

LITTLE IS MUCH

SMALL STUFF PART 3



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Little is Much

Little is Much
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Little is Much*

This study completes our series on *Small Stuff* by reminding us that the work of God is accomplished little by little. The book of Acts shows us many examples of this. Even those things that seem not to be in line with God's plan, He can use for His glory when His people persevere in faith and obedience.

God stands ready to help us along our journey of faith. But we must be careful to make the most of every opportunity, be it ever so small or unpromising, to seek and further His rule in our lives. The first Christians understood this, and God used their everyday faithfulness to spread the Good News of Jesus throughout the Roman world.

Our world today desperately needs Christians who believe that little is much when God is in it, and who faithfully, day after day, undertake the little efforts that God can multiply in amazing ways to bless our neighbors and glorify Himself.

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 A Little Waiting

Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2.3, 4

Waiting to stand

Their Light had left them – the Light of the world. For three years His presence shone among them, before the darkness of death consumed Him. Then, following His resurrection, an even greater radiance of light and understanding broke upon them as He taught them about the coming Kingdom of God.

But now He was gone. Their Light, it seemed, was spent. Would His Word come to pass? And could this “waiting” in prayer, which must have seemed like such a little thing, actually lead to the promised Spirit, and find them standing in the power and Kingdom of God?

They would have to wait and see – wait in prayer until God stood by His promise, so that they could stand in the Kingdom not of this world.

John Milton understood what it was like to lose your light – in his case, his eyesight – and to be left wondering what good could come from it. But he didn’t wonder for long. He knew that if all he could ever do, once his eyesight was gone, was simply stand and wait, then that’s what he would do:

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.”^[1]

After he had become completely blind, Milton composed one of the greatest poems in the English language, *Paradise Lost*. He stood in his calling and waited on the Lord, and God made much out his faithfulness.

Lessons from Milton

Milton’s sonnet reflecting on the loss of his eyesight contains important lessons for us about waiting and standing. Milton’s world in the 1660s had become small and dark, a little thing compared to his earlier career in publishing and government. But he waited in prayer and stood in his calling to compose because he understood it would be a terrible sin not to persist in serving God.

No matter how few our abilities, how small our windows of opportunity, how constrained our situation, or how insignificant we may consider our contribution, we must never forget that we are called to serve our

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Maker and Redeemer. Even if all we can do is wait on the Lord in prayer and stand firm in our testimony of faith, these are the kinds of beginnings that can lead to Spirit-empowered works for the Lord.

At the same time, we need to bear in mind the great privilege it is to serve God, even with the little we may have to offer. As Milton reminded himself, God has called us to serve. He expects us to serve, and not to offer flimsy excuses like, “But I’m going blind!” or “But all I can do is pray!” or “But I have so little to offer!” God doesn’t actually need the little we offer Him, but it pleases Him to receive and use our work and gifts – our loaves and fishes – be they ever so small. Myriads of heavenly beings carry out the cosmic rule of God, and it is our privilege to join them. Our job is to take up whatever “mild yoke” the Lord has assigned us, wait on Him in prayer, and stand firm in our calling. He will do the rest.

Little is much when God is in it, and when we wait faithfully on Him, offering every moment and small ability, each new beginning every day, we will find the Holy Spirit ready to empower us for works of faith, obedience, witness, love, and glory such as we have never dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20).

Back in the upper room

In spite of his light being spent, John Milton stood in his calling as a poet and waited on the Lord to do a great work. He couldn’t see, but he could dictate, and he must have known, as his daughter read back the lines he’d composed that day, that his faithful God was making something very great out of the darkness of his little world.

Just as He did from that ten-day prayer meeting in Jerusalem so long ago.

By the end of that first day of witness in Jerusalem, thousands had come to faith in Jesus Christ. Can you imagine what it was like to gather with the apostles and their friends, back in that upper room, where they had waited in prayer for ten days? What wonder, what laughing and crying, what joy and praise must have resounded throughout that hall!

Their faithful waiting had paid off, and now they were standing in the Kingdom and power of God, ready to be used by Him to turn the world upside-down for Jesus Christ. They will stand firm in their faith and calling who wait faithfully on the Lord in all the little things of their life. For the Light which guides and transforms them, the Light of the world, is never spent.

