there's the other side of it. We call people rock stars. Have you ever called anybody a rock star? Like they're just becoming too much of themselves, a person desiring to be treated with fanatical admiration. None of us want to raise rock stars or divas.

One study I read this week was recently done. It surveyed 1,000 children, ages 6-17, asking them what they want to be when they grow up. The number one answer... One in three children said they wanted to be a YouTuber. Now, please hear me. Right behind that, one in five was some sort of content creation online, social media, and all that. So, it was over half of the children said this. There's great content online and if this is what you're called to do and what God has placed upon you to do... I've even talked to my children about this, as they watch YouTubers. So long as it's for the betterment of others and not about you becoming a rock star or a diva, because you can create great content, you can help people, but when it's all about you, this is where we want to be careful.

Here's what we know as parents and we say it around here a lot. We know our children see everything we do. They see how we behave. They have a front row seat to our families, our marriages, our jobs, to the way we move through life. They hear everything we say. So, they see, they hear, they remember everything, they forget nothing, then they repeat. So, the question I have, as we talk this week... We're just introducing it this morning with serving, but next week we'll talk about serving in the church. Your children have images of you in their head of your serving this church, serving the community, serving others.

The week after that, we're going to talk about serving in the home. What kind of images do your children have of you, Mom, serving Dad; of you, Dad, serving Mom? How about serving your parents, because these images go with our kids. They stay with their kids and then, hopefully, our kids will repeat them in their own homes one day.

Two Christmases ago, I received one of the nicest, most thoughtful gifts I'd ever received from my father in law. He gave me his dad's .22 pistol. I don't know how old it is, but it's old; it looks antique. When I opened it, it was an ah ha moment for me. I was like, "This is too much. I don't deserve this, but to have my wife's grandfather's gun..."

It's very important as I share the rest of this story with you to understand I am not a firearms expert. We have airsoft pistols in our home. I have one pellet gun for the squirrels... sorry PETA. I grew up with BB guns and pellet guns. My brother would shoot at me as I was setting up the army men. We didn't grow up with it. I've been on some ranges and all that with some of you even, but it's just not my expertise.

A couple of days after Christmas, Carson said, "Dad, we gotta shoot that gun!" I said let's do it. So, we went out in the front yard, which I know is probably not the best place to be shooting a gun, but we just wanted to see how it works. As I got the gun out... Denny had given me a box of bullets with it. When I

opened the ammo, I'm like, *these are antique bullets too*. I don't know if bullets go bad, but there was corrosion on them. I started to get nervous. I had some moments where it was thinking we shouldn't even do it.

We go to load the gun and I have no idea how to load the gun. I can't get the revolver piece to come out, so I kind of have to load it in the side. I'm loading it and I'm like *this is an old gun, I don't know when it's been cleaned, I don't know if it works, I've got old bullets*. I don't know if this is safe, dangerous or what, so I said, "Carson, I'm going to need you to stand back." I was going to let him shoot it, but I said, "I've got to take the hit on this in case this thing explodes in my hand." He stands off to the side and I go to shoot it. And let me give it to you just like I gave it to him. This is exactly how the first shots came out of that gun. I looked away while holding the pistol away from me. I've been told since that you should never have your eyes closed while shooting a gun. With every shot, I flinched. When I was done, I'm like, *Okay, it was good. Everything fired in that direction*. I look up and I see my son's face. He looked at me in shock. He said, "Dad, I'll have that image in my head for the rest of my life."

Many of us can think through the images that we have of our parents growing up. As we work through this series, that we would be a church of serving, yes, that we would be a home of serving, yes, that your children, your grandchildren would have these images of Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, as selfless servants. They were constantly about serving other people.

In Matthew 23, Jesus... if you want to read what I believe are some of his strongest teachings... When I say strongest teaching, I mean in tone. Matthew 23 is where you get the woes to the Pharisees. At the beginning of Matthew 23, Jesus is talking about the group of religious leaders, these Pharisees who love titles. They love power and prestige. They love their authority that they've been given. They love to let their righteousness be seen as a show. They love the accolades. They love the attention. They love the recognition.

Jesus is very clear at the beginning of this chapter. Don't do what they do. This is not what you do when you're in a position of authority. We've said it around here for years and it's something Andy Stanley said. When you find that you're the most powerful person in the room, whether that be at work or at home, in a meeting, or whatever, always leverage your authority to help others win. The Pharisees did not do that. They loved to be in the exalted position and they wanted other people to serve them. Jesus is going to say that's not at all what it means for you. He's saying this to you and he's saying this to me; he is saying this to the disciples.

