

Jim Garfield had been wounded by a gunshot and was laid low for almost 80 days, his life barely hanging on a thin thread. It was then he asked an old army buddy, "Do you think my name will have a place in human history?" Then he died, meeting the fate of all humanity, whether sooner or whether later—after all, the Bible teaches that "the wages of sin is death" for us all. But what do we then have to show for it all? Is it like putting your finger in a bucket of water...then removing it...then straining to see your impact?

Now, the reality is, over the past several millennia, only a very small fraction of people clearly have a "name that will have a place in human history" as Garfield put it to his friend...and that's mostly due to the sheer number of people involved. Countless folks have come and gone, departing without a trace of what's considered truly historical impact by both professional historians and ordinary people.

After all, how many people can you even name from, say, the 1800s? Go ahead, try that right now! How many people can you actually name who are considered important for the century lasting from the year 1800 to its close a century later? Or, better yet, how many can you actually name from the 1800s *at all*?

Well, Jim Garfield—that guy who ultimately died from that bullet wound—was arguably one of the most important folks from that century. That's because he was *James* Garfield, the 20th President of the United States! But even if you knew that fact, can you say what he actually accomplished...his true impact?

Well, here's a brief bio of James Garfield. He was a lay preacher; a college president of a college at age 25; an abolitionist against slavery; the youngest U.S. Congressman in 1862; and the youngest Union General in the U.S. Civil War. But Garfield was also an adulterer; he was considered too much of a compromiser in important issues; and he was embroiled in a political scandal that arose from buying shares in a fraudulent company. Also, Garfield was a driving force in helping to create modern top-down government power-centers that negatively afflict America to this very day—yes, a Department of Education and structured civil-service reform that have both worked to foster and forge very powerful, highly partisan, virtually unaccountable federal bureaucracies these many decades later. And one of Garfield's recent biographers was unflattering in an important regard: he wrote that "a slipperiness lurked in [Garfield's] character."

Here's what Garfield wrote about himself in his diary early on. "I feel that there are but two tracks before me—to stand among the first, or die." Turns out, it was *both* in the eyes of popular history! But, unsurprisingly, it's really primarily his death that everyone totally agrees on! So, is James Garfield known for really "standing among the first"—as he wrote that he wished for himself?

Well, here's the truth: only the Lord determines the true measure of a James Garfield...and the true measure of you...and the true measure of me—yes, the true measure of every person who walks on the face of the earth, then and now!

And that's really much of the very foundational, practical framework that the New Testament Word of God brings to us. God's ways are different: His best intentions for us, His instructions to us, His paths laid before us, and His reward structures for believers. For sure, these elements that God deems important are clearly far different than those the world considers important. But frankly, sadly, many striving, ambitious Christians seem to get off on a worldly track all too often!

Still, here's the deal: the pervasive sense of the New Testament is that a life of greatness is desirable and very reachable for every clear-hearted, Spirit-led follower of Christ! Let me repeat that: *the pervasive sense of the New Testament is that a life of greatness is desirable and very reachable for every clear-hearted, Spirit-led follower of Christ!*

So, what does a true life of greatness look like and how is that life "reached," we might ask? Let's just glean from a slice or two of New Testament narrative to shed some of God's light on that.

In John's Gospel (3:1-3 in the ESV), we recall a familiar event: "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know

that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" It's instructive that Nicodemus, a member of the religious establishment, was profiled here, because "religion" *routinely* demands the supremacy of rules and traditions above relationship with Jesus!

But the Bible is very clear: every person must first believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved...and *then that changes everything!* Colossians 1:13-14 says this: "For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." *Here's a key takeaway:* a God-directed life of human greatness is lived *for Kingdom history*, and that's quite unlike Garfield's deathbed concern about his place in so-called "human history."

Now...do you remember when Jesus went to see Caesar in person? Of course, you don't! That's because, in His ministry, Jesus didn't try to mingle with exalted human office holders—or even important religious authorities. Instead, Jesus hung out with "deplorables"...and He went where ordinary people lived...and He called ordinary people...and He joined those gathered to serve or sincerely hear about the one True God. That's where and when He taught them...and He also sometimes observed them for our instruction!

Once, while doing exactly that, He taught His disciples right then and there by pointing out a widow who quietly gave absolutely *all that she had*—which was coins worth about what 12 minutes of labor would earn at the time. And Jesus contrasted her actions with the rich who were there and gave proportionally far less. *So, here's another key takeaway:* while living in the Roman Empire ruled by the *seemingly* most powerful leaders in history and standing near *seemingly* very important religious people, Jesus trained His *seemingly* obscure disciples by singling out a *seemingly* obscure woman who had *seemingly* little influence! That widow's powerful story unfolded for a key purpose of fruitful spiritual consumption by billions from then until now. Her story teaches us that *every believer can have a very reachable life of greatness in Christ, embedded in the dailiness of family life...of neighborhood life...of workplace life!*

And, you know in your own spirit that this outworking of that very narrative is true: at the very moment of James Garfield's death, many *seemingly* obscure people in places around the globe were fruitfully acting upon the love of Christ by sowing into the life of others who in turn impacted still others in the long chain of valuable, fruit-bearing Kingdom history! *Isn't that crazy good?* And God's Kingdom is designed for us, too, to adopt that mindset! Indeed, that's the destiny of humility-grounded greatness that is prepared for every obedient, Spirit-led follower of Christ! ...That's been true for, oh, just about two thousand years!

The secret to that very reachable life of greatness in Christ, of course, *is not to be "reaching" for anything at all...except for Jesus!* Mark 8:34-38 says this: "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, [Jesus] said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'" Yes, in Jesus's very own words, are we ashamed of Him and His words in our generation?

Look, the account of Garfield and those of countless other human-history strivers is very instructive. In contrast to Garfield's rather shallow striving to "stand among the first" of this world—even when near death—we are to focus on *standing with Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the true First and the true Last!*

'Course, this is no blueprint for being "average" in the workplace—quite the opposite! When we focus on stewarding for others extremely well in our appointed roles, we are serving God! You see, it's all a matter of our primary focus, our core mindset, our first priority! Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Yes, *it really is all about Kingdom history!* That's every Christian's very reachable life of greatness, even when others think we are seemingly irrelevant and obscure, absent from the screaming headlines of human history. *Isn't that simply stunning?*

