

LITTLE THINGS

SMALL STUFF PART 1



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Little Things

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Little Things

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Welcome to *Little Things*

In the Christian community, sometimes we give the impression that only the people with big responsibilities matter. They're the ones that get things done, the ones everyone listens to and wants to learn from, the folks we look to for leadership in our churches and Christian organizations. We need leaders, and sometimes leaders play really important roles in the Kingdom. But more than that, we need energetic, everyday believers, men and women who understand that Kingdom progress is incremental and gradual, that it comes as we lay hold on the little things of life and make them something glorious.

The little things matter, as we shall see in this series, *Small Stuff*. Part 1, "Little Things," surveys the often-overlooked little things of life that we must come to prize if we are to be faithful in serving the Lord and in finding the full and abundant life He has for us. The following poem gets at the heart of this 3-part study:

The Little Things
Shaver's Fork, Cheat River

The river whispers ceaselessly.
Its murmured message goes unheard
for most of its journey to the sea.

But when at length it passes me
I listen, hoping for a word
of wisdom, or some insight free

of nonsense, pride, or vanity –
some thought I might employ to gird
my mind against mortality.

Its rushing ripples casually
express their views, without a word,
but clearly and convincingly:

"The little things," it says to me,
"done faithfully and well, absurd
as it may seem, combine to be

the bigger things that finally
endure." It was enough for me.

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 The Prize of Your Life

“Thus you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh,” says the LORD. “But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.””” Jeremiah 45.4, 5

Misguided vision

Baruch had high hopes. And why not? He worked for the best-known prophet of his day, listening in on his devotions, attending to his daily needs, accompanying him in his ministry, copying down all his words, reading his sermons before high public officials, and carrying out important tasks for his master. He was faithful and uncomplaining in all his work, and for this he had high hopes of *greatness*.

Perhaps Baruch envisioned the day when Jeremiah would finally be recognized for being the man of God that he was, and he (and Baruch with him, of course) would be elevated to a greater social standing than what he typically endured (rejection, imprisonment, mocking, and scorn). Then Baruch, too, would get the respect he felt he was due.

Or he may have cherished in his mind an appointment to some cushy position among the political elite of Jerusalem, the consequence of his many eloquent and impassioned readings before them.

Or maybe he saw his relationship with Jeremiah as somewhat akin to that of Elisha and Elijah. Once Jeremiah’s work, albeit good, was done, he would take over with even greater power and impact.

Whatever it was Baruch envisioned, it was a big deal; it would be the prize of his life, and it would finally allow him to be someone other than Jeremiah’s best boy. He would be *someone* in his own right.

But Baruch’s vision was misguided. He longed for greatness, greatness for *himself*— that he might become or accomplish something that would cause him to be seen as a great man in his own right. And the Lord, through Jeremiah, rebuked him.

Seeking greatness

From Jeremiah’s rebuke we might get the impression that seeking greatness is a bad thing.

But Jesus commended greatness on several occasions. He urged His followers to aspire to greatness and to seek it earnestly. He even told them how. He said that greatness could be realized by learning and teaching the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19), serving others selflessly (Mk. 10.42-45), and being faithful in all the small details entrusted to us moment by moment, day by day (Matt. 25.21-23).

The difference between what Jesus commended and what Baruch sought is all in the *focus*. Baruch was seeking greatness *for himself*, that others might look at him with admiration, respect, and maybe even awe. He would be *somebody* in his own right, and that would be really, really *great*. Jesus commended greatness *for the sake of God’s Kingdom*, that His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy would increase on earth as it is in heaven; and the knowledge of the glory of God would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Rom. 14.17, 18; Hab. 2.14).

Baruch prized greatness for himself. Jesus encourages His followers to seek greatness for His Kingdom and glory. This is what He has called us to, after all, and to seek anything other than the greatness He prescribes is to fall short in our calling (1 Thess. 2.12; Matt. 6.33).

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The promised prize

The Lord spoke sternly to Baruch, rebuking his desire for personal greatness, for some big, self-gratifying prize in life. But though God rebuked him, we can be sure He did not abandon him. Instead, he made a promise to Baruch which should be the envy and desire of all who truly seek the Lord.

