

No Gift Too Small

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I'm going to begin with John chapter 6, beginning in verse 1:

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And here I can't help but think of two Scriptures. In Psalm 23, verses 1 and 2, it says, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." And Ezekiel 34:14 says, "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." I don't think it is a coincidence that Jesus fed the multitude as they sat on the grass on a mountain. Of course, all of this is typical of our feeding upon Jesus Christ.

Let's continue in John 6 and verse 11.

And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five

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barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

What struck me about this passage recently is the lad, the little boy and his very little offering of five loaves and two small fish. Sometimes we think we have nothing to offer. We think our gifts, our talents, our possessions, our resources are so small that they can't do anybody any good. So we don't even try. We may feel moved to say something encouraging to someone or do some little good deed or volunteer for something, and then we think, No, what good can I do, and we talk ourselves out of it.

Sometimes we may think our gifts are so small that they are not really gifts at all. What we forget when we think like this is that God can make small gifts do great things. With five barley loaves—tiny loaves no bigger than the size of dinner roles—and two small fish that commentators say were probably about the size of sardines, Jesus fed five thousand men and who knows how many women and children. What if that boy had thought, This is not enough for everyone. I'll keep them hidden for myself. But, in his childlike faith, he didn't. The Bible doesn't say this, so it is purely my speculation, but it seems to me that for Andrew to know that this boy had these loaves and fishes, the boy probably volunteered them. He heard that they needed food and he said, I have some. He wasn't hindered by the grown up thought that it was too little to do any good. But we are to become as little children, aren't we?

Here are three examples of what God can do with small things. All of these are paraphrased from *Competent to Minister, The Biblical Care of Souls* by Martin and Deidre Bobgan: A young married couple was having serious trouble in their marriage. They talked to the pastor, who sent them to see an older married couple who were a good example in the church. The older couple invited them to dinner. While they were sitting around the dinner table, the older woman got up, got a pitcher of water, and refilled her husband's glass of water. It was a very simple act that she hardly even thought about. The younger woman immediately interrupted the conversation and asked, "Why did you do that?" The older woman didn't understand. The younger woman explained that she wanted to know why the other woman had filled her husband's glass with water. The older woman explained that she noticed that her husband's glass was low and she thought he would probably want more. The younger woman said it didn't make sense to her. If he wanted water, he could get it himself. It soon became obvious that the younger couple had no idea that husbands

and wives should serve and care for one another. But this was only recognized by the simple good deed of pouring that glass of water. The older woman's simple act of kindness in refilling her husband's glass of water became the spark that God used to save the other couple's marriage.

In another incident, a couple with two children would stop each week on their way to church to pick up an elderly woman. On the way to church, the elderly woman would tell stories of when she was a missionary's wife in China. She told of the hardships and the joys, the successes and the failures. She told of how her infant son died and how her husband drowned in the Mekong River. She told of how she stayed on because of her love for Jesus and the people she served. She told of how, years later, one of her grown daughters went to school in England and then returned to serve with her mother in China and then died only a few months later. Yet the woman stayed on as long as she could until she was too old to stay. Now, compared to what this woman had done, the couple picking her up and taking her to church was performing only a little service. Yet God used that little service for bigger things. What things? Hearing these stories week after week, the children sitting in the car grew up with a burning desire to serve the Lord. One became a pastor and the other a missionary, all because of the way God used that little service of picking someone up on the way to church.

Another example is that of a successful businessman. He did not normally attend church and was certainly not a Christian. But he decided while on a business trip to attend church. As he listened to the sermon, he thought of all kinds of arguments against what the preacher said. Then, as he was about to leave, a young man walked up to him and happily said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The businessman, ready to argue, said that he didn't see the connection between God giving His Son and having everlasting life. Undaunted, the young man simply repeated, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The businessman, having university training, gave more arguments. But the young man simply repeated, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This continued several times. Each time, the young man would only repeat John 3:16. Finally and suddenly the light went on. God opened the mind of that businessman to see the truth of those words. In faith, he got on his

knees and wept and was saved. He later found out that the young man was retarded and the only Scripture he knew was John 3:16. But God used that young man's small gift to bring the Gospel and eternal life to that businessman.

Turn to Mark 12 and I'll begin reading in verse 41:

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Now, we are all familiar with this event. It is another example of someone giving even what little she had. One mite was worth about a quarter. But you could think, What good did it do? What did those two mites do for God's work? Well, Jesus took notice of it, God made sure it was put into the Bible, and every generation of Christians since has been inspired by it to good works. So even a contribution of money can have more far reaching effects than just the value of the money. I have on more than one occasion heard preachers say that, yes, it was noble for the widow to do this, but it was also foolish. It was foolish of her to give everything. But Jesus didn't say it was foolish. I believe God took care of her every need.

The widow gave all she had. Are we doing all we can for Jesus?

There was a Christian physician in Bangalore, India. While others in his field drove expensive sports cars, he drove a broken down vehicle and lived in a small house that had no hot running water. On Sundays, he held church services in a lean-to shack made of scrap boards and raw lumber. "The faithful walked, limped, and dragged themselves to that mat-covered room to worship.... It was poverty at its most extreme. The people listened to the sermon, sang, prayed, and had communion. Then they did an astonishing thing. They gave their money. Having almost nothing, they gave very little, but the percentage of their earnings that went to God was extraordinarily high" (Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith*, [Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991] 61). Why did these people do this? Why did they sacrifice so much? Because they saw what so many of us living in the

affluent and, so called, Christian world have become jaded to. They saw Christianity as THE light in a very dark world.

