

SMALL BEGINNINGS

SMALL STUFF PART 2



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Small Beginnings

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Small Beginnings

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Welcome to *Small Beginnings*

The daughters of Zeus are reported to have sprung full-grown from their father's head. But that's not the way things happen. Good things, useful things, *big* things come from small beginnings. We need to recognize the opportunities before us each day for small beginnings, so that we can move through them with faith and build on them day by day.

Our lives may seem little and not all that significant, but we can be channels of the Lord's blessings in this world if we make the most of the small beginnings before us each day. We need faith, patience, and diligence to work our Personal Mission Fields, waiting on the Lord in prayer to bring revival, renewal, and awakening in His pleasure and time.

But if we can make the most of our daily small beginnings, we can expect the Lord to meet us in these and do from our small beginnings things exceedingly abundantly beyond all we've ever dared to ask or think.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview. We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Manger Muscle

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3.8

This little Babe

A Child is born.

The only birth announcement is to a group of lonely shepherds, huddled against the cold night.

Circumstances made it necessary for the parents of the Child to be far from home and family. To satisfy the whim of a far-off politician who had determined to measure his greatness by the number of subjected peoples he ruled, they, like everyone else, had to return to their ancestral home to be counted. The mother's condition meant that the couple had to travel more slowly than others making the journey, so they arrived later than most, after all the available rooms had been rented.

They took their repose in a stable, and when the Child was born, they laid Him in a manger.

Apart from those shepherds – little people, as they were regarded – few others knew or cared about this birth, and everywhere throughout Bethlehem and Judea and all the vast Roman Empire, life went on as usual.

In one place, however, this birth, long expected and now accomplished, came as a tectonic quake and an accompanying tsunami of dread, panic, and urgent action. For thousands of years, dark forces of deception, corruption, deceit, and death had ruled the affairs of men and nations. To themselves, they appeared to be making a mockery of the plan and design of Him Who had created all things and Whom these wicked powers wished only to unseat and destroy. They had had their way with men – except for that smallest, most insignificant of peoples, a nation sheltered under the special protection of this dark empire's arch foe, and who clung to His promises of redemption, restoration, and renewal.

And now this Babe, long promised, was at last arrived. The mother's laying Him in that manger landed like the crash of a falling anvil on the Kingdom of darkness. Satan knew full well what this small beginning portended. The poet Robert Southwell (1561-1595) captured the moment:

This little Babe, so few days old,

Is come to rifle Satan's fold;

All bell doth at His presence quake.

Though He Himself for cold do shake,

For in this weak unarmed wise

The gates of bell He will surprise.

Urgent action

He was just a Baby. He had no political clout, no wealth with which to buy favors or enlist supporters, no large public platform from which to persuade the multitudes. He was just a Baby, helpless like many others. And like many others, the prince of darkness reasoned, he could be easily destroyed. Urgent action was required to preserve one's place against this would-be usurper.

As soon as it was feasible, therefore, Satan enlisted religious and political leaders in a plot to destroy this Child. It would involve the destruction of many other innocents, but when one wants to make sure of his objectives, a little overkill is unavoidable.

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But the Child escaped to Egypt and returned to anonymity in the Galilean north. There, under the protection of His heavenly Father, from small beginnings, He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. One day He would appear beside the Jordan River, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and the anointing Word of God. He would be publicly acknowledged as the One Who had come to take away the sin of the world; and taking away the sin of the world meant taking away the privileges and power of the father of all sin and all lies.

So the Child, now a Man, must be stopped. If He could not be killed, perhaps He could be persuaded to change His loyalties. Three times in the wilderness, when the Man was physically weak, the devil sought to win His devotion. Three times he was rebuffed.

This was getting serious.

From small beginnings

But let Him go. Let Him search for followers. Let Him impress the multitudes, wow the crowds, even gather the momentum of a movement. When the time was right, Satan would move all necessary earthly powers to take up his own dastardly mission and do away with this threat to his vast spiritual demesne.

Yet not even that would suffice. The Light had come, and the darkness could not overcome it, and has not overcome it still.

From a small beginning, a mighty cosmic transformation has been wrought. The works of the devil are destroyed by the manger muscle of Jesus Christ. “Our Babe, to show His Godhead true,/Can in His swaddling bands control the damnèd crew” (Milton). The devil still stalks about with all his minions, seeking whom he may devour, but the ranks of those who know him to be bound, and who understand his wiles and resist him by the Power of God, have continued and increased, filling the earth with the knowledge of that little Babe, and carrying the marks of His rule of light into every nook and cranny where darkness has fled from His powerful Word.

