

# The Secret of a Great Life

by Warren Wiersbe

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*The secret to a great life is commitment to a great person, Jesus Christ, a great purpose, building the church, and a great principle, the principle of giving.*

**Duration:** 32:28

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 20:24, Acts 20:35

**Topics:** "Faith And Giving", "Christian Stewardship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the joy and fulfillment that comes from giving. He highlights the selfless acts of missionaries and members of the church who dedicate their lives to giving to others. The speaker emphasizes the principle of giving and quotes the apostle Paul, who lived by this principle. He acknowledges that giving can be challenging and may not always be appreciated, but encourages listeners to continue giving with faith. The sermon concludes with a personal anecdote about the speaker's own realization of the importance of staying committed to the ministry and not being moved by discouragement.

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## Transcript

I want us to think together today on the subject of greatness. Just about everybody knows Shakespeare's famous statement in Twelfth Night when he says, be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.

As you read history and biography, you find that writers have a difficult time deciding what is greatness in a person. To me, a great person is someone who has lived a great life. When I read Acts chapter 20, as a pastor, it's like opening a blast furnace.

When I see what kind of a life Paul lived and what kind of a ministry Paul had, I have to bow my heart and my head before God and say, oh God, how far short I fall of this kind of a life and this kind of a ministry. But too many of us have the idea you must be in a great place to live a great life. Some little person says, yes, but the Apostle Paul had great education.

He was thrust upon the scene at a time when he was greatly needed. He performed a great ministry. But I'm just a little person.

I take a subway to work every day, and I just do my little job at work, and I don't paint with a big brush on a big canvas. And no one ever puts my name on a marquee. No one ever even mentions my name in a church bulletin.

I'm just a little person. But if I read my Bible correctly, in God's sight, there are no little people. And in God's sight, there are no small places.

When I came to the Moody Church, a friend of mine said, my, how does it feel to be at that great church? And I said to him, no different from when I went to the first church I pastored, which was a small church, because there are no small places in God's sight. Every place is a great place. That little office that you work in is a great place if God's there with you.

That little apartment that you live in is a great place if you're serving God. Now, there are some people God has thrust into places of leadership to make it easier for the rest of us. But I want no one to go home from this service today thinking you must travel fourth class or fifth class because you don't hold a big office or you don't carry a big name.

In God's sight, everybody is important. And in God's sight, every place is an important place. And my friends, you and I may not be the apostle Paul, but we can live a great life to the glory of God.

And that's what I want to talk with you about this morning. I ran across an interesting statement by Charles Reed. Charles Reed is probably best known for his novel, *The Cloister and the Hearth*.

But he said this, now that novel, by the way, is about ordinary people who go through ordinary experiences. Mr. Reed says this, not a day passes over the earth, but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers and martyrs, the greater part will never be known till that hour when many that were great shall be small and the small great.

I think he's right. I think that a mother can live a great life. A father, a teenager, a child, a retired person.

And Paul points the way. Paul lived a great life. Paul would have lived a great life had he never been called to be an apostle.

Had he been, quote, an ordinary Christian, unquote, he would have lived a great life. He may not have been as well known had he not been called to be an apostle, but he would have lived a great life. And God wants you to live a great life.

The secret of a great life is commitment. Now, everybody here is committed to something. Please don't say, well, pastor, you're going to ask me to commit my life.

You have already committed your life. The secret of Paul's life and the secret of every great life is commitment. You see, a great life is one that keeps going when things are tough.

Paul said, none of these things move me. A great life is one that makes other people great. It was said, of course, when Lincoln died, that everyone around him seemed to shrink.

Paul was this way. Paul was able to touch the lives of other people and make life worth living for them. A great life is a life that keeps going when things are tough.

A great life is a life that touches other people. A great life is a life that when it ends, you're missed. They wept when Paul left them.

And the secret of Paul's life was commitment. Now, I would suggest to you a threefold commitment that points the way to true greatness in our living. Not smallness, greatness.

Not a dead-end street, an exciting two-way street where we serve God and God serves us. Commitment number one, Paul was committed to a great person, Jesus Christ. Three words stand out in verse 19, serving the Lord, meaning, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, my friend, every one of us is serving someone. In Romans chapter 6, Paul talks about those who serve sin. Sin is an awful master, terrible slave master.

Paul writes about those who serve various lusts. And yet, Paul said, my life is given to serving the Lord. He was committed to a great person.

Now, this wasn't always true. When Paul the apostle was Saul of Tarsus, he wasn't serving the Lord. He thought he was, but he wasn't.

He was serving Gamaliel. He was serving Moses in the wrong way. He was serving Paul.

In Galatians chapter 1, Paul gives to us an interesting little insight into his pre-conversion life. He said, I profited in the Jews' religion. The apostle Paul was rising on the ladder of fame and authority, and the younger rabbis were looking at him and saying, oh, if only we could be like Saul of Tarsus.

