

[Salt and Light Strategies]

Everybody Wants To Be Somebody

by Joe McGee

When you were growing up, what did you do that most often brought approval and attention from the people in your life? Now that you're grown, what do you do that most often wins the approval of those around you? In other words, what is it that truly gives your life significance?

Almost everyone wants to be admired in some way, to be noticed by others, or to be liked. No one really wants to go through life being overlooked as a wallflower.

Every place I've ever worked gave either employee-of-the-year awards or employee-of-the-month awards, and the competition was usually stiff. You could hear the conversations around the shop or at the water fountain — many mocking or making fun of the award, but secretly, deep down, hoping they would win it.

I also remember the honors awarded to students each year in my high school — Best All-Around, Most Popular, Most Dependable, Most Ambitious, Friendliest, Most Courteous, Most Talented, Wittiest, Most School Spirit, Most Athletic, Senior Beauties, plus various club awards. There was even one award called the “Bachelor of Ugliness”! At my school, more than 60 different awards were handed out among 192 seniors!

Then there were the areas in which you could be involved in high school — sports teams, cheerleading, band, chorus, Student Council, FCA, FFA, FHA, FTA, Red Cross, Math Club, Science Club, Beta Club, Bible Club, Key Club, Letterman's Club, Library Club, etc. Students received recognition for belonging to one of these groups. Only rarely was there someone not involved somewhere or serving his high school in some capacity.

Get the picture? People honor and love those who serve — those who step out of their “box” or comfort zone to get involved and be a blessing to others. And it is a biblical principle that anyone who wants to be great in the Kingdom of God must be the servant of all.

Who Is the Greatest in the Kingdom?

After they arrived at Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples settled in the house where they would be staying. Jesus asked them, “What were you discussing out on the road?” But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about *which of them was the greatest*. He sat down and called the twelve disciples over to him. Then he said, “Anyone who wants to be the first must take last place and *be the servant of everyone else*.”

Mark 9:33-35 NLT

Jesus taught the importance of being a “somebody” by serving others. In fact, time and time again, the Word points out the example a leader sets by his service to others.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.” “What is it?” he asked. “In your glorious Kingdom, we want to sit in places of honor next to you,” they said, “one at your right and the other at your left.” But Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with? “Oh yes,” they said, “we are able!” And Jesus said, “You will indeed drink from my cup and be baptized with my baptism, but I have no right to say who will sit on the thrones next to mine. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.” When the ten other disciples discovered what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. *Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.*”

Mark 10:35-45 NLT

Jesus told His disciples that even He came to the earth, not to be served but to serve others. He also taught by His words and by His life that the motivation behind service is *love*.

Love Is Something You *Do*, Not Something You *Say*

In the Word of God, love is always expressed in action. For example, John 3:16 says concerning God’s love for man, “For God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 14:15 (NLT) talks about man’s love for God. In this verse, Jesus says, “If you love me, *obey* my commandments.” In verses 23,24 (NLT), Jesus makes it even more clear: “...All those who love me *will do what I say*. My Father will love them, and we will come and live with them. Anyone who doesn’t love me *will not do what I say*....”

So you see, love is not what you *feel* for someone. It’s what you *do* for someone that makes love real.

Esau and Jacob Are Born

There is perhaps no greater example in the Bible of someone who *served* and someone who *refused to serve* than that of Jacob and Esau. One became a “somebody” in the eyes of God; the other became a “nobody.”

This is the history of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban. Isaac pleaded with the Lord to give Rebekah a child because she was childless. So the Lord answered Isaac’s prayer, and his wife became pregnant with twins. But *the two children struggled with each other in her womb*. So she went to ask the Lord about it. “Why is this happening to me,” she asked. And the Lord told her, “The sons in your womb will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other; the descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son.” And when the time came, the twins were born. The first was very red at birth. He was covered with so much hair that one would think he was wearing a piece of clothing. So they called him Esau. Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau’s heel. So they called him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

Genesis 25:19-26 NLT

Although these boys were twins, they were as different from one another as night and day. God approved of one and disapproved of the other based on the way they each valued and esteemed *Him, their family, and spiritual things*. Jacob valued the prospect of fulfilling divine destiny; Esau valued the idea of seeking temporal pleasures and doing only what *he* wanted to do in life.

