

The Challenge of Recognizing True Significance

Rich Nathan

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Facing Life's Challenges Series

2 Kings 5:1-16

If you were to make a list of the world's best-known artists, certainly near the top of the list would be Vincent Van Gogh.

There is an entire museum in Amsterdam devoted to Van Gogh's work. And it seems that every other calendar has a print of his sunflowers, or starry night. But what a lot of people don't know is that Vincent was the son of a Protestant pastor. In his childhood he read a great deal of theology. He was really impacted by the works of John Wesley, the father of the Methodist church, and John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Thomas a Kempis, the author of *The Imitation of Christ*. In fact, in his early 20's Vincent thought that he had found his calling as a pastor. He even spent some time evangelizing coalminers in Belgium.

But Vincent struggled with mental illness. His father committed him to an insane asylum. When he was released he began pursuing art and said that he wanted to become an artist in God's service so that when people saw his art they would be led to God. Vincent struggled mentally and after a violent argument with another artist, Paul Gauguin, Vincent chased Gauguin away with a razor. And then feeling horribly about what he had done, he cut off part of his ear. And so he began a series of stays in mental asylums which culminated sadly in his own suicide at age 37.

But before he died, he left behind this incredible body of artistic work which was impressive not just in quality, but in quantity. He did something like 750 paintings and 1600 drawings. A single Van Gogh painting has sold for as much as \$50 million. But during Vincent's lifetime, he only sold two of his paintings. On one occasion, he was so saddled with debt that he packed up a number of his works in a wheel barrow and carted them over to a creditor. He asked his creditor, "Would you be interested in accepting these paintings as a fulfillment of my debt?" The man didn't realize that the paintings he was looking at would one day bring in enough money to buy an entire city! He said he laughed at Vincent and sent him away. When the creditor's wife heard about this, she yelled at him and said, "You could have at least kept the wheel barrow – that would have been worth something!"

Art historians love telling that story.

One of the great challenges of life is learning how to appreciate and value what is truly valuable. If you give a child a choice between a big red shiny ball, and a small ruby, the child will pick the big red shiny ball every time. Think about people who we instantly recognize and whose every action is followed breathlessly by millions of Americans. For example, who is this person?

SLIDE – Picture of Paris Hilton

Is there anyone here in the audience who does not know that Paris Hilton was recently in jail and now deeply understands what it feels like to be a political prisoner having suffered through 23 days in the exclusive wing at the Los Angeles County Jailhouse? Paris Hilton, a person who is famous for being famous.

And now, tell me who this person is.

SLIDE – Picture of Rosa Parks

How many of you are certain that you can recognize this woman? This Rosa Parks, who the U.S. Congress labeled the mother of the modern day Civil Rights Movement. It was Rosa Parks, who for years had resisted being mistreated on buses in Montgomery, Alabama because she was black, and in December 1955 became the spark that lit the Montgomery Bus Boycott when she refused to give her seat to a white man after she was ordered to do so by the white bus driver. She said this in her autobiography:

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“People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired. But that isn’t true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was 42. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

And in a radio interview, she said,

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“I would have to know for once and for all what rights I had as a human being and as a citizen of Montgomery, Alabama.”

Well, let me give you a different quiz. Who is this man?

SLIDE – Picture of Donald Trump

Anyone here not recognize him? He is famous for making and losing fortunes, for marrying several blonde trophy wives, for slapping his name on everything that he possibly can, and for his reality TV show when he used to get to say, “You’re fired!” to an apprentice working for him.

Or let me ask you about another businessman.

SLIDE – Picture of Mohammad Yunus

Who here recognizes this man? This is Mohammad Yunus. He is a Bangladeshi economist who in 1974 led his students on a field trip to a poor village in Bangladesh.

They interviewed a woman who made bamboo stools and learned that she had to borrow the equivalent of 15¢ to buy raw bamboo for each stool she made. After repaying the middle man sometimes at rates as high as 10% a week, she was left with about a penny's profit margin for every stool she made. Had she been able to get loans at better rates, she would have been able to raise herself out of utter poverty.