In Matthew 23, we read, **11 The greatest among you will be your servant**. It's where we're going to spend the next few weeks. **12 For those who exalt themselves... speaking of the Pharisees ...will be humbled...** This is a secret of success you don't hear often coming in Tweets and Facebook and social media posts, but one of the great secrets of success is to not exalt yourself. Let someone else do that. Take the position of a servant to serve and to give and to not worry about when the recognition is going to come and when the fame is going to come and when you're going to be known and when you're going to be recognized.

He says, those who exalt themselves, these Pharisees who love everything about the power and the position and the prestige will be humbled, but watch this. **...and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**

Whenever we read this text, we always think, *Well is that coming tomorrow? If I humble myself in this situation, will tomorrow be the day that I get the big promotion, that I get shot to the top...* Keep very close to heart here that Jesus is speaking of a future for you and a future for me, that you and I, as children of God, as co-heirs with Christ, we will reign with Jesus in the future kingdom. We will be exalted one day. Not by our works or by what we have done, but Jesus himself will exalt you. You have what the scripture calls a future glory.

We read about this in Romans 8. **16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...** Christ is the one who exalts us. He is our source of life. **...if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.**

I take this text literally, to speak of a future glory. This is why when you read in 2 Corinthians 4, you get this comparison. Whatever you're going through right now, whatever difficult times or afflictions that you may have, Paul refers to those as momentary, light affliction. Some may say that's not very validating. "What I'm going through is challenging and difficult. Is he comparing what I'm going through to what someone else is going through?" No, he's not comparing what you're going through to anything else here upon this earth. He's comparing it to the next line, which is incomparable, eternal weight of glory. That you and I, in this life, we serve. We don't move forward like the Pharisees. We're not about climbing the ladder so others can serve us. We maintain the position of humility and the position of serving. So, we do not focus on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

So, how do you do this? How do you serve someone? I'll give you a few examples. **How do you serve someone in a meeting who is not contributing?** You can sit around a meeting or a group of people going, *I seem to be participating more in the group and that person is not. I'm done serving that person until that person carries their weight.* We also stop serving people at work **when you do the work, but they take the credit.** This can get your blood boiling. How about this? **When someone takes from you and gives nothing back.** This is the beginning of the heart of a cynic. I'll be very honest with you. I can struggle with this in the church. The person who constantly wants something from us and there's no intention of ever giving anything back. Am I supposed to continue to serve that person? The answer I keep coming back to is yes.

Amy was joking with me this week. She says everybody picks a word of the year. What's your word this year? I said, "No." Then I thought that's not really the spirit of picking a word for the year. But, some of you are there. When I say they give nothing back, there are some in here that this church is able to provide for and give to and they don't have the means or the resources right now to give back. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the person who has no intention of ever giving back. All they want to do is take. Do we serve that person? Do we continue to humble ourselves, knowing

there is a future glory where we'll be exalted, but now in this life and right now, I'm to serve that person? Yes.

How about **that person that the only time you hear from them is when they need something from you?** "I'm not taking that call anymore. I have served them enough. And they're going to want something from me. They're not calling to check up on me. They're not calling to see how I'm doing. They're not calling me right now to find out ways they can help me. They need me to participate in something they're doing." We shut down the heart of serving.

How about this one? I think this one is truly the heart of a cynic. This is where the cynic, that jaded person begins to develop. **When you pour yourself into a person, project, ministry, job, church, or community and get little in return.** "I didn't get the pat on the back that I deserve." "I didn't get the recognition that I deserve." Now, we're not talking about edifying one another today and building one another up in Christ and encouraging one another with words. We're talking about the heart today. We're to encourage one another. We're to building one another up.

Yesterday, this church had a wedding and funeral at the same time. As I'm driving in to do the wedding, I kept thinking to myself, *Boy, here it is again. Mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. We're doing it again at the same time.* We're talking about the one who has stopped serving because they haven't received what they want. The goal is that we would serve with no expectations, but many of you are serving with expectations in your home. Your relationship is not going well because "I just said the thing I know Amy likes to hear, I just did the thing I know Amy likes me to do, when am I going to get back what I've got coming to me?" Listen, I've poured into my children. I have given them everything and it's about dang time they give me... I'm sorry. But, it's about time they pour something back into me. How many parents... Just be very honest. You've had that moment where you've given these kids everything and you're getting little in return. Raise your dang hands right now. Of course! At Christmas, right? You just poured into kids at Christmas and an hour later, they're online, shopping for the stuff they wanted. You're like, "What!? I'm throwing it all out!"