Waiting on the Lord may seem a little thing, but God can make much of it. Wait faithfully on the Lord day by day, and He will make you stand in His glory.

For reflection

1. What is your calling from God? What has He appointed to you as your place to stand for Him? Of what does that place to stand consist?
2. Do you wait daily on the Lord before you go out into your place to stand for Him, in your Personal Mission Field? Do you pray about all the little opportunities you might have in the day ahead? How can you use those prayers to prepare for the Spirit to fill you with power?
3. Will you see any other believers today? How will you encourage them to wait for and stand in the Lord?

Next steps – Preparation: Review your daily preparations and opportunities for serving the Lord. How can you improve your “waiting” so that your “standing” is more fruitful?

2 A Little Troubling

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Acts 8.1

Just as Jesus promised

All the promises of God, which are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, are precious and very great (2 Cor. 1.20; 2 Pet. 1.4). All of them.

Even this one: “In the world you will have tribulation...” (Jn. 16.33). And this one: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3.12). This one, too: “Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous...” (Ps. 34.19).

Those who believe in Jesus Christ are a Kingdom fellowship of sufferers: “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...” (Rev. 1.9). Let this be your mindset, Paul wrote to the Philippians, that like Jesus, you must expect trouble, persecution, suffering, and worse (Phil. 2.1-11).

We have God’s Word on it; He has promised that we will know a little troubling as His children. And because He has promised it, this is a precious and very great Word, indeed. And it is precious and very great because the Lord knows how to overcome the adverse effects of troubling with great victories of joy, rejoicing, and Kingdom expansion.

This, at least, was the experience of the first disciples.

Blessed and joyful in trouble

While that first Christian Pentecost brought a huge ingathering of new believers, it wasn’t for everyone a cause for admiring wonder and joyful celebration. The religious leaders of Israel, who thought they had done away with the threat to their place and power by crucifying Jesus, considered that they had yet a little more work to do.

And that work involved threatening and troubling those who insisted on proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

Peter and John were the first to be warned (Acts 4.1-22). It did not matter that they had done a good work of miraculous proportions. The preaching about Jesus must stop. But Peter and John shrugged off this threat and declared their determination to continue proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. And when they reported the threat to their brethren, unified prayers arose to God, Who filled all the believers with the Holy Spirit and power, so that they joyfully and boldly rose above their little trouble, reaching and gathering multitudes more for the cause of Christ and the community of the afflicted (Acts 4.23-37).

But the religious leaders were not finished. They hauled the disciples before them once again in Acts 5.22-42. This time they not only warned and threatened them, they beat them, probably with thirty-nine lashes. They reckoned that if a little troubling had not done the job, a little more might.

The apostles, however, went away rejoicing to have realized this precious and very great promise of Jesus, and they continued proclaiming His Name with greater boldness and effects.

Great trouble, same result

The religious leaders of Jerusalem were desperate. Despite their threats, despite the beatings and further

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warnings, the apostles continued preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even a great company of the religious leaders became persuaded and were now among the multiplied thousands who worshiped Jesus and shared together in His Body (Acts 6.1-6).

The murder of Stephen seems to have been a tipping point, for immediately after that “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8.1). Imagine the scene, as multiplied thousands of men, women, and children hurriedly packed and fled in every direction to avoid arrest and beating and worse. The roads leading away from Jerusalem must have been clogged with travelers who, having given up everything they knew and most of what they owned, were now fleeing in the Name of Jesus to find new lives somewhere beyond the reach of their persecutors.

And everywhere they went, “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8.4).

In an effort to *stop* the Gospel, the religious leaders had only caused it to multiply and spread. A little troubling was just what the people of God needed to realize more of His power, grow closer to Him and one another, and move out in the next stage of Jesus’ Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and uttermost parts strategy. They rejoiced and eagerly proclaimed the Name of Jesus, even though they had lost everything, because they had *partaken of Jesus*, they had *shared in His sufferings*, and they had *grown in His grace* in the precious and very great promise of a little troubling (2 Pet. 1.4).