The Lord promised to give Baruch's *life* to him *as a prize*. And it didn't matter where he was, what he was doing, or whether the conditions of his life were favorable or adverse. God promised to give Baruch his life as a treasure, a boon and bounty to be enjoyed, invested, and increased. The prize Baruch longed for in his soul would be the prize of his very life – every day of it, every moment and task, every inconvenience or setback or disappointment as well as every duty and delight. God promised to *change Baruch's vision and aspirations* by making the prize he sought nothing other than the life to which he arose each morning and which he journeyed through every day.

Baruch vanishes from Scripture following Jeremiah's rebuke. But we can be sure that, because the Word of God does not fail, Baruch's heart was changed from that moment. He began to see that the *prize* of his life *was* his life, every breath and heartbeat, all the minutiae of personal health and hygiene, every detail associated with his work, each word he might speak or thought he might think, all the unique-to-him *small stuff* of his life – Baruch would come to view these as prizes to be laid hold on with joy and thanksgiving, things to be *prized* because of the presence of God in them and the promise of glory attached to them, things to receive and engage and indulge with boundless energy and joy, because *God Himself was giving them to him*, precious, free, and fraught with glory, every moment of every day.

Baruch's name means "blessed." His mind was so full thinking about the day when he would realize his blessing, his *prize*, that he was failing to notice the innumerable blessings and prizes God was bestowing on him every day.

And aren't we all a bit like that, so busy longing for the *prize* that we fail to *prize* the many blessings and opportunities God gives us every day, so busy dreaming about the *greatness* we think we deserve, that we miss the *greatness* available to us at every moment. But take heart: God can change all that, and teach us to prize our lives as *He* does.

For reflection

1. What do you prize in life? What, as you think about it, fills you with joy and anticipation? What are you willing to devote your best strength and energy to realizing?
2. To what extent does the idea of *Kingdom greatness* factor into your daily life? In what ways?
3. Would it affect the way you think about your daily life if you understood your life to be God's prize for you? Explain.

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 A Thing So Small

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?* Psalm 8.3, 4

Stars and galaxies as far as the eye can see

For most of the great thinkers of the last century, the Milky Way represented the extent of the known universe. And it was pretty impressive. Then NASA launched the Hubble Space Telescope. Suddenly, wherever you looked in the black spaces of the night sky, galaxies and stars abounded, far beyond the Milky Way. The cosmos, it turned out, is bigger than we thought.

Then NASA focused the Hubble on one particular portion of deep space, one little square of camera space, and what do you know? More galaxies and stars, more than anyone could even begin to count.

Now NASA is preparing an even more powerful telescope for launch in the near future, the James Webb Space Telescope. And what do we think they will find? Stars and galaxies as far as the eye can see, or ever will be able to see.

No wonder David shuddered at his smallness, when seen against the vastness of the night sky.

How can it be?

I share that sense of smallness with David. Each evening, as I take the dogs out for the last time, I look up to see what I can recognize in the night sky. The Big Dipper in the northwest, pointing to Polaris and due north. Cassiopeia a little to the northeast. The moon, scooting along the arc of the southern horizon, escorted by Mars or Jupiter or Saturn or Venus. And innumerable stars scattered everywhere, so far from me that the light reaching me departed those luminaries many years before.

And there, amid all that vastness, all that beauty, that brilliant, sparkling, luminescent tapestry of knowability, that order, regularity, immenseness, and majesty – there I stand, gawking and wondering how a thing so small as I could in any way matter to God.

How dare we think that our lives matter, or prize the moments and details of our lives as though they were of any real significance, when considered against the backdrop of the seemingly infinite and ultimately unfathomable cosmos?

Because God says so

But consider the universe – the entire vast cosmos far beyond what any space telescope will ever be able to see – as it appears to God. He contains it all within Himself (Acts 17.24-28). He is not only *seemingly* infinite, He *is* infinite, and the cosmos is merely a thing so small, in all its beauty, majesty, diversity, mystery, and power, to the God Who made and governs it

As we are to the cosmos, the cosmos is to God – a thing so small.

With this one difference: We are made in the image of God, and like God, we have been appointed to bring order and meaning and beauty and significance to that part of the cosmos over which He has appointed us His vice-gerents. To God, the cosmos is just small stuff. But we are not.

