

The Great Life

September 12, 2021

Sports-figure interview

Clint Hurdle broke into Major Leagues baseball as a player with the Kansas City Royals and in 1980 he went on to become a batting coach and, later, a manager. He is one of the few men to have been to the World Series as a player, coach, and a manager. He became the manager for our Pittsburgh Pirates in 2011, and in 2013 he was named manager of the Year as his positive attitude helped the Pirates finally break their 20-year losing streak and go to the post-season. Please give a warm Crossroads welcome to Clint Hurdle!

Interview questions:

1. You were in major league baseball for 40 years. What highlights stand out to you today?
2. You have been open about your faith in Christ. How did you come to faith, and how has it impacted your life?

It's been exciting for me to meet Clint Hurdle, because he both played and managed in Major League baseball. When I was a kid growing up in Forest Hills, I viewed baseball players as a kind of immortal beings. They had supernatural powers to be able to hit a baseball traveling at 90 mph. They could run and throw better than regular human beings.

I loved baseball, but I never dreamed of being a major league player because I knew I was too ordinary. Those guys were the elite, the Great Ones – who lived in a dream world of baseball every day. Even though I liked to play ball, I wasn't one of *those guys* and I knew it.

Other kids might look up to great singers, or Olympic gymnasts, or actors or Presidents; you know -- the kind of people who appear attract 4 million followers on social media. For most of us, as we grow older, we realize that we are probably not going to be nationally famous. But that doesn't matter. One thousand years from now it won't matter who cut a record deal or who had millions of likes on social.

Pop quiz:

- Who was the greatest musician 1,000 years ago in 1020 AD? ...anyone know?
- Who was the greatest athlete of the 14th century?
- Who was the richest person in the world?¹

¹ Mansa Musa of the Mali Empire <https://www.businessinsider.com/mansa-musa-the-richest-person-in-history-2016-2>

No one remembers – and even if you could name the person, would it really matter? The reality is that one thousand years from now, greatness won't be measured by popular opinion; in eternity, greatness is measured by who God thinks is great. And it is not just a select few who are destined to live a great life... *each of us are. We are born to be great in God's sight.*

Jesus explained to us that God measures greatness differently than society does. Jesus was constantly turning people's assumptions about greatness upside down. For example: In the book of Matthew, it says that one day the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, *"Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1)*

Give the disciples credit here – they weren't accepting popular opinion about who was great – they wanted to know who was greatest from heaven's perspective. They might have expected Jesus to say that the greatest is the one who does the greatest miracles or preaches to the largest number of people.

But Jesus calls a little child over to him and says, "If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, become like this child." At that time, children were the least powerful and least influential in society – and yet Jesus says, "Here is greatness." Jesus said that God's definition of greatness is different than everyone else's.

Then after the last supper, we're told *A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. (Luke 22:24).* Clearly, the disciples had a thing about greatness (and so do we!). Jesus heard them and said, "The rich and powerful make people do what they want. But God views the one who serves as the greatest."

Then, to make sure they got the idea, Jesus took up a towel and washed the feet of his disciples. Washing feet is what servants or slaves did! If someone was choosing their online profile picture, they wouldn't pick one with a towel and basin. That was what servants did for the great people.

But Jesus was making a point about greatness in God's sight. He said, "No servant is greater than his master, and if I am serving, you should, too." To follow Jesus is to adopt a lifestyle of saying "yes" to him.

John Stott said, "Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience." That is why greatness is not just for a selected few; Jesus said that God has destined every believer for greatness.

At one point Jesus was asked about John the Baptist. He said in Mark 10:10-11, *This is the one about whom it is written:*

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Jesus said that *anyone* who is in the kingdom – that is, who is following King Jesus – is greater than John the Baptist. That's pretty great, wouldn't you agree? Jesus is saying that every one of his followers will be considered great by God. That includes you and me!

Since greatness is measured by obedience to Jesus, that means that the greatest person in God's sight is the one who keeps the greatest commandments. And if we're a little fuzzy on the greatest commandment, Jesus reminded us what it is.

In Matthew 22:36-40, a skeptical religious leader decided to test Jesus by asking him a question: *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”*

There it is – the greatest commandment: **to love God with our whole being**. If we don't keep that command to love God, then nothing we do will make ourselves significant eternally. But if we do love God, then we will be great in God's sight even if others think what we do is insignificant.

Nicholas Herman, born to peasant parents in Lorraine, France a few hundred years ago. He was so poor that he joined the army just so he could eat. One day in the middle of winter, Herman came upon a barren tree. It had no leaves or fruit; it was waiting silently for spring. While Herman stared at the tree, he was struck by truth about himself and truth about God. He realized that he was like the tree, it looked like he was dead, but God had life waiting for him.

At that moment he knew that there was a loving God and that he loved God. Shortly after that, he was injured and had to leave the army. He decided to become a monk. He took the name Brother Lawrence and was assigned to the monastery kitchen. It was not a glamorous life. He spent each day cooking and cleaning. That doesn't sound very spiritual, but Herman met God there.