From small beginnings, that Babe has transformed history, set the vast cosmos on a course of renewal, rifled the devil’s fold and brought righteousness and peace and joy to multitudes, and provided for us a template for thinking about our own lives. From little things and small beginnings, an abundance of light and life can flow, as we follow Jesus with all the little things of our lives.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that Jesus’ life is a template for our own?
2. Every day with Jesus is a small beginning from which transformation, renewal, and Kingdom progress can issue. What are the implications of this for your life?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to see every small beginning as an opportunity for destroying the works of the devil and advancing the Kingdom of light?

Next steps – Preparation: Reflect on your answers to the questions above. Use your answers to lead you into a time of silent meditation and prayer, waiting on the Lord to convict, affirm, and direct you as He will.

2 Chosen with the Twelve

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons... Mark 3.14, 15

Chosen

One of the rituals of my childhood was sandlot baseball. The best ball field in the neighborhood was right across the street from my house. Nearly every summer day would find boys gradually making their way to the field, until enough showed up to cobble together a game.

Every game began the same way: two captains were selected, and they would flip the bat. One captain tossed the bat, barrel down and handle up, and the other caught it. Then they would make their way, hand over hand, to the top of the bat. The last hand to fit in was first to choose from the assembled players. He would choose one, then the other captain would choose two, then, alternating, each would choose one until all were selected. Then the game could begin, with the team of the captain who chose first taking the field as the “home” team.

As you can imagine, when the choosing began, captains selected the best players, those who could field, run, and hit, leaving the lesser boys to the end. That only makes sense, right?

So what was Jesus thinking? Here “a great multitude from Galilee” had followed Him to that mountain (Mk. 3.7), utterly impressed by His teaching and works, apparently willing to follow Him anywhere. Then an even greater multitude assembled to Him from Jerusalem, Idumea, the Decapolis, and Tyre and Sidon. Everyone wanted to be on team Jesus!

But instead of making it easy for such a large mass of people to join His movement, Jesus climbed a mountain and selected twelve from the throng that managed to make it to the top.

Some might say Jesus missed a golden opportunity to launch a successful effort. But Jesus works from small beginnings, not big productions.

Two facets

Jesus’ calling for the twelve consisted of two facets. First, they were to be “with Him.” Go with Him, eat with Him, talk and pray with Him, accompany Him in His work, hear His teaching, get to know Him. For three years. After that, Jesus would die, rise again, and depart for heaven.

There must have been something really special about that “with Him” time, for this seems to have been what these twelve disciples did most of all.

Second, the disciples were to wield Jesus’ power against the presence and effects of sin. Specifically, they were to preach, heal sicknesses, and cast out demons. But as the gospel records show, they didn’t do all that much of this. A brief preaching tour here, a failed attempt at casting out a demon there, and no records whatsoever of their healing anyone. Moreover, they seemed forever befuddled by and slow on the uptake concerning Jesus’ most important teaching, especially when He explained about His ensuing death and resurrection.

These were the kind of guys you choose *last*, not first. Unless, of course, you’re Jesus.

Nothing has changed

The disciples’ beginnings were pretty small. So inauspicious was the role of the disciples in Jesus earthly

ministry that the Jews who murdered their Captain didn't think it necessary to put them away as well.

But the disciples knew enough to believe Jesus when He taught about the coming Kingdom of God, and to stay with Him, to observe and learn from Him as much as they could.

In his indispensable book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert E. Coleman explains the genius of Jesus' approach to insuring a far-flung and fruitful ministry after His return to the Father. He chose twelve. He poured Himself into them, bore with their dullness and goofy aspirations to greatness, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, let them share in His work – even though they knew but little success – and loved them, loved them, loved them through it all.

When their moment came, the disciples stepped up to the plate and swung with all their might, and the impact of their at-bat is still clearing the bases today, for they taught many faithful people, who taught others also, and are continuing to do so to this day (2 Tim. 2.2).

You and I don't seem like the kind of folks the Captain of the Lord's army would choose in the first round. Or the thousandth. We're little folks, people so small that not even all our neighbors or co-workers know our names!

