

Becoming a Bigger Person

We all need the milk of the gospel really. But the thrill of being saved is in its growth potential! Being a baby is carefree, but it is devoid of the glorious possibilities of work, of influence and of great adventure.

Are you serious about a close walk with God? Are you willing to beat your body and make it your slave? Are you someone who welcomes the Sword of the Spirit, not just the Oil of the Spirit? Then this word is for you. "What do you see, Jeremiah?" This is the time for seeing more of God and more from God. Seeing is what makes us people of enlarged faith and greater impact. To the measure we do not see by the Spirit, we see by the flesh.

I heard a great preacher saying this recently, "*we live in a time of an awakening world but a sleeping church*". He likened churches in the UK to the military regiments of the allied forces in the early stages of World War II - "*strategically competent but dynamically ineffective*".

The points that follow could each make you a bigger person in God, if you mix them with faith. They could make you a wakeful saint, a person who is both strategically competent and dynamically effective!

1. STOP SEEING PEOPLE RELATIVE TO YOURSELF, BUT RELATIVE TO GOD. Too many saints ask this subconscious question, "*Are you for me or against me?*", as though that is what is of ultimate importance. I find these kinds of people boring. Their lives are their worlds and their worlds are their life. And their prison. Everything and everyone must somehow fit into their privatised ambitions and insecurities. To this we say: the gospel of Jesus Christ can put the flesh to death. For you to become a bigger person, selfless love must increase! "*Esteem others higher than yourself*" is a distinct possibility, with practice in the Spirit, because Resurrection life is in you!

2. MAJOR ON THE MAJORS. Romans 14 speaks of three discretionary matters - vegetarianism, alcohol and observing special days. Don't pick a fight over these things, either way! Peace, power and unity are what matters. But there are many other discretionary things: how people worship; "church model"; language; cultural idiosyncrasies and the like. Major on the majors! And do it in the lives of people you love too. Nitpicking with your kids is a sure-fire way to alienation in your old age. For us pastors, too many of us get lost in one or two people's sins and struggles. By this, I am not condemning persevering love and care, but I am judging so much time-wasting with folk who do not want to be free, and show no desperation for their sin. Finally, in preaching, let's major on what the Bible majors on!

3. MOVE FROM CHURCH- TO KINGDOM- MINDEDNESS. This is a huge need today. There is too much domain management and turf-guarding. Some won't even listen to great preachers 'from another camp'. Paul was the epitome of Kingdom-mindedness. Even from his prison cell, this is what he wrote to the church at Philippi: "*But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice*" (Phil 1:18). God is calling his saints out of task-bound, high-walled ecclesiastical rigor mortis where the life of God is organised to death, into freedom and fire and the preaching of the advent of the Kingdom of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Death to the formulaic, manualised, tabulated church recipe book! Life to lively, big-hearted, full-chested sainthood!

4. THINK OF THE FUTURE AS AN ADVENTURE, NOT AN ALARM. You will never become a bigger person by worrying your way into your future. You cannot change your stature by this route. It is exhausting, self-destructive and faith-quenching. Believe, oh believe, that He exists and loves and cares and provides. If he arranged all of the cosmos to feed one little sparrow, will God not be able and willing to feed you? If he exercised so much wisdom in beautifying a brainless lily that cannot even comprehend or enjoy its own beauty, will God not clothe you now?! So many believers spend so much energy and hoard so much kingdom resource trying to mitigate their futures. The Titanic is

going down, and we are here to the end, with smiles on our faces. Get over yourself, and see God a little more. You will see a God at perfect peace above and in the chaos that is Planet Earth. And you will find a God who is willing to share that same peace with you.