Have you seen those videos on YouTube where the kids open a present and it's not what they wanted, so they freak out? I would say Christmas is over for the next ten years. Parents get this way. Spouses get this way. Church members get this way. We serve with massive expectations. I want the image my kids have in their head of a mom and a dad who served one another relentlessly. I want my kids to leave home knowing, "He can't shoot a gun to save his life, but he was always there to pick us up after work, he was always there drop us off at school. You could count on him. You could count on her." "Grandma and grandpa couldn't move around a whole bunch and they couldn't get down on the ground and play with us a whole bunch, but they were always there for us." The images in the head of serving.

Some of you are serving with massive expectations. You want to find great joy in serving? You want to know where all the joy in serving is? It comes in serving with zero expectations. "I'm going to pour into this church with zero expectations." "Im going to pour into my family with zero expectations."

My passion in life is, when I go places like stores and restaurants, pretending like I work there. It's an absolute ball. You should try it sometime. I discovered this at Sugar Leaf. I went up to that senior

couple that were mad. I said, "I hate to hear that. What can we do to make this right? What if I get you a piece of pie? Wouldn't a piece of pie be great?"

So, I buy them a piece of pie and bring it back to them and sit it on their table. He starts asking me questions about the restaurant and I'm like, "Hey, whoa, I don't work here." I get back to my table and I'm fired up. I can't explain it; it's like a drug going through me. I'm like, "Man, did you see that!? That was awesome!" There's nothing illegal about this at all. But I was fired up about it.

If you want to take this up a level, wear a red Polo to Target. Wear a blue Polo to Best Buy. There's a YouTuber that does this. He gathers all of his friends, like 30 of them show up to Best Buy with blue Polos and they end up calling the police. "We've got imposters!" And the police have to come and explain to the manager of Best Buy that there's nothing illegal about wearing a blue Polo.

This guy stands at the top of an escalator in a subway in New York City and his goal is to high five 2,000 people as they get off the escalator. People look at him... especially in New York. "What do you want from me!" "I want nothing from you; I just want to high five you to get your day started off right." This is one of the most joyful individuals I've ever seen. Why? He wants nothing from them. He's just high fiving them. He's just showing where the extension cords are at Best Buy and how you can get a new power supply for you Mac Book. That's serving with no expectations.

Do you know how many people will leave this church this year, if they're not careful, because they didn't get what they want? Remember what Jesus just said. Don't do what the Pharisees do. Don't be seeking the titles and the positions and the accolades. They even went so far as they put things on other people that they themselves were not willing to live out. Serve, knowing that you are a child of God. That's your source. You're an heir of God, a co-heir with Christ. You have a future glory. You have eternal life and throughout all eternity, you reign with Christ.

The fastest way to measure your heart as a servant is to see how you respond when you are treated like one. Some of you are treated like one regularly. All of us need the posture of this young man right here. That's awesome. And can I tell you... Let me just tell all the young people in here. This is why you don't need a hundred friends in life. You only need a few. And you need the one willing to bend down like that. Nothing screams servant more to me than that young man right there. "They set the urinal so high, I'm going to help my buddy." I don't even want to tell what he's kneeling and placing his hands in. That's a servant. Jesus said it clearly. Serve. If you want to be the greatest, you'll serve. Take the posture of humility and serve one another.

We talked about the person who doesn't give you recognition, the person who's not going to give you the return you're looking for on serving. Let me just take it one step further and talk about the person you hate. We quote this verse a lot, but I don't think we go all the way into this verse. **27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies...** Sometimes we throw that out there because it sounds good on a coffee mug, but we have to go further. **...do good to those who hate you...** Serve the person you can't stand. And don't stop there. **28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.** How do you do this? You understand you are a child of God, an heir of God, a co-heir with Christ who has a future glory.

