

On Becoming Agreeably Small



Though the storm was expected, it still caught us off guard.

Dark, charcoal gray clouds rose up quickly, packed together into hideous shapes more common to the churning walls of nuclear mushroom clouds, roiling black marshmallows bearing not sweetness, but destruction. The tops of the heavy oak trees began to sway side to side from the approaching wind—a beast gathering strength, coming straight out of the west.

Lightning flashes began more slowly, just soft illuminations backlighting the top edges of the trees, but then sharpened, transforming darkness into a ghostly silver. The storm front bore down upon us with all the weight of the heavens, caring nothing about anything or anyone it might find in its path.

Following the drill, we trooped down to the lowest floor carrying flashlights. For a few minutes more we got our news from the TV, watching the bright colors of Doppler radar march across the state, heading right for us. But then the lightning flashes made us unplug not only the TV, but every electronic appliance in the house, as well as the phone lines. We knew from experience that all it would take to fry a TV or computer was one strike as far away as a half-mile from the house.

Then the rain began. Broad splashes splattered the outside patio, then were quickly joined together into a common pool as the skies wept their liquid in dense sheets. The wind drove the rain hard against the west windows, searching out and finding the tiniest crack that would give entrance into the house.

Collected downstairs, listening to weather reports on the radio, we heard the dripping. Fol-

lowing the sound, we discovered ground water running through the foundation where the buried power lines came into the house. Openings that had presumably been caulked against such an occurrence were per-

mitting in some of the deluge cascading off the roof of the house. We opened the junction box to see water dripping down *through* the breakers and exposed wires. I immediately shut down the mains, but realized that the exposed wires above the main breakers were still hot. To render these harmless, I would have to go out into the storm to kill the power at the pole.

Donning my mudders and slicker, I stepped out into the tempest. Rain poured down, unrelenting. The air was alive with the booming crackle of lightning.

Hugging the outside wall, I first went to the spot on the north side of the house where water was finding its way down to the holes in the foundation wall. I covered the area with a sheet of plywood to help stem the flow. Overhead, lightning smashed through the atmosphere, followed closely by the thunderous explosions that told me I shouldn't be where I was. The lightning was close, and could at any moment strike any one or more of the trees surrounding our house. I was directly under those trees—the wrong spot to be in a storm.

But this son of an electrician knew that live wires and water do not mix. I wanted to kill the power *outside* the house, not inside. I dashed across the lawn, crossed the gravel drive, heading for the pole. Silver flashes lit up the scene. A sharp crack told me that lightning had just struck something nearby; the sound was simultaneous with the flash of light. I didn't want to be where I was, felt like a sitting duck, felt as if the electrically-charged atmosphere was hovering over my head, gathering steam for one last burst to strike me down on the spot. I wondered what it

My heart is not
proud, O LORD, my
eyes are not haughty; I do not
concern myself with great mat-
ters or things too wonderful for me.
But I have stilled and quieted my
soul; like a weaned child with its
mother, like a weaned child is
my soul within me.

Psalm 131:1-2



felt like to be struck by lightning, but figured I wouldn't know anything until I awoke in the hospital. Maybe.

I reached the base of the pole in only a few seconds and flipped up the cover to the box that contained the main shut off—and was reminded that to accomplish my task entailed more than just pulling down an outside lever. To kill the power I would have to reach inside and yank out an H-shaped bar that would sever the connection. I stared at that bar for what seemed an eternity. Rain poured down over me; everything was wet—including the hand that would be grasping that breaker. I realized that I could yank on the bar and everything would be fine. Or I could yank on it and quite possibly breathe my last.

The sky exploded again, sliced by a close lightning strike. I felt like the bulls eye in a shooting gallery. The heavens were in charge at this moment, and I had no business being out where I was: exposed, drenched, and fixing to stick my hand into electricity. Meanwhile the atmospheric form of that elemental force drew closer, crashing about my head as if thrown by an enraged Thor.

Concluding that the situation would have to be dealt with from inside, I frantically closed the cover of the metal box and retreated into the safety of the house.



King David: 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 NASB

“Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all.

“Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone.

“Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.”

Our Place Under the Son

Standing out there in the storm, helpless and quaking, at the mercy of the elements, I had been painfully reminded of my insignificance against the power and might of the One heaving those lightning bolts—not the mythical Thor, but the very real God of the universe. Right perspective comes quickly when confronted with the stark power of the Almighty.

John the Baptist understood the order of things.

The Baptizer had built up quite a reputation, quite a following. People were hungry to hear his message of repentance and consecration, so much so that they were willing to leave their homes and travel out into the desert wilderness in order to be told by him what despicable sinners they were.

But when, at the height of his career, John's disciples suggested that there may be a usurper out there, competition in the same territory, he made clear to them that this new Rabbi was far more than just another Jewish prophet.

