

## Small Things Make a Big Difference

Sermon given at Community Church, Cowes, Isle of Wight, UK on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006

Stephen and I had been on an interesting path since we've been married (which is coming up to 4 years in December.) Both with our relationship, family and business, we have had a big revelation. Let me explain. Our relationship has changed in many ways as we have had to learn to lead our lives as 2 people undoing their singleness and becoming married... you know how selfishness rears it's head a lot in marriage. We have also had a baby which as you parents know, dramatically changes the dynamic of the home and of your marriage. Stephen is also working on our business 'Procson' (designing and selling lecterns) full time from home now, which has been another adjustment. But this revelation...what is it? It's completely changed our approach to life, relieving us of pressure to be perfect. It has completely changed our approach to our marriage, our friendships, our business and in fact the fulfilling of our dreams. What is it? It's that small things make a big difference.

Arhhh! You say, that old cliché, I know, I know. But do you really know? You may have heard that small things can make a big difference a lot but I want to unpack that statement a bit this morning and help remind you of it's truth and power. It might not seem such a huge revelation to you but I want to share with you just how liberating we have found it. As I mentioned, I have personally been inspired by this revelation in every area of life...with our daughter, with our marriage, with our friendships, the business and especially in the area of evangelism and reaching our unsaved friends and family with the gospel. Now don't switch off...this isn't going to be a sermon full of clichés or one that sends you on a guilt trip about not doing enough witnessing or outreach.

Just the opposite. I want and believe that God wants to encourage you in the ordinary day to day of your lives and help you to see the value in what you are already doing each day and maybe prompt you to look a bit closer to see how He is using you and your life far more than you realise. I also sincerely hope and pray that this revelation will free you up to be yourself, and help you to stop sending yourself on a guilt trip about not doing enough for God. It may also undo the believe that your life is not very important or significant, which is something we all feel at times. What I will say will help you see that it is actually quite the opposite. And maybe we will be able to see and be in awe of the wonderful, marvellous ways that our heavenly father works and touches the hearts and lives of people everyday...through you and me.

So, the revelation for us has been that little things can make a big difference. In fact, it is in the small, ordinary, every day, routine, mundane things that God is spreading His love and building His kingdom at an astonishing rate. We often fall into the trap of thinking that it is only the big, enormous works that impress God or that He can only really work in big extravagant events with great, famous preachers. And we all want to do big things for God but the fact remains that most of us will never speak internationally or to large amounts of people, or do something like open orphanages in India or build refuges in Uganda for example. Of course these things are wonderful but for most of us our lives are very different to this global, jet setting world experienced by a small minority. We need to be realistic. But does that mean that God loves you and I any less or that He has things for us to achieve that are just second best or not as important than those who do get to live in such a way? No way! Or have we limited God to the point where we believe that He doesn't or can't have eternal purpose in the small, everyday things that we do? I believe that's sad and wrong. Such thinking also implies that God might not think enough of us to use us in a powerful or mighty way which again is just sad and wrong. Plus another problem arises when we think that it's only in the big things that the powerful or mighty exists. Again, that is sad and wrong.

Here's the key; what appears to us as insignificant and minor is being used by God. It is exactly what He wants and it is how He is establishing His kingdom on the Earth right now. Do you realise just how much light you carry with you simply by being a Christian? Even if you never opened your mouth ever again (nice thought for some) or did anything good, you are still full of the Holy Spirit of God, the highest power in the entire universe. You are one with the Lord who moves His little finger and oceans part. You take the power of Heaven with you wherever you go simply by being on the side of Jesus. This might seem a simple point to make but we so often overlook this reality or play it down. Of course, it's not us that has the significance here but Him to whom we belong to. This makes a spiritual statement wherever you place your feet. Now of course, the fruit of belonging to and being in relationship with Jesus is that that we are motivated to do good works and live compassionately but these things in themselves are not the point. Jesus is.