Do you know that there are some people who would say that these people in India are poor because they are not faithful to God? They judge a person's Christianity by his material success in this world. But here we see a physician and his congregation who were giving their all to God. Yet they lived in poverty most of us can only try to imagine. Why? Because they were not giving enough? Of course not! The answer lies in God's sovereignty and His blessing His people with what He knows they need, not depending on their works. And, as the authors of the book I read this in explain, these people "seem to prove that when all you have left is God, you get as much of God as you possibly can. The comforts of wealth often rob people of dependency on God" (*Toxic Faith*, 62). Accounts such as this ought to make the purveyors of the "name it and claim it" and "health and wealth" gospels pull their books off the market, cancel their TV programs, and hide their faces in shame.

And, of course, money is not the only way to serve. Let me give you another example from Asia. A Christian was visiting a Chinese couple in Hong Kong, before traveling into Communist China. I'll quote what this visitor wrote,

A friend took me down a narrow alley to a second-floor flat to meet a man recently released from prison in China. I knew I would be pressed to carry Bibles and literature on my trip [into China]. But I was hesitant and tried to mask my fear with rationalizations about legalities and other concerns.

A Chinese man in his 60s opened the door. His smile was radiant, but his back was bent almost double. He led us to a sparsely furnished room. A Chinese woman of about the same age came in to serve tea. As she lingered, I couldn't help but notice how they touched and lovingly looked at each other. My staring apparently didn't go unnoticed, for soon they were both giggling. "What is it?" I asked my friend. "Oh nothing," he said with a smile. "They just wanted you to know it was OK—they're newlyweds." I learned they had been engaged in 1949, when he was a student at Nanking Seminary. On the day of their wedding rehearsal, Chinese communists seized the seminary. They took the students to a hard-labor prison. For the next 30

years, the bride-to-be was allowed only one visit per year. Each time, following their brief minutes together, the man would be called to the warden's office. "You may go home with your bride," he said, "if you will renounce Christianity." Year after year, this man replied with just one word; "No." I was stunned. How had he been able to stand the strain for so long, being denied his family, his marriage, and even his health? When I asked, he seemed astonished at my question. He replied, "With all that Jesus has done for me, how could I betray Him?" The next day, I requested that my suitcase be crammed with Bibles and training literature for Chinese Christians. I determined not to lie about the materials, yet lost not one minute of sleep worrying about the consequences. And as God had planned, my suitcases were never inspected.

Eric Fellman, *Moody Monthly*, January 1986, 33

We're not serving to that extent, are we? And yet, we must never think that what we can do is not enough. I'm going to quickly read Galatians 5:13-14. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Let's look at another example in the Bible. It is in Acts 9 beginning with verse 36:

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and

widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

What did Dorcas do? Was she a great evangelist? Did she preach to the multitudes? No, she sewed coats and garments for the poor. But what was the result, a result that she never expected? In verse 42: "Many believed in the Lord." If she had not been so loved because she so gave of herself by sewing clothes, the disciples would likely not have called for Peter who raised her up, resulting in many believing in the Lord.

Dorcas apparently believed Galatians 6:9-10: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Now, in all of this, I am in no way saying or trying to imply that I have anyone in mind who is not serving. All I am saying is that if we are led to do some small thing, let's not give it up because we think it is too small or we are too inadequate.

As an example from my own life, there is someone here in this church who I noticed was serving without any fanfare, and I wanted to give this person some encouragement and say that I noticed. But I started to hesitate and think, "How can I bring this up?" And, while I was hesitating, this person said something incredibly encouraging to me! But it was an example to me.

1) If you feel led to say something encouraging, don't hesitate, say it.

2) If you feel led to pray for someone, pray for them.

3) If you wake up in the middle of the night, as I have, with someone on your mind, don't gripe that you are awake in the middle of the night. Pray for that person. You don't know what is going on in his or her life. Your prayer may even completely prevent something from happening in the first place.

4) If you feel led to write to someone, do it.

5) If you feel led to volunteer for a project, do it.

I could go on and on with things we sometimes feel led to do, but reject for one reason or another. The Bible says, "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

I recently read (in *The Odyssey of C. H. Lightoller* by Patrick Stenson) of a ship's captain who for some reason felt compelled to go 2,000 miles off course to go past a tiny, isolated island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. He thought it was crazy. His crew thought *he* was crazy. But he did it anyway, and when he got there, there were thirty starving and sick men shipwrecked on that island. He was able to save them all. And one of those thirty starving men was Herbert Lightoller, who was later responsible for getting many of the people who were saved from the *Titanic* into their lifeboats before the ship sank. And again, during WWII, Lightoller saved an additional 130 men in the evacuation of Dunkirk. So how many people did that ship's captain really save when he was led to go 2,000 miles off course?

Let's look at 1 Peter 4:10. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." You men know what an exhaust manifold is. Basically, it is a pipe that branches into several pipes. This verse speaks of the manifold (the Greek word literally means "variegated" or "of various colors") grace of God because God's grace shows itself in a variety of gifts. All grace comes from God, but he gives us different gifts so that we can be stewards of His grace.

If God can use the refilling of a glass of water, the driving of an elderly lady to church, and the one memorized Scripture of a retarded young man to do great works, what can He do with your small gifts, however small they may be? You never know what God might do with one small act of kindness, one word of encouragement, one widow's mite, some clothes, or five loaves and two small fish. Don't ever think your gifts are too small for God.