In this world we will have troubles. The Lord has promised, and all His promises are precious and very great, but only as we rest in Jesus, cling to Jesus, grow in Jesus, and fulfill our calling to be His witnesses (Acts 1.8). A little trouble can lead to spiritual growth, emboldened witness, stronger unity with other believers, and a more vibrant and fruitful witness for the Lord. God Who promises us trouble in this world will be with us in our troubles, so that, no matter whether our troubles are little or great, much good for the Lord and His Kingdom can result.

We need to make sure that God is with us in our troubles, whether they be few or many, little or great. Wait on the Lord in prayer, stand firm in your confession in Jesus, and you will know the presence of God in all your troubles, unto much that is good and glorious.

For reflection

1. Why would Jesus promise us trouble? Is trouble somehow good for us?
2. How should we respond to the troubles we have to face? How do waiting on the Lord and standing firm in our confession help us?
3. If we wait and stand firm through our troubles, what kinds of good and glorious outcomes can we expect? How can believers help one another in this?

Next steps – Preparation: What troubles are you facing? What troubles are you anticipating in the days ahead? How can you prepare for the troubling that has been promised you so as to make sure that God is with you in it?

3 A Little Help

And of the angels He says:

“Who makes His angels spirits

And His ministers a flame of fire.”

...Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Hebrews 1.7, 14

Unaware of angels

Most of us cruise through our days barely conscious of any reality beyond what we experience with our senses. The world of people and things commands our focus and defines the parameters of our experience.

Christians know there is another reality, a spiritual world, populated by God and other spiritual beings. We know this world exists, but apart from occasional visits via the medium of prayer, we're not all that conscious of the spiritual realm during the normal course of our daily lives.

At the same time, we acknowledge that we are the objects of a continuous spiritual warfare, relentlessly conducted by the devil and his cohort (Eph. 6.10-12), and specifically designed to nullify the power of faith in our lives. The devil's objective is to debunk and dethrone the Lord Jesus Christ, and, the tactic of direct assault having proven ineffectual and disastrous (Matt. 4.1-11; Col. 2.15), he has chosen the approach of disarming and disabling those who serve the King of glory, that His reign might be confined to the heavenly realm, with only a bare minimum of earthly impact.

Daily, the devil distributes his weapons to be deployed ferociously against all who believe in Jesus: distraction, indifference to spiritual matters, discouragement, temptation, confused values, self-interest, busyness, neglect of prayer and other spiritual disciplines, compromise, complacency, the spirit of the age, and so forth. Used in combination, these prove to be effective tools for keeping the followers of Christ from realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

We tend not to recognize the assaults mounted against us by the enemy of our souls, at least, not to recognize them *as such*. Likewise, we tend to be unaware of the spiritual powers arrayed for our defense. How much more debilitating would the devil's efforts be were it not for the fact that angels from God minister to us continually?

Angels are the most misunderstood and misrepresented of all the hosts in the Lord's army. Yet our failure to acknowledge them, and our tendency to distort their nature and role in the divine economy does not deter them from their divinely-appointed task.

Angels will not do everything for us. We might even consider that theirs is only a little help. But their help can be a powerful aid for fulfilling our calling as witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Angel powers

Angels are curious creatures. We scarcely understand them, and we show as much when we think of them in "angelic" terms. Angels, as we regard them, are nice spiritual beings with sweet faces and kindly dispositions. We believe in their existence, as an article of faith, at least. But do we understand their roles? Do we appreciate the power they can wield in our defense? Do we thank God for them and call on Him to send them ahead of and around us as we launch out into our day?

Angels can wield power over physical realities. They can hold back the wind (Rev. 7.1), administer physical judgments from on high (Rev. 15, 16), stagger dumb animals and arrogant men (Num. 22.22-31), bring the

greatest of saints to their knees (Dan. 10.1-9), pick locks and open iron doors (Acts 5.19; 12.7-10), and even appear in the form of human beings (Heb. 13.2). Angels have some role in helping people understand the Word of God (Rev. 10.8-11) as well as in communicating the Good News (Rev. 14.6, 7; *angel*, after all, means *messenger*). They assist the saints of God in their daily walk and help to keep them from stumbling in the way (Ps. 91.11, 12). And they can guide us in worship, teaching us how we ought to comport ourselves in the presence of the living God (Rev. 5.11, 12).

