

# Of Stars and Servants



## Who is the greatest?

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”—*Matthew 18:1–4*

\*

My career as a journalist has afforded me opportunities to interview “stars,” including NFL football greats, movie actors, music performers, best-selling authors, politicians, and TV personalities. These are the people who dominate the media. We fawn over them, poring over the minutiae of their lives: the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the aerobic routines they follow, the people they love, the toothpaste they use. Yet I must tell you that, in my limited experience, I have found Paul Johnson’s principle to hold true: our “idols” are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are incurably dependent on psychotherapy. In a heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by self-doubt.

I have also spent time with people I call “servants.” Doctors and nurses who work among the ultimate outcasts, leprosy patients in rural India. A Princeton graduate who runs a hotel for the homeless in Chicago. Health workers who have left high-paying jobs to serve in a backwater town of Mississippi. Relief workers in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and other repositories of human suffering. The PhD’s I met in Arizona, who are now scattered throughout jungles of South America translating the Bible into obscure languages. I was prepared to honor and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples. *I was not prepared to envy them.*

Yet as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. Without question, I would rather spend time among the servants than among the stars: they possess qualities of depth and richness and even joy that I have not found elsewhere. Servants work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, “wasting” their talents and skills

among the poor and uneducated. Somehow, though, in the process of losing their lives they find them. The poor in spirit and the meek are indeed blessed, I now believe. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and it is they who will inherit the earth.—*Philip Yancey*

\*

A meek and a quiet spirit God will not despise.—*Psalm 51:17*

\*

Everywhere you look, people are busy trying to build their own “kingdoms” of power and influence. They strive and sacrifice to make a name for themselves. Desperate to prove their independence, these men and women exhaust themselves chasing worldly success and self-sufficiency. ...

God offers us so much more than the delusion of success—he offers us his kingdom, on his terms. We must come helpless and humble, knowing that we cannot gain his kingdom on our own; we only obtain it when we humbly accept Christ’s love and sacrifice on our behalf. We come as beggars, and then we are given an esteemed place in God’s kingdom as his adopted children.

... Only when we become beggars will we experience the riches of God’s grace.