Mohammad Yunus realized there was something terribly wrong with the whole economic system in Bangladesh. Right there, he took out of his pocket 17 pounds and loaned it to some basket weavers. He discovered that that little bit of money was able to spur personal initiative on the part of these basket weavers and lifted them out of utter poverty. In 1983, against the advice of banks and government, Mohammad Yunus founded what he called "The Grameen Bank".

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The Grameen Bank

It means "Village Bank." And the Grameen Bank gives out micro loans, tiny loans to poor village people, to help them start businesses. The bank has more than 2000 branches throughout the country. It has a staff of well over 10,000 and it has enabled several million Bangladeshis, 95% of whom are women (who in Bangladeshi were called "the hated poor" – not just the poor, but there is a word for "the hated poor"), over 2 million people to start small businesses and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Here are some quotes from Donald Trump:

SLIDE – (add one quote at a time)

- The point is you can't be too greedy.
- Show me someone without an ego and I will show you a loser.
- I wish I had a great marriage. See my father was always very proud of me, but the one thing he got right was that he had a great marriage. He was married for 64 years. One of my ex-wives once said to me, "You have to work at a marriage." And I said, "That's the most ridiculous thing, because my parents, they didn't work at the marriage. If you have to work at a marriage, it is not going to work. It has to be sort of a natural thing." But my ex-wife would say, "You have to work at this, you have to do this, you have to do that." And I'm saying to myself, "Man, I work all day long, well into the evening. I don't want to come home and work in marriage. A marriage has to be very easy otherwise, I don't want it."

Great counsel, huh?

Here is a quote from Mohammad Yunus:

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"If I could be useful to another human being, even for a day, that would be a great thing. It would be greater than all the big thoughts I could ever have teaching at a university."

One of the reasons that I love being a follower of Jesus is that Jesus as my teacher has taught me how to value what is really valuable. The more I study the words of Jesus, the longer I have been in relationship with Jesus, the more I find myself being able to figure out what is really important in this world and what is just fads and glitter.

You know, getting on the road of following Jesus is a call essentially to see the world differently than the way that a lot of people around us see the world. What they call success, Jesus might call failure. What they call up, Jesus might call down. What they call achievement, Jesus might call a trap. What they call unimportant, Jesus might call truly significant.

I've been doing a series from 1 and 2 Kings titled "Facing Life Challenges." Today we are going to look at an incident from the life of Elisha, the prophet, in a message that I've titled, The Challenge of Recognizing True Significance.

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:1-14

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. 2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house.

10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Here is what we read in 2 Kings 5:1:

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:1

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Naaman was obviously a good and great man, a highly regarded soldier, successful in his chosen line of work, but this verse ends with this sad note:

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He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

And I will just note, first of all, that the Bible doesn't ever exhaustively answer our very common question: Why good people, why great people, suffer tragedies, or get ill. We have partial answers to that question. We know that God can use suffering and illness in our lives to make us more compassionate towards those who also suffer. We know God can use difficulties and illness in our lives to make us more dependent on him. We know that God can glorify himself by healing our illnesses; and, he can glorify himself by us faithfully following him even when he doesn't heal our illnesses. We know that our experience of suffering can lead us to comfort others who suffer. We know a number of partial answers to the issue of why good and great people get ill or suffer. But we don't know exhaustively why.

And we are not told in this story why Naaman, who is good and great, had leprosy. And I would suggest, friend, that if you or a loved one is suffering an illness, or have a serious physical condition, or if you or a loved one has suffered a great loss or tragedy, you may get partial answers in this life. But it is unusual for anyone to get an exhaustive answer, a complete answer, regarding their own or a loved one's suffering.

But in line with the message of this text, what I do discover is the insignificance of position when we suffer.

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The insignificance of position when we suffer

You know, it really doesn't matter how big your house is, or what degree hangs on your wall, when you are diagnosed with cancer or Alzheimer's. It's just not important if you speak three languages, or you have a prestigious job, when your spouse says that he or she wants a divorce. And if you cannot get pregnant and you want to be pregnant, or if

you just broke up with someone you thought you might spend the rest of your life with, it really doesn't matter if you have a flat screen TV and your Pottery Barn headboard or cool designer towels will not comfort you.

