

SMALL THINGS THAT CAN BECOME GREAT

By Lavonne James McClish

Introduction

Women are often given to feeling that we are inferior, that we are not important, that since we cannot lead in worship or work of the church, we are insignificant. Long ago Zechariah cautioned us not to despise “the day of small things” (Zec. 4:10). If a cup of cold water is all we have to give, and we give it with love, we will not lose our reward (Mat. 10:42). Jesus said that he who would be great should be the servant of all (Mark 9:35; 10:44). When we measure ourselves by the standards of Jesus rather than those of the world, women have the opportunity to be the “greatest” people in the church.

But so often we seek the **great** things in the wrong sense, as Naaman did (2 Kin. 5:11–13). We want everyone’s attention to be focused on us, as Naaman wanted Elisha to come out and heal him dramatically. Likely the Shunammite woman did not think of providing a comfortably furnished room for Elisha as a great thing (4:8–13), but Elisha did. We also have to keep our eyes and ears open to the needs of others, and not wait for the opportunity to knock. We need to go out and find the opportunities for ourselves. There are many such opportunities just waiting for us to claim them

Our home congregation conducts the Annual Denton Lectures. Of course, some of the work (both physical—because of strength; and spiritual—because of Scriptural restrictions) can be done by men only. However, so much of it is done by women working behind the scenes (nursery, first aid, refreshments, information table, secretarial work, envelope stuffing, and keeping people in our homes). There could be no lectureship without the hard work and long hours of dedicated service of the women, from teenagers to those who are older.

Writing Letters

I did not like my principal when I was in high school, even though he was a Christian and led singing in the worship of the church. I was afraid of him, in fact. I sometimes resented his strictness and felt he was too stern, hard, and unapproachable. **This** principal was **not** a “pal”! But as my children got to the high school age, I began to realize just what this man had done for my peers and me, none of which we appreciated. In his school we had Bible reading, prayer, flag raising (with “To the Colors” played by trumpeters in lieu of buglers), and the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. There were no dances as long as he was in charge. There was no immodest dress—girls even had to

wear jackets over their sundresses, and were not allowed to wear jeans to school. He and he alone set the dress code. He expected the cooperation and backing of our parents and, except in rare instances, he got it. Disobedience or disrespect of any kind meant a trip to his office, and if the infraction was serious, it would result in a paddling. He had been a coach and was a large, strong man. Even the big boys feared him, and preferred to stay away from the business end of his paddle.

One day, when all three of our children were in their teen years, I decided to write to him. “Coach” was not getting any younger. I felt, however belatedly, that I should express my appreciation to him. Little did I dream of the effect my letter would have on him. You see, he had never before received such commendation, praise, and expression of gratitude from **any** of his former students. I had not thought of my letter as a “great thing”; it was simply giving him his due, which was long **overdue**.

In that same school was a very young, sweet, fresh-out-of-college, newly wed home economics teacher. We were never certain what happened, but the end result was that she resigned after three or four years. **All** her students loved her and grieved just as I did at her leaving, but my letter of appreciation was the only one she got. (I did tell her that all the other girls felt the same way.) She died of cancer about ten years later.

Several years after we had attended Freed-Hardeman College, my husband decided to write a letter to the school’s president, expressing appreciation for his soundness in the faith and for his impact on my husband’s life. He indicated in his letter that this brother had likely received many such letters from former students. However, this good man wrote back that such was not the case. He died suddenly only a few weeks later. We should never think that expressing gratitude is insignificant or that others have already beaten us to it, leaving us with nothing else to say.