At the same time, they are continuously on guard and do battle with those beings – spiritual or otherwise – who seek our undoing and want to nullify our faith and impede the progress of Christ’s Kingdom (Ps. 35.1-10).

Surely by tapping into a little of that power more consistently, we could see much more evidence of the Lord at work in our lives.

Enlisting angels

We get a little help from these friends every day of our lives, more, in fact, than we typically acknowledge. We could enlist more of their assistance by following some commonsense practices for working our Personal Mission Fields.

First, thank God daily for angels, especially for those angels who are forever in His face on your behalf (Matt. 18.10). There are plenty of angels to go around – myriads and myriads of them (Dan. 7.9, 10) – so don’t be shy about seeking their help for the day ahead. Jesus indicated that He could call down 72,000 angels if He liked (Matt. 26.23), and while that may be a bit beyond our ability or need, still, His example should encourage us. The Spirit can use angels to help you understand the Word and to be bold in initiating a conversation about the Gospel. Call upon the Lord to send His messengers to you for these specific purposes.

Second, as you reflect on your day at the end of it, consider the various ways angels *may* have been involved on your behalf: interceding for you, keeping you in the Lord’s path, diverting physical dangers, thwarting spiritual attacks, and so forth. Of course, we cannot see them performing these services, but we know they are often sent to do so. It is better to give thanks and to praise God for the little help we may have received throughout the day, than to have received it and take it for granted.

Finally, call on the Lord to send angels to strengthen you in the midst of spiritual struggles, or to help persevere in fulfilling your calling to His Kingdom and glory (Matt. 4.11; Lk. 22.43; 1 Thess. 2.12). Pay attention whenever the Scriptures speak about angels, and this will encourage you to make better use of their help. Remember: the Lord sends them as messengers and servants, so we must always go through Him to garner their assistance, and thank Him for all they do for us.

Our angelic friends can provide more than a little help for us each day. The better we make use of these ready and potent servants of the Lord, the more He will do in and through us.

For reflection

1. What has been your experience in knowing the help of angels?
2. Why is it a good idea to give thanks for the help of angels, and to seek their help throughout the day?
3. What will you do to make better use of the help of angels from this point forward?

Next steps – Preparation: How can you incorporate the help of angels more consistently in your walk with and work for the Lord? Share your plan for doing so with a Christian friend.

4 A Little Mission

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Acts 16.9

Mission to Asia

As the fleet approached the Asian coast, the king suddenly stripped off his clothes, leapt from the bow of the lead ship, and began to run around the ruins of the ancient city of Troy.

While his astonished troops looked on, Alexander of Macedon appeared suddenly at the grave of Achilles, where priests were waiting. The king threw himself face down on the grave, whereupon the priests rushed forward and poured sacred oil over his body, as the Greek army looked on in stunned silence.

Suddenly, Alexander raised himself from the grave of the greatest of Greece's ancient heroes, and presented himself as Achilles Redivivus, the warrior king who would avenge Greece on its enemies. His 50,000 troops erupted in a frenzied roar of approval.

After several initial victories, Alexander disappeared into the Egyptian desert. When he returned, it was in the company of Egyptian priests and the garb of the sun god. He had shape-shifted his identity to gain new allies and prepare for the conquest of Persia and the invasion of India.

Over the next 11 years, this "resurrected son of the gods" would conquer most of the known world, from Egypt to India, spreading the Greek language and culture from Italy to the Levant to southern Russia and modern Pakistan.

But Alexander the Great, for all his show, pretense, and power, was a mere mortal. He died from a wound before his dream of world conquest could be realized. His empire was divided and ultimately dissolved into the pages of history, leaving scarcely a trace of its greatness.

Almost 400 years after Alexander crossed the Bosphorus into Asia, another "army" would cross from Asia to Macedonia. And the world is still resounding with the impact of that smaller, albeit greater mission.

Mission to Greece

We don't know how many people accompanied Paul, Silas, and Luke as they made their way from Troy to Greece, but it was considerably fewer than the 50,000 Greeks and Macedonians who crossed with Alexander.

However, they were on a mission from, and were accompanied by the true Son of God, resurrected from the dead and living in each of them by His Spirit.

No pikes, chariots, spears, swords, or siege machinery were in their arsenal. The only weapon they brought with them was the Sword of the Spirit and the Word of the Gospel.