What I discover from verse 1 is that no matter who you are or how much you have, there are holes in your life that can never be met by position, or possessions. I recall a story by Lee Stroebel, the former legal affairs correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. Lee was not raised in church; he never thought very much about God or a relationship with God. God was pretty much irrelevant to his life. He was extremely successful and he won awards for his reporting with the Chicago Tribune. He had a Yale degree on his wall; he had a beautiful wife. He was making lots of money. And one particular day Lee Stroebel said that he had four of his stories on the front page of the Chicago Tribune – four stories with his byline. He said the way he used to picture his life was that he was driving down the road in a sleek sports car with the top down; he had one arm around his beautiful wife, and with his other arm he was waving at admirers. He said, “You know, you can drive that way so long as the road in front of you is straight and true. But if you hit a curve, you better have some kind of guidance system.” Lee Stroebel said that his life hit a big curve when his dad died. He realized he had no guidance system. There was a hole inside of Lee that could not be filled by position, accomplishments, or possessions. It was at that point he realized he needed God.

And Naaman is someone who is at a point in his life where all the success doesn't matter. How many of you would say today that you can look back on a point in your life and realize that all the achievements, all the success, all the degrees that you have really didn't make a difference in dealing with this big problem in your life. You realized you needed God.

We read this in verse 2,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:2

2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

Now the author is clearly contrasting this young girl with the great Syrian General Naaman. I think the author is telling us something about

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The importance of insignificant people

It would be hard to find someone less significant in ancient Middle-Eastern society than the person we read about in verse 2. She was young in a society that valued age. She was a girl in a society that was entirely patriarchal and valued men. She was a captive slave in a society that valued freedom. She is so insignificant that she is unnamed. And yet she has the solution for the problem that the great man, Naaman, with all of his achievements, doesn't have. The author is clearly drawing a contrast between this very

important person, Naaman, who has no answers, and this very insignificant slave girl, who knows the way forward.

And we see the same contrast in verses 6.8

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:6-8

6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" 8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

The King of Syria thinks the same that almost everyone in the world thinks. If you want something done, go to the top. We're constantly told of the importance of having friends in high places. But being a follower of Jesus causes us to think differently about who is truly important. Let me share with you a story.

A couple of years ago right after Hurricane Katrina, Mayor Coleman's staff called a meeting of various people in the faith community to discuss what part we in the Columbus community could play in assisting the victims of that hurricane. So, along with Craig Heseltun, I drove down to City Hall and a member of the church, Bernie Larsen, who oversees all of the security staff for City Hall, said that I could park in the reserved parking lot in front of City Hall when I got down there. So I drove in front of the gate that was guarded by a rather large woman, who looked like she was having a bad day. I said, "Hi. I'm Rich Nathan, the pastor of the Vineyard Church of Columbus, and I'm here to meet with the Mayor about hurricane relief and the victims of Hurricane Katrina."

She looked at me and said, "Uh-huh."

So I said, "Well, the Mayor called this meeting and his chief of staff, so and so, have invited several of us in the community to participate in this meeting."

She said, "Uh-huh."

And then I said, "My friend, Bernie Larsen, said I could park here."

She said, "Bernie! Why didn't you mention Bernie to begin with?" The gate flew open and she said, "Park right there in space 17. Bernie buys me donuts."

When I told Bernie this story, he laughed and said, "It helps to have friends in low places, doesn't it?" And I thought, is that not the way of Jesus? It helps to have friends in high places, but it helps to have friends in low places. If you want to get something done in this church, don't talk to me. I don't know half the things that are going on

around here. We book 12,000 rooms a year! We have hundreds and hundreds of ministries. I don't know half of what goes on here. If you want to get something done, you need to talk to the people who are actually doing ministry – the children's ministry leaders, the person whose actually distributing the food at the food pantry, the attorney who is volunteering at our free legal clinic.