But if we will stay close to Jesus, daily increasing in love for Him and His Word, allowing His Spirit to transform us into His image, and being ready to make the most of every opportunity for His Kingdom and glory, we will find that, just when we need it, His power will be at work within us to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13), exceedingly abundantly beyond all we've ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20).

The Captain has chosen you, just as He chose the twelve. Begin each day with Him. Stay close to Him. Sit with Him (Eph. 2.6) and see the world from His vantage point. Feed on Him and His Word. And go forth daily for His Kingdom and righteousness. Every situation of every day is an at-bat for team Jesus. And, like the twelve, you may strike out or be hit by a pitch. But more often than not, you'll find the sweet spot in your swing, stroke one over or through the opposition, and move some Kingdom runner along.

Or drive some grateful soul home for Jesus!

For reflection

1. Why is it important to begin each day in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can you improve this time?
2. A disciple is a learner. As the Lord's disciples, we are to "learn Jesus" (Eph. 4.17-24). What does this involve? How can you know when you're learning Jesus (2 Cor. 3.12-18)?
3. We all need to "improve our swing" in order to make an impact for Jesus in every at-bat in life. Where do you most need to improve? What can you do to become a "better hitter" in those areas of your life?

Next steps – Preparation: Review the time you spend being with Jesus each day, from morning to evening and throughout the day. What's one thing you can do to get more time with Jesus and to improve the time you have with Him already?

3 Loaves and Fishes

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" John 6.5-9

What now?

Put yourself in the place of Philip, Peter, Andrew, and the other disciples. Here they were, only a few months into their new adventure with Jesus, and everywhere they go – multitudes! *Great* multitudes. The word about Jesus was out and spreading, and these men, who barely knew what to do with a great catch of fish (Lk. 5.5-7), were now confronted with *a great multitude* of clamoring people, all eager to get close to Jesus.

And now they were hungry. This could get ugly.

What was worse, Jesus, the only One Who could really handle this situation, was putting it back on them, asking Philip what to do for this throng. Imagine the disbelief in Philip's face as he groped for an answer: two hundred denarii was almost a year's wages for an average Joe like him. And even if they had that much money, it would supply only "a little" for everyone. That is, if they could find someplace to buy so much bread.

And if Jesus didn't know what to do, how were *they* supposed to know?

Andrew has the seed of faith, but he seems not to recognize it: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Five loaves and two small fish (note his observation of *small*) was a small beginning, if that.

It was indeed a small beginning. But Jesus works with small beginnings, Kingdom seed beginnings. Small beginnings are all He needs. Like an opened spigot, small beginnings provide a channel through which the mystery of divine power and the satisfying food of grace and truth can flow to refresh multitudes.

From small beginnings, big miracles

Grace travels from God to people, and from people to other people. Jesus put the disciples to work: "Make the people sit down." Imagine having to do even *that*. How do twelve guys make *a great multitude* quiet down and find a seat?

This must have seemed to the disciples like eating an elephant. Mark tells us that Jesus joined them in this task (Mk. 4.19). What He commanded them to do, He would make sure they could carry out. We can imagine Him holding up His hand and everyone getting quiet. Then, perhaps He commented on the lush, comfortable grass all around (v. 10), before inviting the folks to take a seat. The disciples, meanwhile, moved among them, arranging the people in groups of around fifty, as Jesus had instructed them (Lk. 9.14, 15).

Without really understanding how they were going to get this multitude seated, the disciples took the next step – the one Jesus commanded them to take – and His Word empowered them to succeed. The small beginning was off to a promising start.

But there was still the matter of the food.

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Jesus received the loaves and fish, and in front of everyone, He consecrated this little snack to God, giving thanks in public for this meager offering which was about to become a surfeit of chow. After that, with the disciples standing around Him, He began breaking the loaves and fish (Lk. 9.16) and handing them out to the disciples to set before the multitude.

Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt? Could they even believe what they were seeing? One after another, they held out their serving baskets while Jesus piled on the food. Where was this coming from? How can this be? But there it was, and off they went, distributing the food to the groups, who received it gratefully without knowing how any of this was happening. This went on until “they all ate and were filled,” “as much as they wanted” (Lk. 19.17; Jn. 6.11).

Can you hear the conversations, the occasional laughter, all the cordiality and pass-the-bread-please and enjoyment that accompany sharing a meal with 5,000 of your closest friends? The sound of grace wafting over and wending through these multitudes must have been unforgettable.

