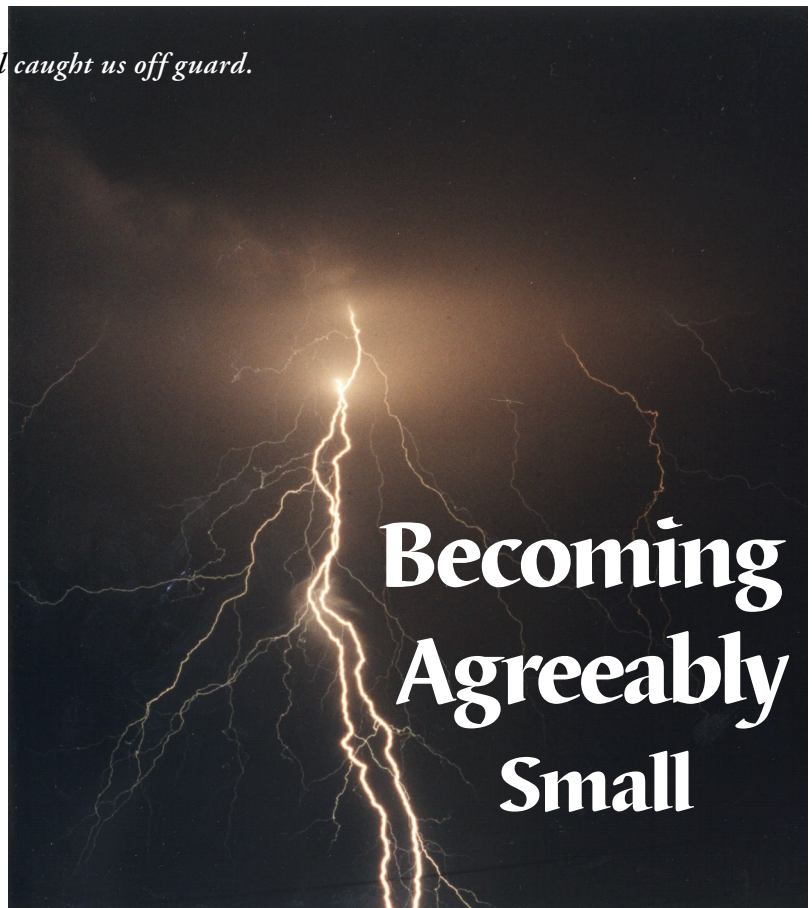


*Though the storm was foretold, its might still caught us off guard.*

A Song of Ascents, of David.

O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;  
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,  
Or in things too difficult for me.  
Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;  
Like a weaned child rests against his mother,  
My soul is like a weaned child within me.

Psalm 131:1-2



## Becoming Agreeably Small

**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 in their breast. 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 back-lighting 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 time-honored drill, we trooped down to the lowest floor carrying flashlights. For a few minutes more we got our news from the television, watching the bright colors of Doppler radar march across the state, heading right for us. But then the persistent and close lightning flashes made us unplug not only the television, 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 television or computer was one strike only one half-mile distance 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.

Huddled downstairs, listening to weather reports on the radio, we heard the dripping. Following 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 allowing 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 dam 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 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. It occurred to me that I could yank on the bar and everything would be fine. Or I could yank on it and discover the effects of 220 volts on a wet human body.

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.

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.

## We Already Are

The key to becoming agreeably small is to accept the fact 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.

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

Psalm 34:3 NKJV

When we "magnify" the Lord, we are not literally making Him larger—we're only making Him larger in our lives, in our aspect. 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 Five 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.

## Returning to the Cross

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, until it becomes 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. Realizing this, 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. dsf