The importance of insignificant people. You know, on the day that President John Kennedy was shot, another wonderful man died.

SLIDE – Picture of C.S. Lewis

Do you know who this man is? He is my favorite Christian author, C.S. Lewis. He is certainly among the top three most influential 20th century Christians in the Western World. Millions of people have become followers of Jesus through the writings of C.S. Lewis. On the day he died, his death went almost unnoticed because the world's attention was fixed on the assassination of John Kennedy. And when he was buried a few days later, only a few people attended C.S. Lewis' funeral. Those who did come were nearly all close personal friends. That such an influential man should die so humbly and so quietly with so little notice is really disturbing. And yet, this is the way of Christ. Christ values people differently than the way the world values them.

We read in 2 Kings 5:3-4 these words:

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:3-4

3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." 4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

The great man, Naaman, was clueless regarding how to find healing or restoration. But this little unnamed slave girl had the answer to Naaman's problems. And, again, I think we find this wonderful juxtaposition of significance and insignificance. And so we discover

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The importance of insignificant people's counsel

You know, we so often miss incredibly important truths for our lives because they come from unlikely sources – maybe from people whose political perspectives we disagree with, or who have certain problems in their lives that cause us to discount them entirely. I think Christians often miss what God might be doing in the world because the source of a particular activity is coming from someone who may not pretend to have a relationship with God, or who certainly doesn't advertise their relationship with God.

For example, you might read an article about Angelina Jolie and how she is adopting another child from somewhere around the world.

SLIDE – Picture of Angelina Jolie

And because the media has a very cynical view of Angelina Jolie and thinks all of her adoptions are so peculiar, you might think the same thing. And because of her lifestyle and all of her well-advertised love relationships, you might discount someone like her altogether. And yet, God, I believe, is using this most unlikely person, Angelina Jolie, to call attention to the millions of children around the world who are living in need. And he is actually calling the world's attention to this great gift of adoption.

Important counsel from unlikely, insignificant people. I think of Francis Collins, the man who headed up the Human Genome Project that mapped the entire several billion letter genetic code for us as human beings. Francis Collins was raised in a home that didn't value faith very much. He rarely attended church. What he valued was science. He valued empirical evidence and scientific investigation. He was working on his Ph.D. at Yale in Chemistry when he decided to get his medical degree. And in his third year of med school, while he was doing rounds, he was caring for an old woman in North Carolina. This old woman took his hand and said, "Son, what do you think of Jesus Christ? Who do you think he is?"

Francis Collins felt his face flush. He stammered out some embarrassed answer of, "I don't know." The woman still grasping his hand said, "Son, let me tell you who he is." And from her hospital bed, this poor older woman from North Carolina spoke directly to Francis Collins' heart. He was so shaken by that encounter that he began thinking, "You know, here I am a scientist. I pride myself in weighing evidence. And yet, I have never deeply investigated the evidence for the most important questions that exist in the world: is there a God and can we know this God?"

So he wandered down the street to a Methodist pastor who Francis Collins happened to know. He said, "I want to investigate Christianity. Can you recommend something?" The Methodist pastor went to his shelf and pulled off a book by C.S. Lewis, the man I talked about before, who only had a few people attend his funeral. The book was *Mere Christianity*. And Francis Collins read that book and he said that every couple of pages C.S. Lewis anticipated one of his objections and answered it so plainly. It was through that book and some other writings that Francis Collins made a decision to place his faith in Jesus Christ. All of this is written about in Francis Collins' wonderful book titled *The Language of God*, which I highly recommend. And in particular for those of you who are interested in science or who have a high school or college student who is taking biology, or maybe you have a friend who is curious about how faith in God ties together with belief in the theory of evolution.

We read in verses 5-6 these words:

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:5-6

5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and

ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

And I think we discover in these verses the insignificance of money in making someone happy.

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The insignificance of money in making someone happy

In today's terms, Naaman was offering about \$2 million for his healing, for paying a hefty hospital bill. But it is particularly regarding money that the way of Jesus is so different than the way of this world.