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David's point is that our lives matter because God says they do. God orders and oversees the details of the cosmos, from the farthest and mightiest galaxy to the smallest sub-atomic particle. He sustains all things and causes them to hold together. He works all things according to the counsel of His will and does all things well. And He works *all things*, every last bit of cosmic small stuff, together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

And if God rules His small stuff with such glorious and breathtaking results, we must believe that He intends us to do the same with ours. What are we, that God considers and takes thought of us? We are the ones by whom He daily brings more of His order, beauty, goodness, blessing, and majesty to light through the moments and activities of our daily lives. And if we wonder to what end this might lead, or what the small stuff of our small lives might contribute to God's cosmic purposes, we need only consult the writer of Hebrews (2.6-9), as he quotes Psalm 8:

*But one testified in a certain place, saying:
"What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
You have put all things in subjection under his feet."
For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus...*

Jesus is filling God's cosmos with Himself (Eph. 4.8-10), and while we don't see His glory and goodness everywhere abounding at present, and while we can't fix the whole world, we have been entrusted with a corner of the cosmos – all our relationships, roles, responsibilities, time, possessions, duties, and tasks – over which we preside and which we can affect for the manifestation of Jesus Christ.

Who would have thought that a thing so small, entrusted only with so many small things, could contribute to something so glorious, eternal, and good?

God, that's Who.

For reflection

1. Do you think it would be a good exercise for you to look up at the night sky a little more? Why or why not?
2. God makes small stuff beautiful, so beautiful that it bears witness to Him as its Creator (Rom. 1.18-20). How can keeping this in mind help us to prize our lives and all the small stuff they contain?
3. Do you believe that the ordering of your life, in all its moments and details, can contribute to filling your world with Jesus? How should this affect the way you approach your daily tasks?

Next steps – Preparation: [Here's a little chorus by Kitty Suffield](#) that I encourage you to learn and sing first thing in the morning and as often as possible during the day:

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown and you can win it;
If you go in Jesus' Name.*

3 Every Moment

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.15, 16

Billions and billions

It can be mind-boggling to look up at the night sky on a clear, moonless evening, and consider that many of the points of light we see represent not just stars or planets, but whole constellations, filled with billions and billions of stars. Billions and billions of constellations and billions and billions of stars.

It is just as mind-boggling to contemplate the moments of time God invests in our lives. The person who lives to be 80 years old will have run through 2,522,880,000 seconds during the course of his life. That's a lot of moments, a good many hours and days – each one personally sent as a gift from God and as an investment intended for His glory.

But precisely because they are so *small* and so *many*, it's possible we may not prize the moments of our lives as fully as God intends. As Jonathan Edwards noted in his sermon on *The Preciousness of Time*, “When God created you, and gave you reasonable souls, He made you for an endless duration. He gave you time here in order to a preparation for eternity.”

We don't typically think of time as an investment – billions and billions of seconds and minutes, fraught with potential for glorifying God. Again, Edwards: “How little is the preciousness of time considered, and how little sense of it do the greater part of mankind seem to have!” Time is such a little thing, and we tend to mold the time of our lives into infinitely varied routines of work, rest, and re-creation. The one constant all people share in common is that we never seem to have as much time as we need.

Edwards was correct when he wrote, “upon time we should set a high value, and be exceeding careful that it be not lost.” Every moment of time, all those billions and billions of seconds, not received as gifts and invested for God's glory will be lost to the evil of our day, frittered away, wasted, used to honor self rather than God, and thus squandered, when they might have been *improved* for God's glory in many ways.

No time to spare

The Christian is called to do everything for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31). And, since everything we might ever do must be done in time, that makes the time of our lives especially precious. As Edwards observed, “Time is so short, and the work which we have to do in it is so great, that we have none of it to spare. The work which we have to do to prepare for eternity, must be done in time, or it never can be done; and it is found to be a work of great difficulty and labor, and therefore that for which time is the more requisite.”

God gives us the time of our lives. Do we suppose that He has no purpose in doing so, other than to allow us to amuse ourselves as seems best to us? No, God gives us the moments of our lives as an investment, a gift which He invites us to receive and use in line with *His* purposes. But we must make the moments of our days count for what God intends. And we must make up our minds to do so well in advance of receiving this most precious gift, or it will be gone through our fingers before we can employ it for our Kingdom-and-glory calling: “Every part of [time] is successively offered to us, that we may choose whether we will make it our own, or not. But there is no delay. It will not wait upon us to see whether or no we will comply with the offer. But if we refuse, it is immediately taken away, and never offered more.”

We need to manage time like the servants in the parable of the talents, seeking by every means to *redeem* the time God gives us, so that He will be glorified in every moment of our lives. Edwards reminds us, “you are

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accountable to God for your time. Time is a talent given us by God; He hath set us our day; and it is not for nothing. Our day was appointed for some work; therefore He will, at the day's end, call us to an account. We must give account to Him of the improvement of all our time.”

