

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rise Above the Crowd

Sunday, July 21, 2019

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Matthew 5:38-42, Matthew 7:12

I love the old joke about the poor man that went to church every morning for a year to pray. He knelt at the altar and prayed, “Lord, please, please, please, let me win the lottery.” He did this every day for a year. And his prayer was always the same, “Please, please, please, let me win the lottery.” Finally, one morning he heard from God. God said to the poor man, “Please, please, please, buy a ticket!”

Now, God may not want us to win the lottery, but God does want us to live an abundant life. And God wants to empower us to live an abundant life, but we must do our part. We must participate. I like the old quote from St. Augustine, “Without God, we cannot. But without us, God will not.” If we choose to participate with God through inspired actions, we will draw closer to Christ, manifest the abundant life, and find success in everything we do.

Today I want to share with you how to manifest the abundant life. The answer is found in the greatest sermon ever preached – the Sermon on the Mount. Specifically, Matthew 5:38-42 and Matthew 7:12 (please read these passages).

Go the Extra Mile

We have all heard the old adage, “Go the extra mile.” The source of this great wisdom is Jesus, from the text I read a moment ago. Jesus instructs us in verse 41 to go the extra mile. Now, this was not just a figure of speech for Jesus. Jesus gave this instruction in the context of Roman’s occupation of Palestine. Jews were required by law to carry Roman supplies for a mile. Many Jews would mark a mile post from their houses and would not carry supplies one step further from that post. Yet, Jesus came along and instructed them to carry the load another mile! Imagine their response. This must have turned some heads!

One of the hallmarks of Christian behavior is doing more than is required – going the extra mile. There are really three ways we can live life. The evil way is to return evil for evil or evil for good. The human way is to return good for good. But the Christian way is to return good for evil. This is the essence of the extra mile – doing more than is required. Any person can retaliate. Any person can return good for something good that has been done for them. But it takes someone empowered by God to overcome evil with good.

If we choose to live our lives by going the extra mile we will experience amazing changes in our lives. We will see a change in our attitudes immediately. The extra mile has been called the smile mile. Doing what is required is drudgery, but going the extra mile brings joy and fulfillment because we are doing it out of love. The first mile is what we have to do, but the extra mile is what we want to do. If we just do what is required, we are controlled, but if we go the extra mile, we control the situation with God’s love. Love always wins.

When we go the extra mile, we will also find success in everything we do. All successful people apply the principle of going the extra mile. Think of the successful people that you admire. They all go the extra mile in their chosen field. This is why they are successful. Think of your favorite store, mechanic, barber shop, or restaurant. Chances are you like these places because they go the extra mile.

Let me give you an example. Take grocery stores. There are many places to buy bread, milk and cereal around here. And if you go into most grocery stores and ask where the soup is, they will simply say, “It’s in aisle 8.” But there is one particular store in this area that is different. If you go into that store and ask where the soup is, they will not only tell you; they will show you. They will walk you to the aisle and the very place where

the soup is shelved. So, there is a reason why Publix rises above the crowd! They go the extra mile.

Would you like to be successful in what you do? Just do a little bit more than is required. You see, most people just do the absolute minimum. Most people's attitudes are, "I don't get paid to do that." "This is all I am required to do, so I am out of here." Folks who have this attitude are never successful. People who just do the bare minimum never rise above the crowd. So just do a little bit more than is required. Go the extra mile and watch yourself rise above the crowd. Remember, the only difference between the word ordinary and *extraordinary* is that little "extra."

The principle of the extra mile touches on a spiritual law. We reap what we sow. When we do more than is required, great blessings are returned to us in the same manner we gave those blessings out through the principle of going the extra mile.

Of course, one of the greatest benefits of going the extra mile is that it provides the best opportunity to influence others for Christ. Very few people go the extra mile, so when someone does it, people notice. People will want to know why you forgave instead of retaliated. People will want to know why you are working on that project an extra hour at work. People will want to know why you are doing more than is required. And you will be able to tell them it is because of the love of Jesus in your heart.

I remember a lady in another church I served who was a friend of many people in the church, but she never came to church. She would show up to outside events like concerts and festivals, but she never came to worship or Bible studies. She claimed she had issues with God and organized religion. Finally, she showed up to worship one day and the whole church was buzzing about it. A couple of weeks later I asked her what influenced her to come to worship. She told me something I will never forget. She said there was a man she knew at work who was betrayed by a friend. She told me that her coworker forgave his friend and that she never saw anyone do that before. She was amazed. She found out he was a Christian. She

said, "I wanted what he had. That's why I have come to church."

Go the extra mile. You never know what a difference it will make.

Live By the Golden Rule

The premise behind the Golden Rule is not unique to Jesus. Long before Jesus, philosophers would speak of this idea. However, before Jesus, it was always in the passive sense: "Don't do unto others that you would not want done unto you." In other words, don't harm others.

When Jesus came along, he radicalized this rule by making it active. He said, "DO unto others that you would want DONE unto you." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Project yourself on to the people you see every day. Think about how you would like people treating you. Then go do that!" Anybody can keep their hands to themselves and not harm people. But it takes someone empowered by the love of God to actively seek ways to treat others right.

If you live your life by the Golden Rule, you will rise above the crowd. Let me give you an example. Most of us don't have many nice things to say about the airline industry. Over the last several years, most airline companies have laid off many people and scaled back their customer service. Many of them have gone belly up while some of the CEO's have run off with lots of money. However, there is one airline that has risen above the crowd. There is one airline that has never gone bankrupt or had to lay off anyone. There is one airline company that has made money every year it has been in business. The airline is Southwest.