DISCIPLE (of John)

Master, what's to become of us? We're being replaced by this other rabbi. This one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you referred to as the Lamb of God, the Messiah—He's baptizing. The people are flocking to Him instead of us! What are we to do?

JOHN

(calming him; slightly irritated at the disciple's apparent priorities)

Don't worry so. A man can only receive what is given him from heaven. Why should my baptism be more important than His? You're forgetting what I said before, "I'm not the Christ, but have been sent ahead of Him to prepare the way."

His disciple still doesn't get it.

JOHN

(patiently teaching)

Maybe you'll understand if I put it this way: The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. Jesus is the bridegroom and all the people who believe in Him are the bride. Do you understand that?

The disciple thinks so, slowly nods his head.

JOHN

(continuing)

Now, there's a third person, the friend of the bridegroom, who attends to Him, waiting at His side, listening. The friend of the bridegroom hears and rejoices at the sound of the bridegroom's voice. He delights in it! *(pause)* I am the friend of the bridegroom—and so this joy of mine has been made full.

John 3:22-36

DISCIPLE

(seriously)

What will happen to you, master?

JOHN

(simply, with a shrug)

I must decrease; He must increase.

DISCIPLE

(incredulous)

How could you even consider such a thing? God's appointed you, trained you, given you an effective ministry. God has set you apart to accomplish His will, and now you want to just fade away, giving it all to this one you call the Messiah?

JOHN

(flaring angrily)

You're as short-sighted as the rest! I call Him the Messiah because He is! With my own eyes I've seen the Holy Spirit come out of heaven and rest on Him. *(with intensity)* Don't you see? It's happened! He's here! Why do you resist the good news?

DISCIPLE

But why should this mean you diminish your work? Isn't there room for both of you?

JOHN

(struggling for patience)

The Anointed One who comes from above—from the heavenly Father—is above all; I am from the earth, so my words are of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above me—above all! He is from God and speaks the true words of God, for the Spirit given to Him is beyond

measure. The Father in heaven loves His Son and He's given all things into His hand.

DISCIPLE

(shaking his head)

It's too much for me. Will the Messiah, this Jesus, free us from the Roman tyranny?

JOHN

(as if he had never thought about that before)

I—I'm not really sure.

DISCIPLE

(disgusted)

Then why has God bothered sending Him? What good is He?!

JOHN

(furious; slapping his disciple across the face)

Shut your mouth! I won't allow such profanity! We've no right to define the Son of God. *(composing himself; but still with intensity)* What I do know is that he who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who doesn't believe will not see life. The anger of God will stay with him.

DISCIPLE

(from the ground, where John's slap has left him; contrite)
But it makes no sense to me. I—I just don't understand.

JOHN

(kneeling down to comfort)

True faith comes when we believe without understanding.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself.” The disciple must say to himself the same words Peter said of Christ when he denied Him: “I know not this man.” Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism. It is not suicide, for there is an element of self-will even in that. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only Him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us.

Jesus is Savior and Lord of my life,

My hope, my glory, my all;

Wonderful Master in joy and in strife,

On Him you too may call.

Blessed Redeemer, all glorious King,

Worthy of rev'rence I pay;

Tribute and praises I joyfully bring

To Him, the Life, the Way.

Jesus is Lord of all, Jesus is Lord of all,

Lord of my thoughts

and my service each day,

Jesus is Lord of all.

LeRoy McClard

Releasing Lordship

Marcus Dods

We must learn to cease from measuring the power of God by our own, and reasoning from one to the other.

The only sure way to do battle with Satan is to thoroughly embrace his opposition. The only sure way to overcome the self-exalting systems of Satan's domain—this world—is to thoroughly and completely embrace the system and mindset of God's. Halfway measures won't do. We will never break free of the world's "me first" philosophy until we have given ourselves completely to God's position that only He can come first.

Week in and week out believers the world over demonstrate that they are prepared only to give the Lord half of what He demands. They strap on their Sunday duds, stand faithfully in their favorite church pew and recite the familiar litany of the faithful:

"I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go"

"To God Be the glory"

"Glory Be To the Father"

"Now I Belong to Jesus"

The halfway measure is to say these words without smirking and, maybe, believe that they are true.

But to completely give ourselves over to this system we must actually live out the philosophy they represent every day of our lives. Are we truly living for God's glory or our own? When we bow our heads in our private prayer closet and speak our innermost thoughts to the Father, do we really mean what we say? Is it honesty or just well-rehearsed platitudes?

"Your will be done..."

"Everything I have is Yours..."

"...and I'll give You all the glory"

"...and for Jesus' sake..."