They didn't land at a hero's grave, but smack in the midst of a prayer meeting of some obscure women. They didn't encounter massed resistance which had to be defeated in pitched battles. Instead, they ended up in jail for silencing a little demon-possessed girl and thus drying up an income stream for some heartless entrepreneurs.

And, unlike Alexander's mission to Asia, Paul's mission to Macedonia and beyond has changed the world and is still changing it nearly 2,000 years later.

Little is Much

Little is much when God is in it.

Mission to your world

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are people on a mission. Your mission may seem small and not all that significant to you. Imagine how Paul's mission to Macedonia appeared to those magistrates who beat him and Silas and threw them into the local dungeon.

No dungeon could hold Paul and Silas. Not even the counsels and stratagems and powers of hell can stop you from bearing powerful lived and spoken witness for Jesus Christ. Your world may seem like a formidable place. But the world is only the Lord's field, where He is sowing, cultivating, and harvesting a mighty ingathering of souls for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

And He is doing this through people like you and me. Your Personal Mission Field awaits you every day. Go into it determined to be Christ's witness, and make disciples by every means and in every season. The work won't always be fun and games – ask Paul and Silas. God threw an earthquake at the city of Philippi to help in furthering their mission. You probably won't need an earthquake, but He has angels standing ready to clear the path for you, and His Word and Spirit poised to open doors of opportunity wider than those of that Philippian jail.

The world remembers Alexander the Great as a tragic oddity. He knocked a few people around for a few years, then he died, and the world went back to business as usual.

The world can never forget the apostle Paul, because by faithfully discharging his little mission to Greece, he set the stage for the progress of Christ's Kingdom – progress that has not abated for 2,000 years.

And you and I are the Kingdom-seekers. We are the joy-bringers. We are the Good News bearers. And when we are faithful in every little opportunity, every moment of every day, God can do much that will change our world for His glory and the blessing of all to whom He sends us.

For reflection

1. Do you think of yourself as on a mission for the Lord? How does that affect your daily planning and preparation?
2. Meditate on Matthew 5.13-16 and 1 Peter 3.15. How do these apply to your daily life?
3. What is the greatest obstacle to your being more consistent in your mission for the Lord? How can you overcome that obstacle?

Next steps – Preparation: Pray about and plan for your day as though it were part of Paul's mission. What difference does that make as you go forward?

5 A Little Singing

*But I will sing of Your power;
Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning;
For You have been my defense
And refuge in the day of my trouble.
To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises;
For God is my defense,
My God of mercy. Psalm 59.16, 17*

The power of song

As they arrived at their post in Siam, Mrs. Anna was feeling no small amount of trepidation about tutoring the children of the king. Her own son, Louis, was even more disquieted by the new and foreign culture. To help Louis deal with his fears, Mrs. Anna encouraged him to turn to song:

*Whenever I feel afraid, I hold my erect,
And whistle a happy tune, and no one will suspect
I'm afraid...*

*The result of this deception is very strange to tell,
For when I fool the people I fear, I fool myself as well.*

While whistling is not exactly singing, the point is the same. Music, and in particular singing, can exert a powerful influence on our affections, turning fear to courage, gloom to delight, uncertainty to conviction, and reluctance to readiness. This is no doubt why singing and music appear in every culture known to humankind. Singing can exert powerful effects on every aspect of life. We sing to express love and woo a lover, to bring some rhythm and joy to our work, declare our pride in an athletic team or our love for our country, tell stories, proclaim abiding truths, ready ourselves for battle, rally social movements, unite a congregation or political party, and just to have fun. Singing is not a uniquely human phenomenon, but no other creature shows such diversity, power, and conscious or varied use of singing than human beings.

God made human beings for singing. Our penchant for singing reflects the eternal melody of love that exists between the Persons of the divine Trinity. We are made in the image of God, so we sing because we can't help ourselves. And we sing because we understand, if only implicitly, that singing has power we may not understand but we cannot deny.

God commands singing

As Christians, moreover, we sing because God commands us to sing. Throughout the psalms "sing to the LORD" calls His people to raise their voices and sing in praise, thanksgiving, celebration, supplication, imprecation, doubt, fear, confession, anticipation, and covenant renewal. Singing, in fact, is one of the indications that we are being filled with the Holy Spirit, as Paul explains in Ephesians 5.18-21.