And what about that nameless lad? What a hero! One of the disciples said to him, “Jesus would like to have your loaves and fish.” “Sure!” came his reply. He didn’t care whether that was enough to feed everyone. All he knew was Jesus was asking for his loaves and fish. Jesus would know what to do with them. Jesus would take his loaves and fish and would do what was best. By all means, Jesus, have all my loaves and fish.

It's all loaves and fishes

That’s the thing about being little people with only little things to offer the Lord. He can turn our little gestures, our kind or affirming words, all our small beginnings of kindness, gentleness, self-control, excellence, and consideration of others into banquets of grace for unsuspecting people far and wide.

Our job is to recognize that everything we have – our time, every situation and conversation, every task or errand, all our casual and purposeful encounters with others – is all loaves and fishes. In the morning, first thing, inventory the loaves and fishes you’ll be taking with you into your day. Bring them to Jesus, giving thanks for His bounty and power, and asking Him to take your loaves and fishes and use them to touch others with the mystery of His grace and the power of His truth. Give freely, lavishly, and selflessly until everyone has had their fill of your attention, thoughtfulness, assistance, or witness.

Then gather up the leftovers and begin preparing for the next conversation or encounter with whomever Jesus wants to feed with the loaves and fishes of your life.

For reflection

1. What are the loaves and fishes of your life? Do you believe Jesus can use these as means of grace and truth in the lives of others?
2. Why is it important that we offer our loaves and fishes up to the Lord daily in prayer?
3. Out of His fullness, Jesus reaches to us with wave after wave of grace (Jn. 1.16). What is His purpose in this? How can we make sure that we are faithful spigots of the living water Jesus wants to flow through us (Jn. 7.37-39)?

Next steps – Preparation: How can you improve your prayer life – first thing in the day and throughout it – to the best use of the loaves and fishes of your life?

4 Faith to Amaze

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” Matthew 8.10

Freely and unconditionally

Winter, 313 AD, and Constantine, new emperor of the west, was looking for ways to secure his control over the entire Roman Empire. In a meeting in Milan with Licinius Augustus, ruler of the east, the two agreed to a proclamation discontinuing all persecution of Christians. In the Edict of Milan they declared, “that every one of those who have a common wish to follow the religion of the Christians may from this moment freely and unconditionally proceed to observe the same without any annoyance or disquiet.”

Rome’s persecution of Christians had only served to accelerate the advance of the faith. As the Carthaginian lawyer Tertullian observed a century before Milan, writing to the proconsul of Africa, who was persecuting believers, “what will you make of so many thousands, of so many men and women, persons of every sex and every age and every rank, when they present themselves before you? How many fires, how many swords will be required? What will be the anguish of Carthage itself, which you will have to decimate, as each one recognizes there his relatives and companions, as he sees there men of your own order, and noble ladies, and all the leading persons of the city, and either kinsmen or friends of those of your own circle?” To the emperor, Tertullian wrote, “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled everything you have – cities, tenements, forts, towns, exchanges, yes! and camps, tribes, palaces, senate, forum.”

The persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire, though intense and brutal, was ineffectual, as the numbers of Romans becoming Christians continued to grow until, as Constantine seemed to realize, the Christian movement could not be stopped. After two-and-a-half centuries of on-again-off-again persecution, Christians were finally free to “practise their cult” without fear of interference. Constantine himself had benefited from identifying with the Christian movement at the battle of Milvian Bridge, and now he was determined to allow Christians freely and unconditionally to worship and serve their God – and his.

Eighty-three years after the Edict of Milan, Christianity would be declared to be the only legal religion of those territories and peoples governed by the emperors from Rome.

And it all began with one man’s amazing faith.

Faith to amaze

Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion who interceded with Him to restore the life of a beloved servant. Jesus agreed to come and heal the servant, but the centurion, pleading all unworthiness, and acknowledging the absolute authority and power of Jesus, requested that He “only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.”

The centurion did not know how this could be. He’d never seen such a thing before. But he’d seen Jesus, and seeing Jesus, he knew.

When Jesus heard this, He marveled, and testified that He had not seen such great faith anywhere, not even in Israel. He went on to promise that this centurion, and many more from throughout the Roman Empire, would “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 11). Jesus foresaw the day Tertullian described, when Christians would fill everything and every place throughout the Roman world.