Beans or the Birthright? **Esau Sells His Blessing**

As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open fields, while Jacob was the kind of person who liked to stay at home. Isaac loved Esau in particular because of the wild game he brought home, but Rebekah favored Jacob. One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home exhausted and hungry from a hunt. Esau said to Jacob, “I’m starved! Give me some of that red stew you’ve made.” (This was how Esau got his other name, Edom — “Red.”) Jacob replied, “All right, but *trade me your birthright for it*.” “Look, I’m dying of starvation!” said Esau. “What good is my birthright to me now?” So Jacob insisted, “Well then, swear to me right now that it is mine.” So Esau swore an oath, thereby *selling all his rights as the firstborn* to his younger brother. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and went on about his business, indifferent to the fact that *he had given up his birthright*.

Genesis 25:27-34 NLT

No doubt, Esau was hungry that day as he came in the field — but he wasn’t “dying of starvation” by any means! He simply responded to the smell of food and desired so much to satiate himself that — in the words of Genesis 25:34 — he “despised” his own

birthright, forsaking divine destiny and the plan of God for his life in exchange for temporary pleasure. It's interesting that between these twin brothers, one esteemed the "beans" — the other esteemed the birthright!

Why the Birthright Was So Important

In Bible times, the birthright of the firstborn was the "double portion" (*see* Deuteronomy 21:17), and it was very important. The oldest son was regarded as the heir, not only of the father's wealth but of his power and authority. With that inheritance, he was also charged with the responsibility of caring for his mother if she survived his father—and to continue raising his younger siblings once his father was gone. Additionally, he was to care for the orphans and widows in his tribe and to continue the family business.

So the birthright of the firstborn was more than just an entitlement to the physical assets of the family; it was also a spiritual position. Particularly in those days, God would lead families through their patriarchs. And in the case of Esau and Jacob, this "spiritual position" also meant that the one who received the birthright would be the one through whom the covenant promise made to their grandfather, Abraham, would be realized.

In other words, the Messiah would come through the holder of the birthright to bless the nations of the earth! As the firstborn, that birthright was Esau's. Unfortunately, he failed to appreciate its value and, consequently, failed to receive it.

After Esau sold his birthright, Esau continued making poor choices. He married Hittite women against his parents' wishes. He also married two Ishmaelite women. Esau, who was also called Edom, became father of the Edomites. Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, became father of God's chosen people, Israel. As one might guess, the Israelites and the Edomites became bitter enemies. The Edomites often aided Israel's enemies in attacks on Israel, their own brethren!

The Blessing of Responsibility

Before he died, Isaac laid his hands on Jacob, thinking he was Esau, his eldest, and spoke this blessing (*see* Genesis 27:28,29 *NLT*):

**May God always give you plenty of dew for healthy crops and
Good harvests of grain and wine.
May many nations become your servants.
May you be the master of your brothers.
May all your mother's sons bow low before you.
All who curse you are cursed, and all who bless you are blessed.**

When Jacob bought the birthright from Esau, it was a legal deal. Jacob understood the great importance of the birthright, and he valued it so much that he and his mother exerted strenuous effort to obtain it from Esau, its original owner.

In ill-esteeming and disregarding his inheritance, Esau was saying, in essence, "I don't

want the double blessing. I don't get to keep it all or use it just for my benefit. I'll have to take care of some snot-nosed orphan, some crying widow, or someone who's sick and can't work. And I don't want to do that — I only want to be responsible for myself!"