There have been surveys done of college freshmen for the last 40 years regarding things that college freshmen consider essential or very important in life. And one of the things that we discover is that for college freshmen being well off financially is the second most important value in life. 73.4% say that being well off financially is essential to happiness. The first value is raising a family.

Now, are college freshmen accurately perceiving the world? Remember that one of the wonderful things about getting on the road of following Jesus is that we are clear about what is truly significant and what is insignificant. Sometimes what the world calls up, Jesus calls down. And what the world calls achievement, Jesus calls a trap. So let me ask a really simple question. I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you agree with this statement.

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The wealthier you are, the happier you are.

Now, it is not entirely false in countries like Bangladesh or India, being relatively well off does make for a much greater sense of happiness. Psychologically as well as materially, it is better in Bangladesh or India to be high caste than low caste. We human beings do need food and we do need rest and we do need shelter and we do need warmth and we do need social contact. All of those things make us happier. But researchers in the U.S., Canada, and Europe have discovered that there is almost no link between income and happiness once people reach basic levels of comfort in life. Apart from the very poor, all of the research studies indicate that more money produces diminishing returns in an individual's life.

This is as you might expect. I mean the third piece of pie doesn't offer as much gratification as the first or second piece. And once you have a coat to wear in the cold, you don't feel nearly as much satisfaction or happiness from your fourth or fifth coat.

But you say that more money offers a greater sense of control. You are able to do more things with money than you are able to do without it. But they surveyed Forbes 100 Wealthiest People in America – people whose net worth is over \$1 billion dollars. And

they discovered that people who have enormous net worth are only just slightly happier than the average American.

It is not hard to find people who were fabulously wealthy and yet wretchedly unhappy. Listen to some of these quotes:

SLIDES (One at a time)

- John D. Rockefeller: I've made many millions, but they've brought me no happiness.
- Amy Vanderbilt: The care of \$200 million dollars is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it.
- John Jacob Astor: I am the most miserable man on the earth.
- Henry Ford: I was happier when doing a mechanics job.
- Andrew Carnegie: Millionaires seldom smile.

Dr. Aaron Beck conducted a ten year study of patients hospitalized with suicidal intentions. He published the results in "The American Journal of Psychiatry." One of the 15 major risk factors contributing to a suicidal frame of mind was listed simply as:

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Having great financial resources.

The doctor's terse commentary was this:

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The risk of suicide increases with resources.

But on the other hand, what we find in the U.S. is that victims of some disabling tragedies often do not exhibit long-term emotional devastation. For example, they've done studies of people who have become blind or paralyzed after a car accident. And initially following a devastating accident there is often depression and anger and frustration. First, they have to learn to cope with all of these new limits. But meet that person after a couple of year and the research indicate that most people eventually are restored to their former state of happiness. University students with disabilities report themselves to be as happy as able-bodied students. And their friends agree with their self-perceptions.

The bottom line, according to Jesus, life circumstances play a negligible role in producing happiness. Where do people find happiness from? Loving relationships with other people; a love relationship with God; and discovering an overall purpose for life.

The reason why Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* was so popular was that he summarized something of Jesus' basic teaching about the key to happiness. Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* communicated so plainly Jesus' philosophy that you discover happiness by finding your purpose for life. What are you here for? And that

living out of a sense of purpose and meaning will produce joy in your life whatever your circumstance.

We read in verses 9-14 these words:

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:9-14

9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

What we discover here is the insignificance of great religious activity.

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The insignificance of great religious activity

Naaman is asking for a big ritual and he wants Elisha to come out to raise his hands over him. He wants to dip in a big river rather than the tiny little muddy river that is the Jordan River.

And I think we are discovering something in all of this about what is important and what is unimportant to God in terms of real change. Here at Vineyard we use a phrase that communicates something of this church's philosophy. We talk about being non-hype. We want to be low-key and non-hype in all of our expressions – in prayer, worship, dress. We talk here a lot about being naturally supernatural. In other words, we don't believe that God is impressed by lengthy, showy prayers, or the extravagance of the adjectives we use to describe some of our activity. We know that God is not hard of hearing, so it doesn't matter if we shout while we pray, or if we pray quietly – God can hear.