I want to explore this concept around small stuff mattering and talk about how it has been evident in mine and Stephen's lives. Jesus used the mustard seed in this illustration of how a little amount of faith can make a huge difference in life. Matt 17.20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." This got me thinking about small things having big results. Let me ponder this thought with you for a minute with some practical examples and then I'm going to give you a few points about what small things in life can do. OK, examples:

- With each ejaculation, 50 million sperm are released yet it takes only 1 to join with the egg to produce a human being. And the sperm is so small it can't be viewed with our eyes. This is too amazing for our minds to truly comprehend.
- Another example: if we were to just keep the tires of our cars properly inflated, it would increase your fuel efficiency by 2 miles per gallon and increase the life of your tire by 15%. If every American made this change, 4 million gallons of petrol could be saved every single day and we would have 30% fewer tires in our landfill. Amazing eh?
- Sydney, indeed a lot of Australia has a severe water shortage (it is the driest continent of earth) and the Sydney Water Board are trying to push homes to take on water saving measures. One of these is to install water tanks (water butts.) Since October 2002 more than 18,000 rainwater tanks have been installed in homes in Sydney saving around 730 million litres of drinking water a year.

Those were just a few examples of some small things that have huge results. The same principle can be seen in the small things we do everyday of our lives. We so often think that it's only the big steps, the big prayers, and the big things that count. And of course they do, but it's also the small things that can have enormous impact over time. By small things I mean the kind word to a friend, helpful attitude with a colleague, a quick prayer for a neighbour, playing a game with the kids...they are all being used by God to spread His love. And He is using them all for the big result of leading people to Himself.

So this is the premise. Let me explain why small things can have a big difference and give you some examples along the way. Here's 3 points about small things making a big difference:

- **Small things are good because they can be done everyday**

I thank the Lord for wonderful, big events and moments in our lives. Moments of meaning often set down in our lives as critical points. Moments like accepting Jesus as Lord, getting married, having children, having that holiday of a lifetime, reaching a special birthday or anniversary, graduating from college or getting the job of our dreams. These events must be relished and celebrated and I love them but the truth is that most of our lives are rather ordinary.

Let me explain more clearly using my own life. At the moment, my days are very much the same. My average day involves getting my daughter up, (sorry, that should be being woken up by her) feeding her, playing with her, putting her down for a nap, getting her up, feeding her, playing with her, putting her down for a nap....getting up, going for a walk or catching up with a friend, feeding her and putting her down to sleep. And while she's napping, I doing the washing, get lunch or dinner ready, maybe chatt to friend on the phone or pay bills on the Internet. Now I'm not saying that this is boring or horrible, no, because having a baby and watching her grow is just too special for words. But you can see that my days are generally pretty ordinary. But does this mean that God is using me less than someone on the mission field or someone working for the church? No way!! Satan has deceived us into thinking that our lives are of no significance to God if they are ordinary. In fact it's the very opposite!! Look, Reinhardt Bonke or Joyce Meyer are amazing world changing teachers and evangelists. God uses them in ways that boggle the mind and their impact is global. But they will never probably come to Cowes and hold a mission. Now I know that Cowes is the centre of the universe, but the fact is that they haven't had this revelation yet! So they probably won't come. But does that mean that God loves the unsaved people here in Cowes any less than the people who live in big cities where they speak and hold rallies? No way! So how is God going to love and save the people of Cowes? Through you and through me! Through you and I and our ordinary, everyday lives. No matter how routine, mundane or uneventful we believe our lives to be. God is and can use them to impact people around us.

Even though my day to day life can be pretty ordinary, I still get countless opportunities to do things like, smile at the cashier in the supermarket and ask how their day is going, or write a quick email to a friend to ask how they are or pick up a few groceries for a friend who struggling with money. I also get lots of chances to circulate with other mums now. And I firmly believe that God uses all these things in His eternal plan of saving the world, person by person. Don't ever let the belief that small things don't count affect your thinking, they do, they do, they do!!! God is using the small things you do every day to edge people closer to Him and to remind them that His goodness and kindness still exists and moves on the planet. 2 Corinthians 9:11 'You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.' In our thinking, we limit the 'generous' to extravagant things, like big sums of money or big gestures of love but generous on every occasion includes the small day-to-day things in our words, our time, our kindness and these things can be small.

Let me give you an example from my own life. We have a friend who we know is really hard up and has a very difficult life due to many things and recently it came to my mind whilst I was in a supermarket that I should get him some groceries. I got him some food and gave him a call. Now I hadn't prayed about it or got overwhelmed with the conviction to do so but I believe that it was the Holy Spirit who prompted me to do it. This is more obvious in hindsight when I took them to the friend who was really moved and asked me if I had been talking to God because he had hardly any food and wouldn't have any money for several days. I was touched by how much it meant to him and how it made Him feel that God was looking after him, especially since it had been a very simple thing for me to do.

