

You Matter to God...more than you might want to think
Crossroads Christian Fellowship
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Ephesians 1:3-2:10

In Our Greatest Gift, Henri Nouwen tells a parable of faith and hope. He imagines twins—a brother and a sister—talking to each other in their mother's womb:

The sister said to the brother, "I believe there is life after birth."

Her brother protested vehemently, "No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us."

The little girl insisted, "There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move." Still, she could not convince her twin brother. After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, "I have something else to say, and I'm afraid you won't believe that, either, but I think there is a mother."

Her brother became furious. "A mother!" he shouted. "What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let's be content."

The sister was quite overwhelmed by her brother's response and for a while didn't dare say anything more. But she couldn't let go of her thoughts, and since she had only her twin brother to speak to, she finally said, "Don't you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They're quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful."

"Yes," he answered. "What's special about that?"

"Well," the sister said, "I think that these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don't you think that's exciting?"

The brother didn't answer. He was fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and felt that the best thing would be simply to ignore her and hope that she would leave him alone.

Have you ever noticed how God takes the seemingly insignificant and makes it into an agent of greater social transformation? It seems to begin with an insignificant person, just one of millions or billions and within that person - an apparently outrageous nagging thought or idea.

It's what I call the "smalllogy" of God.

Since the beginning of the record of God and people God has chosen to use imperfect, sinful people to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Each one of these examples has its own context and meaning and to be understood fully must be understood within that context – "smalllogy" is part of each one...and is my interpretation.

- From the beginning of redemptive history God has sought-out the faithful to carry his will forward and reveal God's faithfulness and power...

Cod called Noah and his family to guard the faith of humanity

God called Abraham to become the seed of a great nation, God's treasured people

God called Moses to lead that nation to the land promised to Abraham's descendants

God sent reluctant Jonah with a message to a pagan people

God reduced Gideon's army of 30,000 to 300 to defeat a vastly larger force

God sent little David to take out big goliath and the mighty Philistine army

God anointed kings and prophets as his servants to guide Israel in faithfulness

Every one of these greats of the faith began as ordinary people facing a decision of faith and trust.

- John 3...God sent his only Son to forgive a world of sin
- Matthew 17...“faith as small as a mustard seed becomes a powerful agent of transformation.
- Matthew 14...the lunch of a small boy was used to feed 5000 people
- James 5... “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”
- God decided 12 disciples were enough to change the world
- Luke 21...The penny of a widow was worth more than the offerings of the wealthy
- Ephesians 2...A forgiven person becomes part of God’s kingdom and eternal, unstoppable plan
- Luke 2...“where two or three gather in my name I am there”
- The least will be the greatest in the Kingdom of God

This list could go on and on. The point is that from the beginning God has used ordinary, seemingly insignificant faithful people to accomplish the extraordinary, supernatural, and the impossible. It is this way so in the end there is no doubt that God has been at work and not human strength, or wisdom, or cunning.

The cost for these seemingly insignificant, ordinary people? Trusting God completely and in doing so no longer insignificant or ordinary because they stepped into what God had designed for them to do and it fit perfectly with what God was doing around them at that place and time.

Each handing over life and heart to the rule of God. Trusting God is the common element. It happens in seemingly small ways like the little boy who simply shared his lunch. Moments that become life changing when are suddenly able to see ourselves in eternity...God is God and I belong to God....from this moment, and every day until I die and then through all eternity...I am God’s son or daughter and servant...like a small child offering a sack lunch we trust God and humbly offer our lives and hearts to God’s lordship and God’s plan.

The point is this...you and I matter to God. Our decision or indecision to trust God truly makes a difference as God is at work in each of us, in this church, and in this world. In doing so you and I are no longer insignificant or ordinary because we have stepped into what God had designed for, into what God is already at work doing, and fits perfectly into what is coming towards us in history. You and I matter to God...more than we might want to think.

I am going to step out of the norm this morning and read a long passage from Ephesians simply because I cannot put it together better than how the God gave it to Paul. Let’s read together Ephesians 1:3-2:10. As we read, please allow God’s spirit to speak, convict, and or convince. After we read this together I will ask for your thoughts or questions.