The fact is, friend, I've discovered in my own life and in the lives of most other people that real life change not by the big and the showy, but by the small things that impact us in a deep way. I think this is true even about the reasons why people get on the road to becoming followers of Jesus.

Most of you have heard my story about growing up in a Jewish family and meeting the woman who is now my wife, Marlene, in college. People often ask me what persuaded me to become a follower of Jesus. I can tell you as honestly as I can that there was not one big thing, but a lot of little things that God used to get my attention, to communicate something of his reality. For example, I remember having lunch with Marlene and watching her relate to some of her Christian friends. We would come into the dining hall and meet a few of her friends. They would hug. There was an obvious joy in seeing one another; an unforced natural affection of one Christian to another. As I watch Christians just do what Christians do naturally – hug, watching these hugs had a huge impact on me. My friends never hugged when we greeted each other. Watching Christians relate when there was an absence of one-upsmanship; it was obvious that people were trying to encourage each other.

These little things deeply impacted my life. It wasn't great religious activity. It wasn't seeing a miracle. It wasn't listening to a profound and irrefutable argument that led me to Christ. It was dozens of little things through which God spoke to me about his reality.

Let me finish by sharing with you two simple reasons in closing why God chooses the insignificant.

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The reasons God chooses the insignificant

Here is what we read in 2 Kings 5:16-17,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:16-17

16 The prophet answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. 17 "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord.

The first and most important reason that God chooses the insignificant is because this is the way God gets the glory. We read in verse 15,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:15

15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

Elisha, refusing to accept money says this in verse 16,

SLIDE – 2 Kings 5:16

16 The prophet answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

Elisha is saying “It wasn’t me. I didn’t do the healing. I can’t do that. God did it.”

The mammoth, showy, glitzy, the campaigns, the important people of the world, it is easy for us to look at those things and say, “This is what made the difference. It was this master plan; it was this brilliant person; it was this extraordinary talent; it was this magical formula.” The way you look at your life and say the only thing I can point to that made a difference was I just made a choice to be obedient to God in this area. And that released so much life in me.

Or the only reason I can point to that I’m well is that a few other Christians came over and they prayed for me and in a few days my condition rapidly changed.

God loves the insignificant because it is through the insignificant in things like simple obedience or simple prayer that God gets all the glory. Here is what it says in 1 Cor. 1:26-31,

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 1:26-31

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let those who boast boast in the Lord.”

And the other reason why God chooses the insignificant is because it communicates something of the way God is. God loves working in hidden ways, in secret ways, because that is who God is. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. God came in the form of a server. He was born in a little obscure village named Bethlehem. He grew up in an even more out of the way obscure insignificant place called Nazareth. He worked in a simple profession, carpentry. He had a group of followers, none of whom could be considered particularly important in terms of the things that make people important. And he died in ignominious scandalous death on a cross. Hiddenness and humility – these are fundamental characteristics of God.

So here you are, you are followers of the way of Jesus – learn to listen to Jesus and be formed by Jesus regarding what Jesus says is important. So, for example, obeying God is way more important than doing great things for God. _____ for your family is way more important than purchasing more things for your family. Finding meaning in life is way more important than making a lot of money. And loving God is way more important than anything else you can think of.

Let’s pray.

The Challenge of Recognizing True Significance

Rich Nathan

August 25-26, 2007

Facing Life's Challenges Series

2 Kings 5:1-16

I. The Insignificance of Position When We Suffer (2 Kings 5.1)

II. The Importance of Insignificant People (2 Kings 5.2)

III. The Importance of Insignificant People's Counsel (2 Kings 5.3, 4)

IV. The Insignificance of Money in Making Someone Happy (2 Kings 5.5, 6)

V. The Insignificance of Great Religious Activity (2 Kings 5.9-14)

VI. The Reasons God Chooses the Insignificant (2 Kings 5.16, 17)

A. God Gets the Glory (1 Corinthians 1.26-31)

B. This is God's Way