Paul said, I was profiting from the Jews' religion, but he wasn't serving the Lord. What a tragedy it is when people think they are serving God, and they're really serving sin or themselves. Then Paul met Jesus Christ.

In verse 24, he tells us what it means to know Jesus Christ. None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received, notice now, of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Now, that's a great statement.

My life, my course, my ministry. Now, you have a life. Your life is God's gift to you, and your ministry is your gift to God.

And Saul of Tarsus met Jesus Christ. He thought he was dead. He'd been going all over preaching, Jesus is dead.

He's a liar. He's an imposter. His disciples stole his body, and then on the road to Damascus, Saul looked up, and he saw the living Christ, and his next word was, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And he experienced the grace of God.

Now, he had thought that the gospel was a lie. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried.

He arose again the third day according to the scriptures. And Saul of Tarsus would meet and say, this is a lie. And now he looked up and saw the living Christ and said, that gospel is the truth.

He did die for my sins. He was buried. He was raised from the dead.

He is alive in heaven, and I can experience the grace of God. At that point, Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle and committed himself to a great person, Jesus Christ. Now, my friend, have you experienced the grace of God? You see, Saul was a religious man, but he wasn't a saved man.

He was a zealous man, but he wasn't a saved man. He was a moral man, but he wasn't a saved man. He was a self-righteous man, but he wasn't a saved man.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, touching the law blameless, a persecutor of those who opposed him. And yet when he saw Jesus Christ, he took all of his spiritual wealth and threw it in the garbage can. He said, all of these things which were gained to me, I was profiting in religion.

I have counted nothing but refuse that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of faith, faith in Jesus Christ, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. And he committed himself to a great person. Now, I noticed as I read Acts chapter 20 that this commitment cost him something.

Serving the Lord, not serving God's people, serving the Lord, not serving myself, serving the Lord, not serving my reputation or what people thought of me, serving the Lord, not serving people, serving the Lord, serving the Lord with tears. When you read about Paul's ministry in Ephesus in the earlier chapters, you don't hear anything about tears. You read about riots and preaching and miracles, but you don't read anything about tears.

The hidden story of a man's ministry. He said, I serve the Lord with tears. You commit yourself to Jesus Christ.

You'll know what it is to weep, to weep over lost souls, to weep over sinning believers, to weep over Christians who can't get along with each other, to weep over people who are anchored and won't move, to weep. He knew what it was to weep. Serving the Lord with tears.

Serving the Lord with toil. Day and night, publicly and from house to house, Jews and Gentiles preaching and teaching, showing and telling. Toil.

And beside all that, Paul was earning his own way. Testing and trial. They tried to kill him.

And yet Paul says, none of these things move me. Backslidden Christians won't move me. Unsaved opposition, it won't move me.

None of these things move me. I have committed myself to a great person. And that's the first step toward a great life.

Have you committed yourself to Jesus Christ? Now, if you haven't, you're not living. There's a second commitment that Paul made. Not only was he committed to a great person, Jesus Christ, but he was committed to a great purpose.

Building the church. You see, wherever Paul went, he started churches. Don't misunderstand me.

Not organizations to support Paul. Churches to serve the Lord. Not monuments to his ministry.

Ministries to the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever Paul went, he started churches. Paul believed in the local church.

And as I read Acts chapter 20, I find the Apostle Paul saying something like this. I have committed my life to God's program on earth. I've committed my life to a great purpose.

A man becomes great as he involves himself in something much bigger than he is. Far too many people today have plugged themselves into something rather small, rather weak, rather temporary. Paul said, I came to Ephesus.

There was the great temple of Diana. It had been there for many years. The worship of Diana had been going on for many years.

And I dared to preach the gospel of the grace of God. And we founded a church. And that is what I live for.

I am committed to a great purpose. The purpose of building the church. That's why Jesus died.

I will build my church. Now, we represent many kinds of ministries. There are some here today who are missionaries, some are pastors, some are in Christian organizations of one kind or another, radio or teaching or publishing.

But I want you to know that anything we do for Jesus Christ, if it's not in some way related to the winning of souls and the building up of his church, it's not going to last. We broadcast this service, so I must be very judicious in my choice of words. But there are organizations in America today, yes, around the world that bear the name Christian, but they are no longer Christian.

And a few years ago, they ceased to be interested in winning the loss and building the church. And God has just taken his hand off of them. I don't care what organization you may be involved in, and I'm involved in a few.

If that organization is not contributing in some way toward the purpose for which Jesus died, I will build my church. God will not bless. I notice here that the local church was important to the apostle Paul.

He gave his life for it. You say, Pastor, I'm an architect. I'm a lawyer.