What God commands of His people, He enables. The book of Psalms alone is a rich treasury of songs to lift, inspire, comfort, and guide us. Over the course of the centuries, Christian composers from all cultures, following the command of God to sing new songs to Him, have produced an incomparable wealth of hymns, choruses, oratorios, masses, cantatas, chants, and songs to express their relationship with God.

God not only commands singing, but He hears it as well. The book of Revelation shows us that God in heaven surrounds himself with singing – a perpetual and holy chorus which we on earth join each time we

come together for worship.

Singing is a quintessentially human activity, and a fundamental Christian discipline. We might be surprised how a little singing can engage God for much good.

Others hear our singing, too

Beaten, humiliated, and thrown into a dungeon with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas must have been a little dazed (Phil. 16.22ff.). They had followed a vision from the Lord in crossing from Troy in Asia to Philippi in Greece. Paul had consistently taught that entering the Kingdom of God involved tribulation (cf. Acts 14.22), so he likely wasn't surprised at being mistreated in Philippi – just a little dazed.

What to do?

Paul knew, and so did Silas. They began “praying a hymn” (as the Greek has it). They may have turned to the songbook they'd known from childhood – the book of Psalms – to sing together a *song* like Psalm 67, a prayer written in the form of a song, and focusing on the salvation of God:

*God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us,
Selah
That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations.
Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy!
For You shall judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations on earth.
Selah
Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
Then the earth shall yield her increase;
God, our own God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.*

Psalm 67 would have reminded Paul and Silas of their mission (vv. 2-4). It would have called on God to judge the rightness of their cause and the unfairness of their treatment (v. 4). It would have lifted their weary souls in praise and invoked God's steadfast love and mercy on their behalf (vv. 3, 5, 1). Psalm 67 would have brought some heavenly brightness into the darkness of that jail (v. 1). And it would have provoked God to respond to His own words and promises, to bless His people and advance His Kingdom on earth (vv. 6, 7).

But that song might also have piqued the ears of prisoners and jailer alike, as Paul and Silas sang with confidence of the blessings and salvation of the Lord.

And how will you be blessed by singing today? Will you sing of God's power and mercy? Will you celebrate His praises or declare His defense in song? And who will be blessed, or at least piqued, to hear you singing about your love for Jesus and His great gift of salvation? Do not underestimate the power of singing. A little singing before the Lord, might not cause an earthquake, but it could bring about much good, both in you who sing and in those who hear you.

Little is Much

For reflection

1. What role does singing to the Lord play in your relationship with Him? Could you improve this? How?
2. Do you have a favorite hymn or praise song? What is it about this song that makes it special to you? How do the lyrics affect you? What about the music?
3. How can singing create opportunities for witness-bearing?

Next steps – Preparation: Make a point to learn some new hymns and to sing them – to yourself or out loud – as often as you can. How does your soul benefit from this?

6 A Little Setback

For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. Romans 15.22-24

Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" Acts 25.12

Planning for Rome

The apostle Paul had long wanted to visit Rome and preach the Gospel there. Rome! The capital of the civilized world. Of course Paul would want to go there. As he says in Romans 1.13, he had often planned to go to Rome, but things just got in the way. But now, as he was concluding matters in Greece, Paul believed the time was right for him to make the long journey. A quick trip to Jerusalem, and then he would make getting to Rome his priority.

We can see his mind at work, thinking through the different parts of his plan. *First*, how would he get there? Rome itself had already helped to facilitate the trip by building excellent roads. Primarily constructed, like the US Interstate system, with military purposes in mind, the Roman roads made travel easy for all kinds of purposes. And it was true that all roads led to Rome. Perhaps Paul would walk there, as he did throughout Asia.

Rome had also swept the Mediterranean clear of pirates, again, with military purposes as the primary motive. This meant that all kinds of ships could ply the seas, and so perhaps Paul was planning a sea route for at least part of his trip. Probably he would need a combination of land and sea travel. And, *second*, he would continue evangelizing and starting churches as he journeyed.