5. RISK DISAGREEMENT BY SPEAKING. This is a dangerous thing to write, especially if you are a man whose tongue is a razor. I am speaking more here to men who have shrunk themselves by agreeableness at the expense of truth. Those of us who have swapped power for plausibility. The men and women who would rather then preserve fragile peace by staying silent. Carl Trueman once wrote that Christian debate was never meant to be "*a self-congratulatory love-fest*". With so much illegitimate hierarchy in the church, preserving the 'power players' at the expense of releasing true dialogue and with it, the priesthood, some challenge is much needed. Oh, how we need original thinkers to risk moments of unpopularity! **Gal. 2:11** *When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.* Stand up and be counted. Be a friend of God before you are a friend of Man. Just don't over-rate yourself or your wisdom. Remain a learner, speak and listen freely.

6. GET RID OF WRONG VIEWS OF AUTHORITY. The 10 spies who returned in unbelief from their Canaan scouting trip had 'positional authority'. They were recognised as credible in their respective tribes. They knew how to counsel marriages and families and make right judgments in matters of social affairs while crossing the desert. But they had no faith, or little faith. *Faith is what brings authority* - and the Roman centurion of Matthew 8 understood this. There is no authority to your "office" or title. Where we borrow authority from position we too will be like the seven sons of Sceva on the day of war, stripped and beaten. Worldly governments may operate from office, but not so the sons and daughters of the Kingdom. Jesus had no office or title. Neither did Paul, but the demons shivered because he '*knew who he believed*'. I have come to see that there is no authority in knowing scripture either. It is only the Word emblazoned by a private friendship with the Spirit that forges the sword of God in our mouths. Our authority is in prayer and intimacy. Without prayer - intimate prayer - we are relatively powerless. Gifts may still operate, but the many Jericho walls remain untouched. Please settle your view of authority, and of 'government' too - you are not governmental because you are born with a willy, excuse the French. Government comes from submission to Christ, upon whose shoulders all of God's government rests! Settle this! It will stop much time wasting, and also liberate women from ecclesiastical chauvinism. Reece Howells knew his God. He stood interceding for Britain under the droning engines of the fighter planes as they dueled it out in the summer of 1940. God heard his prayers and delivered many nations from the tyranny of the Third Reich. That's power! **Matt. 8:9** *For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

7. GIVE MORE THAN YOU SAVE. **Prov. 11:24** *One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.* To grow bigger in God, this is one lesson you need to pocket. Let's be straight here - I do not believe in New Testament 'tithing'; I do not want compulsive giving; I beg from no man and no man must beg from me. Great - those are the negatives sorted. *But you cannot live by your negative truths.* So, what is your positive view of your money and possessions, in light of eternity? Are they yours? Are you, yours? Have you seen a God so compelling that you would willingly sell a house or land or car and bring the money to the feet of the church, the foundation and pillar of Truth? Or are you wasting your life trying to deflect attention from your secret idol? Sow to the East and have blessing hit you from behind, as it charges in from the West. Anyway, if nothing comes back to sowers, they know that their God and Sovereign is their "shield and very great reward"!

8. STEP OUT OF THE ORDINARY. *"But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."* "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”(Matt 14:27-29). Too few people these days are doing anything unusual for Christ. All I hear is how people are "just making it". I hear so many friends sharing the same fears and frets that my unsaved relatives share in. Are you bogged down in the usual, in the mundane, in the same quiet desperation of the world-people? In your mind...in your life...are you in a rut? Can God surprise you? Can he say, 'sell all you have'; 'set apart for me..'; 'go to the house on Straight Street"...? I sense the thrill. GK Chesterton said it best when he wrote of the "sanctified sensational".

9. DON'T MAKE ROOM FOR SELF-SINS. How much of your thought life is about you and your issues? You need deliverance! Self-sins so easily masquerade as pathologies and hangovers of past events. They even hide amongst the baggage by convincing their host that 'it was because of the sins of others'. I find no place in scripture to validate and indemnify sin. But it is true that we cannot just evict these squatters with the broom of self-determination. We need to come under the law of displacement - lesser things need to be displaced by greater things. A vacuum always sucks. Get sucked into God's vacuum, and He will get sucked into yours. *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” (Col 3:1-3)*

10. CELEBRATE BIGGER PEOPLE AND GIFTS. What happens if a Spurgeon joins your church? What happens if your next employee is a modern Bill Gates? What happens to your wife's gifts where they exceed yours? What if your assistant is a prophet of God? Can you learn from a beggar, and sit at the feet of a younger man? **Eccl. 4:4** says, *"And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."* Are you free of the truth of this verse? Have you been delivered from small-minded comparison and competition? Get over it, there is always someone better and bigger and more beautiful than you. The point of Christian ministry is enlarging others, not diminishing them to your level. In celebrating others, there is great reward, both in the here and now and in the hereafter.

