

EXCERPT



Great to Good

How Following Jesus Reshapes Our Ambitions

July 23, 2024 | \$18, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1065-5

Greatness is overrated. People tend to measure success by worldly standards, but God cares more about our character than our reputations. Pastor Jae Hoon Lee unpacks what it means for us to live in obedience and faith, to strip away ambitious self-glorification, and to instead live humble lives of goodness and love.

Cultivating Inner Goodness to Transform the World

In 2001, Jim Collins published a book on business management titled *Good to Great*, concerning the steps companies had to take to be excellent institutions. This book became a bestseller and even influenced the American church, with many churches endeavoring to become “great” churches.

The church, however, should do the opposite. We should be “great to good” Christians, not “good to great.” The church should strive to be good rather than great. What do I mean by that?

Jesus referred to himself as a *good* shepherd, not a *great* one. He attributed his accomplishments to God, not to himself. After all, God was the one who raised him up. So the church should follow his example of humility, service, and meekness instead of trying to elevate itself unnecessarily.

Similarly, as Christians, we should not just stop our spiritual growth with our *belief* in the doctrine of Christ. Through Christ living in us, we must continue *being* like Jesus by embodying his character. We must be people who live out good deeds like Christ, the good shepherd. We should be missionaries who possess a good conscience and unimpeachable character. We should not strive for fame or “greatness.” We need to strive for good.

Jesus spoke about the goodness of Christians in the Sermon on the Mount: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Jesus also called us to be the salt and light of the world, but what does that entail? Good deeds.

Now, of course, only performing good deeds does not make one a good Christian. But to understand the missionary calling of the church and that of Christians is to manifest our faith in the world through our actions.

Elizabeth Shepping was one such Christian. Born in Germany, Shepping immigrated to the United States, became a nurse, and took courses on the Bible. After converting to Protestantism from Catholicism, Shepping answered the call. On February 20, 1912, she embarked on a voyage to Korea, traversing the seas aboard a passenger ship and devoting the rest of her life to the impoverished and downtrodden of Korea. Gracefully wearing Korean peasant garb and men’s black rubber shoes, Shepping cared for, healed, taught, and lived among the Korean people while other missionaries lived in relative luxury. She remained resolutely single and never thought to return to the United States. Eventually, Shepping changed her name to Seo-pyeong and learned the Korean language, insisting on using Korean even when using the language was prohibited under the Japanese occupation.

A beacon of compassion, she opened her heart and home to the forsaken—adopting fourteen orphans and providing shelter to thirty-eight widows. Before Seo-pyeong’s death, she donated her body to a foreign hospital, Severance. At her funeral, hundreds of mourners trailed after the procession for miles and miles, marking the civil funeral service of the city of Gwangju.

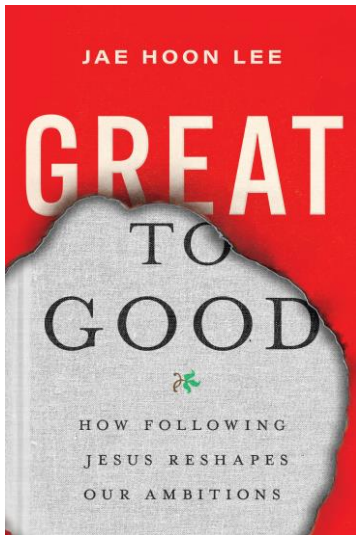


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"Pastor Jae Hoon Lee's collection of fifty vignettes draws on inspiring examples. After reading this short book I feel all the more encouraged and inspired to pursue goodness—not self-promoting greatness—for the sake of Jesus Christ and for the good of others."

J. Nelson Jennings, editor of Global Missiology—English

During her life and at her death, Seo-pyeong was loved. But as the years passed, her name became obscure and is fairly unknown to those outside of Korean Christian circles. Shepping exemplified the life of a good Christian. She never wanted to be great, but all her life she strived to be good.

