

A High Impact Life: Greater Works

Dr. Tom Pace

October 13, 2019

John 14:12-17

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. John 14:12-17

You might want to keep that Scripture open in front of you. Let's pray together. *O God, open us up, open our eyes that we might see the world anew and our ears that we might hear your word in the midst of these words. Open up our hearts, God, that your word would fall in. And then in response, God, open our hands that we might serve others. Amen.*

Ray Lewis was probably the greatest pro middle linebacker ever. He played for the Baltimore Ravens for 17 years. Recently he was speaking to a group of young athletes and was asked what his philosophy was. He said: "Don't walk through life just playing football. Don't walk through life just being an athlete. Athletics will fade, character and integrity and really making an impact on someone's life - that's the ultimate vision. That's the ultimate goal, the bottom line."

Jane Goodall is a famous conservationist, biologist who worked with chimpanzees for many years, and she's 85 now. She was honored at a dinner and here's what she said: "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

The great Billy Graham said this: "Scripture is filled with examples of men and women whom God used late in life often with great impact. Men and women who refused to use old age as an excuse to ignore what God wanted them to do."

And then there's Anita Roddick. She was a British businesswoman who in the 1970s created a cosmetic company. Then in the early 2000s she sold it for 625 million pounds. She gave away her entire fortune before she died. She left nothing to her children, and they affirmed and celebrated that decision. I love what she said: "If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito." I think that one's good!

So when I look at the people in the world around, in the news, everywhere I look – people who I want to be like and are inspiring to me, all of them have approached life with an attitude of "Not what I can get" but "What can I give?" What can I do? How can I make an impact on the world around me?

Look, I think every single one of us wants to live a life that matters. I don't know anyone who if I talked to them would say, "You know, I just want to get everything I can before I die." Kind of like "He who dies with the most toys wins."

We may live that way and our actions may say that, but if we talk and ask, "What do you really want" then that's not it. We want to make a difference. We want our lives to matter to some people. Even to just a small group of people. We want to live the high impact life.

Now Jesus clearly led the highest impact life. We've divided history by him like when we call history dates being in "B.C." and "A.D." No single person in history perhaps has made a greater impact on the world around us. That's why it is so perplexing that in John 14 he says, "And greater works than these you will do." That's after he's talked about what he's done in his life when he speaks about doing the works he's done. "And greater works than these you will do."

So I want us to take a look at this passage because I think it gives us the skeleton, the components of what it means to live a life that makes an impact, a high impact life.

Two weeks ago in our series we talked about the Scripture in Philippians where Paul says we are to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in us to will and act according to his good pleasure." In other words we have been given our salvation for a reason. We don't earn our salvation, but we work it out, we do something with the salvation we've been given. He goes on to say that we should be "shining like stars" in the world around us, so that you might be a witness for the greatness of God. So we're to do something with our salvation.

Then last week Katie Montgomery Mears taught us that we're to start small, to start closest to those around us. It isn't about doing something super-big but it's a matter of doing small things with great love.

Let's look then at this week and talk about the three components of a High Impact Life, what it takes to do that. I want to start with verse twelve. In the beginning he says, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do..." This is really simple, not easy but really simple. If we want to have a high impact life, we are to do what Jesus did. We are to live and love like Jesus lived and loved.

So what did Jesus do? Well, wherever he went he shared the Gospel, the good news. He shared God's love. He told them that God loved them so much that they didn't have to earn God's love, that God loved them. And God loved them so much that he sent him to come and to die for them. He lifted the burdens of religion, of legalism off their shoulders and told there was nothing they could do that would keep God from loving them. Whenever Jesus met someone, he tried to meet their needs. If they were hungry, he fed them with loaves and fishes. If they were sick, he sought to heal them. If they were an outcast, he brought them in.

When Jesus came across injustice he spoke out against that injustice. He said, "You who are without sin cast the first stone." And he stood in their way. He called people out and held them accountable. Most importantly, the Scripture tells us that Jesus came so that God would be with us. What Jesus was was that he was with us.

What are we to do? We're to do the same thing. Wherever we go, whatever place we are we help people to know how much God loves them. We try to lift the burden of legalism off their shoulders and tell them that they can't do anything that will keep God from loving them. That's the good news. We try and meet their needs. If they're hungry we try to feed them. If they're sick we do what we can to minister to them. If they're an outcast, we try to give them a place and draw them in and invite them to our table.

Most importantly when there are people who are going through life, we say that we're going to go through life with them. We say, "You're not going to go through this alone." We do the work that Jesus did. It's really that simple - that's the Christian faith. We do the things that Jesus did.

He says it in two other ways in this passage. In verse 15 he says, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Earlier he said, "If you believe in me you'll do the work I do." Here he says, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments."

So what are the commandments? He says, "A new command I give you that you love one another." He's saying, "You know the Ten Commandments - I give you a new one - that you love one another." So what are we to do? We're to love one another. Just like Jesus loved, we're to love.