11. STOP BEING CAUTIOUS IN YOUR LANGUAGE. Many are too careful. They are "precise, polite but never profound". Many still cut down tall poppies. If you are never celebrated, do you celebrate others? A church that has a well-developed culture of celebration is a church in revival. Yes, I believe in honest and forthright speech, but so much of this these days is a cover for a sly comment. Release the power of the gospel through your tongue! Know that God knows your every hidden sin, but has not exposed you. Learn the life-skill of seeing the good, and commending it, rather than hunting for the bad to expose it. There is no glory in store for the witch-hunter saint. It is not even saintly.

12. ASK GOD WHAT HAS ROBBED YOU OF YOUR ZEAL AND DEMAND IT BACK. By scripture! The word exhorts us to *"never be lacking in zeal"*. We are called to keep our fervour, serving the Lord. What has happened to yours? After having begun in the Spirit, how now have you drifted axle deep into the sands? Petition for God's tow-truck! Get hooked up and winched out. Do whatever it takes! Without zeal, the boxer has lost the match. *"It is not the size of the dog in the fight; it is the size of the fight in the dog"*. This is a worthy saying. No church or life will be built on the 'reasonable man' principle. Not only because it is a fight and a race, but because the devil fights dirty. Stop being so reasonable, and get radical again. Luke-warmness makes Jesus sick. I believe the following is true - God loves heating up cold hearts. He rejoices at the penitent sinner coming home. But once home, don't fall into the starchy sin of the older brother, whose love grew cold in the very house of his father.

13. BE VIOLENT AGAINST TEMPTATION. If you want to grow bigger, than direct part of your new-found zeal towards beating your body and making it your slave. Please. Don't believe your feelings first. *"Feelings come, feelings go, feelings are deceiving; my faith is in the Word of God, nought else is*

worth believing". For so many of us, it is the one little rusty stake through our foot that keeps us going round in circles for years. **Ecclesiastes 10:1** *"As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor."*

14. OVERCOME THE 'YUCK FACTOR'. I borrow this from my friend RT Kendall. Everyone has one - at least one - trait or quirk that offends us. We have one or two in ourselves. We used to call it the "chipboard under the veneer". these days, most just hit it and then bounce away. With one offence, the relationship is terminated. This attitude will keep you very small, and keep you in a bunch of friends who are obsequiously clever, swampy, mawkish yes-people. Learn the secret to this scripture from **Proverbs 19:11**, *"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense."*

15. DON'T BE YOKED TO LITTLE PEOPLE. Bad company corrupts good character. *"Show me your friends and I will show you your future"* is a little harsh but carries some weight nonetheless. By this header I do not mean be elitist and aloof, but choose your friends wisely. And if you are small-minded, then be humble and learn and embrace the bigness in others. Many years ago, I drifted to the edge of my fellowship. Within a year, my circle of friends had changed totally. I woke up with such a fright one morning. I realized I was on the edge of a precipice, but had been nudged there so subtly by the devil. That same week, an elder came to me saying God had given him a dream – in it he saw me walking on the very edge of a cliff, wobbling as a I went. He said God had asked him to tell me that I was about to throw away a glorious inheritance, and He did not want that. Yikes!

16. READ MORE DEPTH, TAKE IN LESS SLUSH. Your gift can bring you before kings, yes, but without some investment you can end up more as the court jester than the wise counselor. Don't get stale dated in your knowledge; don't fall for the entertainment monkey. "The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept were toiling upwards in the night".

Run, Forrest, run!