The reason Southwest has been so successful is because the business is run by the Golden Rule. The former CEO, Herb Kelleher, believed in one principle above everything else – treat the employees right. Kelleher believed that if you treat the employees right, you will treat the customers right. When Kelleher received a profit through his stocks so did the mechanics through their profit sharing program. When someone was promoted and given a raise, they would not lay that person off and hire someone cheaper to make more profit. They encouraged loyalty and they got it.

And because the employees were happy, they began to make the customers happy. The rest is history. Why? Because Herb Kelleher ran his company by the Golden Rule. Go the extra mile. Live by the Golden Rule.

Make Other People Feel Important

This sums up what I am seeking to express to you today. In fact, in many ways, it sums up the teachings of Jesus. Make other people feel important because they are! God made them. They are special.

Think of the people you love to be around. Chances are you like being around them because they make you feel good about yourself. They make you feel like a million dollars.

So, how do we make other people feel important? It is really pretty simple. One of the things we can do is remember people's names and call people by their names. The old adage by Dale Carnegie is true: "The sweetest sound a person will ever hear is the sound of their own name." It is true.

I learned this lesson shortly after I arrived here Johns Creek UMC. I ran into a familiar looking lady who had a name tag on. I looked at her name tag and called her by name. She was floored. She said, "Your recall is amazing! You've only been here two months and you remember my name!" Well, she obviously forgot she was wearing a name tag. So, I had to be honest. I said, "Well, I cannot lie. You are wearing a name tag." She said, "Oh! I forgot!" But I will never forget the look on her face when she heard me call her name!

Another thing we can do to make other people feel important is by simply smiling at them. A smile can do amazing things. A smile can light up a room. Most people walk around with a sour look on their face. Smile and the whole world just might smile with you.

I remember being in the post office several years ago. It was a Saturday and the place was crowded. People were waiting in line and they were all fidgety and frustrated. There was a lady in front of me in line who was very agitated. For some reason, she turned around, and I just smiled at her. She replied, "Thanks." I said, "For what?" She

said, "For smiling at me. I can't remember the last time someone smiled at me. I needed that." A smile can do more than we think?

Of course, one of the best ways to make people feel important is to get them to talk about themselves. You want to be an interesting person? Then act interested! Because people's favorite subject is themselves! People will rise up and call you blessed if you get them to talk about themselves. It happens to me all the time. Someone will come into my office or I will see them at the store and I will ask them about themselves and they will tell me and I will listen. They say, "I just love talking with you. You are so insightful. You are a great counselor." And I am thinking, "I just asked them three questions about themselves. They did all the talking." But what am I doing? I am listening. You know how rare it is to find someone who just listens to us. Listening is the highest form of love.

I learned this lesson at a dinner party a while back. I met a man at the party by the name of Tom. We got into a corner and started talking. And he asked me about my favorite subject – golf! For an hour he just asked me questions about golf and I was off to the races talking about the swing, and courses and clubs. Well, at the end of the party I told the hosts how great Tom was. Then I asked them where Tom played golf. They said, "Tom doesn't play golf! Tom hates golf!" I said, "What? Are we talking about the same Tom?" They said, "Yeah, we heard you talking to him Charley!" I said, "I don't understand. Why would he ask me about something that he didn't like?" The host said, "Well, that is just the kind of guy Tom is. He knew you were interested in it." Wow! I never forgot that guy!

There was a story that appeared in Guideposts magazine some time ago that I will never forget. It was about a town in the mid-west that had a population of about 56,000 people. It was situated on a bluff, looking over a great river. There was a time when this town flourished, but not anymore. Evil days had come and this town had declined. It had become shabby. Business was bad. The people were without hope. The school system deteriorated and the educational development score

was one of the lowest in the country. The school system was treated with contempt.

At the same time there was a young Hindu man from India who had a dream of coming to America. He got accepted to a college in the mid-west. He was taken in by a Christian family. They didn't try to convert him, but they gave him a Bible and asked him to read the gospel of Matthew. He was so overcome by the truth of Jesus that he was converted to Christianity. He read other books about the faith and became a very positive Christian. He stayed in school and got his PhD in Education. He then became the superintendent of schools in a small town of about 12,000 people.

Meanwhile, the shabby town I mentioned earlier continued to decline, so they called this young Indian man to be their superintendent. Before he made his decision, he visited the town. As he toured the town, everyone told him how bad it was. One man said to him, "Don't come here. It is the worst town in the country. I wouldn't send my dog here."

He went back home and informed his family that they were not going. His young son spoke up and said, "But Dad, I thought you said that nothing is impossible with God?" With that, he decided to pick up his family and go!

When he got off the airplane, he went immediately to a large gathering of students in the

town. He stood before the students and said, "I've never seen such wonderful young people. You are terrific! I've come here because I want to be associated with the greatest young people in the world. You are the smartest kids I have ever seen!"

He went to the Rotary club and said, "This is one of the greatest towns I have ever been in. Great pioneers built this town. This is one of the most wonderful towns in America! You don't know what you have." Every night after school, a bus load of kids would come to his office and he would tutor them and tell them how great they were.

In three years, the educational level of this school system went from one of the worst to one of the best in the country! To this day, the biggest day of the town is not July 4th or Christmas, but Local Pride Day! One man! One person who was willing to be enthusiastic and positive in the Lord changed a town (Norman Vincent Peale, "Positive Thinking, Successful Living").

Go the extra mile. Live by the Golden Rule. Make other people feel important. And watch as you rise above the crowd.



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