Big returns

From the fleeting moments of our lives, big returns for God's glory can be realized, if, following Paul's instruction, we will redeem the time He gives us. We redeem our time when we use the moments, hours, and days of our lives consciously for Christ and His Kingdom, praying that His Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, working to bring His righteousness, peace, and joy to light in all the niches and nooks of our lives, and offering testimony, thanksgiving, and praise to the Lord increasingly.

In Edwards' terms, we must begin to *improve* our time, just like developers improve real estate by taking what is given and building permanence, beauty, and utility upon it. Edwards offers three suggestions for improving our time.

“*First*, improve the *present* time without any delay.” Paul would say “walk circumspectly” or pay more attention to each moment, how you're using it, what you seek of it, and how it will return to the Lord Who gave it to you in the first place. Be more conscious of how you use each moment of time, by fixing your mind on the things that are above, and not on things that are below (Col. 3.1-3).

“*Second*, be especially careful to improve *those parts* of time which are most precious. Though all time is very precious, yet some parts are more precious than others; as, particularly, holy time is more precious than common time.” Make more of the time you have with the Lord. Look for ways to enrich your times of reading and study, prayer, singing, worship, and listening for the Spirit. Take your “holy time” into the ordinary time of your life by learning to pray without ceasing and to sing to the Lord throughout the day.

Finally, work hard to improve everything you use or do in time, that the goodness, grace, truth, and excellence of the Lord might be seen in it: “You have need to improve every talent, advantage, and opportunity, to your utmost, while time lasts...” This includes planning the time of your life each day, seeking the Lord for guidance, wisdom, and power to do the work He has appointed for you in the time He gives you (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17).

In your life you will have more of time than of anything else with which to glorify the One Who created and redeemed you. Time may be a little thing, but fill it with the presence, purpose, power, and glory of God, and much of the reality and wonder of Christ's Kingdom will shine forth.

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown and you can win it;
If you go in Jesus' Name.¹*

For reflection

1. What does it mean to “walk circumspectly” with respect to the time of our lives? How do you practice this?
2. If we don't *improve* the time God gives us, what do we do with it?
3. Suggest some ways to improve the time you have with the Lord each day.

¹ Kittie L. Suffield, “Little is Much”

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Next steps – Preparation, Transformation: Is your time as precious as it should be? Let us send you a copy of Jonathan Edwards' sermon, The Preciousness of Time, and a tool – “The Time of Your Life” – to help you begin getting a better handle on your time. Write to tmmoore@ailbe.org and request these tools for improving the time God gives you each day.

4 More Glorious

But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 2 Corinthians 3.7-9

Unmistakable glory

Anyone who has ever stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon, inebriating their souls with that stupefying vista, knows why this unspeakable wonder is not called “The Pretty Good Canyon.”

The Grand Canyon evokes a presence and power, larger and more lavish and looming than just that embodied in those strata of stone and that careening river far below. While doubtless few acknowledge that presence as God, yet a sense of transcendence, wonder, mystery and even fear is every visitor’s common experience.

Believers know this to be an encounter with the glory of God. Creation declares the Being and presence of God, though every man may refuse to acknowledge Him (Rom. 1.18-21). People may deny the God of such glory, but they cannot mistake His presence, just as those terrified Israelites could neither mistake nor bear the radiance of God’s glory, emanating from the face of Moses (cf. Ex. 34.29-35).

The glory of God is the presence of God suddenly making itself known, and not only in things grandiose and immense. As Gerard Manley Hopkins put it (“God’s Grandeur”), the glorious presence of God flames out from ordinary things, like the shining surface of shook foil. It gathers to a sudden greatness like the ooze of oil crushed. Unexpectedly, there it is. It seizes our attention, trips a switch in our soul, and sends our thoughts outward and upward into the realm of wonder.

The glory of God on Moses’ face was a small thing, an occasional flaming-forth on the visage of one man among a million. Yet the people of God saw it, and they did not mistake its meaning. They could not bear it, and they could not deny it. Those little episodes of radiance spoke the presence and power of God to the heart of every person, and caused them to long for more of His promised blessings.

The disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration were similarly affected as the glory of God enveloped, transformed, and irradiated from Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 17.1-8). So enthralled were they by the sight, that all other desires dissipated in a moment, and they wanted only to remain there with the Lord in His glory.

