

Title: “No Little People, No Little Places”

Key verse: Exodus 4:2 & 20 (NKJV) – So the LORD said to him [Moses], “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.” . . . <sup>20</sup> Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. In the last couple of years, I have shared with you some material I learned from a Christian minister named Francis Schaeffer, one of my favorite authors. I am going to do that again today – but instead of sharing one of his books with you, I'm going to share with you one of his sermons. Francis Schaeffer had a great influence on many Christians of my generation and of the generation just before mine. In fact, he has had an influence on several men who have ministered here at Osaka International Church in years past. Schaeffer was an American missionary living in Switzerland in the 1950s when he had a spiritual crisis that caused him to rethink his whole approach to the Christian life and Christian ministry. He left his mission agency and started a brand new ministry, which he called L'Abri Fellowship. “L'Abri” is a French word meaning “the shelter.” Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith opened up their home as a shelter, a spiritual refuge, to college students and some older people who were struggling with various questions of Christian faith, because in our modern society, there are many negative voices criticizing the idea of religious faith and of Christianity in particular and even questioning the whole notion of truth. Many people visited L'Abri Fellowship because it became known as a place where anyone could come and hear honest answers to honest questions from a biblical and intellectually robust perspective. Honest answers to honest questions about the Christian faith. The ministry started in Switzerland and then they opened a second branch in England. I have studied at the England branch twice – in 1986 and 1991.

Francis Schaeffer answered many questions, gave many lectures, wrote many books, and preached many sermons. One of his sermons became somewhat of a classic, and he repeated it in several different places at several different times. It is that sermon which I would like to share with you today. I will be outlining the major thoughts in Schaeffer's message, but also add some of my own related thoughts.

The sermon is entitled “No Little People, No Little Places.” Schaeffer begins by telling the story of Moses, who had left Egypt as a fugitive and was a shepherd for 40 years in the wilderness. Then in Exodus chapter 3, we read of his encounter with God on the slopes of Mount Horeb at the burning bush.

Let me read Exodus 3:1-7 (NASB95) – Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup> Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup> He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.”

Verse 10 – “Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Here was Moses, a shepherd in the wilderness, who was suddenly visited by God. God told him that he was on holy ground, so he must remove his sandals. Then the Lord announced who He was – the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And God had a special task for Moses to do: to go to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, and to lead the people of Israel out of bondage and out of Egypt.

This was a huge task, and Moses feels that he is a nobody – how could he be the one to confront Pharaoh and to obtain the release of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt?

In verse 11 we read this – But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

And then in verse 12, God responds by saying, “I will certainly be with you.”

Here is a promise that God will be with Moses when he goes to Pharaoh with this message.

Despite the promise that God will be with Moses, he is still hesitant. Let's read Exodus 4:1-2 (NKJV) – Then Moses answered and said, “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you’.”<sup>2</sup> So the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.”

This is intriguing. Moses is worried that Pharaoh and the other people down in Egypt won't believe him when he says that God has sent him. So now God draws Moses's attention to something that seems like an unrelated topic. The Lord asks him a question: “What is that in your hand?” Moses looks at his hand and he replies, “A rod.” It's a simple shepherd's staff – nothing significant.

Let's continue reading ... Exodus 4:3-5 (NKJV) – And He [the Lord] said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.<sup>4</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail” (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand),<sup>5</sup> “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

With just a stick of wood, God performs a miraculous sign. So when Moses returns to Egypt, God will be with him and when he meets Pharaoh, Moses can repeat this sign and show the Egyptians the power of God and the fact that the Lord is with Moses.

God will use the rod of Moses – a seemingly insignificant piece of wood – to accomplish a significant task. And that is the lesson of today's message.

What do YOU have in your hand? You – my brothers and sisters gathered in this auditorium today. What do you have in your hand? You might think that you are an insignificant person ... you might think that the tools you have at your disposal are not terribly useful. But God wants to use even you. He wants to use whatever it is that you have in your hand. Big or small, significant or insignificant, God can use it. Be open to Him when He asks you to do something for His kingdom, for His church. In God's kingdom, no one is a little person. I will return to this theme a little later.

