

The Power of One

James 4:10

A few weeks ago my son Mitchell graduated from Mercer University in Macon. The commencement speaker was Mercer President, Dr. Kirby Godsey. The graduation speech had one point. I have made that point the title of my sermon today and it is also the theme of this years Youth Camp. That point is “**The Power of One.**”

I am grateful to Dr. Godsey for his insight and his influence on our youth camp and my sermon for today.

This week I will begin my 20th year of service as your Associate Pastor. I began this work at First Baptist Church before our youth were born. Hundreds of youth have gone to camp over these 20 years and they have been a part of our youth ministry. But not one of those hundreds has your name, your personality, your set of gifts, or your DNA. That is also true for everyone in this room today. No one is just like you. Thank you, Mr. Rogers. It’s good to be in your neighborhood.

The Power of One. Kirby Godsey, the president of Mercer, suggests that the Power of One is not a trivial reality. It is the ultimate reality for which you were born.

He says, “You can do something that no one else can do. You have a speech to give that has never been given because, no one can say what you can say. You have a journey to make that has never been traveled because no one can ever go where you can go. You have music to write that has never been sung. You have stories to tell that have never been heard.”

“You have art to create, communities to build, children to bear, families to nurture, problems to solve, intolerance to overcome, wars to end, encouragement to give, hope to engender, and a church to embrace. You have the power to do what has never been done. You have the power of one.”

There are many life examples of one person making a difference. President Godsey told the story of how his thirteen year son, Hunter, became the power of one. It is the story of Hunter and Terry.

The Godseys were living in Danville, VA. Young Hunter Godsey had a paper route. As he worked the streets delivering papers, he met a child of the street. His name was Terry.

Terry’s parents were radically poor. His mother was ill and his father was an alcoholic. Terry, whose future life seemed desolate, discovered friendship in Hunter Godsey.

Hunter began to take Terry along on his paper route and even shared the modest financial rewards of delivering papers. As the friendship grew, Hunter invited Terry to his home for meals and just to hang out.

During the holidays, you would find Terry at the Godsey’s Thanksgiving table or opening

gifts on Christmas morning.

It was a painful goodbye for Hunter and Terry as the Godsey family moved from Danville, VA to Macon, GA. In Macon, Dr. Godsey was to become president of Mercer University.

The boys kept in touch through middle school and high school. Young Terry was a janitor at his high school to provide some support for his family.

As a junior in high school, he took the SAT and scored very high. But the thought of going to college was out of the question.

Here was this bright, gifted young man, adrift in the grips of a history of poverty. The Godsey family stepped up, contacted Terry and invited him to visit Mercer University.

He was a bit apprehensive. Terry's father had died. His mother was still sick. But friends in Danville agreed to provide care for Terry's mother and the Godseys sent Terry a plane ticket to Atlanta.

His first venture beyond home and his first flight on an airplane. When he arrived in Atlanta, boyhood friend Hunter was there to meet him.

Terry did enroll in Mercer. He graduated with honors and a major in Chemistry. He was given a full scholarship to complete a Master's degree in Chemistry at Georgia Tech and then was awarded an Assistantship to study for a Ph. D. in Chemistry at the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

Today, Terry is a major research scientist, publishing widely and regularly sending experiments into outer space through the Shuttle program.

Terry is married with two children and has nourished and nurtured his mother back to remarkable good health.

The story of Hunter and Terry - it is the power of one.

How does one person, you, have that kind of power? Listen as I read James 4:10 “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*” (NIV) This is the Bible verse theme for Youth Camp this year. Humble yourselves...

That is how you have the power. When we bow down, He will lift us up. Humble yourselves before the Lord.

The Message translates the verse this way: “*Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.*” (Message)

Listen to the New Living Translation: *“When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor.”* (New Living Translation)

That is how you have the power of one.

One of my favorite Broadway musicals is “Camelot.” The film version is based on T.H. White's book, The Once and Future King in which he recounts the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Arthur had a dream of all the kingdoms united in a worthy cause. His motto was "Might for right, NOT might is right".

Can you hear the hopeful refrain: *“Don't let it be forgot / That once there was a spot / For one brief shining moment / That was known as Camelot!”*

I want to break into song - I am thinking Richard Harris or Robert Goulet - but one note from my voice and you would be thinking something else.

King Arthur was going to make a difference - the power of one. But not by might - his power, just like ours comes from humbling ourselves before the Lord.

When we bow down, He will lift us up.

Spiritually, we cannot lift up ourselves. Christianity is not a “boot strap” theology. Bootstrapping is a self help solution to life. The etymology of the word is thought to be from a German Baron who pulled himself out of the sea by using his own boot straps.

Bootstrapping or self reliance can be an important attribute but concerning our spiritual life, the Apostle Paul reminds us, *“We are saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves lest any man (or woman) should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8) We do not achieve spiritual maturity by our own accomplishments.

To be the power of one, we must decrease and he must increase.

Now, don't misunderstand James 4:10 *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”* (NIV) Remember that James is the same author that says, “Faith without works is dead.” Even in our humility and dependance on God, we must also utilize the gifts and talents that are God-given.

Can we have it both ways?

John 14:12 Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things....”*

Jesus said we will do great things. What have you done great lately?