And then, *third*, how to pay for all this? A trip to Rome would not be inexpensive, since Paul would have had a team with him, for whom he would need to provide support. Where would the money come from to cover these expenses?

Paul was probably developing a plan for that as well, as he hints in Romans 1 and 15. Paul must have been feeling as though he was grooving with the Spirit, so strong was his impulse to go to Rome at this time.

And while he was certainly correct about the larger goal, the details of his plan would unfold in a manner entirely unlike anything he could have contrived.

Jail time

Things did not go well in Jerusalem. The religious leaders, angry at Paul for any number of reasons, managed to have him arrested and put in custody of the Roman authorities. This definitely was not part of Paul's plan, although he was well aware that something like this was likely to occur (cf. Acts 21.1-14). When a plot was concocted against Paul in Jerusalem, the Romans transferred him to Caesarea. There he was kept under house arrest for two years (Acts 24.27), which must have seemed like a lifetime.

This was beginning to look like a serious setback. It was not at all what Paul had planned. He'd expected to be in Rome long ago, preaching the Gospel and starting churches throughout the city. Now he could only sit and wait for the slow machinery of Roman justice to determine his fate.

The Roman authorities in Caesarea had no idea what to do. They kept passing him from one court to

another, hoping he might bribe them for his freedom or that his accusers would just give up and go away. Paul also perceived that his case was going nowhere, so he invoked his privilege as a Roman citizen for a hearing before the emperor.

In Rome.

A plan comes together

Suddenly, a major part of Paul's plan fell into place. He would go by ship and at Rome's expense. Items 1 and 3, check. There was the problem of his being a prisoner, of course, but he must have felt confident that Roman chains would not be able to contain the Gospels.

And he was right. Who knows how many of those sailors on that storm-tossed ship confessed faith in Jesus upon seeing Paul's faith and wisdom? Many people on the island of Malta heard the Gospel and experienced the grace of God through Paul's ministry. Check item 2 of Paul's plan for getting to Rome.

And upon his arrival there, he had his own apartment, guarded 24/7 from any potential violence by Roman guards. He didn't have to seek out synagogues or marketplaces to evangelize the lost; they came right to his home. Those who attended to him from the imperial staff heard the Gospel, and many of them believed as well. And the Christians in Rome, to whom Paul had written his epistle, were emboldened by Paul's witness and became "much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Phil. 1.12-14). And finally, Paul had his audience with the emperor. Though he stood alone before the imperial court, he did not flinch, nor did he fail in his witness. And he must have impressed them because, if tradition is true, Paul was released from this first imprisonment to continue his ministry.

A little setback like Paul experienced in Jerusalem and Caesarea might have caused others to despair. Paul realized that God was simply altering his larger plan for working his Personal Mission Field. Paul used that little setback, as he used every setback, to grow stronger in the Lord and firmer in his resolve to fulfill his witness for the Lord.

No little setbacks can keep us from being faithful. If we will rejoice and give thanks in all our trials, and keep our eye on our plan for working our Personal Mission Field, God will open surprising doors of opportunity, and use our little setbacks to realize much good in advancing His Kingdom and glory.

For reflection

1. Do you have a plan for working your Personal Mission Field? Do you review this plan daily and commit it to the Lord in prayer? What are the key elements of your plan?
2. What kind of setbacks discourage you in your walk with and work for the Lord? How can you turn those setbacks into opportunities?
3. How can believers encourage one another to be faithful in bearing witness for the Lord (Heb. 10.24, 25)?

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

7 A Little Deviation

It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 11.1

No big deal

It must have been regarded by everyone as no big deal. David had earned his rest, or so he may have suggested to Joab and the army. If he wanted to remain in Jerusalem, rather than go out with his army as was his custom, and the custom of all kings at this time of year, nobody seemed to mind.

It was just a little deviation from the norm, from expectations, and from David's normal practice. But that little deviation would lead to big disaster.

Just as Hezekiah's little deviation into pride and self-puffery did, when he showed the evidence of his greatness to the emissaries from Babylon (2 Kgs. 20.12-19).

And just as Judas' little embezzling of pocket change from the disciples' treasury must have seemed like no big deal. He'd pay it back some day. Maybe (Jn. 12.4-6).