Every day, everywhere

The glory of God is all around us. God is making Himself and His presence known in everyday creatures, great and small. The glory of God strobes in that flash of sunlight reflected from a single drop of dew on a fresh cut blade of grass.

The glory of God is the thrill of wonder, provoked when your eye catches that of a nuthatch at the feeder or a chipmunk just outside your glass door, and you are catapulted into a mysterious micro-universe of knowing and unknowing.

The glory of God calls out from the atoms of everyday objects, like this table at which I’m writing, bearing witness to strength, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness that can be easily taken for granted.

Hopkins elsewhere wrote that the glory of God can be seen in the nameless faces and gestures of ordinary

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people. It bursts to life like a broken perfume bottle in the tender patience of a carney, as he awaits the decision of an autistic child, whether to strap on his ride, and in the heartfelt word of affirmation, gratitude, and praise shared by the child's grandmother, who saw Jesus in that nameless carney's love.

The heavens declare the glory of God, wrote David, who shuddered before their vastness (Ps. 19.1-4). At the same time, we hear God passing in autumn leaves, gently rustled and whispering of His power over winds and breezes, times and seasons, death and life. All creation sings the glory of God, and we who know Him can, by the power of His indwelling Spirit, see that glory, know that glory, and enter that glory far more than Moses or those children of Israel ever knew.

Glorifying God

We who know God and discern His glory in things small and great, can *magnify* the glory of God so that others encounter it as well. Indeed, we should expect to glorify Him in all the little and big things of our lives. As in the parable of the talents, if we are faithful to glorify Him in little things – like eating and drinking and everything else associated with taking or sharing a meal (1 Cor. 10.31) – then He will enable us to glorify Him in more and greater things as well.

All the little things of your life, the things with which you fill up the moments of time entrusted to you, have rich potential for magnifying the glory of God. Believers are like docents in an art museum: We see more than most folks, understand better than they what the Creator intends, and are able to point out details of beauty, wonder, goodness, and truth that others simply overlook. We're also like the dew on the morning grass, able to refresh, delight, and renew the people around us with a word fitly spoken, a smile sincerely flashed, an attentive ear, a surprising gesture of appreciation, an offer to help, or a gift from out of the blue. Little things that become much when God and His glory are in them.

Your life is worth living, every moment of the day and in all its details, because the God Who bedazzles visitors to the Grand Canyon and gawkers at the night sky, can sparkle and flame and ooze and beckon from all the little things you do and say.

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown and you can win it;
If you go in Jesus' Name.²*

For reflection

1. How do you understand the glory of God? In what ways do you experience His glory?
2. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. To what should the glory of God lead us?
3. What can you do to become more aware of, sensitive to, and engaged with the glory of God around you?

Next steps – Preparation: Begin keeping a journal or notebook of moments and situations in which you experience the glory of God. Share them with people you know.

² Kittie L. Suffield, "Little is Much"

5 Next Steps

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Matthew 13.31, 32

Left foot, right foot

One of my favorite columns by advice writer Judith Martin (Miss Manners) was her response to a young girl preparing for her first prom, who asked Miss Manners how to walk in high heels. Her answer: "Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot."

One step at a time, in other words. Think about it as you take those first steps, until you get the feel of what it is to walk in high heels, and you will improve in all subsequent steps until you don't have to think about it as much.

We can imagine that, by the time that young lady reached her prom, she was not only walking confidently, but ready to dance.

In a 1970s article entitled "As Breathing and Consciousness Return," Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn addressed the question of what it would take to throw off the tyrannical rule of the Soviet machine and reclaim Russia for the people. He insisted that all that was necessary was for every Russian who loved his country to take a single moral step within his own power. That step would embolden them for the next, and the next, and the next, until...it was 1989, the Candlelight Revolution in Romania, and the end of the Soviet Union.

Left foot, right foot. Single moral steps. Mustard seeds of faith sown into the ground of your Personal Mission Field. From little things and small stuff, Kingdom fruit blossoms and Kingdom power expands.

The field is the world

Jesus deliberately inserted the parable of the mustard seed between that of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13.24-30) and His explanation of that parable (vv. 36-43). When He came to the explanation – that the field in His parable represents the entire world, where faithful servants of God are sowing good Kingdom seeds – He wanted His hearers to be thinking small. Mustard seed small. Next steps small.