Using and Helping Older People

A few years ago, we visited a congregation in another state, where my husband was speaking on a lectureship. Living and worshiping there was a couple that I knew from my childhood, from hearing him preach in Gospel meetings where my father was the preacher. (They remembered me, though I was only a child, and expressed a great love and respect for my parents.) Both were approaching ninety years of age, but they were still remarkably active, and still in possession of their **considerable** mental powers and spiritual strength, coupled with a wealth of knowledge, both Biblical and secular. Their local congregation needed the wisdom this wonderful couple possessed. However, she confided to me that the church leaders had virtually “put them on the shelf,” thus nullifying their effectiveness. What a terrible waste! Even though they were old and not in perfect health, they could

still have given so much. We must find ways to show respect for our older people and to make use of their experience and knowledge. It is so easy just to brush them aside as tiresome, telling the “same old stories” over and over and talking about the “good old days.” We need to pay attention to them and learn from them.

Often, as people age, their eyesight begins to grow dim or to fade altogether. Among the many pleasures they are denied is that of reading. We can find an encouraging booklet or tract and record it onto a cassette tape for them. Make an enlarged copy (with permission) of a tract or book (such as Thomas Warren’s *Our Loving God—A Sun and Shield*), for one who still has some vision remaining. Send cards with a note and signature written in large, bold letters with a Sharpie marker.

Sometimes people (regardless of age) just need a listening ear and a broad shoulder. We should try to understand what they are saying and why. If they seem to be whining or complaining, remember that, given their set of experiences, pains, and griefs, we too might whine and complain. Encourage them to talk about their lives. We might be surprised at the interesting, informative, and even entertaining knowledge we could gain from those old stories told by older people. A few months ago I received a poem via e-mail, which said in summary: “**Look** at me! I may be old, gray, stooped, decrepit, and wrinkled on the outside, but I am still the same person on the inside. Get to know me. Don’t judge me only by what you can see. Give me a chance!”

Miscellaneous

Women who no longer have children at home may be able to give more time than they could before. There are so many ways to banish that “empty nest syndrome,” but none better than looking and listening for the needs of others. One need of young mothers, especially, is encouragement. Sometimes caring for babies or small children can be very wearing, discouraging, and trying. Instead of criticizing, we can try to remember what it was like when our own children were young. If we offer suggestions, they are much more likely to be received if they are offered in a spirit of encouragement and love than if they are perceived as criticisms.

Many of us who are older can still drive, but many cannot; they are stuck at home unless someone offers to take them somewhere. They may not like to ask, but we can call them and offer a ride, or we can offer to shop for them. If it is difficult to find the time for a visit, how about a phone call? Just a little time spent in chatting and listening can brighten another’s day.

Those who cannot cook might buy. For many of us who are still very busy, it is difficult to work cooking—even for our own families—into our schedules. Yet there are sick or shut-in people who need help. At such times we can be thankful for the fast-food places and “delis.”

Sometimes a need arises for which no ordinary gift or remembrance will suffice except one that requires time, love, and effort. For this reason one lady has for several years made old-fashioned, cooked fudge every holiday season, for special people in her life (past and present) who badly needed love and attention. That homemade fudge told these people that they were highly thought of. It also took them back to an earlier, happier, simpler time when people—especially mothers—often did such things. It was comforting. There are many other ways to show love to those who badly need it.

In one of the congregations with which we worked several years ago was a couple who, every now and then (and for no special occasion), would send us a beautiful card to let us know they were thinking of us. They will never know how much their thoughts and encouragement meant to us. Many of us fail to realize how difficult are special days such as birthdays, anniversaries, and death dates for those who have suffered a great loss, especially of a spouse or a child. A “thinking of you” card, a hand-written note, or a phone call are certainly appropriate. If possible, we could take such people out to eat, or take food to their houses and eat with them. These are small things, but they would mean so much to those who are depressed, sad, and alone with their memories. Some people would like to talk about their lost loved ones, and we should encourage them to do so rather than feeling uncomfortable listening. Give them opportunities to bring up memories, especially happy ones, and offer memories of your own where you can.

Conclusion

May we so live that Jesus’ commendation of Mary could be said of us: “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:8). May we merit the love the widows expressed for Dorcas (Acts 9:36–39). We may not be able to do **great** things, but we can do many **small** things, with results that would likely amaze us. I doubt that Mary realized that her “insignificant” good deed would be told, as a memorial to her, far and wide down through the years to our time.

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