As God's sent people, our primary calling is to be this kind of good church in and to the world. This means proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and letting the world witness the goodness of the gospel through our actions.

Let us look at the Korean church as an example. The Korean church has historically had a significant impact on society through the gospel, promoting societal reform such as the elimination of slavery in 1894 and the advancement of women's rights and education.

The church also provided key support for the 1919 Independence Movement, aided refugees and orphans after the Korean War, and funded projects such as leprosy treatments, tuberculosis eradication campaigns, and abolishing licensed prostitution. These transformative "good deeds" are carried out by dedicated Christians answering the call to love their neighbors sacrificially.

Martin Luther's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful reminder of how we should approach our neighbors in need. Rather than asking what would happen to ourselves if we stopped to help, we should ask what would happen to the person in need if we did not help them. This mentality of sacrificial love is what separates an event from a movement.

The difference between an event and a movement is sacrifice. As the global church continues to pursue good deeds in the world, we should not forget the importance of sacrifice. Only when we are willing to lay down our lives for the sake of our neighbors will we see a holy movement in the world. May the church of Korea be a shining example of a good church that not only believes in the gospel but also lives it out in practice.

This book offers contemplative reflections and meditations concerning how a Christian can be "good" rather than "great," focusing on self-examination in the context of the Korean church. Based on the idea of contemporary Christians embodying God's goodness in the world, this book primarily explore how we can cultivate inner goodness and engage with the global community in the pursuit of "good" rather than "greatness." These reflections are intended for sharing among English-speaking Christians, with the hope that together we can participate in the transformation of the world as committed followers of Christ.

—adaptation from the introduction



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BIO



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"While many would consider the various ministries of Onnuri Church in South Korea as extraordinary, Senior Pastor Jae Hoon Lee is a humble yet gifted servant of God who exemplifies an ordinary ministry. That is, he endorses a Christian life and ministry that is based on and follows in the footsteps of Jesus."

Julius J. Kim, visiting professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California, former president of The Gospel Coalition

Respected South Korean Church Leader

"Rev. Jae Hoon Lee is a good man. Many know him as pastor of the globally influential megachurch Onnuri. Many know him currently as well as cochair of the Fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. I know him in both capacities and more. I've seen him endure through challenges. I've seen him bear the weight and joy of leadership. And through it all, I can say that he is a good man. A man who embodies what Billy Graham described as 'the spirit of Lausanne.' A man of humility, study, friendship, prayer, partnership, and hope. It's a true honor to be his partner in the gospel and his friend."

—**Michael Y. Oh**, global executive director and CEO of the Lausanne Movement

Jae Hoon Lee is the senior pastor at Onnuri Church, a prominent congregation with over 80,000 members worshipping in more than 21 languages in 11 Korean campuses and 30 campuses abroad. Onnuri Church, which means "All Nations," is deeply committed to fulfilling the Great Commission. They have sent out over 2,300 missionaries to various parts of the world, with 950 currently serving in 75 countries. In addition, Onnuri Church operates CGN, a 24-hour Christian satellite network that broadcasts in seven languages including Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Arabic, and Spanish. Onnuri Church has also established "A Better World," an NGO dedicated to promoting infrastructure development in 34 countries.

Additionally, Pastor Lee is the chairperson of the Gospel Coalition Korea and Handong Global University. He also serves as the cochair of the host committee for L4, the 2024 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in Seoul.

He is the author of *My Country to God's Country*, *Grace Wins!*, *Thinking of Thinking*, *Heaven Opens Up on the Earth*, and *Authentic Gospel*. He promotes justice, restoration, and societal well-being, embodying the gospel's transformative power in many ways in Korea. He holds theological degrees from Hapsin Theological Seminary (M.Div.), Trinity International University (Th.M.), and Presbyterian University & Theological Seminary (D.D.) Pastor Lee lives in Seoul, Korea, with his wife and two children.



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