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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

August 23, 2015

### The Scramble for Success

*“An argument broke out among the disciples  
over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest.”*

Luke 22:24 (Common English Bible)

Little has changed in the human condition from the day of Jesus' ministry on earth to our day – in every walk of life people seem to be playing the status-seeking game. It is seen in their homes, their furniture, and the car they drive. It is noticed in the clubs they join and the company they keep. Many surround themselves with symbols of their preferred place in the social order. Advertisements advance this endless scramble for position in social rank. Luxury items carefully placed on optimal pages of newspapers and magazines with one aim – promotion of ostentation and snobbery. Success is measured by the stuff we acquire, greatness measured by our position in the company and community.

The unfortunate result of this scramble is that we become self-centered. Everything becomes about us. Even in the church – perhaps particularly in the church – a self-centered nature is revealed in demands that the worship music suit our personal taste, the pastor be more outgoing, and the children be less distracting. Criticism always shows up in someone who is thinking far too much about themselves. There was a case of a woman who made a special donation for flowers in worship one Sunday morning. Mention of her gift was inadvertently omitted from the worship bulletin. Recognition denied, she demanded a refund.

Jesus had a great deal to say about self-centeredness and status seeking. “Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They love being greeted with honor in the markets. They long for the places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets” (Luke 20:46). Jesus' remark, “Watch out” could not be clearer. Self-promotion has no place in God's kingdom. For a people who claim to follow Jesus, many of us are missing the mark – some considerably so!

What is a faithful response? First, understand that Jesus never forbade his followers to seek greatness. It is right to seek it, but it must be real greatness. The greatness esteemed by Jesus is one that places initiative, ambition, and developed ability at the service of others; at the service of God's mission. The parable of the valuable coins in Matthew's twenty-fifth chapter is but one supreme teaching of the Bible that God expects us not to be idle. Second, if we are to reverse ourselves in the stream of self-interest and drive for success we must keep before us – morning and evening – the example of Jesus. In him we see love to God as the inspiration of life. There is simply no substitution for the regular reading of scripture and prayer for maintaining our focus on why we live and strive to achieve much.

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