And let me tell you that 'Mavis' who lives next door to you or 'Mr Smith' who runs the shop at the end of the street or the bus driver you might meet today can all be touched by God through you, everyday!! Looking out for people even in the smallest of ways like opening a door, baking a cake or looking after a neighbours kids for a few hours are ways that God communicates worth and value to people. Such these things reflect the God we serve who is interested in the detail of our lives. Remember how Ps 46 v 1 tells us that 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.' They reflect our God who is fun, caring, kind, gentle, and thoughtful, who accepts us and who wants to do good things for us - everyday. Yes, He is also about the enormous, profound, awe-inspiring demonstrations of grace, love and sacrifice like the sending

of Jesus but it is often the small expressions of His love that lead the way and open the door for people to meet with Jesus on this level. It also sows eternal seed into people's lives, seeds of goodness, love and acceptance which all come from God. Ask God everyday to use you in a naturally supernatural way and He will. Ask that you may have God encounters of the super ordinary!! That He would use your smile, your kindness and the way that you carry out the routine of your life to touch and impact others with His love. And the fact is that you may never know how these things impact people, well not this side of eternity anyway but they do count.

Praising the Lord whilst cooking the tea brings in the presence of God into your home. Cooking a meal for a single parent may be what they need to be reminded that they are valuable and thought of. Not reacting in a road rage situation! Being graceful to people in such situations. This stuff reflects our God who cares and gives us opportunities to really be his hands and feet. Colossians 3:12 'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.'

- **The small things could be the tipping point**

Have you ever heard of the book 'The Tipping Point' by Malcolm Gladwell? This book is about the tipping point, a term Gladwell defines as the 'one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once.' His book outlines how lots of collective small things contribute to resulting in one huge event or change or epidemic. To help explain this, think about these tipping points; there is only 1 degree of difference between hot water and boiling water. That 1 degree is the tipping point making water not just hot, but boiling. For us personally, for our business, the tipping point came by making a lectern for a church in Canberra. Stephen was often asked to design lots of different things, many of which didn't always come through as people changed their minds or didn't pursue the product for various reasons but this one did. So this turned into a defining moment because it sent us in a direction of lecterns, which we now sell all over the world. So you can see that the tipping point could also be called the turning point or the point where everything changes, but the thing to remember is that it is caused by a very small thing. Thus small things that make a massive difference.

A tipping point in my life was a decision I made on a Wednesday night in Sydney in 2001. It was the decision not to go to a 'Johnny Walker' night. This was an event put on by Johnny Walker, where you get to sample lots of whiskey. Now this isn't a dig at Johnny Walker but it was at a crucial time in my life where I was only going to church on and off and was very much in two worlds. I had also made contact with a person at church about going to a bible study group on the same Wednesday night. I knew that if I joined a bible study group then it would make all the difference because I would make friends and become accountable to them. They would be able to support me and pray for me through the very hard transitional time that I was in. But I had promised a friend that I'd go along with her to this whiskey night (and a very pushy friend at that.) But I had such a sense that the decision to go or not go was pivotal in my spiritual walk, for my commitment to church and really, my ultimate walk with God. And who knows that when such moments carry spiritual significance a storm brews spiritually, as the forces of good and evil start to battle it out (sounds like a star wars episode, eh?) The decision was not about going out with some mates for a night; it was about my future – about putting a stake in the ground for what I really was about. I also knew that the night would end in drunkenness and be really unhealthy for me, in every way. And this friend was pushy and aggressive about me not letting her down. But I felt like it was now or never for me with bible study group. So I didn't go out drinking, I went to bible study group. A small, insignificant thing to do on a Wednesday night, but it had an enormous implication for me and my future. And to be honest, that first night wasn't amazing, I found the people all a bit weird and felt like I didn't really have anything in common with anyone and it wasn't a particularly interesting evening but the end result was the amazing thing. It was the first night of me really making a commitment to Hillsong church. It also started to distance me from that group of drinking friends who were pretty bad news for me and well,

the rest is history. A small decision which was the tipping point in my life and one that ended up having a massive result.

So, maybe you can identify some tipping points in your life. Or maybe you are facing a really hard situation where nothing seems to be changing but let me encourage you, there will be a tipping point in this situation so press on. You never know where or when the tipping point will occur but it will if you don't give up. It might be one small prayer or one small kind word away. Maybe you need a breakthrough for a family member, so keeping praying! The tipping point will come. Remember the parable of the persistent widow?

