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LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT!

“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” (John 6:9).

It was a *big* miracle with a *small* beginning—when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish. A “loaf” in scripture was much smaller than what *we* call a loaf today. Not only that, but these small loaves were made of *barley*, which was considered inferior to wheat (Rev. 6:6; Ezek. 13:19).

The lad, a *small* boy, who had the *small* loaves, also had two *small* fish. We don’t know the details, but it could be his mother packed his lunch that morning to send with him. Little did she realize that later that day, that small lunch would feed thousands of hungry people!

Because the Passover was near (verse 4), we know it was Spring. This explains why the hills were covered with green grass (verse 10) where the people could sit down and eat. When everyone had eaten, the leftovers filled twelve baskets (verse 13)—that was one basket for each of the twelve preachers that doubted it could be done!

A *little* is a lot when God is in it!

There are times when we may feel like we only have “little” faith. If so, we are not in bad company. To his own apostles, Jesus said: “O you of *little* faith” (Matt. 8:26). But as they continued their walk with him, that little faith became great faith. One only has to read the book of Acts to see their exploits of faith as they went forth with the gospel.

On the other hand, there were two people to whom Jesus said: “*Great* is your faith”—the Syrophenician woman and the Centurion (Matt. 8:10; 15:28). In each case, a healing resulted, but whether their faith accomplished anything beyond this, we are not told.

Jesus likened faith to a *little* mustard seed which, as it grows, becomes a plant many times as large (Matt. 13:31,32; 17:20). In our backyard is a grapefruit tree. When we first notice a grapefruit, it looks like a tiny green marble. But it continues to grow until, by late November, it becomes a large, lovely, yellow grapefruit. What it looks like at first is not what it is destined to become (cf. Heb. 11:1). Faith is the same way; it can grow—*exceedingly* (2 Thess. 1:3).

It is not whether we have “great faith” or “little faith,” it is *what we do with the faith we have*. It is believing that a little is

a lot when God is in it, and putting faith into action. As we begin to trust God for answered prayers—possibly starting with seemingly “small” answers—it will inspire our faith to believe for bigger things.

We recall the time David (who was *little* in comparison to the giant) faced the giant Goliath. The soldiers of Israel were nervous in the service and having hysterics in the barracks. But David said he had overcome a bear, he had overcome a lion, and was now ready, with God’s help and by faith, to slay the giant (1 Sam. 17; Heb. 11:32,33).

Zacchaeus was a *little* man who did a *little* thing, but the results were great. He climbed up into a tree in order to see Jesus as he passed along the Jericho Road. He rose up above anything or anyone that would be in the way. He not only saw Jesus, but Jesus saw him and salvation came to his house (Lk. 19:1-5).

Gideon is listed among the great heroes of faith (Heb. 11:32). But he was not always in this category. The odds were stacked against him—his family was “poor” and he was the “least” in his family (Judges 6:15). Nevertheless, heeding a divine directive, he set out to free his people from Midianite oppression. He assembled an army of thousands. But lest the people would suppose a victorious outcome was accomplished by their own might, the Lord said to reduce the number. Gideon, consequently, operated a draft-in-reverse program. Anyone who did not want to be in the army could go home. Most went home! Ending up with only 300 men, a *little* army, the enemy was defeated, despite the odds.

Today, and for many years, a comparatively small group of people, calling themselves the “Gideons,” have distributed millions of Bibles all over the world! It is written: “Five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight” (Lev. 26:8). “A *little* one shall become a thousand, and a *small* one a strong nation” (Isa. 60:22).

I can personally testify to God’s provision in my own life and ministry. With a comparatively *few* people—some who help financially every month and some who do so from time to time—I have continued year after year in the ministry since 1957. I have had no guarantee of support from any denomination or group. I have never resorted to gimmicks, prosperity plans, or pressured anyone to give. A *little* group has made it possible for us to reach *many* with biblical truths.

A beautiful song written years ago by Stuart Hamblen asks the question, “How Big is God?” It speaks of his greatness—this world is but a room within his house, the open sky a portion of his yard. He’s big enough to rule his mighty universe, “yet *small* enough to live within my heart”!

We can see God in the big things—like the sun, moon, and stars. But he can also be seen in *little* things: a tiny snowflake, a leaf, a fingerprint, or the human eye. All are wonders of his creation.

Even a tiny ant—mentioned as one of the “four things which are *little* upon the earth” (Proverbs 30:24,25)—is amazing. An ant can wander far from its “home” in search of food and find its way back, as though it had a built-in GPS!

A young man was asked if God had “called” him to preach. He replied that “called” might not be the right word—perhaps it was more like a “whisper”! God’s directive may not come as the thunderous sound of Sinai, it may come to us as “a still *small* voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

We should not despise the day of *small* things (Zech. 4:10).