And Demas' little clinging to some worldly indulgence – no big deal. He could handle it. Until he no longer could (2 Tim. 4.9, 10).

And Peter's little lapse into ethnic favoritism at Antioch. Just a little thing, a slight deviation from what the council in Jerusalem had declared. But he paid for his little deviation by being publicly embarrassed by the apostle Paul (Gal. 2.11-21). We can be sure Peter rued ever compromising his convictions just to stay in the good graces of the big-boy theologians from Jerusalem.

Little is much when God is in it. This is true, as we have seen.

But when God is *not* in the little things we do, when those little things are little deviations from Biblical truth, much can happen as well, but not the kinds of things that glorify God and bless us and our neighbors. Indeed, often the exact opposite is the case.

The narrow path

Jesus explained that the gate of discipleship is a narrow one (Lk. 13.22-24). The path leading to that gate is a clearly-marked thoroughfare, with guardrails Old and New, a firm roadbed of apostolic example, and the Holy Spirit as our constant GPS, pointing and fueling the way to ever-increasing Christlikeness.

But that thoroughfare is cluttered on the right hand and the left with exit ramps offering a wide range of tempting alternatives – short-cuts, scenic routes, improved roadways, interesting diversions, exciting no-guardrail excursions, get-rich (or get-popular) quick schemes – and all of them promising “easy exit, easy return.” We can't not see them – all those glitzy billboards, blinking arrows, friends waving from the overpasses, and the like. And we might be tempted to think that a brief excursion from the well-defined path won't hurt anyone. After all, I can get right back on the discipleship thoroughfare and be none the worse for it, right?

Wrong.

Little is Much

Little deviations are deviations, whether large or small. A little deviation at any moment on a journey to the moon will find you lost in deep space before you know it, beyond reach of radio or telescope, all alone and cold, and dying a slow death.

It is the same with the deviations we allow in our walk with the Lord. We might think them inconsequential and, after all, nothing worse than what other believers are doing. But deviations from the Word of God can sear the conscience (1 Tim. 4.1, 2), pollute the heart (Matt. 6.22, 23), harden the mind (Eph. 4.17-19), and turn you from the path of discipleship to one of self-indulgence and lying to the Lord.

Continue on that path, and sooner or later you will find the thoroughfare of discipleship no longer alluring, the goal of Christlikeness not worth the trouble, and the life of faith you pretend to be living a mere cultural accoutrement to wear before your family and friends.

Little is much

Little deviations can lead to much trouble, disappointment, confusion, and collapse. Do not give in to them, and do not harbor them in your soul. Recognize them for what they are, and as you're thinking about giving in to the little deviation, remember the much trouble and destruction to which these can lead.

Every temptation to deviate from the path of discipleship also offers a little opportunity to remain faithful to the Lord. When we're tempted to veer from the path of following Jesus, we have a choice to make. Either we will follow that temptation and fall through it into sin, or we will resist that temptation, hew to the path of discipleship, and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Resist the little temptations and see how much God can do to form you into the likeness of His Son.

Because God is with us when temptations arise, and when you seek the Lord in the face of every temptation to deviate from His way, you will find that faith and obedience lead to much growth and blessing by keeping you on the thoroughfare of discipleship and of glorifying God.

For reflection

1. What is temptation? How can we know when we're being tempted? Can we recognize the "off ramps" of deviation if we're ignorant of the "guardrails" of Scripture? Explain.
2. Paul says that every temptation also has a way of escape, so that we can bear up under the temptation and not fall through it into sin (1 Cor. 10.13). How can we find "a way of escape" in the face of temptation to deviate from the Lord?
3. How can Christians help one another to stay on the path of discipleship and resist the little deviations that tempt us?

Next steps – Transformation: Make sure you know what to do when temptation arises. Mediate on Psalm 73. How did Asaph face down the temptation to covet and complain? What did he do?

Little is Much

For reflection or discussion

1. How is that little can be much when God is in it? How should knowing this encourage us?
2. What opportunities do you have each day for doing something little for the Lord?
3. What can keep us from believing that our little efforts for the Lord can accomplish much for His glory? How can we overcome these obstacles?
4. How can believers help one another to be more conscious and conscientious of doing little things in the Name of the Lord?
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.

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Thank you.