1:3 How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. **4** Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. **5** Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) **6** He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son. **7** Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people - free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! **8** He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, **9** letting us in on

the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, **10** a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. **11** *It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living,* **12** part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. **13** It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free - signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. **14** This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

15 That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the Christians, **16** I couldn't stop thanking God for you - every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks. **17** *But I do more than thank. I ask - ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory - to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally,* **18** *your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for Christians,* **19** *oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him - endless energy, boundless strength!* **20** *All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven,* **21** *in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever.* **22** He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. **23** The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

2:1 It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. **2** You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. **3** We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us.

4 *Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love,* **5** *he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us!* **6** *Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.* **7** *Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.* **8** *Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish!* **9** *We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing!* **10** *No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.*

- As you think about trusting God and handing over your life, what encourages/discourages you?
- What happens inside when you consider that God has a purpose – an extravagant work in you – a design set into place long before the foundations of the earth were laid?

How have I trusted or withheld my heart and life to God?

When we come face to face with this realization, the sudden understanding that God has a design and purpose for us, but we can only get there by trusting... John Blackaby, In Experiencing God - says this very place I our journey of faith produces A Crisis of Faith. As we see eternity and our place in it we also see that it is utterly impossible for any of us to do what God has designed us to do... that's the crisis... God's answer is "we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to *join* him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing".

Blondin lived from 1824-1897 and was a famous French tight-rope walker and acrobat. His greatest fame came in 1859 when he accomplished one of his greatest feats for the first time walking a 1100 foot tight-rope suspended 160 feet above the waters of Niagra Falls. Blondin went on to walk across the falls several times each with a different theatrical flare. On one such high-wire walk Blondin crossed over the falls pushing a wheelbarrow. When he reached the other side he asked the spectators if they believed he could do it again. Everyone cheered. Blondin then asked if they believed he could again cross the tight-rope with someone in the wheelbarrow. Everyone cheered believing that he could do it and wanting to see this incredible stunt. Blondin then asked for a volunteer to ride in the wheelbarrow. No one stepped forward. It was one thing to believe Blondin could do what they had all seen him do, and another to put your life in his hands letting him push you across the falls on the high wire. (Encyclopedia Britannica)
If you trust God, at some point you have to get into the wheelbarrow.

In the Nineteenth century there was a successful attorney in Chicago by the name of Horatio Spafford. He was intelligent, successful, and godly. Early on in his success, he came to the realization that he needed to have balance both in his home and church as well. He loved them and He loved his church. Also, he was a close friend of D.L. Moody, the great evangelist. This guy was trying to build a solid spiritual life.

In 1871, Spafford's real estate investment was totally wiped out during the great Chicago Fire. Several months before that, his only son had died. Wanting to get things together, Spafford planned a trip to Europe with his family, and that trip was going to coincide with an Evangelistic crusade of D.L. Moody. At the last minute, a business development delayed him, so he sent his family as scheduled, and he was going to catch up with them later.

However, the ship that they were on got hit by an English vessel, and it sank in just twenty minutes. All four of his daughters drowned. His wife survived though and was taken to Whales. From there she sent her husband a message with the words, "Saved alone." Right away he boarded a ship to meet her. The captain knew his sorrow, so as they were traveling, he stopped the boat over the place Spafford's daughters had drowned.

He didn't understand why all this had to happen. But that day He trusted in the Sovereignty of God. And as that ship was stopped, it was there he experienced "sorrows like sea billows roll" and it was there that he knew God "regarded his helpless estate" and all he could say was "It is well, It is well with my soul." This experience led him to write probably the most inspirational song in hymn books today.

When we trust in the Sovereignty of God, even though it may not make sense, it beckons us beyond ourselves, to take a step of trust into what God is doing, and it will always bring a sense of peace, contentment, and confidence.

Through the story of Horatio Spafford, and the hymn that emerged through his pain, and his desire to come alongside D.L Moody – thousands upon thousands of people came to believe in Jesus Christ in Europe.