May 19, 2006 I heard this story on National Public Radio about doing great things and the power of one.

The story is about Dan Anderson of Lawton, Oklahoma. He grew up seven blocks from the train tracks during the Great Depression.

His best buddy was Joe. To help their families in the snowy cold winter, Dan and Joe, each eleven years old, would pick up coal along the railroad track. Their home pot bellied stoves were kept warm by coal.

One day, Joe brought along his five year old brother to help glean the coal. Dan was not so sure this was a good idea.

Heavy snow the night before made coal hard to find. All three boys walked and walked along the icy track that morning, no luck. They ventured to a new site hoping for more coal.

It was the train trestle, a beautiful bridge made out of steel. The trestle floor was big timbers all spaced a few inches apart.

The boys had never walked on the trestle and they knew better than to be there but the early morning train had already pulled out of the station, so they felt secure.

But suddenly they felt the track shaking and they heard the whistle of an oncoming train. It was an express train and the boys did not know the express schedule. The train's whistle was going crazy. The frightened boys began to run.

Joe grabbed his little brother's hand but the young fellow did not budge. His small foot had gotten wedged between the big timbers. Big brother Joe began to panic; he could see the speeding train, and in his terror he released his brother's hand and ran off the trembling trestle to safety.

Dan saw what happened and he too tried to pull the little boy's foot free, but the more he tugged the more the little fellow cried because the pressure of the timbers was hurting his foot and the pulling was hurting his leg.

Desperate to save the young boy, it suddenly occurred to Dan to unlace his shoe. Dan looked down and there was just one end of the shoelace showing up out of the snow.

He pulled on the lace and miraculously the bow came apart. The boy was wearing high top shoes with real stiff soles. Dan put his index finger in the shoelaces and loosened them enough and then pulled the boy's foot free.

He grabbed him up and took him in his arms and ran off the trestle. As they sled to the side of the track, the huge train roared by and the steam from the powerful engine showered them both.

Dan, now an old man, said it was the scariest moment of his life but also one of the most fulfilling moments he had ever had.

The power of one: Dan saved the little boy and maybe in so doing he also saved himself. (National Public Radio - StoryCorps...)

The power of one - don't misunderstand, it is not self help, bootstrap religion. It is James 4:10 - Humbling ourselves before God and allowing Him to lift us up.

It is taking our gifts, talents, and abilities and saying, "Lord, use them, use me to be your hands and feet and voice to someone who needs the good news, the gospel."

The power of one is not about you; it is about God and what He can do and will do through us if we make ourselves available.

One theologian (William Barclay) suggests that in James 4:10, humility is the key to authentic Christian living. Humility:

Only when we realize our weakness, will we draw on God's strength. Humility.

Only when we admit our spiritual poverty, will we pray for the riches of God's grace. Humility.

Only when we confess our own sin, will we long of a Savior. Humility.

The power of one is releasing our independence and relying on our dependence on God. Have you done that, can you do that, will you do that?

Father's Day was last Sunday. My father died in 1994. He influenced my life in many ways, but he really became the power of one to me in the summer of 1972.

I have told some of you before, it was that summer after graduating from college and seminary and not being able to find a job for months and months that I turned to my Dad and asked if I could work for him. He was a farmer and he and my Uncle Bill also ran a cotton gin.

I was feeling desperate and unwanted. It was like I was all dressed up and had nowhere to go. My father was very kind and gentle but told me with no hesitation there was no job in the cotton field or the gin office. I could stay with him and my mother until God called me into a ministry position.

He was the power of one that day - because what I thought, at the moment, was his emphatic "No" became God's opportunity for my "Yes."

In a few months, I accepted a job at Southern Seminary and worked there for fifteen years.

Ironically, my good friend and the president of the seminary, Dr. Roy Honeycutt, would

repeat this same power of one scenario in 1987.

That year the vice president resigned. I wanted that position. I made an appointment with President Honeycutt and told him of my ambition. He said the decision was not his alone to make; there was a national search being conducted and I could apply for the job.

I did and the process lasted several months. At the conclusion, I was not chosen to be vice-president. Dr. Honeycutt was very kind and gentle and told me with no hesitation, "God is still calling; listen."

He was the power of one that day - because what I thought, at the moment, was his emphatic "No" became God's opportunity for my "Yes."

In a few months, I accepted your call to be the associate pastor of First Baptist Church.

Were these two men denying me or showing disdain or unconcern for me? No. They were the power of one to me. My father's influence carried me deeper into the ministry. Dr. Honeycutt's influence helped me evaluate my seminary ministry and ultimately brought the Murchison family to Augusta, GA. They were the power of one and they changed my life.

You will never know who is looking, listening and being influenced by you. To some person you could be the Power of One, the one person to change their life.

James 4:10 *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* May it be so for everyone of us.

Dear God of Hope:

We humble ourselves before you, O God. Lift us up and You be Lord of All within our lives. In Jesus name WE pray. Amen

• Dr. Kirby Godsey, President of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. "The Power of One," Graduation Address, May 13, 2006.

• National Public Radio, Story Corps, "The Boys, One Bridge and a Train," May 19, 2006

• The letters of James, William Barclay