But is your faith small? Are you perplexed about how you should serve the Lord? What your calling in life might be? What you should do or where you should go? Are you having trouble seeing the far horizon of your calling from the Lord? Not a problem: just take the next small step in your bigger faith.

Each of us has been assigned a sector in the Lord's field, and this is our Personal Mission Field. It is comprised of places and people, responsibilities and opportunities, roles and relationships. We launch out into that field every day, and wherever we are, whatever we're doing, whomever we're with, opportunities abound for sowing small mustard seeds of faith into situations and souls.

That may not sound very glamorous, but it is the way Jesus taught us to think about our lives as His followers. Mustard seeds of faith take the form of prayers and plans, words and deeds, smiles and acts of kindness, notes of affirmation and appreciation, conversations in which we share our love for Jesus without apology or argument. Our seed sack should be full as we head out each day, replenished by our time in the Word and prayer, and the preparations we have made for the people and situations we anticipate. And we must be diligent to make the most of every moment the Lord gives us for sowing mustard seeds into the field

of the world.

From those small gestures of faith, the Kingdom of God can take root and grow.

Walk on

Left foot, right foot. A single step within the Holy Spirit's power. Every next step.

The Christian life is often described as a *walk* (cf. Rom. 8.4, Gal. 5.16, etc.). In New Testament days, walking was the normal means of conveyance. Left foot, right foot; one step after another. Walking is time-consuming, but if you know where you want to go, and keep at it using a reasonable pace, you will get there soon enough.

And if, as you are walking, you sow seeds of faith, you can expect that soon enough, real fruit will begin to appear in your Personal Mission Field.

John Chapman could see a day when the land would be full of fruit, like the fruit he enjoyed in the orchards of Mr. Crawford, where he worked. He believed people should be able to share in this goodness, and so he set out across Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana with his bag of seeds in hand.

Johnny Appleseed, as he has come to be known, planted his seeds in clusters, and fenced them in to protect the young trees against animals. He did not realize the fruit of his walking and sowing during his lifetime. He died in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in 1845. But the legacy of Johnny Appleseed's faithfulness continues to be celebrated in a wide variety of ways to this day.

Walk, sow; left foot, right foot; single moral steps; every next step.

Your daily walk with the Lord is fraught with power and potential for bringing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit to your world. Seek the Lord's advice, pay attention to the steps before you, and walk by faith, not by sight, sowing mustard seeds of faith as you go. Even though you may sow in tears, the Lord promises that much reaping will result, whether in your lifetime or beyond (Ps. 126).

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown and you can win it;
If you go in Jesus' Name.³*

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. How can you prepare each day for the walking and sowing opportunities of your Personal Mission Field?
3. How can you encourage other believers in their next steps of faith?

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.

³ Kittie L. Suffield, "Little is Much"

6 Lift Up Your Eyes!

Little Things (6)

And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman... Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" John 4.27, 34, 35

Missed opportunities

The disciples of Jesus were Jewish men of their day. And even though many of them had been recruited from the region of the Sea of Galilee and would thus have had frequent interactions with Gentiles, they, like all Jews, would have shunned contact with Samaritans (Jn. 4.9). The Samaritans were half-breeds, leftovers from the intermarriage of rebellious Israel and Assyrian pagans. They were no people at all, or, at best, they were little people, with nothing to offer the Jews, and not the kind of people one would associate with the promises or Kingdom of God.

So it must have felt a little creepy to those Galilean Jews when Jesus led them into Samaria rather than along the familiar route to Galilee, through Decapolis on the east side of the Jordan. Why was He taking them this way? And why would He have them go into a *Samaritan* city to buy *Samaritan* food, while He took His ease at an ancient well?

We can imagine their shopping trip was hurried and devoid of small talk with the despised Samaritans.

Then, to top it all off, upon returning they find Him talking with a Samaritan *woman*, who was herself amazed that a Jewish man – a prophet, no less – would initiate a conversation with *her*. The disciples marveled at what they must have regarded as Jesus' puzzling, if not improper, behavior.

But unlike His disciples, Jesus never missed an opportunity to offer someone the water of life. The disciples could not see past their prejudice and priorities to the plentiful harvest bustling all about them in that Samaritan marketplace. But Jesus knew there are no little people, and nothing more important than offering all people a drink from the well of eternal life.