And that great world-transforming movement began here, with one man’s amazing faith in Jesus and His

Word.

What about us?

Do we have that kind of faith? Are we willing to take Jesus at His Word? Do we believe that Jesus has power and authority to overcome the reign of sin and death and corruption which we find everywhere in our world, even in our own Personal Mission Fields? And are we willing to have Him speak His powerful Word to us and through us, in the belief that great life-bringing consequences can ensue?

The amazing thing about that centurion's faith is that he believed Jesus could do the impossible. Jesus could speak, and His Word would transcend space and time, bodily weakness, and every imaginable obstacle, to bring wholeness and life to a beloved servant. Jesus' Word is living and powerful (Heb. 4.12). It will accomplish whatever God intends for it, as He sends it out into the world through the frail vessels of His believing children (Is. 55.10, 11; 2 Cor. 4.7). We believe that Jesus *might* be able to do things that can make our lives easier and more agreeable. But do we believe His Word is powerful to make us effective witnesses? Disciple-makers, burden-bearers, salt, light, leaven? Agents through whom the world can be transformed and renewed?

What beginnings are before you today? What opportunities for you to exercise amazing faith in the Word of Jesus, and for Him to use you as a conduit through whom rivers of living water flow, bringing life and hope and peace to the people around you? Every little opportunity for obeying Jesus with the loaves and fishes of our lives is potentially the beginning of something new and big. We cannot know what God will do with the Word He sends out through us. But we can be faithful. We can obey. We can believe Jesus for things that seem to us to be, if not impossible, at least highly unlikely.

And when we do, sowing Kingdom seeds into every little opportunity of our day, we invite Jesus to make something new of this small beginning, something that can turn our world upside-down for Him.

For reflection

1. Do you think Jesus would marvel at your faith? Why or why not?
2. What obstacles do you need to overcome in having a faith like that of the centurion?
3. How can believers encourage one another to have this kind of faith?

Next steps – Preparation: Pray that Jesus will give you faith to see the opportunities for amazing faith and to move into them, trusting Him to do something new in and through you today.

5 A Beautiful Thing

“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Mark 14:9

Beautiful work

All who know the Lord Jesus would be overjoyed to hear Him say of something they had done, that it was a “beautiful work.”

This is how Jesus described Mary’s anointing His head with spikenard. The use of *καλός* – *good* or *beautiful* – is instructive here, because this word can signify both outward beauty and excellence as well as moral excellence and fittingness. Beauty is thus linked in Jesus’ mind with goodness, excellence, and what is appropriate and able to please. Mary’s outward work was beautiful, and it revealed a beautiful heart.

We can imagine that those who were in the home of Simon the leper on that occasion would have concurred. As the fragrance of Mary’s sacrifice wafted throughout the house, people would have raised their heads, sniffed the air curiously, taken a deep breath, and wondered about the source of this excellent aroma. And while certain people – including some of His disciples, egged on by Judas Iscariot (Matt. 26:8; Jn. 12:4) – expressed disapproval of such extravagance, Jesus rebuked them. He explained the purpose of Mary’s gesture and declared that this humble act of sacrifice, so beautiful in the moment, would waft like a fragrance throughout the ages and over the face of the earth, as Mary’s beautiful work would be forever inextricably linked to Jesus’ own story.

Mary’s act of devotion has served as an example for believers in every age and place. And like Mary’s oil, we can become a fragrance for Jesus in every place the Lord sends us, every moment of every day.

A controversial fragrance

Paul undoubtedly knew the story of Mary’s anointing. He identified himself and all true followers of Jesus Christ with that oil – precious commodities though whom Christ “diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14). Believers like Paul, who live devoted and sacrificial lives for Jesus, “are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (v. 15). Wherever they go, whatever they’re doing, they give off the aroma of Jesus. So completely immersed in Jesus were the first believers in Antioch, so much did Jesus fill their minds and conversations and shape their lives individually and together, that their neighbors took to calling them the “Christ ones” (Acts 11:26).

And, like the fragrance of Mary’s spikenard, that aroma can be a source of controversy. Some, detecting the fragrance of Christ in all our words and deeds, will be encouraged in the life of Christ. They will be drawn to Him, open to hearing about Him, eager to grow in and become more like Him, and committed to having the fragrance of Christ in themselves.