So, Moses hears God's call and he obeys. He packs up and heads back to Egypt. Exodus 4:18 (NKJV) – So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, “Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

Verse 20 – Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

*And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.*

Well, look at that. This rod is still in his hand. But did you notice how the rod is now described?

It is no longer the rod of Moses. It is now the rod of God. God is the owner of it, and He will accomplish His purposes with it down in Egypt. As you continue reading the book of Exodus, you will see Moses using this rod many times: he lifts the rod to bring the judgements of many plagues on Egypt, he uses it again to part the Red Sea so that the children of Israel can cross, and then he uses it to provide water to the people in the wilderness. This rod is used for both judgment and blessing.

The rod of Moses has become the rod of God. I told you that today's message originally came from Francis Schaeffer, and when he preached this message, he said this (let me quote):

Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. ... Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me must become the me of God. Then, I can become useful in God's hands. ... The problem for each of us is applying this truth to ourselves: Is Francis Schaeffer the Francis Schaeffer of God?

That's the end of this quote. And I could personalize this lesson for myself: Is Brad Houdyshel the Brad Houdyshel of God? Does Brad live with the awareness that he does not belong to himself but he belongs to God? And that anything that he has in his hand can be useful to accomplish God's purposes? How about you? Do you live with an awareness that you belong to God, that you should consider yourself to be: the "you" of God?

Let me quote 1st Corinthians 6:19-20 (NASB95) – Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

*You have been bought with a price. You are not your own.*

Let's read 1st Peter 1:18-19 (NASB95) – Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Christ died for your sins to pardon you. He redeemed us from a life of sin. And that means we are now His – we belong to Him.

Francis Schaeffer continues. He says this:

But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me must become the me of God. Then, I can become useful in God's hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people.

There are no little people and no big people – there are only consecrated people or unconsecrated people. Have you consecrated yourself to God? Have you dedicated yourself and your possessions to God? Do you consider that you belong to God? If so, then you are a child of the King. And you are not a little person. No one is a little person in God's Kingdom. God can use even you.

I have shared with you before some of my thoughts on 1st Corinthians chapter 12, where the Apostle Paul lists the spiritual gifts that are given to each member of the church, the Body of Christ. Let me share those thoughts with you again today.

Let's read 1st Corinthians 12:4-7 (NASB95) – Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Verse 11 – But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Verses 14-17 – For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

Verses 21-23 – And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable.

Every member of the church is important and no spiritual gift is more important than others – every member is important and all gifts are important, even the less flashy gifts, the less noticeable gifts. Don't consider yourself small and insignificant. In Francis Schaeffer's words: there are no little people or big people ... there are only consecrated people or unconsecrated people. Let us each seek to be a consecrated person and play our part in the Body of Christ. Your part is important no matter how small you think it might be.

There is another passage of Scripture that I am quite fond of. It's the Parable of the Talents, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25. Here, the word "talent" doesn't mean a skill or a personality trait – it is unit of money in the ancient world. In this parable, a rich man gives some of his servants one or more talents of money in order to do business with it and increase the profits.

Let me read Matthew 25:14-18 (NKJV) where Jesus tells this parable – “For it (*the kingdom of heaven*) is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. <sup>15</sup> And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. <sup>16</sup> Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. <sup>17</sup> And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received one [talent] went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.”

Each of these three servants had different abilities and the rich man gives them each a different amount of money, in accordance with each one's ability, and the rich man expects the servants to do business with the money. Two of the servants do exactly that, but the third servant is either fearful or lazy and he simply digs a hole in the ground and keeps the money there.

Let's continue reading the story. Verses 19-21 – “After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ <sup>21</sup> His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

Verses 22 and 23 tell the same story about the second servant.

Then the third servant comes forward. He says this in verse 25 – “‘And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’”

In verse 26, the master calls him a "wicked and lazy servant." Then in verse 27, the master says this – “‘So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.’”

That servant did not do the minimum sensible thing: he didn't even put the money in the bank where it could have at least earned a little interest.

