

“Do Not Succeed At Something That Doesn’t Matter”

Job 38:1-7

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

Jesus teaches that living as a servant-leader is the key to a life that matters. Let me tell you the story of Rudy:

Rudy is the true story of a young overachiever and his tenacious pursuit of his dream to attend the University of Notre Dame and play football for the Fighting Irish. However, the road leading to his goal was filled with obstacles. First, because he was small and had barely average speed, there was little chance he would be able to make the Irish’s football squad as a walk-on. Second, Rudy was dyslexic, and his high school grades had suffered as a consequence. It would be almost impossible for him to be accepted by the prestigious university in the first place. Refusing to give up, he took a Greyhound into South Bend and met Father Cavanaugh, a scholastic priest who agreed to get him into a semester of Holy Cross Junior College. If his grades were good enough there, perhaps Notre Dame might consider letting him in.... Rudy’s grades.... improved dramatically. But three semesters and three rejection letters later, he is devastated and hopeless. His next semester is his last chance, because Notre Dame never allows seniors to transfer. He.... managed his way to South Bend, labored in class, and even scraped up enough odd jobs so he can [could] eat. He has been diligent and worked every angle he knew. But it hasn’t been enough. Rudy finds himself in the chapel where he had first met Father Cavanaugh. And once again, he pours out his soul to the elderly priest. “Maybe I haven’t prayed enough,” Rudy says, almost frantic. Father Cavanaugh answers with kind, narrow eyes, “I’m sure that’s not the problem. Praying is something we do in our time. The answers come in God’s time.” Rudy isn’t satisfied. There has to be something else he can do. “Have I done everything I possibly can? Can you help me?” Father Cavanaugh’s answer is measured but sure. “Son, in 35 years of religious studies, I’ve come up with only two hard, incontrovertible facts: There is a God, and I’m not Him.”¹

Rudy was pursuing something that mattered, playing football at Notre Dame. What mattered most, from Father Cavanaugh’s perspective, was Rudy to deepen his sense of belonging to God. Although Rudy did eventually get into Notre Dame and played

¹The source is the film *Rudy* (Tristar, 1993), directed by David Anspaugh. Found October 12, 2021, on preachingtoday.com.

football, the point is not to succeed at something that doesn't matter. What really matters? A deepening and more intimate relationship with God, others, and your service in God's mission.

Jesus teaches that living as a servant-leader is the key to a life that matters. Succeeding and resting in the truth that you belong to God and know who you are in Christ matters most. In this regard, Bobby Schuller in *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* writes, "Bonding is my greatest need. There are people in my life who love me and want to know me better."² Believe that God and others want to know you better. Act on your desire to get to know God and others better. Therein lies the significance of thinking and self-examination. Bonding relationships with God and others are truly impactful.

The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel Readings remind us that participating in God's mission through service, building personal and intimate relationships with God and others, is how we grow as followers of Jesus. Job 38:4 reads, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." Hebrews 5:8-9 reads, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him..." And Mark 10:43-44 reads, "... but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Remember, the greatest success is becoming a servant leader just like Jesus.

²Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2019), 191.

Leaving everything, following Jesus, serving others, and being a slave to all would appear not to be a great marketing strategy by Jesus. But he attracted twelve initial disciples and by the time of Pentecost thousands and thousands and thousands of new disciples were following Jesus. James and John expected Jesus to do whatever asked of him, like who is the greatest and which one of us gets to sit on your right or left side. They wanted to be in charge. They wanted a special place in Jesus' coming kingdom. They didn't understand surrendering their wants for God's. John and James did not understand letting go. They struggled accepting the life God was giving them and really wanted a life they were creating in their minds and hearts. They struggled with understanding the gospel, the good news, as a message of giving oneself up through service for the sake of another. Jesus invited them into a different way of living.³

Let's not jump too quickly to think we are any different than James and John. I've been following Jesus since I was thirteen years old. I am doing better but still have times when I expect Jesus to fulfill my understanding of how life should be. I still have moments of wanting to be in charge and to serve when it's convenient. If you really want to live abundant life now, let go. If you really want to live, accept the life God has for you and surrender the one you're attempting to fabricate. God alone is God, so surrender to what God wants. Even Jesus said, "Not what I want, but what you want." Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life," the words of the Greatest Commandment, the

³In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Brady Banks, Jennifer T. Kaalund, George R. Hunsberger, Alicia D. Myers, and Nontombi Naomi Tutu in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 390-394, 398-400, 400-401, 402-404, and 404-406.

teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 are a great road map to succeed at something that really matters. Amen.

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