He said, "People invent methods of coming at God's love, they learn rules and set up ways to remind them of God's love. That makes it seem complicated to become aware of God's presence. Yet it might be this simple: just do our common activities wholly for the love of God. We don't need to do great things... We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him. Then if there is nothing else I need to do, I lay flat on the ground in worship before him who has given me the ability to work. Afterwards, I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up a straw from

the ground for the love of God." Together, God and Brother Lawrence cooked meals, ran errands, scrubbed pots.

If you would have bumped into Herman, I doubt you would have thought, "There goes a great man." He spent the rest of his life in obscurity in the kitchen. When he died at the age of 80, fellow monks found a few pages of thoughts he had written down. They printed them, and called the little booklet "The Practice of the Presence of God." It has become an all-time classic.

But that is not why God sees Brother Lawrence as great: Brother Lawrence was great because he fulfilled the greatest commandment – what was most important in heaven and earth: he had great love for God.

You and I are called to become great the same way – by loving God. There have been many times that I have walked away amazed at the sacrificial love for God shown by Crossroaders.

For example, I think of Mark who has quietly expressed love for God in multiple ways. For years he disciplined middle and high school age boys by leading a group, going on mission trips, caring about them, and showing what it meant to be a godly man. Even as they graduated out of student ministry, Mark meets daily with God and sends a short text of spiritual encouragement to three separate groups; then he goes to work and helps the community in practical ways through his business. He does these things quietly, but God sees.

We are each born to love God with our whole hearts. But what do if I don't have that love? How do we grow in love for God? I'll be talking about that next week!

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God, and then he added a second part: In Matthew 22:39-40 he says, *"and the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Loving God ranks as the greatest commandment, but loving others is such a close second that Jesus couldn't mention the first without the second.

We can't love God and not love the people he loves. When we love God and love others we won't have to be commanded not to murder, or gossip, or steal from others, because we don't do those things to the people we love.

Over the years I have been inspired to see Crossroaders love others. I've seen Life Groups care for each other through the pandemic. Carolyn is a retired nurse, but she sprang into action to administer vaccines to people. Then she noticed seniors who had lost loved ones and friends through the pandemic. So, she went door to door in a senior living building just to check on them, and ended up leading a Grief Recovery experience at their building.

Patti has started a ministry to support those who have lost children and loved ones to addiction. She started it in Weirton, and now a new chapter has started in Ohio. Why? Love for others. That's how greatness is measured.

There is one other source of greatness, that is: fulfilling the Great Commission. After Jesus rose from the dead, he gathered his disciples around and gave them what we call the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to link live to a conference of church planters in southern India. Pastor Raju heads a network that has started 165 churches in the last several years. And they run an orphanage of around 45 children as well. They were having a conference with their church planters.

Pastor Damian shared some encouraging teaching with them, but we agreed that we those pastors had a lot to teach us. So, I asked them some questions about their ministry.

Pastor Raju explained that these pastors had come to faith in Jesus, then left the relative comfort of the larger towns and gone out into the rural areas to preach the Gospel to those who had not heard it. These pastors had given up stability and comfort to go to areas that are very poor even by Indian standards. They cope with meager finances, Covid restrictions, and spiritual resistance. Even though they show love to the people of the villages, they are often persecuted. The government routinely denies them permission to gather and they are often beaten severely. The pastors know this will happen, but they go anyway.

I was moved to see their passion for Jesus and faithfulness to His call. I was humbled because I realized that I was looking at greatness. The world ignores these pastors as irrelevant. If they are seen at all, it is as poor men and women who work in obscure places showing love for people who often don't return it. But God sees them. He sees them lay down their comfort (and sometimes their lives) out of obedience. Their place in eternity will be highly honored.

Over the next four weeks we're going to focus on living into our destiny through the Great Commandments and the Great Commission. There's no higher priority. You're invited to join us. Here's how:

1. Join a Life Group. We need others for this journey. A Life Group will help you. We're starting new ones, and every group is open. Just stop in the lobby or use the Communicator Card to sign up and we'll be in touch promptly.
2. Meet daily with God. Read the Bible for a few minutes and talk to God each day. The card on your seat has suggested Bible readings you can follow each day.
3. Worship each weekend. If you're out of town, join us online.

Maybe today you realize that you've been living for yourself more than for Jesus. Maybe you've believed in God, but your life has been your own and not his. You can speak to God today in prayer and tell him that you want to change – that you want to refocus your life on loving him and loving others.

Let's take a moment to do that now – you can repeat these words in the quietness of your heart:

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me. Thank you for leading me to hear this message today. I want my life to count for you and others. Please forgive me, and help me to follow you. Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer, that's a great first step – way to go! But I need to be honest with you: if that is all you do, if you don't take the next step, your life won't change, and you won't experience the greatness you are meant for. Because faith is not about just believing God exists, it's about pursuing him and yielding our lives to him.

So, we'd like to help you take a next step. Tell us online that you've taken this step and we'll help you do what the rest of the church is doing. We'll help you get into a Life Group and give you a Bible if you need one. Come on back to worship next week. This is the path toward a new life – and it will be great!