How is it that I might be of encouragement to us all this morning – to give up on our tight grip of control over our lives and trust God’s design...stepping with confidence, even though it doesn’t always make sense to us,

Let’s be very clear that even though we are indeed small and insignificant in the face of eternity, and our events, decisions, acts may seem inconsequential – Even though God begins with what to us seems insignificant and so often uses what does not make sense on human terms - God’s purposes are not insignificant or inconsequential. His vision is not small. He means to one day to see every knee bow and hear every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When we trust God and live a life obedient to his word and will, though we may be small we are endowed with the same promise and power God poured into his Son – he would pour into each of us...and it is more than we can possibly imagine

As we see God’s sovereignty over history and how God has transformed the course of this world through ordinary people who trusted (and even in spite of some reluctant ones) – it all begins with a decision, however small or great the risk – to let go our tight grip of control over life and trust God with it.

What we can learn this morning is don’t ever be afraid to trust God. We never need fear what we do not understand or can not see when we trust God. We need not fear handing over parts, pieces, or the whole of our lives to God, doing something for God however insignificant it may seem – or if it takes every fiber of our being – we can trust completely God’s design and purposes.

Amen

Additional illustrations:

Believing things ‘on authority’ only means believing them because you have been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine percent of the things you believe are believed on authority. I believe there is such a place as New York. I could not prove by abstract reasoning that there is such a place. I believe it because reliable people have told me so. The ordinary person believes in the solar system, atoms, and the circulation of the blood on authority--because the scientists say so. Every historical statement is believed on authority. None of us has seen the Norman Conquest or the defeat of the Spanish Armada. But we believe them simply because people who did see them have left writings that tell us about them; in fact, on authority. A person who balked at authority in other things, as some people do in religion, would have to be content to know nothing all his life. C.S. Lewis.

"Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand." Augustine.

Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace. Oswald Chambers in Run Today’s Race.

One day a man went out walking in the woods. He really wasn't paying much attention to what was going on around him or to where he was. He was just walking aimlessly through the forest. As he walked he came to the edge of a sharp cliff. Like I said, he wasn't paying much attention to where he was going and he walked off the edge. Now, if you ever watched any of those Saturday morning cartoons where Bugs Bunny or some other such creature walks out onto the air and sees where he is and turns around and walks back, that's a lie! There isn't anything out there but down, as our hiker found out. He went down. But, to his surprise, much like some of the old Saturday morning cartoons, there was a big branch sticking out on the side of the cliff. Some how, he managed, as he was falling, to stick a hand out and grab that branch. It must have been a really funny sight; this guy was just hanging there from his branch. He realized that he was in a real bad bind and wouldn't be able to hang onto the branch indefinitely. He started to yell, "Help! Is anybody out there?" Soon a soft voice from the sky answered him, "Yes, I am here." The hiker says, "Who are you?" The voice says, "I am God." The hiker then asks, "Can you help me?" God says, "Yes, I can help you. Let go of the branch." The hiker hangs there for another minute and then yells, "Help, is there anybody else out there."

"A few weeks ago I thought I was going out of my mind. At the time I didn't realize I was experiencing a form of an "Anxiety Attack." My heart raced with fear as thoughts came to my mind of all the things I hadn't accomplished that day. And the fear of failing the people around me made me want to get sick. I was constantly thinking of all my mistakes I have made over the years...How I lacked in being a godly woman of God. How I have not been there for my kids like I know I should be. It was so paralyzing that I couldn't even function at work. And my husband and children suffered the most because I unknowingly shut out the world around me. I did the least to just get by. Then one night out of desperation I cried out to God for help. I opened my bible to 2 Corinthian 10:5 "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing EVERY THOUGHT into captivity to the obedience of Christ." And like blinders being pulled up from my eyes. I could see that I was believing a lie. Every thought was designed to destroy me. And I knew those thoughts were from the enemy and not of God. Then the scripture, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" echoed in my mind. I surrendered my feelings of failure to God that day. I gave Him my fears and anxieties. And my life was changed by the power of Jesus Christ. Every day when those thoughts would haunt me again, that scripture about condemnation would echo louder and I again surrendered them to God. I learned that it was a life change and not a moment change. That I am to surrender daily all that is in me that is not of God." – Esther

I heard a story about a train traveling through the night in a very violent rainstorm. The lightning flashes were almost blinding, the rain hitting the windows was deafening and the strong gust winds rocked the train from side to side. When the lightening flashed and lighted up the darkness, the passengers could see the rising water along the tracks. This created terror in the minds of the passengers. Several passengers noted that through all the noise, lightening and wind, one of the passengers, a little girl, seemed to be at perfect peace. The adult passengers couldn't figure out why the little girl was so calm during all this excitement. Finally, one passenger asked her, "How is that you can be so calm when all the rest of us are so worried about what might or could happen?" The little passenger smiled and said, "My father is the engineer."

