

A Stop by Quiet Waters
By
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“The Significance of the Insignificant”

I want to share part of an email I received a few months ago. *“Hope all is well with you. Do pray for me. I've been wrestling with a sense of insignificance lately. I look around at all the people who are completely unaffected by my ministry and the few who are and I wonder if I am doing my job. It's daunting. I've always considered myself the servant who was given the one talent -- never in God's plan for me to have a super big ministry. And that's okay, I love being faithful with the few the Lord has given me. But man, people all around me are going to Hell and I am diddling around with just a few. And some of them don't seem to be growing at all. I'm depressed. Please pray for me. Thanks and blessings...”*

I suspect several of you can identify with our brother right now, and all of us have been there at one time or another. In a culture that measures significance by size, (the great cathedral versus the local church on the corner) income, (a multi-million dollar budget versus thousands) numbers, (hundreds or thousands of attendees versus a handful) influence, (speaking at conferences versus speaking to 5-15 at your weekly Bible study) programs, (dozens of activities and scores of volunteers versus struggling to offer even the most necessary ministries to your people) converts, (a steady stream of people coming to Christ versus one here and there) etc., it is easy to feel insignificant and unproductive.

But is the significance of the servant-leaders of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found in size, numbers, etc.? I do not wish to dismiss the above things as unimportant, but I want you to see where your significance really comes from, and how God himself views your life and ministry.

First, if we seek our significance in any of the above things we will be forever chasing a fantasy and never finding fulfillment. When I first entered the ministry I remember thinking that if I could only pastor a church of 200 people I would consider myself a success and be content with that. When we passed the 200 mark I found myself setting a higher goal. When that one was passed I was still discontent and set yet a higher goal. So it went.

One Sunday while driving I was listening to Bob Russell of Louisville Christian Church, a congregation of several thousand people. He told of having recently attended a conference at Willow Creek, and thinking on the way home about what was wrong with him that his ministry was not as large as Bill Hybels. Then it hit me that no matter how large my ministry might grow I will never feel significant if I am looking for significance and success in numbers, etc.

Do you know that 85% of all churches have 70 or fewer attendees? Does this mean that God is weak and unable to grow larger churches? Does it mean that he can only develop a few pastoral leaders who have the gifts and abilities to grow a large church? Not at all. God has so many small churches because he desires to have small churches. There is no other explanation for this unless you want to limit the sovereignty of God. It is His desire to have these many small churches because he is doing something significant through them which he sees better than any of us do. Isaiah 55:8-9 says,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” ^{NIV}

The many small churches in our culture are making a far greater impact than we realize. I was talking this morning with a friend who is an executive in one of the largest corporations in America. He said most people think our economy is driven by the Fortune 500 Companies, but that is not true. The economy is really driven by the thousands and thousands of small businesses which employ 5-15 people.

The same is true with the church. Most people think it’s the mega churches which are making the greatest impact on our culture, but that is not true either. They get the greatest visibility, as do the giant corporations, but it is the thousands and thousands of small churches who are making the greatest impact for Christ in America.

I am not criticizing or putting down large churches, for I pastored one. I am just stating a fact. Researchers tell us that the total number of churches in America over 1000 in membership make up only a fraction of a percent of all churches. A fraction of a percent is not very much. One great advantage of the small church is that it can more fully create a sense of family, belonging, and can care more personally for those in its midst.

Dear servant-leader of the living God, you may have the privilege of shepherding a small flock of God’s sheep. These are all prized by Him, even though they sometimes won’t eat, and wander away over and over. Sometimes they fight among themselves, and they seem to ignore your voice, so you get weary. Just keep on preaching, teaching, praying, trusting, and serving the Lord Jesus by serving his people, and you will be significant in the eyes of God.

In Matthew 25:21 and 23, the Lord Jesus said, *“You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”*

May you be filled with the peace and joy of the Lord Jesus day by day.

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