White unto the harvest

Jesus knew what the disciples were thinking, and He used their conversation about food and drink to teach them an important lesson about missed opportunities. The disciples regarded the Samaritans as little people, or perhaps even not real people at all. Jesus saw them as a fertile field and a potentially abundant harvest of souls for God.

Jesus wasn't hungry for the food the disciples offered Him, because He had become sated with the food God provided Him with that Samaritan woman (v. 34). While the disciples missed an opportunity to spread the Word of life, Jesus made the most of His time with the woman at the well. And now He wanted His disciples to see what they had missed.

We can imagine the road and fields sloping down toward that ancient well were filled with people running out from the village to see this Man Who had told a woman of ill repute everything she'd ever done. Their linen garments would have reflected the mid-day sun, and their hurried movements doubtless resembled the waving stalks of wheat, ready for harvesting.

Did Jesus gesture toward those nobodies, those little people, as He commanded His disciples to lift up their

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eyes and see the harvest? And does His Spirit, dwelling in each of us who believes in Jesus, do the same in us day by day? Are we so busy with our projects, our agendas, or our interests and needs that the people we see each day, who populate our Personal Mission Field, are just too small for us to notice? Is it not possible that in some of these “little people” God will have been working to prepare a place for the sowing of His Word? Or even for the harvesting of fruit?

Sowing and harvesting

Why do we miss so many opportunities to sow the good mustard seeds of the Kingdom into the Lord’s field? Is it because we consider the people around us not sufficiently significant? Do we avoid them because we fear what they might think? Have they offended us in some way? Do they strike us as not likely to be interested in spiritual matters?

Are they just of too little importance for us to offer them a drink of living water?

We are always on call as we enter our Personal Mission Field. We must make sure that our sack of mustard seeds is full and that we are ready to make the most of our time for Christ and His Kingdom. Some of the people we see each day will have had a background in church, or a friend in some other of their life settings who has talked with them about Jesus. Some of the people we will engage in conversations may listen politely but not believe. But we may sow a seed that others will cultivate or harvest.

There are no little people in the world, only people in all walks of life, all conditions of wellbeing, all occupations and social strata who are made in the image of God and need to be restored to the image of Jesus Christ. We must not walk past these people, in a hurry to get on with our lives without having to be troubled by their needs or concerns. As we pray for them daily, we will begin to see them not as little people but as potential followers of Christ and citizens of the Kingdom, people whom God our Father loves now, even though they may never think of Him (Matt. 5:44-48). We must train our minds and lift up our eyes to see the many opportunities the Lord gives us each day – both with those who have no faith and those who do – for sharing His grace and showing His love to the last, the least, and the lost.

In the little moments of your life, in all the little places and among the little people you go, by every little task or gesture or word, have your seed ready for sowing, looking to God to supply the living water that can cause that seed to spring up to eternal life.

Little is much when God is in it!

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For reflection

1. What does it mean to *be witnesses* for Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8)? Is this something we do by words alone? Explain.
2. Do you pray each day for the people in your Personal Mission Field? Do you think that, if you did, they might loom larger in your mind throughout the day? Or that the Lord might open doors of opportunity for you to sow good Kingdom seed into their lives?
3. How can Christians help one another to be more consistent in lifting up their eyes to see what’s going on in the field of their lives?

⁴ Kittie L. Suffield, “Little is Much”

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Next steps – Conversation: Today, start as many conversations as you can with people in your Personal Mission Field, praying as you do that God would give you an opportunity to sow some seed of grace into their lives.

7 Come. See. Can It Be?

The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they went out of the city and came to Him. John 4.28-30

Seed to harvest

It was the heat of the day. People were at work. Tending their gardens. Putting infants down for a nap. Haggling in the marketplace or swapping stories and gossip in the town square. That is, they were busily pursuing their normal routines, not expecting that this day would be different from all the others of their routine existence.

But on this day, that Samaritan village would be changed forever.

It all began with the cries of a woman everyone knew, but with whom only a few ever associated. A woman, whose reputation led her to shun polite company, suddenly burst into their midst with what must have been an arresting look on her face. Were those tears of joy? Was that a smile of relief? Hope? Deliverance?

As she made her way into the town square, people could not help but wonder what had happened, what was going on. Why was this disgraced woman, who avoided the looks and gossip of her neighbors, now here in their midst, excitedly and even joyfully declaring, "Come, see a Man who told me all things I ever did!"