This is a momentary, light affliction down here and you're here but 70 years or 80 if your strength is there upon this earth. The idea of taking it to a whole other level of serving someone you hate? How do you serve someone you hate? Let's just put specifics to this. How about serving someone who hurt you? How about serving someone who recently lied about you. They spread a rumor about you that you know isn't true and now you're going out there wanting to fix it all and straighten everybody out, but what if the moment for you is to just sit back and trust the Lord in this situation and love them, do good to them, bless them, and pray for them. Some of you are like, *I prefer to talk about the belly fat. We should have done a self-help series.*

This is the recharge I need going into 2019. I hope you need it as well. These are the ones I'm supposed to serve. I'm not done. I'm going to serve the one I disagree with. Boy are we in a culture that we don't know how to... I want some of you to practice this. Take something to that neighbor, give a gift to that neighbor you can't stand. Go take a plate of cookies to the democrat down the street. Take a gift to the red hat-wearing, make America great again, Trump supporter that you can't even stand to look at. *Man, I can't believe that they stand behind this guy and everything he does and everything he tweets.* Love them. Be good to them. Bless them. Pray for them. We've been doing that. Love them. Serve them. Do good to them. For some of you, you're going to find this year is your opportunity to serve and love the person who left you. This is going to begin to resolve your anger because you know that person is not your source. Some of you need to let go right now and start loving and serving the person who fired you.

Jesus says it this way in Matthew 20: ***25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them..."*** It's what the Pharisees did as well. They lorded it over people, liking the titles and liking the recognition and wanting to be great. ***"...and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead..."*** "This is not how I want you guys to live. This is not how I want you to move forward. When the church gets started here in a little bit, I'm going to be gone, I'm going to leave. You guys aren't going to operate the church this way. You're going to serve the church." ***"...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."*** "I didn't call you guys to me so that you would serve me and meet my every need, I wanted you to walk alongside of me and learn how to do this because I'm going away and you're going to take it over. You're going to continue this." ***"...and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

This is the model we have in scripture. Remember we said children see everything we do, hear everything say, they forget nothing, and then they repeat. Jesus starts his earthly ministry by inviting the disciples to follow him. We give you that invitation today. For some of you that have just been attending this church or you've been here for a little bit, we're encouraging you and inviting you to be a part of what we have here. I think we're almost, if not already sold out... sold out sounds weird. But we have a full Starting Point on Wednesday night for those coming and wanting to learn more about church membership and being a part.

Jesus invited his disciples. He simply said, "Come follow me." Then he spent years with them, showing them how to serve. It started at a wedding. You can't let this pass you by when you read the gospels. It was Jesus and his disciples, it would say, that were at a wedding and it needed wine because it ran out.

Jesus made it. The disciples wanted to send everybody home and Jesus said feed them. They were like, "There's no food," so Jesus creates food, he makes the food. They watch this the whole time. The disciples wanted the children to go away from Jesus because at that time in history, childhood was an insignificant period of life. "Stay away from Jesus; he's got bigger things to do." Jesus, again modeling humility and modeling servanthood, became indignant with the disciples and said, "No, bring these kids to me; this is what it's all about." He showed them how to serve.

But he didn't stop there. He served them and asked them to serve one another. We read this in John 13. ***14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*** The bottom line of this series and where we're headed with serving in the church, serving in your home, identifying, exploring your gifts and what God has called you to do, and then ending with fueling your passion for ministry. True servanthood.

Servants leverage their time, talents, and resources for the betterment of others. Selfish people use their time, talents, and resources for the betterment of themselves. In this series, we're talking about serving as the antidote to selfishness. Again, we're not talking about self-care for those of us who need to lose a few pounds. Today's a good start. I'm practicing self-care. I am saying no to things. I don't know if you're worn out, but that inbox got filled up at the end of last week and it's going to get filled up tomorrow as people head back to work, giving you homework assignments of things they would like for you to do for them.

You still have to practice self-care, but it's the selfishness, the thinking about yourself too much as we head into this new year. And making the decision "I'm going to serve my church, I'm going to serve my community." Obviously, we hope that it starts in your home, that you would serve your home, that moms and dads will be serving one another and not just the children. That children would learn how to serve in the home. That children would learn how to serve without being asked. And all the parents said... Amen. Praise our Father in heaven. This is what we long for. It's the desire for our church and it's the desire for our homes.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you for a fantastic 2018. We're grateful for what you've done in our church and in our community. We still have much to figure out on meeting the needs of this community.

In meeting the breakdown of the family and the homeless crisis, we ask that you give us wisdom and discernment on that, knowing that it is not just going to be a few people that can figure that out and make that happen, but it's going to take an army, and you have gathered them here at this church. For that we are grateful.

Give us wisdom and discernment as we move forward with the resources and the time and the talents that you have given to everyone in here. We pray for homes and our church, that our children get great models of serving this year and we are grateful for it.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Everyone agreed and said... Amen.