

GOD IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

The True Friend Of The Little Man

Luke 12:4-9

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Big Idea: *God values you even when no one else sees or takes notice.*

Homer Stokes walked confidently to the microphone. Standing next to him was a man of small stature, probably less than 3ft. tall. They were dressed identically in a white shirt and tie. Each carried a broom. Homer started speaking in grand tones and using sweeping gestures. He spoke about the corruption he perceived in the government of the state under the current governor. He claimed to be under a mandate to sweep out the current administration. He claimed to be “the friend of the little man.”

So goes a scene from the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* What do you suppose Homer meant when he claimed to be the friend of the “little man”? That term has become a catch phrase referring to the faceless multitude, John or Jane Doe, people whose identity isn’t important enough to remember. Who are some of those people in your life? Have you ever felt like one of those people?

Of course you have. In fact, some of you may feel like “the little man” today. I will talk in a few moments about why that happens. But for now, I want to highlight the fact that God is infinitely acquainted with you. You were not just another face in the crowd to Him. This into these words...

Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.

² You have taught children and nursing infants to give you praise. They silence your enemies who were seeking revenge.

³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers--the moon and the stars you have set in place--

⁴ what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us?

⁵ For you made us only a little lower than God, and you crowned us with glory and honor.

⁶ You put us in charge of everything you made, giving us authority over all things—

⁷ the sheep and the cattle and all the wild animals,

⁸ the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth!

(NLT)¹

An old hymn says, *What our friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and grieves to bear.*

Today in our worship, we have the opportunity to witness and share in an expression of friendship toward God. For the past few weeks, I have been meeting with a family that is part of our church and we have been learning about baptism. The Bible teaches very clearly that if you want to be united in friendship with God, baptism is part of the process.

Romans 6

...when we became Christians (we) were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. (NLT)

In His infinite wisdom, God has given us a physical experience that reflects the essence of our relationship with Him. He wants to become ONE with us. In baptism, we are united in with Him. He takes away the guilt of our sin and clothes us with His purity, and we climb up from the grave of baptism as changed people. It is a physical, public act that demonstrates that we have chosen to give ourselves to Him - like a man and a woman who exchange vows at a wedding ceremony.

BAPTISMAL SERVICE²

We praise God and for the opportunity He has given us to begin all over again. We praise God for the opportunity He has given us to trade our sorrows and guilt for His joy and purity.

Think for a moment about your image of God. Do you think of God like the President of the United States? What words come to mind? Powerful? He is certainly that. What about the word busy? After all, He is involved in every detail of creation. That would sure keep me busy. But God isn't a human being, of course. I'm not quite sure what "busy" would look like on God.

How about this word? UNAPPROACHABLE. Do you sometimes feel like God is unavailable? Do you sometimes feel like the concerns He has about other parts of creation are more important than the concerns you have?

I believe that feeling comes both from our ideas about God and our ideas about ourselves. And unless you're like, the *president*, you probably lapse into moments where your routine tempts you to feel like you're blending in. Becoming just another face in the crowd.

We don't plan it that way, do we. Remember the movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*? George Bailey had plans. George Bailey had dreams. George Bailey had ambitions. One evening at dinner with his father, he began to talk about the way his life was going to go. He talked of traveling the world. He talked about life in the big city. He talked about achieving great accomplishments.

Of course, you know the rest of the story. George didn't get to go away. He got trapped into small town where he grew up. He got trapped doing a job in a small savings and loan. He got trapped by love and marriage and parenthood. In spite of all his ambitions, his drive, and his dreams, he got trapped. A little man, as far as the world was concerned. And as far as he was concerned, too.

¹ Scriptures marked "(NLT)" are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by [Tyndale Charitable Trust](#). [Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.](#)

² LifeSpring practices baptism by immersion (a complete covering of a believer) because we believe it is the best picture of death, burial and resurrection. We also believe this was the practice of the first Christians and that immersion is the best understanding of the words used to describe baptism.

Part of the lesson of *It's A Wonderful Life* is that we need to **change our focus**. We need to redefine terms like wealth and significance.

Maybe part of your problem today is that you rely on your CAREER to give your life a sense of significance.

Don Hewitt retired in 2004. When a guy gets to be 81 years old, he has every right. Who is Don Hewitt? Hewitt was the executive producer of *60 minutes*, the long running television news magazine. His career is decorated with mementoes from celebrities, presidents, and kings. A person might think that he would sit back and enjoy the sense of accomplishment from such a successful career. Instead, Hewitt bid Mets that he feels empty. He said, "I'm not trying to be an egomaniac, but look. I don't want to lower the temperature. Where do you go? What do you do that's going to be like this? What I've got to do is feed my soul."³

His point is that no matter how successful person may become, eventually it all goes away. Career isn't to the task of filling your soul with significance.

Psalm 37:4

⁴ *Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires.* (NLT)

Don't get the wrong idea. This verse is not a blank check promising everything you could ever want. It is a call to make God the focus of our lives. It is a call to make God the central pursuit of our lives as we seek significance.