Doubtless many of the men of that village thought to themselves, "I could tell you *that*." But there was something in her demeanor, something in the urgency of her voice, and in the way she kept going from one man to the next with the same animated invitation (John's use of the Greek language here indicates repeated utterances) – something about all this stirred the men of the village, and they began streaming out after her toward the ancient well where Jesus sat.

She had only sowed a little seed: Come. See. Can it be? But from that little seed, a great harvest would be reaped (vv. 39-43).

This woman's mustard seed can serve as an outline for us, as we enter our own Personal Mission Fields, transformed and sent by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Come

Let's note three things about this woman's report. First, it began with *a credible invitation*. This woman was evidently a different person from the one the men of this village were used to seeing skulking around, shame-faced, and avoiding their gazes. Something had happened. Something had changed – something inviting, appealing, and infectious.

Jesus has called us to *be* His witnesses (Acts 1.8). When we are people in whom Jesus is manifestly alive and present, our invitations to consider Him will be much more potent. Peter explained that the hope we have – the hope of knowing God in His glory and living for His glory in the moments and details of our lives – can be so visible and arresting, that people will want to know more about it (1 Pet. 3.15). As we *invite* the people in our Personal Mission Field to *bear* about Jesus, *read* or *learn* about Jesus, or *join us* to worship Jesus, they will be more likely to "come and see" if what they see in us suggests something they might like to see in themselves as well.

How real is Jesus to you? How present is Jesus with you in all the little moments and details of your life? Do you meet Him in His glory such that His glory radiates from you in all the little things of your life? And are

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you ready to invite others to consider Him Who is the source of such hope?

Seed-sowing begins in an invitation – an inviting life followed by an inviting word.

See

Second, the woman offered two foci for her invitation: Come see a Man. Come see a Man Who did something for me.

This is good counsel. If we want others to consider Jesus, we shall have to explain why. What has Jesus done for *you* that might make someone want to come and see Him for themselves?

Prayer is the place for recounting the blessings of Jesus and being renewed in them daily. Consider how many of the psalms tally up the Lord's blessings with gusto and joy. Read Psalm 18, 40, 65, 103, or 104 and let the Spirit lead you to meditate on all the ways God our Father and Jesus our King fill your life with bounty, beauty, and blessing day by day. Learn to delight in every little blessing, and you will always have some mustard seed to invite others to consider.

But we must not be content with having them consider our lives. *We* want them to see *Jesus*. Tell what Jesus has done for you, and tell Who Jesus is and what He has done *for the life of the world*. Be ready with the Gospel of the Kingdom in all its rich tapestry and texture. Explain how the Word of God became flesh and dwelled among us, how He taught and loved, suffered and died and rose again, and that now He offers the gift of forgiveness and abundant life to all who will believe.

Can it be?

Finally, set your seed firmly into the soil of your friend's soul by asking a pointed question: Can this be the Messiah? Can He Who has done so much for me do the same and more for you? Is not He Whom multitudes in every age and from every culture and walk of life have believed and served, Who brings fullness of joy, holy pleasures, and lasting purpose to life – is not He the One you're looking for to satisfy the deep longings of your life?

Questions beg answers. Those Samaritan men rushed out of that village to answer the woman's question for themselves, and many of your friends will do the same – agreeing to read a gospel with you, to meet and talk further about Jesus, or even join you for church and dinner following. You may not reap them as a harvest for the Lord, but the seed you sow might one day come to fruition at the witness of another.

Mustard seeds are little, but they have a definite shape. Let yours take the shape of *Come. See. Can it be?* and you may be surprised to see how Jesus might use your faith to draw others to Himself.

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For reflection

1. What is the Gospel? That is, if you had an opportunity to share the Gospel with a friend, what would you say?
2. What has Jesus done for you? How has He changed your life? What have you gained of His full and abundant life that someone else might also enjoy?

⁵ Kittie L. Suffield, "Little is Much"

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3. What's a question you might use with someone in your Personal Mission Field to initiate a conversation about Jesus?

Next steps – Transformation: OK, so you haven't done this sort of thing much before. Today's a good day to make the most of your time and sow a little Kingdom seed. Focus on the people you'll be with today. Pray for each by name, and ask the Lord to open a door of opportunity for you to initiate a conversation about Jesus.

Little Things

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “little things”? Why is it important that we be mindful of these?
2. What is a Personal Mission Field? Have you mapped out your own?
3. How has Jesus impacted your life? Why is it important that you recount His many blessings in prayer each day?
4. What are the most important points of the Gospel?
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:

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Thank you.