Several years back, our drama group in San Diego, *His Company*, required the services of a sound man who was not a member of the troupe and had never worked with us before. At our first meeting, while I was explaining the production to him, as well as those duties that would be required of him, the sound man stopped me with his condition for this "service": he would be happy to work with us—so long as he got a line of credit in the printed program. As it was a small thing (and I had planned on doing it anyway) I heartily agreed.

From that point on I always felt a little sadness for the sound man. His work for us was exemplary; he was always on time for rehearsals and on cue with the mics. But I knew that in his heart the motives were wrong. And he had foolishly exchanged the eternal reward of the Father for the fleeting glory of man.

The world will never embrace the Biblical concept of lowliness; Christ's humility is repugnant to a system that exalts self. So we can quit wasting our time trying to negotiate some pleasant compromise between the two. Jesus made this division between the two clear:

John 15:19

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

There's room for only one God—and the position has already been filled. We will never know His peace until we give up the futile notion that we are in competition with Him. He is God, and we are not, and that's it.

Reverend W. Arthur

There was a cripple who spent his life in a room where he could not see the sun. He heard of its existence, believed in it, and he had seen enough of its light to give him high ideas of its glory.

Wishing to see the sun, he was taken out at night into the streets of an illuminated city. At first he was delighted with the bright lights, but then he reflected on the sky, and realized there was darkness spread amid the lights. So he asked, "Is *this* the sun?"

Next he was taken out under a starry sky and was enraptured until, on reflection, he found that night covers the earth and was bewildered. Again he asked, "Is *this* the sun?" Finally he was carried out on a bright day at noon, and no sooner did his eye open on the sky than all questions came to an end. There is only one sun! His eye was content; it had its highest object, and knew that there was nothing brighter.

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The same is true of the soul: it enjoys all lights, yet amid those of art and nature, the soul still inquires for something greater. But when the soul is led by the reconciling Christ into the presence of the Father, and he lifts upon it the light of His countenance, all thought of anything greater disappears. As there is only one sun, so there is only one God. The soul which once discerns and knows Him, knows that there is none greater or brighter, and that the only possibility of ever beholding more glory is by drawing nearer.



To Be Lifted Up

I hear that things are different now, but the US Navy boot camp experience of the late Sixties included considerable abuse—both verbal and physical. The company commander of each unit was given broad license to express his pique in any number of ways. Any hapless recruit, fresh off the farm and still wet behind the ears, who found himself falling behind in ranks or marching out of step with the rest, could quite literally receive a sound boxing of the ears, or a hard slap up the back of his head.

Likewise the colorful descriptions with which the company commander referred to his charges were mostly profane, insulting, and wholly unsuitable for this venue. But all expressed the fundamental position that we were all the lowest of the low, dogs, worms, worthless, and generally disqualified from participating in civilized society. Though even the simplest “boot” realized that this was all for effect—designed to reduce us all to a common low level from which the Navy could rebuild each of us in its own peculiar image—it was still rather unpleasant and demeaning to be so regularly referred to as a “worm.”

Some Christians today think that the lowly boot's relation to the company commander is a fair description of the believer's relation to God the Father. They see themselves as something worthless, as something one would wipe from the bottom of a shoe, and God as the stern drill sergeant fixing to box them about the ears.

It's true that we are called to be humble, even lowly before God, but consistently in both the Old and New Testaments this is a position from which the Lord is eager to actually *exalt* us.

Humble yourselves before the Lord,
and he will lift you up. James 4:10

Biblical humility is not worthlessness, but is, instead, the holy act of finding our worth in Him. Into a world that preaches the doctrine of self-promotion and self-glorification, God the Father preaches, instead, that it is the glory we seek for ourselves that is worthless; the only glory worth having—the only glory that really lasts—is that which is given by Him as the result of our humility!



Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine;

Living with Jesus, a new life divine;

Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,

Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.

Daniel W. Whittle

Philippians. 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Going to the Mountain

Oswald Chambers

We want to be able to say, “Oh, I have had a wonderful call from God!” But to do even the most humbling tasks to the glory of God takes the Almighty God Incarnate working in us. To be utterly unnoticeable requires God’s Spirit in us making us absolutely humanly His. The true test of a saint’s life is not successfulness but faithfulness on the human level of life. We tend to set up success in Christian work as our purpose, but our purpose should be to display the glory of God in human life, to live a life “hidden with Christ in God” in our everyday human conditions. Our human relationships are the very conditions in which the ideal life of God should be exhibited.

The key to becoming agreeably small is to reach the point of realizing that we already are. What we are in comparison to God is not optional; it is a contrast fixed in time and space. “Becoming” small is similar to how we say we “magnify” the Lord.

Psalm 34:3 NKJV

Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.

