

The Measure Of A Man In The Completed Canvas

God's Handiwork

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Today, in a throw back to its days of mobsters and Al Capone, the city of Chicago is once again more well known for its murder, mayhem, crooked politicians, and the same anarchy that seems to be festering in many of our country's major (and minor) cities. We certainly are in the midst of watching the chaos and disorder that becomes the lot of an immoral society that is enmity against God.

However, when we were young, in a time when a white shirt after 6 PM was the appropriate dress in downtown Chicago, and a semblance of law, order and respect for authority was prevalent, the city of Chicago was a thriving and relatively beautiful city on the lake.

When we were young, Nancy and I spent a great deal of time enjoying concerts, theater, parks and museums. We had the privilege to share these things with our children, along with many of the sights, sounds and beauty of the city noted for incredible art and architecture. Of course, those days are in the review mirror and our children deeply regret that they cannot share with their children the same family time in museums, concerts, walks, and bike rides along the lake.

One of the most enjoyable family excursions we typically had was when we went to the Art Institute, which is the home of the largest collection of the Impressionist masters outside of France. Within that collection is Georges Seurat's iconic *Sunday on La Grande Jatte*. The 7' x 10' master work is the lone piece of art hanging on a wall in a large room within the Art Institute's Impressionist Wing. This allows people to examine it closely and also from a distance. Most of you are probably familiar with the piece from seeing it in either magazines or movies (such as *Ferris Buehler's Day Off*).

But the most interesting thing is when you have the opportunity to carefully examine it closely. You see, George Seurat pioneered a new branch of

Impressionist art called Divisionism or Pointillism. In a book I have from the Art Institute entitled *The Age of Impressionism at The Art Institute of Chicago* is the following passage under Georges Seurat:

Just weeks after Georges Seurat exhibited *Bathers at Asniere*,^s he began work on the painting that is considered the masterpiece of his career and a watershed in the history of modern Impressionist art. The ambitious canvas took two years to execute; Seurat actually completed it in 1886, in time for the eighth Impressionist exhibition, but he included the year of inception in the painting's title, *A Sunday on LaGrande Jatte—1884*. In doing, he probably hoped to underscore his primacy in the new movement that he called "chrom-luminism," now known as "Divisionism" or "Pointillism."

Inspired by research on optical and color theory, Seurat devised a technique in which he applied small dashes and dots of related or opposing tints to create gradated shades and blend tonalities into a decorative unity. He also sought to emphasize the long gestation period of this composition, which aimed to recast the Impressionists' concern for light, shadow, and color into an art of permanence firmly rooted in classical ideals. . . . Although Seurat was criticized for what was deemed a mechanical and impersonal style, the genesis of *La Grande Jatte* not only involved a calculated and methodical preparatory process, but also intuition and trial and error.

Another reference source (Wikipedia) adds another valuable element to this comment:

Seurat's artistic personality combined qualities that are usually supposed to be opposed and incompatible: On the one hand, his extreme and delicate sensibility, on the other, a passion for logical abstraction and an almost mathematical precision of mind.

So, brethren, what does all this have to do with us sitting here in these services today, within the Body of Christ?

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(<https://www.cgg.org>)

I ran across this quote from an American author by the name of Kristin Hannah that fits very nicely right here:

The measure of a man comes down to moments, spread out like dots of paint on the canvas on life. Everything you were, everything you'll someday be, resides in the small, seemingly ordinary choices of everyday life Each decision seems as insignificant as a left turn on an unfamiliar road when you have no destination in mind. But the decisions accumulate until you realize one day that they've made you the man that you are.

When you closely examine *La Grande Jatte*, it mostly looks like just a random pattern of dots on the canvas. Although there are some things that seem to be clear, you never see the whole picture until you are far enough back to see the magnificent intricacies of color, light, texture, and form, combined within qualities that may seem to be incompatible or opposed.

Brethren, we are all what may seem to be a pattern of random dots on a canvas and we see not only God through a glass darkly, but each other that way; even as God gives us a bit of room to step back a bit to get a better view of His handiwork. But it is only God who truly sees the perfect blend that He is creating in each of us and when His work is pleasing to Him.

What is the measure of a man? Probably the most beloved Chicago Cub of all time—Ernie Banks—put it this way: "The measure of a man is in the lives he's touched."

From Martin Luther King Jr.:

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. Nothing worthwhile is easy. Your ability to overcome unfavorable situations will provide you with time to demonstrate your true strength and determination for success. Always set your standards high. Your greatest achievements lie within the infinite feats you achieve in your life.

And the American evangelist Dwight Moody, one of the founders of the Moody Bible Institute, once said, "The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves."

Brethren, this week marked the 29th anniversary of the Church of the Great God, a small work that God has been using as a resource to people around the world in a way that touches more people worldwide than the Worldwide Church of God ever did.

We, of course, are not the only group within the Body of Christ God to whom God has given this privileged opportunity, but it has been a privilege and an honor to be a part of this within this work of God for 29 years.

Last week, as Richard noted last Sabbath [in the announcements], was also marked by the death and burial of one of the main pillars in this Work, my dear friend, Mike Ford. Just as my dear friend, John Reid, before him, a significant part of the measure of the men is in the lives they touched and those they served.

Each was made up of so many different points of paint and neither was at that complete work of perfection we will see in the resurrection. But both had been cultivating, over the years, the ability to sincerely wrap their welcoming arms around many and carefully listen.

Of course, there were a number of times Mike knew he had pushed things too far from his own point of view. But he, like the rest of us, was a work in progress, and his sincere work to embrace and listen was always growing.

Just as *La Grande Jatte* is a metaphor we can apply to each of us individually, it is also a magnificently beautiful metaphor of the whole Body of Christ, as only God can see. We are all God's combination of applied small dashes and dots of related or opposing tints to create gradated shades and blend tonalities into a decorative unity that must be the Body of Christ.

Both Mike and John Reid had developed two vital qualities over the years we all need. Warmly and sincerely embracing many and carefully listening.

Both of them have left a hole, not only in our lives, but within the work that God expects to go forward for His honor and glory.

We all have plenty of work to do together, and as God gives us the ability and opportunity to do it, *we must answer God's call* to do the work within this small group that is our privilege to do, no matter what job God may have given us the ability to do. We have got to do it, and we have got to listen to Him.

Brethren, what is the real measure of the man that God has blessed us to do together? God clearly gives us the answer through the apostle Paul:

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

In the first few verses of Isaiah 57, God tells us,

Isaiah 57:1-2 The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

However, brethren, I want you to think about this:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

This is the Great God who inhabits eternity and sees the whole finished painting and how all the applied small dashes and dots of related or opposing tints blend into a decorative unity of the perfected elect of the Body of Christ.

He alone can see the perfected, finished product that He has put in a place of safety, while the rest of us continue to faithfully and diligently move forward in the work He has given us to do, while knowing He clearly sees the perfected end result in us as well.

As Ronny Graham beautifully showed last week ["The King's Highway"], we are all on the same high way of holiness as Mike and John, but we have not finished the trip yet and we must all do the work God has given us the privilege to do within this small group within the Body of Christ, seeing in faith the beautiful *La Grande Jette* that God sees both personally and as one united Body of Christ.