Others will find the fragrance of Christ in us a stench in their nostrils, and they’ll wonder about how we can waste so much time, effort and money on such nonsense. They may object to the fragrance of Jesus. They may revile and denounce us, demand that we keep our religion to ourselves, exclude us from their company, or worse.

Becoming a fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus Christ should be the objective of every believer. Paul commanded his readers to imitate him (1 Cor. 11:1). Whatever he did to become a fragrance of Jesus, we who believe in Him must embrace as our own callings. Our lives in all their many aspects, facets, dimensions, and undertakings can be the fragrance of Christ to the world, a fragrance that diffuses, arrests, affects, and draws

many to a deeper love for Jesus.

But being a fragrance of Jesus to the people around us must be taken up anew every day and sustained diligently by first making sure that we are at all times a fragrant aroma to God.

Begin here

Being a fragrance of Jesus, a beautiful work that draws others to Him, begins in prayer:

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!

For praise from the upright is beautiful (Ps. 33.1).

LORD, I cry out to You;

Make haste to me!

Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.

Let my prayer be set before You as incense,

The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Ps. 141.1, 2).

By some mystery we cannot now understand, our prayers are regarded by God as a sweet fragrance, a beautiful thing. In heaven at this time, departed saints gather our fumbling efforts at prayer into bowls, and, working with a great angel, somehow sanctify and improve our prayers like the fragrance of incense (Rev. 5.8; 8.3-5). These prayers, received as a beautiful thing by God, engage the power of God for good and beautiful works on earth, and serve to make us a fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

If you would be a beautiful thing to God and a fragrance of Christ to the world, you must pray. You must begin your day in prayer. All your undertakings and activities must begin in prayer. You must work to make prayer without ceasing the fragrance of your daily life, praying about everything, giving thanks in all things, rejoicing in the Lord at every moment, and offering the loaves and fishes of your everyday life in amazing faith to Jesus. From small beginnings in prayer, great and thunderous works of the knowledge of Jesus can fill your Personal Mission Field for His glory (Rev. 8.5).

And then, at the end of the day, as you review your work for that day before the Lord of glory, if you listen carefully and wait long enough, you may hear Him say into the recesses of your soul, “You are My fragrant and beautiful work. Well done, good and faithful and fragrant servant.”

For reflection

1. Have you identified your Personal Mission Field? Watch [this brief video](#), then download the worksheet to map out your sector of the Lord’s field.
2. Is your prayer life sufficient to allow you to become a fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus? Do you want to be such a fragrance?
3. How can you encourage other believers to be a fragrance of Jesus to the people around them?

Next steps – Preparation: Share today’s article with a friend. Challenge your friend to join you in mapping out your Personal Mission Field, then get together to share and pray that you may daily increase as a fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus Christ to God and to the people around you.

6 Here a Little, There a Little

*“Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?
For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.”* Isaiah 28.9, 10

The essence of discipleship

In his excellent book about growing old, *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, Dr. J. I. Packer makes two very important observations that apply, not only to those who are growing older, but to all followers of Jesus Christ.

The question Dr. Packer unpacks is: How should we as Christians finish our appointed course, so that we are filled with the joy of the Lord? The world tells us to relax, take it easy, let your working days be behind you, volunteer or not, play golf or take up a new hobby, and as much as you safely can, indulge your every whim. But, as Dr. Packer points out, this route to the end of our days is not an option for believers. Those who are made in the image of God, and who are being remade into the image of Jesus Christ, will continue following Him *all* their days. And that means, at the very least, that we can always *learn* something new and *lead* someone more deeply into fellowship with Jesus.

This, you will recognize, is the essence of discipleship. The New Testament word for *disciple* derives from a root which means *to learn*. A disciple is a learner, and a disciple of Jesus is one who learns Jesus. And the work of disciples, as they are learning Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24), is to make disciples of others and thus to lead them more completely into the knowledge and service of our Lord (Matt. 28.18-20).

The consistent witness of Scripture is that we cannot be true followers of Jesus if we are not *learning* Him. He calls us to learn from Him (Matt. 11.29). The apostles command us to follow in His path, grow in Him, and be transformed into His image (1 Jn. 2.1-6; 2 Pet. 3.18; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). And, as we learn Jesus, we will want every person around us to know about Him and, hopefully, join us as learners and leaders for Jesus.