It was when Saul was *little* in his own eyes, he was exalted by God (1 Sam. 15:17).

If we are faithful in *little* things, God can make us faithful in big things (Matt. 25:23; Lk. 16:10).

It was only a “*small* cake” the poor widow baked for the prophet Elijah, but the result was that her food supply never ran out, even in drought (1 Kings 17:13-17).

It was “a cloud as *small* as a man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:44) that signaled the end of the drought and the return of God’s blessings to Israel in the days of Elijah.

God’s wrath is described as “*little*” and for a “moment,” but his kindness and mercy are everlasting (Isa. 54:8).

When Jesus was born into this world, he had a *little* beginning, of course. Even the town where he was born was little: “Bethlehem...*little* among the thousands of Judah” (Micah 5:2). Yet this little baby, born in this little town, would in time impact every town and city in the world, little or large!

“*Little* Drummer Boy,” among songs heard during the Christmas season, tells of a poor young boy who was unable to afford a gift for the infant Jesus. So, instead, he did what he could: he played his drum for him. “Come they told me...a newborn King to see...Our finest gifts we bring...to lay before the King...I have no gift to bring...Shall I play for you on my drum?”

Now I know there are those who would point out (correctly) that this story is not in the Bible, and may find fault. But we should keep in mind that the Bible itself, on occasions, uses little make-believe stories to make a point (Judges 9:12,13).

The point we can glean here is that in doing what may seem like a *little* thing, *if done for Jesus*, can be significant. The *little* offering given by a poor widow woman, in the sight of God, was bigger than the large offerings given by the rich (Mark 12:42). “A *little* that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked” (Psalms 37:16).

Even a *little* thing, like providing a “cup of water” to one who is thirsty, is not without its reward (Matt. 10:42). God

does not overlook *little* things; even a sparrow that falls to the ground is noticed by him (Matt. 10:29).

You may have heard the saying, “A little bird told me.” Let me say, parenthetically, we note it was not Big Bird, but a little bird! While not a biblical quotation, of course, it could have stemmed from Ecclesiastes 10:20: “...a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter.”

A lot of people in this world are discouraged, hurting. Just a *little* kind word, a smile, a “thank you” can make a difference. Failure to do this, can have a reverse effect: an unkind word, a frown, a gesture of ingratitude may take a person down. It might be a *little* thing, but, as in the proverbial saying, it could be “the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

Many examples come to mind of how *little* things can make a big difference—good or bad:

A bill for our car license came in the mail. It seemed quite high, especially since Arnold Schwarzenegger, who had become governor of California, promised to reduce license fees. But, assuming the amount was what we owed, the bill was paid. Later, when looking over the paper work, we discovered that a fine of over \$100 had been added to the license fee. This, it was claimed, was because of an unpaid parking ticket in the City of Oakland. Here was our car license number, the date when the car was over-parked, and now—because over a year had passed—severe penalties had been added!

Based on records about a trip we made to Branson, Missouri, and other evidence, I could prove our car was not in Oakland on that date. In fact, from the time we purchased this car—in 2002—it had *never been in Oakland!* I had some doubt the money would ever be refunded. But when I wrote and explained, a refund check soon came in the mail. Apparently an officer who ticketed an over-parked car in Oakland had read one letter or number on a license plate incorrectly—just one *little* letter caused the mistake!

Let me tell you a tale of two cities—Calexico and Mexicali. Calexico (a shortened form of California-Mexico) is on the American side of the border. Mexicali (a shortened form of Mexico-California) is on the Mexican side. A wire fence separates the two. In seconds one can “Walk from Calexico into Mexico.” Back in the 1960s, while holding meetings at a church in Calexico, a pastor and I were driving along that fence. He exclaimed: “Think how different our lives would be if we had been born on the other side of that fence!”

The state of Arizona has the death penalty; the adjoining state, New Mexico, recently voted to abolish the death penalty. Suppose a grievous murder is committed out in the open desert that spans the two states. If it could be proved that the murder happened on one side of that line—even by a few *inches!*—it could mean the difference between life (in prison) or death!

Suppose the insurance policy on a house expires on a given date at 12:01 a.m. If the house burns down before this—even by a few *minutes!*—it would be insured. Otherwise it would not.

Out in the vast Mojave Desert of California, a single railroad switch can send a train to Salt Lake City or to Kansas

City! A *tiny* measurement of a couple inches makes the difference.

Water, when heated to 211 degrees is hot! But just *one degree more* causes it to boil. At 212 degrees it can produce steam and power a locomotive. A *little* thing—just one degree—makes the difference!

At the Indy 500 the winner might take home a million dollars, while the one in second place will take home much less, even though mere seconds may have separated the two.

The Bible mentions how a *little* rudder can set the course of a huge ship or a tiny match, as it were, can set an entire forest on fire. So the tongue of man, though *little*, has a big potential for good or evil (James 3:2-5).

