

Chapter Three

The Measure of Greatness

Athletes strive for perfection and try hard to minimize mistakes. Knowing that, we must not confuse the call to greatness as a call to perfection. Athletes may struggle with being called a “perfectionist”— wanting to do all things without mistakes, almost to a fault. It is paramount that we understand the type of perfection we are talking about in living out the call to greatness and what type of perfection God calls us to in the spiritual life.

How did you do with last week's challenge of seeking ways to improve your relationship with Jesus?

Verse of the week: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)*

We saw how living out the call to greatness means living out personal excellence in all areas of our lives. Often times though, we might confuse personal excellence and perfection.

1. What is the difference between personal excellence and perfection?

Would you all agree with this view? Why or why not?

2. Can you think of an example of that situation?

Let's look at a story in the Bible that will help us better understand the difference between perfection, personal excellence, and greatness.

Story of St. Peter

Read Matthew 16:16-19

"Simon Peter said in reply, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Jesus said to him in reply, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

3. What do you think is happening here in these verses?

Read Matthew 26:69-75

(Context: Beginning of Jesus' Passion. Jesus is being taken in to be questioned by the High Priest)

"Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, 'You too were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about!' As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazorean.' Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man!' A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, 'Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away.' At that he began to curse and to swear, 'I do not know the man.' And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: 'Before the cock crows you will deny me three times.' He went out and began to weep bitterly."

4. What happens in these verses?

5. Why do you think St. Peter denies Christ three times in the courtyard?

What would you have done in that situation?

Have there been times in practice or games where you were called to step up, make a big play, and didn't because of fear? What happened?

Most of us know these stories of St. Peter and we can identify with him in his struggle. He fails to be great in the moment of questioning as to whether or not he is a disciple of Jesus because of fear of persecution or suffering. However, the story of St. Peter's call to greatness is not over. Let's continue reading.

Read John 21:15-19

(Context: Jesus has been raised from the dead and has been appearing to his disciples)

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He then said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, 'Follow me.'

6. What is happening in these verses? How does the ending to St. Peter's story reveal our call to greatness and the difference between perfection?

Greatness doesn't mean we will never fall or fail. Proverbs 24:16 says "*The righteous man falls seven times a day.*" We are not perfect human beings, but God will forgive us and accept us back in spite of our imperfections and failures. God loves us no matter what! Our call to greatness has nothing to do with being perfect and never making mistakes, but in striving for perfection and getting up every time we fall, believing in the love God has for each of us. We can't despair like Judas who hanged himself after denying Jesus and turning him in to the authorities. There is greatness in each of us.

Peter's story is a story of hope. It shows us that God can work with us and our failures and weaknesses if we're willing to fight as Peter did, to fall, and to get back up again. St. Peter wasn't a perfect person. He failed in many ways, but he was magnanimous in his willing desire to serve God, the Church, and others. This is what God asks of us today, and that is what living out our Call to Greatness means.

Greatness is attainable for us. If we get discouraged and want to despair, we must remember St. Peter and how God elevated him to the status of leader of the Church in spite of his failures.

What parallels can you find between Peter's story and your own in becoming great?

Read passage from Theodore Roosevelt's *Man in the Arena*.

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat"

What do you think is Roosevelt's point?

Do you think this is true for an athlete? How can we apply this to the life of an athlete?

Read 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

In the midst of our weaknesses and failures, God always supplies strength for us. We are never left alone to fight our battles. We can call on Jesus to help us fight and to help us get back up again.

Our call to greatness does imply living out excellence in every way, but not in being perfect, because we will fall short. It is only when we get back up and try again that we truly are living out the call to greatness.

Remember Michael Jordan's quote:

"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Perfection and excellence are not the same thing.

7. What are some ways in which perfectionism can hinder us on/off the field?

Revisit verse of the week: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)**

Think of some things in your life that you are approaching with the attitude of being perfect rather than being excellent.

8. What are some things you can do to switch that mentality and to work on it?

ACTION POINT:

Be attentive to the manifestations of perfectionism throughout the week during practice or games and pray through them. (Maybe be attentive to one area you mentioned in the last question). Ask the Lord to help you do your best then and during your prayer time, and let Him do the rest. We will come back and talk about these situations and discuss what we learned.

CLOSING PRAYER

