

## Editorial

### The Important Unimportant

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Jesus lived it. The Bible teaches it. Deep down, people admire it. Christian mission depends on it.

Humble service.

Not fame or fortune. Not advancing by trouncing others. Not self-promotion.

Humble service.

Living that way unavoidably is a struggle. Media highlight celebrities. Ads push gadgets and comforts. Accumulating wealth is touted as the path to life's ultimate goal of human happiness—which reportedly is a deserved right. The rebellious human heart—"deceitful" and "desperately sick" as everyone's is (Jer. 17:9)—resists submissively returning to the Maker of all things.

Following Jesus means humble service. Participating in the Creator-Redeemer's mission means humble service. Finding life by losing it means humble service.

Many of God's humble servants have in fact become well-known. They have not intentionally elevated themselves, but for his own purposes God has granted these servants a measure of fame. Such biblical characters as Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, Isaiah, Mary, Peter, and Paul are widely recognized. Similarly, a number of humble Christian mission servants are familiar to many Christian circles and in some cases beyond, including Patrick, Alopen, Cyril and Methodius, Francis Xavier, William Carey, Mary Slessor, Nicholas of Japan, and Nate Saint.

Other biblical characters and Christian mission servants, however, remain relatively obscure. Jehosheba (II Kings 11; II Chron. 22), Ebed-melech (Jer. 38-39), Joanna (Luke 8, 24), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2, 4) are among the relatively "unimportant" servants recorded in Scripture who played invaluable roles in God's redemptive mission. The same goes for Euthymius (at least outside of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox circles), Rebecca Protten ("Mother of Modern Missions"), Catherine Mulgrave, and Oshikawa Masayoshi—all of whom had massive impacts through their humble service.

More numerous are the humble servants whose names are known by God but lost to subsequent generations. The children and grandchildren of the Israelites who exited Egypt. The Israelite slave girl who told Naaman's household about Elisha (II Kings 5:1-5). God's people (included in the "Faith Hall of Fame") who "were tortured, ... suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.... were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated ... wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. 11:35-38). Early followers of Jesus "who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen" and "preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19). Moravians who voluntarily became slaves as gospel messengers.

Throngs of Jesus's historically anonymous followers across the generations, living and serving in myriad contexts either among their own people or cross-culturally. The vast majority of today's

over 2.5 billion self-identifying Christians. Most of you readers and I. Called to follow Jesus as his humble servants.

In reference to this issue's articles, humble servants seek to rescue "downcast sheep" for the sake of those sheep, not for their own advancement or recognition. Conducting and taking surveys about movement catalysts humbly intends to serve the cause of God's kingdom, not to seek popularity as a masterful numbers-cruncher or expert analyst. Latin American gospel witnesses, as well as non-Latin Americans who collaborate with them, humbly serve in ways that may not seem important to others but are essential in God's eyes.

In his book entitled *No Little People*, Francis Schaeffer put the matter this way:

We must remember throughout our lives that in God's sight there are no little people and no little places. Only one thing is important: to be consecrated persons in God's place for us, at each moment. Those who think of themselves as little people in little places, if committed to Christ and living under His Lordship in the whole of life, may, by God's grace, change the flow of our generation (Schaeffer 1974, 38).

Schaeffer would no doubt agree that, even if "little" and "unimportant" followers of Jesus do not bring about noteworthy changes, humbly serving Christ is the best way to live and to participate in God's mission.

The pull toward self-promotion can be subtle and potent. Seeking to be "important" can veer away from what is actually the most important path of humble service. The risen Suffering Servant is his people's Exemplar, King, High Priest, and victorious Protector:

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (I Corin. 15:56-58).

## References

Schaeffer, Francis A. (1974). *No Little People*. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press. (Quotation from 2021 ed., Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway.)