Now he even makes it even a little more significant in verses 14 and 15. He says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name." And then in verse 14, he says, "If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." So what is he saying there? He's saying, "You're not just doing what I did, you're actually representing me in the world. You are *being* me."

Paul develops the idea when he says, "You are the Body of Christ." When Jesus says, "in my name" he doesn't mean you can get whatever you want because "Jesus told me to." It means that whatever you do, you do it in the character of Jesus. Anytime in Scripture when you see the word "name" you can pull that out and put the word "character" in. That's because one's name is to mirror one's character. So Jesus' name means "one who saves" so we're to do whatever we do in the character of Jesus. Seeking to bring salvation, healing to others.

John Knox, who's maybe the greatest Presbyterian theologian since John Calvin said it this way: "The soul *residuum* (which means "what's left over" - the "soul left over") of the Christ event (meaning the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus) is the church."

Other than us, and it doesn't mean the institutional church but all the followers of Jesus. Other than the followers of Jesus there's nothing left after Christ came. We're it. We have that responsibility to be Jesus in the world. There is no Plan B - that's it. The way we have a high impact life is to live and love like Jesus.

I want you to do this. Think about the people in your life who have made the greatest impact on you. I can think about them in my life and they are not perfect people by any stretch of the imagination. But the part of them that made the impact on me, that shaped me, is the part that's like Jesus.

So there's one person who just over and over again would affirm me and celebrate me and just tell me how great I am. To say, "You're amazing" but at the same time would kind of "call me up." "You can do better. Why don't you do this? I can't believe you're not going to try this?"

Why aren't you trying this?" How Christ-like is that? To accept us right where we are and celebrate us right where we are and then call us up, call us forward, call us to become more and to grow.

There's someone else who just inspires me to no end. He's passed away now but he stood up for what was right as a pastor in the Civil Rights movement, amidst so much negative popular response to him. He did it not by acting like he's some big martyr, but like he did it with joy and a twinkle in his eye. Just sort of honestly saying, "This is who I am." He's so bold and courageous and that's so much like who Jesus is. That part is what inspired me and made such an impact on my life.

There's someone else who is so incredibly generous. Other problems and parts of that person's life have their issues, but this person is incredibly generous with their time and money. And that's so much like Jesus who gave himself away.

You see what I mean? That when we live and love like Jesus, we make an impact on the lives of other people. You know the song from "Wicked" where it says, "I am who I am, because I knew you, because I knew you, I've been changed for the good."

If we're going to make an impact on the lives of others the way we do that is to live and love like Jesus. That's in our church's mission statement. St. Luke's mission is "to equip families and individuals to live and love like Jesus." So when we do that, we make an impact.

That's the first component, and here's the second one. Because he goes on to say, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I do and in fact will do greater works than these." That's in verse 12b. Greater works than these? Really? Like greater works than raising Lazarus from the dead? Seriously?

I included this in my Friday prayer that I asked God to help me do greater works than his Son Jesus. I sent it in, and my assistant sent it back to me and said, "Did you really mean this?" It was underlined, and she offered some alternative statements. She always proofreads my stuff. But I said, "Just look at John 14:12 - it says that!" She responded: "Oh. Awesome."

So what does that mean? Greater works? Well, I want you to think about it as not in terms of just the single thing, but in terms of the extent.

Look, Jesus never traveled more than 100 miles from his home. And yet the church through our collective impact, the Gospel is in every corner of the world. Every corner of the world.

How many people did Jesus heal? Maybe a 100 or a thousand? I don't really know. Yet through the church - Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic - hundreds of hospitals have been created. And through those churches incredible mission work, medical mission work, bringing healing to millions of people. That's "greater works than these."

It's a matter of that extent. What happens is that we come together collectively, join a movement of God, then we really make an impact, so much more than any one individual of us can by living and loving like Jesus. When we come to live and love like Jesus together, amazing things can happen.

You hear more and more about this growing phrase. It's when people say, "I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious." Or they might say, "I believe in Jesus, but I don't like the church. It's hypocritical; it's all about money..." There seem to be a thousand reasons and sometimes these comments echo in my mind. I'm a pretty non-institutional kind of guy, believe it or not. I think those things myself.

But here's what I'll tell you. Being "spiritual but not religious" has not created one hospital. Being "spiritual but not religious" has not created one university, one school. Being "spiritual but not religious" has not brought together a community of young people and given them a place to feel included and to accomplish something. Being "spiritual but not religious" has not created the World Vision International which has fed thousands and hundred of thousands of people around the world. Being "spiritual but not religious" has not created Living Water International which has dug water wells for people around the world and changed their lives dramatically. Being "spiritual but not religious" did not create the Christian Community Service Center where people come together and provide food for the hungry.