There was a Pastor, who after the usual Sunday Evening Hymns, stood up, walked over to the pulpit and, before he gave his sermon for the evening, briefly introduced a guest minister who was in service that evening. In the introduction, the Pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends and that he wanted him to have a few moments to greet the church and share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service. With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak.

"A father, His son, and a friend of his were sailing off of the Pacific Coast," He began, "When a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high, that even though

the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright and the three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized.

The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. The aged minister continued with his story, "Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy he would throw the other end of the lifeline. He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves. "As the father yelled out, 'I love you son!' He threw out the lifeline to his son's friend.

By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of the night. His body was never recovered." By this time, the two teenagers were sitting up straight in the pew, anxiously waiting for the next words to come out of the old minister's mouth. "The father," he continued knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into eternity without Jesus.

Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save his son's friend... With that the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room. The Pastor again walked slowly to the pulpit and delivered a brief sermon... Within minutes after the service ended, the two teenagers were at the old man's side.

"That was a nice story," Politely stated the boys, "But I don't think it was realistic for a father to give up his son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian." "Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied glancing down at the worn Bible. A big smile broadened his narrow face, he once again looked up at the boys and said, "It sure isn't realistic, is it? But I'm standing today to tell you that the story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His only son for me. You see... I was the father and your Pastor was my son's friend."

Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends. George Muller.

One of the greatest stories ever written was when Paul and Silas were in Philippi, with swollen ankles, bleeding backs, beaten with rods, in a rat infested inner prison. Apparently that is a good platform for revival. Apparently that is a good time to write history.

Do you hear them grumbling?

Do you hear them criticizing everybody else?

Do you hear them running everybody else down?

Do you hear them talking or complaining?

-Paul said, "We will not look at our difficulties. We will not measure the height of these walls, neither will we look at any of this." The inner prison was indescribable, but Paul said, "I will remember the Lord God who split the Red Sea and He is the God of the cloud and the fire."

-“I know that I cannot curse the darkness, there is only one thing that can take care of the darkness. I will light a little torch. Let's sing. I know that it is midnight, but I am going to use everything I have. My hands are in stocks. My feet are in bonds. I'm beaten but I can wiggle my fingers and toes. I have a mouth. I am not going to wait for big things. I am not going to wait for the moment.”

-They turned a place of torture into a cathedral of triumph and set the city and continent ablaze. The man responsible was a handcuffed man, a chained man, but he pushed back the horizon. Write history even if it is not time to write history. Bound, contemptible, weak physically, yet he shook the Roman Empire. It was this little man who said, "None of these things move me!" (Comments about Paul in the Philippian Jail from "Desire," by Vesta Mangun, p. 15-16)

The Road of Life

At first I saw God as my observer, my judge,
keeping track of the things I did wrong,
so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die.
He was out there sort of like a president.
I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him.

But later on, when I met Christ,
It seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride,
but it was a tandem bike,
and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know when it was that he suggested
that we change places,
but life has not been the same since.
When I had control,
I knew the way.; It was rather boring,
but predictable...
It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when he took the lead,
He knew delightful long cuts,
up mountains, and through rocky places
at breakneck speeds,
It was all I could do to hang on!
And even though it seemed like madness,
All He said was 'Pedal'.

I worried and was anxious and I asked,
'Where are you taking me?'
He laughed and didn't answer,
and I started to learn to trust.
I forgot my boring life
and entered into the adventure.
And when I'd say, 'I'm scared,'
He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed,
gifts of healing, acceptance and joy.
They gave me gifts to take on my journey,
my Lord's and mine.

And we were off again.
He said, 'Give the gifts away;
they're extra baggage, too much weight.'
So I did, to the people we met,
and I found that in giving I received,
and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, To be in control of my life.
I thought He'd wreck it; but he knows bike secrets,
knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners,
knows how to jump to clear high rocks,
knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal
in the strangest places,
and I'm beginning to enjoy the view
and the cool breeze on my face
with my delightful constant companion
Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore,
He just smiles and says....'Pedal.'

-Author unknown