Numerous stories can be told about *little* things that kept many people from being in the Twin Towers on 9/11. The head of a company survived because his son started kindergarten that morning; another because it was his turn to pick up donuts. One woman's alarm failed to go off, another was delayed because of an auto accident on the New Jersey Turnpike. One missed a bus, another had car trouble. One man put on a new pair of shoes, took the various means to get to work, and developed a blister on his foot. He is alive today because he stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-Aid!

Sometimes we become annoyed at *little* distractions, but who knows: there may be a purpose we do not understand, even in *little* things.

In a complex world, it is amazing that often a *simple* solution can solve a big problem.

While driving along a highway, a man suddenly had a flat tire. He pulled over and prepared to put the spare tire on. As he unscrewed the lug nuts, he carefully placed them in the hubcap he had just removed. But then he accidentally tipped the hubcap over, causing all the lug nuts to drop, irretrievably, down into a drainage pipe at the side of the road! A few miles away he could buy more lug nuts at a parts house, but how could he get there with no way to hold the spare tire on the car? He was stuck.

As the story goes, the incident happened right in front of a home that provided care for people who were mentally challenged. One man, not considered very bright, analyzed the situation, and made this simple suggestion: "You could take one or two lug nuts off each of the other three wheels. These will hold the spare on until you get to the parts house." The "bright" man had not thought of that!

Another story is told about a truck driver who was transporting a load of automobiles on a double-deck trailer. When he came to a tunnel, he determined by careful measurement that his load was two inches higher than the roof of the tunnel. What could he do? To turn around and take another route would mean going many, many miles out of his way. Standing nearby was a little boy who came up with a simple solution: "You can let the air out of the tires that are on the cars on the top deck!"

It is said that many people suffer daytime fatigue because of dehydration. The solution is simple: drink more water!

As to problems between husbands and wives, some are complex. But there are many areas where simple *little* changes can help a lot.

A man may drive foolishly, go too fast, and leave very little room between his car and the one in front of him. Such irresponsibility terrifies his wife and children. He may believe, and insist, he is not endangering them, but would it be asking too much to slow down and put the others at ease who do not have their hands on the wheel? That would only be a *little* thing on his part, but could make a big difference.

Another man was constantly saying "O God!" this, and "O God!" that. It bothered his wife. She felt it dishonored God and was, in a sense, taking his name in vain. He claimed he did not mean it that way. But if something is perceived this way, if it is hurtful to someone, why continue?

"The *little* foxes spoil the vines" (Song of Sol. 2:15).

A husband and wife share life together (1 Peter 3:7). Should they not be a blessing to each other? If one constantly nags, complains, is pessimistic, critical, or negative, it subtracts from their peace. Sometimes with just a *little* extra effort, life can be happier for both. They can become *encouragers*, rather than *discouragers*.

Little gestures like the husband opening the door for his wife can be meaningful; he can be pleasant, and show appreciation to her in word and deed. The wife might prepare a favorite food for her husband, set the table nicely, and add a couple candles for atmosphere. *Little* things add a special touch.

How often we have timed an evening walk to enjoy seeing the full moon, or near full moon, come up over the eastern hills! This may have followed a glorious sunset. And there have been those early, at-dawn moments when Mount San Jacinto, looming 10,000 feet above the desert floor just west of us, acquires a bright glowing pink color.

Nature's display, freely provided, is ours to enjoy, if we will. *Little* things *can* mean a lot.

Over 50 years ago, a popular song, worded it this way:

*Give me a hand when I've lost the way,
Give me your shoulder to cry on,
Whether the day is bright or gray,
Give me your heart to rely on.
For now and forever, that's always and ever,
LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT!*

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us not to overlook the little things. Help us to remember that little is a lot when it is part of your plan. May we be faithful in little things, so you can make us faithful in greater things. May we cast aside every weight and the sin—even a little sin—that could set us back in life's race, as we look unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith. In whose name we pray, Amen! —Ralph Woodrow



No, I am not a plumber—I am a preacher! Until about 25 years ago, when I held meetings at a church in Wilmington, Delaware, I had never known of anyone with the *same name* as mine. One day as the pastor and I were driving along a busy street, I happened to see the sign of a plumbing company: “A. Ralph Woodrow, Inc.” The initial “A.” was different, but otherwise the owner and I had the same name! We exchanged letters at that time, wondering if we might be related. Recently, Dave Miller, who manages our website and lives in Wilmington, took a photo of this truck that was stopped in front of him.

The following articles are posted on our website www.ralphwoodrow.org and are also available in printed form upon request.

Little Things Mean a Lot
King James Only?
Procrustes
False Prophets
Going Home Another Way
Words!
Water
Trees
Christmas, Easter, and the Cross
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