I'm a schoolteacher. I can't give my life for the church. Do you want me to resign my job and become a preacher? No, not unless God calls you.

But you see, all of us are helping to build the church. All of us are involved in witnessing and praying and giving and winning people to Christ. And my great commission that I read in my Bible that Jesus gave to me says, after you've won them, baptize them and teach them and send them out to win other people.

This is the kind of work the local church is involved in. Paul said the local church is important to me. I'm giving my life for it.

He goes on to say the local church is important to God. In verse 28, he warns them about the fact that they had better be careful how they handle the church. Notice, it's the church of God, not a denomination, a designation.

The church of God. God the Father has put his name on the church. It's the church of the living God.

God the Son died for the church. He purchased it with his own blood. God the Holy Spirit is supervising the church.

He ought to be. He's the one who appoints leaders for the church and raises up guides to shepherd the church. So God the Father put his name on the church, and God the Son shed his blood for the church, and God the Holy Spirit is supervising the church.

You be careful how you deal with the church of the living God. I hear a great deal of criticism about the church these days, and some of it is just. I don't mind criticism of the church as long as it's loving.

Paul loved the church, and God loved the church and gave himself for it. I notice that the church is important to Satan. Satan wants to wreck the church.

In verses 29 and 30, Paul warns us. Paul says that Satan wants to get in and wreck the church. He said to begin with, he'll bring people in from the outside.

Here is the flock over which we are shepherds. Here is the flock, and Satan gets the wolves in, and the wolves devour the flock. I wonder what God is going to say to people who exploit the church for their own personal gain.

He says not only will people come in from the outside, but the devil is going to raise up problems from the inside. Even of your own selves will men arise, and they'll split groups, and they'll get followings to get disciples after themselves. You watch out for anybody who wants you to follow him.

You follow that man who wants you to follow Christ. So the church is important to Paul, and the church is important to God, and the church is important to the devil, and the church ought to be important to us. He says, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up.

Are you helping to build the church? Anybody can criticize. Anybody can find mistakes. The only people who don't make mistakes don't make anything.

Anybody can tear down. A child can tear things down. It takes maturity to build things up.

Paul says, I have committed myself to a great purpose, the purpose of building the church. That's what makes a great life. I see a third commitment here in the life of the Apostle Paul.

Not only was he committed to a great person, Jesus Christ, and not only was he committed to a great purpose, building the church, but he was committed to a great principle, the principle that is spelled out in verse 35, it is more blessed to give than to receive. This is one of the sayings of the Lord Jesus not recorded anywhere in the Gospels. In his Harmony of the Gospels, A.T. Robertson has a list of some of the sayings of the Lord Jesus that are supposed to be authentic.

We don't know. This is authentic. Paul remembered something Jesus had said.

He said, I want you to know, friends, I have shown you by my life and I have taught you by my lips that here is the principle to live with and to trust. It is more blessed to give than to receive. Now, in the English language, we have blessed, more blessed, most blessed.

We have a comparative here. If it is more blessed to give than it is blessed to receive, it's blessed to receive. It's more blessed to give than to receive.

This is the only beatitude in the Bible that has the more attached to it. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are ye when men revile you. Blessed, blessed. But here it's more blessed.

Earl V. Pierce used to call this the supreme beatitude, and he's right. Paul said, my life has been committed to a great principle, not the principle of getting, but the principle of giving. Some of the students will be shocked at this statement, but those of you who are a little more down the pike will not be.

I have never felt that everything that's done in a local church has to please me. If that were the case, I would be constantly miserable. Nor have I ever felt that everything I have done ought to please everybody.

Mr. Lincoln talked about fooling some of the people some of the time. You can please some of the people some of the time. I seriously doubt if you'll please all of the people all of the time.

I have never felt that what goes on in a local church always has to please me. But I have felt this, that whatever is decided that we're going to do, I'm going to give myself to it. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And someone goes away from a service and says, I didn't get anything out of it. And my question is, what did you put into it? Shame on you. Now, most of the people I meet who don't know Jesus as their savior are living by the principle that you get all you can, regardless of what happens.

Most unsaved people live by the principle, get, get. If I don't get, I've wasted my day. Sad to say, some Christians live by this principle, getting.

I would share with you that if you want your life to be a great life, a big life, I didn't say famous, I said big. An Old Testament saint prayed, oh, that thou would bless me indeed, and that thou would enlarge my coast. Oh, it's a plea for bigness in our lives.

Solomon said, give me largeness of heart. David said, enlarge my steps. I would suggest if you want bigness in your life, if you want greatness in your life, start living by this principle.

It's more blessed to give than to receive. Do you ever stop to think that God gives far more than he receives? What if God lived by the principle you live by? I don't give unless I get. Where would you be? God gives far more than he ever receives.