Luke 18; the Parable of the Persistent Widow

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup>He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. <sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

<sup>4</sup>"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' "

<sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

The widow got her breakthrough, and you will too. Or maybe even more amazing, something you say or do might be the tipping point in someone else's life. Someone you know or run into might need to just meet one more Christian for him or her to think that Christianity is worth a look. You might be what is needed to be the tipping point in someones life. Scripture reminds us of this too in Galatians 6:9: Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.' It's true. Don't grow weary and think that the prayers you want answered or the break-throughs that you're seeking won't happen, they will! These situations will have a tipping point and the harvest - the result will come if you don't give up.

- **Small things are apart of Heavens bigger picture**

You never know when your small action might be hugely significant in someone's life in getting them to make a decision for God. If you think about your own salvation, it was probably a series of small steps that got to that final place of saying 'yes' to Jesus. It might have been several conversations with friends, reading some books or articles, looking through a pamphlet you received. And think even further back...maybe other more subtle or what you believed to be insignificant things helped point you in that direction...maybe a neighbour was a local vicar and you always thought what a friendly chap he was or did your daughters brownie pack met at a local church, which made you think about the people who sat inside that church on a Sunday morning? You might think that such examples are silly, that they don't really count but they do.

Let me explain. Most of us view evangelism as one person preaching the gospel to another, that person thinking about it there and then and then making a decision on the spot, all in that moment. Now of course, this does happen for some people but in most cases, this scenario is inaccurate and puts a lot of pressure on us to constantly preach at our friends and family, thinking that if we don't then we has missed the opportunity. This approach can also make us really unpopular and tends to get on peoples nerves! Try looking at it like this: evangelism can be viewed as a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being a completely unchuched atheist and 10 being a person making a decision to make Jesus their Lord and Saviour. Between 1 and 10 there are all of those other steps. In real life, these steps might be when asked at work what you did at the weekend, you say..."went shopping, walked along the beach and went to church. Oh yes, also

had the family around for dinner.” That’s it, church was only mentioned once but in that person’s mind, a seed was sown. It might remind them of how they used to go to church as a kid or reminds them of a Christian they once knew at university. Or those early steps could be prompted by how you conduct yourself, in a Christian manner – by the things you don’t do like not gossiping or swearing. You never know, it might be what gets a person from say step 1 to step 2 along that path to Jesus. We put a lot of emphasis on the end step, 9 to 10 which of course is the vital step but all of the preceding steps are essential as well. And it doesn’t mean that we don’t talk about our faith or share our testimony if the chance arises but I hope that this way of looking at it helps you to realise that God can and does use EVERY hint, mention and remark that you say in His direction. Another step could be that you offer to pray for someone, not there and then but at home. Or that you might make a comment about how a prayer was answered. We tend to underestimate the power of such things when they are done casually but often this is the very place where God can work. And you might never see that person reach step 10 but God will be so chuffed with you for helping them move from say step 4 to 5.

To round off this point, let me give you a personal example. Just before I left home to go backpacking to Australia, I bumped into a friend on a local High Street. Now spiritually, I was in a very dark place. I was in a lot of sin, which bought loads of confusion and I was really down. I was, lets say, well on my way to BacksliderVille!! Anyway, I said to this friend that I was heading to Australia and he said “Oh, if you get to Sydney, you must look up Hillsong Church, the music there is great.” That was it; we then went on the talk about other things. However, that church that he mentioned stuck in my head and even though it was 2 years before I actually set foot inside Hillsong church, God has used a casual conversation on the street to help direct me back to Him and get me back to the life of freedom He intended for me. Amazing eh? That friends didn’t preach at me or push the point, he just said it naturally and casually about Hillsong church. No matter how small the comment, prayer, or action, when done in the name of Jesus, it packs the power of Heaven!

Let me conclude. My hope is that I’ve encouraged you to see that the small things REALLY count! They count in the world wide effort of God to establish His kingdom on the Earth, it’s just that we often don’t realise it. In fact, YOU count in God’s effort to establish His kingdom on the Earth and the small things you do everyday count so much more than you know. And I want to encourage you to look for the opportunities that are already there; everyday with the people you know and come across each day in your daily life. Know that God is using you, your life, your words, your smile, your kindness and even the things that you don’t do – not reacting in tricky situations or getting cross, bring His presence to the earth. Ask Him to help you to see the opportunities and pray that He will help you to see the significance in what you often think is small and unimportant. And finally, remember that the small things do and will have a massive result in time, the tipping point will come and Heaven will celebrate with you 😊