See, if you really want to make an impact you have to join with other people. It feels really good to be authentic and say, "Well, I'm not going to join that group because they disagree with me on this or that." And it feels good because you think you're being authentic. You might say, "I'm not going to be that joiner." But it's when we become joiners, when we say, "You know what, I'm going to put my own individual interests aside, and I'm going to join others so that together we can actually do something."

That's why the church is powerful. It's because despite our faults, despite the places where we're broken, we still come together and we still say, "Let's do this together. Let's make a difference." And then we join in this high impact kind of work.

There's a great video that I saw at a leadership conference a few years ago and it's called "The Dancing Guy." I don't know if any of you have seen it, but you can go online and see it. It's a hoot. Here's the deal. It's one of these cell phone videos and it's really choppy since someone's taking it. It's at an outdoor concert on a hillside. You can picture college students, one guy with no shirt on and they're just listening to the music. Then this one guy gets up and he begins to dance. And dancing is an interesting word for it. He's not really dancing. He's just doing weird things with his body. He's just waving his arms and jumping around - I guess you could call that dancing. I'd do it for you, but it would go viral.

So this guy gets up and he begins to dance and it's crazy dancing. You're seeing others wince and say, "That guy is so weird! Oh, my gosh, that guy is weird!" Then after he does it for about thirty seconds, this other guy comes, and he starts to dance like that. Then you say, "Look at those two weird people there dancing like that." Then this third guy comes in and he starts to dance.

Now the first guy's the leader, the second guy we call the first follower, and the third person is the second follower. And pretty soon you see people start to come by the dozens. And then you have an entire hillside full of people dancing. And you look at it and ask, "Hey, how did that happen?"

Here's the leadership point. It's not the leader, not the first person who makes the biggest difference. It's the second, the third, and the fourth followers. They say, "We can do this. Let's do this." Jesus is our leader, but we make a difference when we join in. When we say, "Let's go! Come on, people!" And as we do it others see that, and they follow it along.

Let's remember the first two components of a high impact life. One is that we live and love like Jesus, and second is that we live and love like Jesus - with others. That we come together to do these greater works.

There's one more component that's important. In verse 16 it says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." It's the Holy Spirit. This is the secret sauce.

You can seek to live and love like Jesus, you can do that together. But what creates a community of impact, a world changing impact? It's the Holy Spirit coming among you. Coming into the lives of each us as individuals and coming into the life of our community. The Psalmist says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

Remember with me the book of Acts. Here's the setting: in chapter one Jesus has died and been resurrected. He's even appeared to his disciples, so they know he's been resurrected. They're in the Upper Room, they're hunkered down, and they're praying. They're hidden away, they're afraid.

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit comes and they are not the same. No more fear, no more being hidden away, no more hunkering down. Peter is preaching boldly. Five thousand people come to be a part of this new movement of God. The transformation comes with the holy Spirit. That's what changes things.

Have I told you about my Jeep CJ7? I love my Jeep CJ7. I love my wife, I love my mother, I love my children... I know you're not supposed to love things but just forgive me for this one. I love my Jeep CJ7. It's a beautiful thing and I worked really hard just to tinker with it. I clean it up and I put gizmos on it and all of that and I drive it. I let the wind blow through my hair.

But it has a problem and in that the gas gauge doesn't work. So four times I've run out of gas. Four times, run out of gas, had to walk somewhere, get a gas can. Then I have to come back and pour in the gas. Had to call my wife to pick me up to get the gas can.

So now I carry a gas can and I take a picture of this odometer every time I fill it up so I can do the math as to when I'll run out of gas. What occurred to me is that that's how a lot of us live our lives. We do the mechanics, we organize our lives well. We want to sign up for the right things, we want to join the right ministry. To volunteer for the right things. We want to be good parents, to treat people well around us. We want to do all those things.

We shine up our lives, we work on the efficiency of it. But we're not connected to any fuel source. No power. We have the form of godliness but lack the power of godliness, because we don't invite the Holy Spirit in to change and to transform us.

When I look at my life and I'm having trouble and I'm feeling fractured and pulled in a thousand different directions, I feel like what I sometimes call "fibrillating" - like a heart that doesn't quite pump any blood. It's just going so fast.

What I realize is that when I stop and look at it it's not that I need to work harder, it's that my prayer life has fallen apart. I'm not fervently or authentically praying that God will come – what the hymn text says – and that the "spirit of the living God fall afresh on me." Fall afresh on us as a community.

Those are the components. Our vision here at St. Luke's is a "city transformed by the love of Jesus." That's the vision. Our mission then is to "equip families and individuals to live and love like Jesus." And when we live and love like Jesus and when we come together to do that as a community of people, as a movement, and when we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and to use us, that's when we can live a high impact life. That's when our church can be a high impact church.

Let's pray together. *Gracious and loving God, we ask that you help us, shape us in your image that we might live and love like your Son Jesus. Help us to put aside our own individual interests and agendas and come together to live your agenda for us. Bring us together so we might be a movement that works together to be transformative for our city, and most importantly, God, fill each one of us and this community with your Spirit. Amen*