



"We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

—Mother Teresa

17-Jun-11

Should We 'Sweat the Small Stuff'? (Part One)

"Don't Sweat the Small Stuff—and it's all small stuff." Certainly, there is [wisdom](#) in this simple statement, which is also the title of a popular book by Richard Carlson, Ph.D. As Carlson states, "Often we allow ourselves to get all worked up about things that, upon closer examination, *aren't* really that big a deal." The book provides helpful hints on keeping our emotions, especially anger and dissatisfaction, in a proper perspective.

As humans, we have a proclivity to worry about the things that we should not. But worse yet, we have a proclivity to not worry about the things that we should. An article by Jeffrey Kluger in the December 4, 2006, edition of *Time*, "How Americans Are Living Dangerously," reinforces this human propensity. The author writes:

It would be a lot easier to enjoy your life if there weren't so many things trying to kill you every day. The problems start even before you're fully awake. There's the fall out of bed that kills 600 Americans each year. There's the early-morning heart attack, which is 40% more common than those that strike later in the day. There's the fatal plunge down the stairs, the bite of sausage that gets lodged

in your throat, the tumble on the slippery sidewalk as you leave the house, the high-speed automotive pinball game that is your daily commute.

Shadowed by peril as we are, you would think we'd get pretty good at distinguishing the risks likeliest to do us in from the ones that are statistical long shots. But you would be wrong. We agonize over avian flu, which to date has killed precisely no one in the U.S. . . . We wring our hands over the mad cow pathogen that might be (but almost certainly isn't) in our hamburger and worry far less about the cholesterol that contributes to the heart disease that kills 700,000 of us annually.

As Kluger points out, we humans actually "pride ourselves on being the only species that understands the concept of risk, yet we have a confounding habit of worrying about mere possibilities while ignoring probabilities, building barricades against perceived dangers [like being bitten by a poisonous snake or being hit by lightning] while leaving ourselves exposed to real ones." Many are afraid of flying for fear of dying in a plane crash, but they fail to evaluate the real risk: 44,000 auto-travel deaths versus a few hundred in air travel. After September 11, 2001, we avoided flying for fear of being hijacked by terrorists. According to David Ropeik, an independent risk consultant, the increase in road traffic in the three months following 9/11 led to an increase in fatalities equal to one-third of those who died in the terrorist attack!

Knowing that we have a proclivity to worry about the things that we should not worry about and not to worry about the things that we should, how might our spiritual lives be affected? Could we be worrying about things that we should not and not worrying about things that we should? Are there little things in our lives that seem insignificant but actually pose a great spiritual risk?

Many modern-day Christians feel [God](#) does not care about little things. They take a very human perspective of God to justify their philosophy. Since humans tend to care only about the big things and not about the little things, surely God must follow suit. They say to themselves, "As long as we are not out there committing the big sins, we're okay."

In this vein, [Song of Songs 2:15](#) contains an interesting lesson: "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." Foxes, relatively small animals, seem harmless at first glance. Unlike wolves or coyotes, they do not travel in packs but are loners, lurking and sneaking around. The author is speaking of when, in search of food, foxes sometimes enter into vineyards to eat the grapes. However, foxes are often too small to reach the grapes, so they would chew on the vines to get to the grapes. By chewing on the vine, the grapes would fall closer to the ground and could be eaten.

Instead of the farmer just losing his crop from that vine for one year, he would lose his entire vine. A vine that produces fruit does not grow overnight but takes years of diligent preparation and care. A fox, though, can take all that away in minutes.

This passage in Song of Songs is typically associated with [false teachers](#) and rightly so (see [Ezekiel 13:3-4](#)). However, there can be another application. Notice [John 15:1-2](#), 5-6:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

If we are to be a true follower of Christ, we must be united to Him—the vine or the root branch—by [faith](#). It is through our connection with Him that we derive our spiritual strength and produce fruit. Just as a branch pulls all strength and nourishment from its parent stalk, so too do we receive all our strength from the Vine. Our spiritual survival rests with our Root Branch, [Jesus Christ](#). He tells us in verse 5 that without Him, we can do *nothing*. In verse 6, He warns us that, if we do not abide—live in or continue—in Him and bear fruit, we will be cast out, withered, and burned in the fire. However, if we do abide in Him, and His words abide in us, God will hear and answer our prayers. If our faith and complete confidence is in Him, and we listen to and obey His words, our heavenly Father will be quick to respond to us.

In the analogy, the little foxes of [Song of Songs 2:15](#) threaten our faith and our connection with Christ. Therefore, these little things are not little to God, and they should not be little to us.

The importance of the little things is seen throughout the Bible. From as early as Genesis 3, we see a seemingly insignificant act of eating fruit from a tree result in grave consequences. Though God had just warned Adam and Eve of the penalty of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Eve was persuaded by "a little fox"—in this case, the serpent, [Satan](#) the Devil—to eat of the fruit that led to self-centeredness and death! It was sold as a little thing—just a piece of fruit—but this [sin](#) separated mankind from God.

As fruit-bearing Christians attached to our Root, Jesus Christ, this same principle holds true for every small transgression. They may appear little to us, which is how Satan convinces us that they are no big deal. But these little foxes run throughout our vineyards, and we must take action to remove them.

- Bill Onisick

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Do Little Things Not Count?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Seemingly insignificant things to man are quite big things to God. Some well-meaning individuals, blinded by their pride, vanity, and clever sophistry, consider certain areas of the Bible to have little or no importance. They (1) fail to grasp the spiritual intent of the scriptures and (2) fail to separate the holy from the profane. Like Nadab and Abihu (offering strange or common fire) and Cain (offering an unworthy sacrifice), those who ignore the clear biblical instructions for the wavesheaf offering with its unambiguous prohibitions (Leviticus 22:24-25 and Deuteronomy 12:10) risk the displeasure and judgment of Almighty God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Small, But Significant](#)

by Staff

Sometimes small things make big impacts. Such a small thing was Simon of Cyrene's carrying of Christ's cross. Do we in God's church today consider our "smallness" to be a blessing or a curse?

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