Nature gives far more. Nature's constantly giving. When God built this universe, he built into it the principle, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

And yet you and I sometimes can get so selfish, so very selfish. We can put evangelical blinders on our eyes and see only our little self. Paul says, the thing that helped to make my life what it was is the fact that I dared to believe that God would bless me more if I'd give than if I'd get.

Paul says what Jesus says, give and it shall be given unto you. And this works. The happiest people I know are people who are constantly giving.

They are wearing themselves out day after day, whether it's at work or at home, just sharing with others. Here's a mother with some little children and she never stops to think of the sacrifice she's making. Oh, she could be out playing tennis or swimming or she could be watching color TV as the stomach turns and

she could be doing all of these things.

But here she is giving her life to these little children who rarely give anything back. And you stop her at the close of the day and say, you've had a rough day, haven't you? I've never thought about that. It's been a very happy day.

Why? I've been giving. Whenever our missionaries return home to Moody Church, I feel like I should do what Cornelius did when Peter walked into his household. Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet.

Remember that? Peter said, get up, I'm a man like everybody else. But I feel like doing that. Our great missionaries, God bless them, out there giving, giving, giving.

I think of members of Moody Church who, whether they are at work or at home, wherever they are, they're just sharing with people, just giving. It's hard, but oh, it's happy. And you get to the end of the day and your body's tired and your mind is weary and you've shared and you've shared and yet you can look up and say, Father, it's been a great day.

You've helped me today to learn once again, it's more blessed to give than it is to receive. This is the principle Paul lived by. This is the principle that you and I should live by.

It takes faith. Sometimes you give and they kick you. Sometimes you give and they slap you.

Sometimes you give and they rob you. Sometimes you give and they take all the credit. Fine! Jesus said freely you have received, freely give.

Thank God there's no rationing when it comes to spiritual things. Now, there's never going to be another Apostle Paul. We don't need one.

He finished his course and did his work. Some years ago when I was pastoring down in the Cincinnati area, we were up in Chicago on vacation passing through and I stopped at a church that is pastored by a friend of mine. He wanted me to preach at the morning service, but during the Sunday school hour they had a guest speaker.

I confess to you that when I was leaving home on this vacation I was a very discouraged preacher. We'd been going through a building program and we were just having a lot of difficulty and unfortunately preachers are human like other people are. I was very discouraged.

I went to this Sunday school meeting to listen to this man preach and I can't remember the first ten minutes of what he said. I was selfishly sitting there licking my own wounds. All of a sudden the Lord shook me because the preacher quoted verse 24 of Acts chapter 20.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And God just hit me with that verse. He said you can let things move you.

I said well I hope not. He said you've got a life. Be thankful you've got a life.

I gave you that life. I've put that life on a certain course. I've put your life on a certain course to finish a certain ministry.

Now are you going to do it or aren't you going to do it? You're going to count your life dear unto yourself. Do you have to live? I said no Lord I guess I really don't. I could die and the work would go right on.

I said you stay on that course. You finish that ministry. If you get off that course you'll finish your ministry but not with joy.

I want you to finish your ministry with joy. I can't remember anything else that preacher said that morning but I'll never forget what God said to me through him. And we did go back and we did finish the course with joy.

We don't need another Apostle Paul but we need people like him. We need people who will have greatness of life. Who will keep on going when the going is tough.

Who will pray for their enemies. Who will love the critics. Who will get the work of God done.

Who will be a blessing to other people. Who will say it's not really important that I get anything. What really is important is that we build the church of Jesus Christ.

That's the secret of a great life. Being committed to a great person. Jesus.

Being committed to a great purpose. Building the church. Being committed to a great principle.

It's more blessed to give than to receive. Now to what are you committed today? If you are committed, if I am committed to anything other than this, our lives will be small, feeble, and there just won't be much lasting to it. It might be good for us to close with the words that they wrote on D. L. Moody's gravestone.

Mr. Moody wanted them to put on his gravestone, he hath done what he could. They put on his gravestone, the world passeth away and the lust thereof, and here's what they wrote, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Do you want a great life? Commitment.

You are already committed to someone. Is it Christ? You are already committed to some purpose. Is it building the church? You are already committed to some principle.

Is it giving? This is the secret of a great life, and it begins with surrender to Christ. Let's pray. Father, forgive us for smallness of faith, smallness of planning.

Forgive us for even thinking that because we're in a little place, we aren't important. Lord, this is not humility, it's pride. Forgive us.

Take each one of us and grant to us a great life. In whatever place we may be, in whatever ministry or work you've called us to do, mark our lives with greatness. Help us to keep going, though it's tough.

Help us to keep sacrificing, believing you're going to abundantly reward. Help us to keep touching the lives of other people for their good and for your glory and not for our gain. To the glory of Jesus Christ we pray.

Touch our lives with greatness, for we ask it in his name. Amen.

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