Maybe part of your problem is that you rely on CASH to give your life a sense of significance. Of course, it isn't so much the cash...it's the things the money can buy. We live in a very materialistic culture, but it's more than that. It's about freedom and significance based on what ever your definition of "the good life" is. How much time and money is being spent to create dissatisfaction in our lives? Advertising is essentially built on creating the impression that if we buy this product or service, we will be taking a chance step toward achieving "the good life."

How much is it enough? The world around you says, "Just one more dollar." But how much is really enough?

Hebrews 13:5-6

⁵*Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you."* ⁶*That is why we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"* (NLT)

God wants you to say that what you have right now is enough. You don't need "just one more dollar." You don't need "just a little bit more." You have all you need right now. The love of money and the love the things is a trap leading to emptiness because we are never going to be satisfied. We will never have enough. You cannot buy a sense of significance that lasts.

But there's at least one more place where people sometimes look for significance. That's COMMUNITY. Maybe if I know enough people...maybe if everybody listens to what I say...maybe if I get in on some of the decisions being make in my community...then I'll be significant.

And that might work for awhile...just like significance by career or cash. We may begin to feel the buzz of significance, but then something will change that upsets the balance of the equation. Another person comes along to compete with us, or we have a tragedy in our family, or we get sick...and then we find that we've become just another face in the crowd.

The illusion of CONTROL ...

³ "Retired 60 Minutes Exec Hewitt: 'Where the Hell Do You Go?'" www.DrudgeReportArchives.com (8-20-04); submitted by David Slagle. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, International.

Whether its CAREER or CASH or COMMUNITY or anything else, if you are depending on your circumstances in any way for your sense of significance, you are in for a fall. When you are depending on your circumstances for significance, you are in essence saying that you are in control. And if you haven't learned by now, you will very soon realize that control is an **illusion**. Ultimately, you do not have complete control over the success of your career or the amount of money you make or the opportunities you have in your community. There is only one thing you have control over...

The only thing we can control is OUR EFFORT

You can decide how much effort you exert and where you exert it. So it makes sense that we should exert our effort where it counts the most. Where is that? Well, career and cash and community all kind of drop away, don't they. The most lasting significance is **relational**.

RELATIONAL Significance Is Eternal

It all starts with your relationship to God. When you pour yourself in that relationship, you will begin to feel it in every area of your life. Deepening your relationship with God will help you understand your significance better than any other pursuit. Better than career...better than cash...better than community...better than control. Let me tell you why, and then I'll give you four quick steps how...

Luke 12:4

⁴ "Dear friends, don't be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill the body; they cannot do any more to you. (NLT)

Let's paraphrase that, because in our culture (at least right now) we don't face death by persecution as much as we face a sense of death by insignificance. So don't be concerned about career insignificance...don't be concerned about cash insignificance...don't be concerned about community insignificance. So what should we be concerned about?

Luke 12:5

⁵But I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill people and then throw them into hell. (NLT)

God should be the most significant concern in your life. Why? Well, of course, one reason is because He is all-powerful and has the ultimate decision over our existence. But there's another reason...

Luke 12:6-7

⁶ "What is the price of five sparrows? A couple of pennies? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. ⁷And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows. (NLT)

I don't understand how...it's way beyond our capacity...but every single one of us is significant to Him. But I want you to put that side. I want you to sense more than ever before that YOU are significant to Him. He knows every detail of your life. He cares about every detail of your life. You may feel like just another face in the crowd, and that may cause you to feel invisible and distant from God. But He is closer than you think. And you can begin to understand how significant you are to Him by doing these four things.

Steps toward understanding your significance...

1. Humility before God

Don't you deserve better circumstances? I know I do. I deserve to achieve greater significance in my career, I deserve to have more significance in the community, and I certainly deserve to make more money! Don't you think so? Don't you think I deserve to make more money?

Seriously, we all feel like that – probably more than we are willing to admit. Why? Because saying those things is prideful. But we still feel that way. And the more we pour ourselves into chasing them, the more elusive they become.

James 4:7

⁷So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. (NLT)

Part of what that means is that we will find greater significance when we humble ourselves to God. That brings us to the second step of significance...

2. Accept your circumstances

You may think that you would be happier with different circumstances, but I'm telling you that you choose to be happy. And God can take any situation and use it to accomplish His purpose. So the question isn't, "Why did God put me in these circumstances?" That question is, "How does God want me to use these circumstances to honor Him?"

3. Focus on serving people

That is usually at least part of the answer to the question. I am convinced that God orchestrates the connections we have with people. The purpose for that is because we need to have their influence and/or they need to have our influence. And guess what...the more we focus on loving and serving people and building our relationships with them, the more significant our lives will naturally become.

4. Draw near to God

James 4:8

⁸*Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you.* (NLT)

These four steps are not linear. This is a system of living...a lifestyle. You do them all at the same time, as the opportunity presents itself.

And you need to know that these steps are a choice you will need to continually make. It won't always be natural or convenient. But the more you choose to take the step, the stronger those muscles will become.

So, are you ready for the first step? Do you need a deeper relationship with God? He wants to get closer to you. He has already done everything He needs to do to make it possible. How it's your turn. Draw near to God today. What's your next step?