Knowing and showing

Discipleship thus comes down to *knowing* Jesus and *showing* Him to others. A moment's reflection on Who Jesus is will reveal the exhilarating, albeit daunting, nature of this challenge.

Jesus Christ is the Word and Son of God, the Reason for and Explanation of all things (Jn. 1.1-4). He is the Light of the World (Jn. 8.12), the One in Whom the entire vast cosmos consists, and Who upholds it all by His Word of power (Col. 1.17; Heb. 1.3). He is the Creator of the world, King of kings and Lord of lords, and He sits enthroned in eternal glory, amid the praise of saints and angels, at the right hand of God Almighty. He commands the wind and the seas. He subjects and overcomes spiritual forces of wickedness. He heals the sick and raises the dead. He is all-powerful, all-glorious, all-majestic, all-beautiful, all-good and true, immense, unfettered by anything but His own will, radiant in holiness, infinite in kindness and love, the beginning and end of all things, and the Savior of all who believe in and follow Him.

To know Him thus is to know fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11).

Our task is simple: Know Jesus with increasing intimacy and effects, and show Him in His fullness to all the people around us. The measure of your discipleship is the consistency and faithfulness with which you know and show Jesus. And while that's a simple task – not at all complex or unclear – it is a calling that requires a lifetime of discipline and devotion.

And it all begins, every day, in the Scriptures, where we learn Jesus and become equipped to lead others to Him (Jn. 5.39).

Whom will Jesus teach?

To a people consumed by pride, complacency, and the diversions of this world, Isaiah posed the question, “Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message?” Following Jesus is a huge calling, infinitely fresh and varied, which unfolds over the course of a lifetime. Throughout our lives we meet, interact with, and affect and are affected by an immense number of people. Think of the people in your family, your neighborhood, your workplace or school. The people you meet at the grocery store, post office, or in any number of social or cultural situations. This is your Personal Mission Field, and Jesus sends you daily to it on the same mission for which He was sent, to bring near, by words, and deeds, the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Jn. 20.21).

To do this faithfully each day, you need to read and search the Scriptures – *all* the Word of God, over and over, deeper and deeper, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little, faithfully and devotedly, every day. There are no shortcuts in this journey, and nothing can substitute for being daily immersed in the Word of God. You need all the resources of Scripture, in all its scope and depth, to know Jesus and show Him to your world.

We cannot follow Jesus except as He reveals Himself to us in His Word. And we cannot lead others to Him except as we show Him as He is in His Word. The life-giving power of Scripture awaits us and those to whom we show Jesus (Jn. 6.63; Heb. 4.1), and we must make sure to avail ourselves of it daily.

The ability to know and show Jesus, to learn Jesus and lead others to Him, comes from the line upon line, here-a-little/there-a-little, daily discipline of reading, meditating in, and studying the Bible, the Word of God. For the Bible contains the *message* of God's grace in the life, death, resurrection, reign, and imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your Personal Mission Field comes to you as a barren waste – dry, unfruitful, and awaiting irrigation and cultivation. To make of this an oasis and a fruitful field, abounding in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will need to pour into it daily of the grace of God, drip by drip, draught by draught, seed by seed. But this will only be possible as you drink daily from the Word of God, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.

For reflection

1. What is your vision and plan for showing Jesus to the people in your Personal Mission Field?
2. How would you improve your daily time in the Scriptures? What can you do to get to *more* of God's Word? What can you do to *go more deeply* into it?
3. Where do you need to improve in *learning* Jesus and *leading* others to Him?

Next steps – Preparation: Review and revise your personal plan for knowing and showing Jesus.

7 To Those Who Wait

*But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40.31

Rarin' to go

No wonder they were so fired up and rarin' to go. The eleven disciples had just spent the most electrifying forty days of their lives with Jesus. He had shown Himself to be alive by many infallible proofs. They'd seen Him appear and disappear out of a room, drive schools of fish into their barren net, reveal Himself to followers here and there, and join them in meals and fellowship.

For forty days Jesus reviewed and enlarged upon His teaching about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1.3), reminding His disciples of Old Testament promises and the parables He'd spoken during His earthly ministry, and adding more clarity, vividness, and color to flesh out their prayers for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

No wonder we find them, in Acts 1.6, eager to get on with the Kingdom and everything that goes with it: "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" They had bought into the vision and were all about taking their place as rulers alongside their risen Lord.

