

Little Things Mean a Lot



Christopher News Notes

“You aspire to great things? Begin with little ones.” —St. Augustine

A HESITANT TOUCH. A small coin given in charity. Both little things, seemingly ordinary. Yet, to Jesus, both of them were significant. In the first instance, Jesus was surrounded by a crowd while on His way to help someone who had sought Him out. A woman, who had heard of His reputation as a healer, touched the fringe of His garment, hoping to be cured of the bleeding that had troubled her for 12 years.

That touch could have gone unnoticed in the crowd. But Jesus sensed it, and turning to the woman, said, "Your faith has made you well."

In the second instance, Jesus was teaching in the temple and watched as people put money into the temple treasury. Many rich people put in large sums, but then a poor widow came along and put in two copper coins. Jesus noticed. Speaking to His disciples, He said, "This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had."

Little things do make a difference. It is the little things, the ordinary things, the routine things that bring change to individuals or that come to symbolize change. And that which brings change to the individual brings change to the world. For instance, it was Rosa Parks' resolve not to sit in the back of the bus that gave rise to the civil rights movement and thrust Martin Luther King, Jr., to the forefront of history.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed, "The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." President Calvin Coolidge put the same idea another way: "People criticize me for harping on the obvious. Perhaps someday I'll write an article on The Importance of the Obvious. If all the folks in the United States would do the few simple things they know they ought to do, most of our big problems would take care of themselves."

Little Things That Matter

■ **A warm greeting:** Richard Levangie, writing in *Catholic Digest*, tells of his despondency at the age of 19 following the death of his father, three other relatives, and a close friend. One day, feeling especially empty, he went to Mass in a strange church and sat off to the side, barely participating in the rite. At the sign of peace, he recalled, "Two elderly women hobbled over to my solitary corner on fragile legs. Their journey seemed to take forever, and yet their greeting was warm and caring. In the moment it took them to

arrive, I made the decision to rejoin the living."

- **Small talk:** At a father-and-son banquet at which he was to speak, baseball star Yogi Berra was happily signing his name to bats and balls given to the youngsters attending the event when he noticed a group of youngsters who had no gifts. He asked who they were and was told they were from a nearby orphanage. Berra left the head table to sit with them and sign their programs. When one of the organizers asked him to return to the head table and say a few words, Berra told him, "Go on with the program. I'm busy talking to some friends."
- **A lesson learned:** Sonya Martin of Oregon recalled that when her daughter was four, she constantly ignored requests to say "please" and "thank you." So, Mrs. Martin told the girl that each time she used the words without being reminded, she could put a penny in a jar where money for the hungry was being saved. The strategy worked. And the girl's manners improved even more when she received a letter of thanks.
- **Kind words:** the publication *Soundings* told of a reporter asking a couple about to observe their 50th wedding anniversary the secret of their marriage. The husband said that after the wedding, his wife's father had given him a package, saying this is all he needed to know to make the marriage work. In the package was a gold pocket watch. Across the face, where it would be seen daily, was this message: "Say something nice to Sarah."
- **Letters to read:** When Linda Bremner's eight-year-old son entered an Illinois hospital for treatment of the cancer that eventually took his life, he was inundated with mail. His mother noticed how it lifted his spirits. She made sure he received mail for three years. After his death, Mrs. Bremner obtained the names of other ailing children and began sending them cards, puzzles, riddles, jokes, and the like. She created the non-profit organization "Love Letters," through which she sent "fun stuff" to hundreds of terminally ill children every month.

The Power of Small Actions

"Drops of water,
grains of sand—
with time and unrelenting persistence
carve monuments in stone
no human effort can match.

So with our lives—
the fleeting thoughts,
the momentary inspirations,
the beauty seen,
the verse read,
the smile given,
the hurt ignored,
the harshness unsaid,
the small disciplines and tiny joys
form a life,
mould a character that outlasts
all the monuments of time."

—Roy Nunley

- **A promise kept:** In 1955, the son of the founder of a Georgia real estate firm deposited \$300,000 in a bank to repay some 500 stockholders who had lost money when the firm failed. The deposit fulfilled a promise made by the father 28 years earlier. The father's death and a war intervened, but Johnny Mercer, who had become a popular songwriter, never forgot his dad's promise. Mercer's songs have become classics. One of them is "Accentuate the Positive."
- **A can of food:** When Robert Simon and Celine Burk were married in Beverly Hills, they requested that guests bring some canned food to the reception. "Help us share our joy with others," they asked, revealing that the food would be distributed to the poor "as an extension of our love."

Only a Drop

What is the importance of the little things in the face of the complex issues faced by our world? Mother Teresa provided an answer when asked about the work of her religious community on

behalf of the dying poor of Calcutta. "What we are doing is just a drop in the ocean," she admitted. "But if the drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of the missing drop."

The challenge to every individual is plain. Our drops are vital to the well-being of the ocean. Here are some others who have found ways of making their drops meaningful.

- **Peace:** During the 1980s, an interfaith center for peace in Troy, New York, wanted to bring Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina to their community for a lecture series, but needed \$8,000 for the project. Then, the center's director, GERALYN McDOWELL, recalled something Esquivel had written: "The elephant is powerful, but the ants—well, there are more of us." She told *Salt* magazine, "Maybe we couldn't raise \$8,000, but there was no reason we couldn't raise \$100 – 80 times over." As each \$100 was collected, another "ant" on a project poster was colored in.
- **Environment:** Tanja Vogt, a 15-year-old sophomore in West Milford, New Jersey, began an environmental chain reaction with a paper advocating the elimination of polystyrene trays in the school cafeteria. Her class took up the cause (polystyrene is not biodegradable) and persuaded students to pay a nickel extra for paper trays. Subsequently, an all-paper policy was introduced in schools throughout the district.
- **Poverty:** Started by some Connecticut families in

1963, the Box Project assisted more than 2,500 poor families in Mississippi on a one-to-one basis. Participating donor families would send a carton of items on a monthly or bimonthly basis to a family, a struggling student, or an elderly couple with whom they would then correspond. Volunteers in Mississippi made sure that only the truly needy were taken into the program. A volunteer Box Project board matched a sponsor family with those in need.

- **Hunger:** On learning that wholesome but out-dated food was being discarded by a local supermarket, Celeste McKinley of Las Vegas talked the manager into giving the food to her for distribution to the poor. That was the start of Gleaners, an organization that served some 20,000 people, permitting them to purchase a monthly cart of groceries for two dollars.
- **Education:** In 1964, at a meeting of Baptist women, Olna Daves learned that one of every five people in Gaston County, North Carolina, could not read. With several other women, she took lessons in tutoring and then organized the Gaston Literary Council. To raise funds for books, gas, and other expenses, she made about 100 prom and wedding gowns a year. One of her graduates was a truck driver who used to ride around Gaston looking for someone to read his delivery schedule to him.
- **Family Life:** Military service in Korea left Harry Holt of Oregon with disturbing memories of the condition of many children there. A farmer, he and his wife had six children of their own, but started sending funds to care for children fathered by American servicemen. Eventually, they adopted eight Korean children, arranged placements for others, and then established Holt International Children's Services. In 30 years, the organization placed more than 50,000 children in adoptive homes.


"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

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Christopher News Note 667

ISBN: 8755-69601

**This is an edited reprint of
the classic Christopher News Note
"Little Things Mean a Lot."**