

# How Do You Define Greatness?

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How do you define greatness? Think about that one for a moment. What are the criteria that you use when labeling someone as great? How you answer that question will in large part determine how you will use your energies and talents every day. It is a good desire to want to be great. Wanting less than greatness may sound humble but, most likely, it is only a way of guarding yourself from failure.

We should strive for greatness, even if we may never fully achieve the level of greatness for which we strive. Accepting our limitations and striving for greatness are not mutually exclusive ideas. It might even be said that greatness takes into consideration the cards one has been dealt. In many ways, the battle for greatness is a battle against the inertia within us. And it is a worthy goal to take up the gauntlet against that part of you that is willing to settle for less than greatness.

Teddy Roosevelt captures well the right sentiment:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better,” Roosevelt said.

“The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, he at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

Although Mr. Roosevelt inspires us to strive for greatness, he has not defined the greatness for which we are striving. And it is at this point that our world has most lost its bearings. This is not a new problem. And it is one that infects us all in one way or another. We have defined greatness as being better than someone else. There is a kind of greatness that is derived from simply being able to do something better than others. But this sort of greatness falls short of true greatness. Achieving great things does not make someone truly great. Accompanying this desire to be better than others, there is also a subtle desire to have others serve us. It may be expressed in the desire for control over others. One way or another, we want others to behave in the way that we want them to behave. And so, in the mindset of the world, if you have the ability, in one

way or another, to get others to do what you want, then you have achieved greatness. You have attained what this life has to offer.

But true greatness is not about getting others to do what you want. True greatness is about putting aside your initial desires so you might learn to serve others. True greatness is learning to serve the good interests of others more than your own. True greatness is using your time and talents and resources to be a blessing to others.

A father is great when he gives up time from his personal hobby to take time with his kids. A mother is great when she stays up throughout the night with her ailing child. An employer is great when personal profits are not his only concern, but also the interests of his customers and his employees. An employee is great when he diligently seeks the interests of the company and not simply his own paycheck. An athlete is great when the game is not simply about showing how good he is, but finding ways to play in such a way that he serves his teammates. A politician is great when he genuinely wants to serve those he represents.

Plain and simple, greatness is found in serving others. Maybe it is time to stop taking our cues of greatness from the world, and begin taking them from the one who truly defines greatness in his teaching and life,

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” Mark 10:42-45