The disciples had been through forty days of pre-game pep talks, and now they wanted to launch out into the field and claim the prize.

But Jesus told them they had to "wait" (v. 4).

Wait for what? Wait how?

The promised Spirit

The Kingdom of God does not come apart from the Spirit of God (vv. 5, 8). The Spirit of God is the power of the Kingdom, the holy spiritual energy that enables people to overcome entrenched self-love, reach up to God in worship and yield to Him in service, and take up the daily work of seeking and advancing the rule of King Jesus unto righteousness, peace, and joy *in the Spirit* (Rom. 14.17, 18). Before the disciples could get on with the work of the Kingdom, they would need to receive the promised Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God, when He came, would give them a new heart, a heart that could be shaped to love God and neighbor with increasing fervor and effects (Deut. 30.1-10).

The Spirit of God would teach the Law of God to the followers of Christ, and give them power to fulfill that Law, so that the path of love for God and neighbor would be clear and they would be able to walk it faithfully (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

The Spirit of God would bring forth the fruit of true spiritual life, life that rises above mere self-centeredness and the priorities of the world into the virtues and gifts that make for selflessness, caring, giving, and ongoing transformation into the image of Jesus Christ (Gal. 5.22, 23; 1 Cor. 12.7-11; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Small Beginnings

The Spirit would empower them to embrace the rule of King Jesus for every area of their lives, and to live and proclaim that rule as the Good News of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and reign (Acts 1.8).

And the Spirit would bond all believers together in peace and love, to build the Church of Jesus Christ into a holy, beautiful, and joy-filled temple of God (Eph. 2.19-22; Ps. 48.1, 2).

The disciples were to wait for the Spirit, for Him to come and indwell them; to convict, fill, and teach them; to lead them into all truth; and to give them the power they would need to fulfill their calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12). Until the Spirit came, there would be no Kingdom; and apart from the Spirit, there can be no Kingdom progress or advance.

Together in prayer

But *how* were they to wait? Go fishing again, and hope the Spirit shows up on the shore, a fire going and fish on the barbie?

Of course not. The disciples went to Jerusalem and gathered with a hundred or so of their friends and other disciples, and they commenced a ten-day prayer meeting, waiting on the Lord in prayer and crying out to Him to send the promised Spirit (cf. Ps. 40.1). We know that the disciples prayed continuously, even though there would have been much coming and going during those ten days (children to feed, jobs to do, errands to run, and so forth). They could not have known how long they would have to keep up their waiting, but they believed that the good things of the Lord would come to them if they were patient and persistent in this effort of united, specific, extraordinary prayer.

Ten days later was the festival of the first fruits – Pentecost. Jews from around the world assembled in Jerusalem to give thanks to God for the first fruits of their harvest. Little did they know that many of them would actually *become* that harvest, as the Spirit fell and thousands were converted to Christ and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God's own Son.

That meeting of a hundred and twenty or so praying believers may not have seemed like much of a way to begin the coming of Christ's Kingdom among men. But it was precisely what He ordered, and it therefore could not have failed.

Do we desire the coming of Christ's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven – powered by His Spirit, working in and through His people, for revival, renewal, and awakening? Then we must seek it in prayer, taking our stand together as watchers on the wall, taking no rest and giving God no rest until He fills and empowers His Church and sends us to the world as His witnesses once again (Is. 62.6, 7). The Good News and all the good things of the Kingdom will come to us, but only if we will wait together for a fresh upwelling and outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God.

For reflection

1. Why is it important that believers join together to seek a further coming of the Holy Spirit?
2. How would you define the terms revival, renewal, and awakening? Are these aspects of the Kingdom of God worth praying about and working for?
3. What groups of believers can you enlist to begin seeking the Lord for a further upwelling and outpouring of His Spirit unto revival, renewal, and awakening?

Next steps – Transformation: Begin praying today for more of the Spirit unto revival, renewal, and awakening. Enlist others to join you.

Small Beginnings

For reflection or discussion

1. Everywhere throughout creation we learn that big things come from small beginnings. Can you give some examples? What should we learn from this?
2. What “loaves and fishes” can you offer to Jesus each day? How might He use these to bless others?
3. Why was Jesus amazed at the centurion’s faith? Do you think Jesus would be amazed at your faith? Why or why not?
4. How can believers help one another make more of the small beginnings God provides for us each day?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.