When we “magnify” the Lord, we’re not literally making Him larger—we’re only making Him larger *in our lives*. To magnify the Lord is to make Him and His ways more prominent—more important—in our mind and life. He remains the same; it is our perception that changes.

Magnifying the Lord means, in a practical sense, getting closer to Him. If I am driving up Interstate 5 in California, above Sacramento, at some point I will see the snow-capped Mount Shasta looming in the distance. It begins at a manageable size, far in the distance, seen through the windshield of my car, but as I proceed down the road—as I draw nearer to the mountain—it becomes larger and larger, until its immense size and grandeur is overpowering, and I can’t take my eyes off its impressive beauty. But the mountain hasn’t changed one iota; it has remained its same dimensions throughout.

Neither have I changed. Driving closer to the mountain may make me *feel* smaller, but I am still the precise size I was miles back when I first spied the mountain through my windshield. It is only my perception that has changed, as I consider my stature in comparison to the huge monolith.

Likewise, it is only our perception that changes when we become small in relation to God. Nothing changes in a physical sense: God the Father gets no larger than He always has been, and we get no smaller than we already are.

Becoming small in an intellectual sense is accepting the truth of the relationship: No matter the distance between us, God will always be great, and we will always be small. Becoming small in a practical

sense, however, is the practice of daily magnifying who He is in our mind by continually drawing closer to Him.

We can see the fruit of being small in our horizontal relationships. We can see the fruit of a “small” mindset, for one example, in the behavior of our pastors.

In a negative sense, there is a disagreeable pattern that is often played out in the lives of some pastors who have not apprehended this perspective. Time and again we’ve seen and heard of church leaders who have become so enamored of their own abilities that they have forgotten that it is Christ, not them, who is the head of the church. They have lingered too long over their own press releases, believing the hype, believing the spin churning through their own imagination—until they have enthroned themselves as plastic dictators, reveling in their power and influence.

This is not the picture of the Lord Jesus, who, though He possessed the power of the universe, had a “small” mindset.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.



Then, as if it weren't enough for Him to stoop physically to our level, Jesus stooped even lower:

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

This picture we see in the pastor or church leader who, though he may wield influence and authority over the flock, remains humble in spirit, giving way to others, practicing the teaching of the apostle Paul to

Philip. 2:3

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.



We become small by consistently, repeatedly humbling ourselves in the shadow of the Almighty's throne. There we practice the habit, intentionally, until it becomes a part of us, something we do without thinking.

But for some it is too painful to go to the mountain of God. His all-consuming Presence is too lofty, too other-worldly to comprehend—much less apprehend. So they don't, and, as a result, they begin to grow again in their own eyes. Time spent away from the throne is time spent magnifying self.

So God has made a way. There is a place we can spend time when the mountain of God seems too high over our heads, too grand and intimidating. It is a place considerably lower, yet just as holy; it is a place of profound earthiness and humanity, yet just as sacred and hushed as God's sovereign seat.

In a small and tortured land there is a place of barren sorrow, of rock-strewn ugliness roofed over by the thundering hosannas of heaven. There is a place where evil men died, and where families bid final farewell to their loved ones, a place where the soil is

washed by the blood of the guilty and the tears of friends.

Upon this hideous crown of rock Jesus Christ gave His life. He was not evil, but pure and sinless; He was not the one guilty, but He died in the guilty's place, and His blood washed down and soaked into the hard soil, into the earth crafted by His own hands. And there His family and friends wept over the loss of one so innocent and young.

To become small, we need only return to the cross, for to gaze upon the pain and suffering of the One who sacrificed Himself for us is the surest path to humility—and an understanding of who and what we are in relation to the Lord.

To become small is to take Jesus at His word when He described, at the Sermon on the Mount, what it will be like to be an active participant in His Kingdom:

Matthew 5:3-12

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

A light bulb begins life as lowly sand. This earthly material is heated and formed into a fragile glass sphere. The hand of a superior being then screws the bulb into a threaded socket and flips a switch. Electricity instantly floods into the bulb's circuitry, causing its internal filaments to glow, bringing brilliant light into a darkened room.

For what, then, should the bulb take credit?

We are what God has made us: our talents have been gifted us from above; our skills and abilities have been nurtured by a patient Father; our accomplishments have been planned and crafted by someone greater than ourselves.

What glory, then, could possibly be due us?



Psalm 70:4-71:6, 14-16, 19

*But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation always say,
"Let God be exalted!"
Yet I am poor and needy;
come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay.
In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your
ear to me and save me.
Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from
the grasp of evil and cruel men.*

*For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confi-
dence since my youth.
From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.
But as for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.
My mouth will tell of your righteousness,
of your salvation all day long,
though I know not its measure.
I will come and proclaim your mighty acts,
O Sovereign LORD;
I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.
Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have
done great things.
Who, O God, is like you?*



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