The Bitter End of Irresponsibility

Someone might think, *What's so bad about that? Esau lost a few blessings, but he really just gave Jacob the responsibility that would have otherwise been his. It's not the end of the world.*

But the Lord, the ultimate Giver of the birthright, didn't see it like that. In fact, God called Esau's actions "godless" and "immoral."

Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau. He traded his birthright as the oldest son for a single meal. And afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he wept bitter tears.

Hebrews 12:16,17 NLT

For a mere meal "bowl of beans," or stew, Esau sold his birthright — his father's wealth and position of power and authority, both naturally and spiritually. Esau chose to indulge his sensual appetite, gratifying himself "in the here-and-now," even though it meant casting away an inheritance that included the lineage of the Christ the Messiah — God Himself in the flesh!

When Esau forsook his inheritance, the Bible says he was "...indifferent to the fact that he had given up his birthright" (Genesis 25:34 NLT). However, later, when he wanted the blessing from his father, it was too late. Although he wept bitterly, there was no going back.

Two Types of People in the Last Days: The Godly Vs. the Ungodly

Just as with Jacob and Esau, there are two types of people in this world who make choices every day that affect their lives and the lives of those around them. In the book of Jude, we read the traits of these two types of people in these last days.

These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want. But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said. They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them. But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves

safe in God's love. And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

Jude 16-23 NLT

Ungodly Sinners (Verses 16-19)

1. They are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their own desires.
2. They brag loudly about themselves.
3. They flatter others to get what they want.
4. They are scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires.
5. They create divisions among the Body of Christ.
6. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.

Godly Saints (Verses 20-23)

1. They build each other up in the most holy faith.
2. They pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. They keep themselves safe in the love of God.
4. They show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.
5. They rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment.
6. They show mercy to others but with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate those lives.

Reading these verses, it's not hard to see which lifestyle is pleasing to God and which one isn't. It's also interesting that the life that pleases Him is a life devoted to *loving Him* and *servicing others*.

Still Searching for Significance? Living for Others Makes You a 'Somebody' in God's Eyes

In Isaiah 58, we read that Israel became angry with God because He didn't seem to be impressed with their fasting.

“We have fasted before you!” they say. “Why aren't you impressed? We have done much penance, and you don't even notice it!” “I will tell you why! It's because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like a blade of grass in the wind. You dress in sackcloth and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord?

Isaiah 58:3-5 NLT

Then in verse 6, the Lord says, “No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to...,” and in verses 6-10, He enumerates the things we are called to do to engage in the kind of fasting He wants — to fast in a way that’s pleasing to Him.

- Free those who are wrongly imprisoned.
- Stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn.
- Share your food with the hungry and welcome poor wanderers into your home.
- Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.
- Stop oppressing the helpless, and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors!
- Feed the hungry and help those in trouble.

**If You’ll Do *That* —
You’ll Get *This***

In verses 8-12, the Lord gives the results of the fasting that pleases Him.

- Your salvation will come like the dawn.
- Your healing will come quickly.
- Your godliness will lead you forward.
- The glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.
- When you call, the Lord will answer. (“Yes, I am here,” He will quickly reply.)
- Your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day.
- The Lord will guide you continually, watering your life when you’re dry and keeping you healthy and strong. You’ll be like a well-watered garden, an ever-flowing spring.
- Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities.
- You will be known as a builder of walls and a restorer of homes.

Let’s Go Be Salt and Light

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world — like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Matthew 5:13-16 *NLT*

From the beginning, God has made it clear that we are indeed our “brother’s keeper” (*see* Genesis 4:9). He has called each one of us to be “salt and light” to those around us, both

to the world, or the unsaved, and to our fellow brothers and sisters in the family of God. So the next time you're tempted to be a *nobody* — to “hide under a basket” your gifts, talents, and physical resources — remember that God created you to be a *somebody*. He has called you to a life of *service* — to be someone great and of great significance in the Kingdom of God.