When I read this story, I see that we all have differing abilities, and God gives us a task that matches our ability level. In 1st Corinthians 12, we each have a spiritual gift and we each should exercise our gift for the benefit of the whole church. In Matthew 25 and the Parable of the Talents, we see that the important thing is not the size of the task we have been given but whether or not we are faithful to perform that task. The third servant failed to show any faithfulness at all. I would hope that none of my brothers and sisters here would neglect to do anything to help build the kingdom of God.

When I read the Parable of the Talents and look at myself in the light of this story, I don't see myself as a five-talent person ... nor do I think I'm a one-talent person. Maybe I'm a two-talent person. I don't have a super amount of ability, but I do have some ability and I ought to be using it for the benefit of the kingdom of God. I've described to you before how I started out small in Christian ministry at my home church in California and also here at OIC. I sometimes lead a Bible study group, and for more than 15 years I have been on the Sound System team. I don't have very good ears and I'm not mechanically oriented, but I am a detail-oriented person, so I volunteered to serve on the Sound System team. I was content for a long time to be somebody serving behind the scenes at OIC, but then one day about seven years ago, Pastor Alistair asked me to start preaching sometimes. There was a time when I could not imagine speaking in front of people – especially speaking about God's Word – but when Pastor Alistair made his request, I calmly said Yes. I have had a lifetime of consuming Christian material – listening to sermons, reading books, studying the Bible – so now I am sharing that knowledge with my church family. This is where the pastor and the church council would like me serving when needed.

Well, let me return to Francis Schaeffer's theme of "No Little People, No Little Places." I made an excursion into 1st Corinthians 12 and Matthew 25, but that was not a part of Schaeffer's original message – that excursion was my own related thoughts on this topic. Schaeffer points out that there are no little people and no big people – there are only consecrated people or unconsecrated people. Whether you have a big task or a small task, the important thing is that you be devoted to God and be faithful to Him and to His people. Every person is precious in God's sight. One of the bedrock foundational notions of L'Abri Fellowship is the doctrine that every person is made in the image of God and therefore every person has dignity and value. In the 1950s, when Francis and Edith Schaeffer left their mission agency and opened up their home as a shelter to Christians and non-Christians struggling with various questions related to faith, the visitors found that they and their questions were treated with respect and they were given thoughtful, biblical, and intellectually sound answers to their questions. They found Francis and Edith Schaeffer genuinely cared for every student who visited them. Each one of us is made in the image of God and each one has dignity and value.

In those early years in the 1950s, the ministry of L'Abri Fellowship often struggled financially. And yet they also had some remarkable answers to prayer and God supplied their needs. Francis Schaeffer has often said that L'Abri Fellowship would not have grown into the ministry it became if the Schaeffers had not been willing to be little people in a little place. It takes humility and a servant's heart to be a successful instrument in God's hands.

Let me read Matthew 20:25-27 (NKJV) – But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.<sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.<sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.”

The way to be truly effective as a Christian minister is to be a humble servant to others. This leads us to the other half of the title of today's sermon: just as there are really No Little People, so also there is No Little Place. If you are where the Lord would have you be, then it makes no difference if you are in a seemingly small place or a seemingly big place.

As I was reading through Francis Schaeffer's sermon again in preparation for writing my own message for today, I was reminded of something I heard many years ago. I heard that quite a few seminary students have some big ideas for what kind of ministry they imagine they can be involved in in the future. Some of these students imagine having a large, influential ministry like what John MacArthur or John Piper have. But such notions, I think, are out of place. We should not be imagining great things for ourselves. We should actually seek smaller places.

Let me quote a little more of Schaeffer's sermon:

But if a Christian is consecrated, does this mean he will be in a big place instead of a little place? The answer, the next step, is very important: As there are no little people in God's sight, so there are no little places. To be wholly committed to God in the place where God wants him—this is the creature glorified [the human being glorified]. ...

Nowhere more than in America are Christians caught in the twentieth-century syndrome of size. ... Not only does God not say that size and spiritual power go together, but he even reverses this (especially in the teaching of Jesus) and tells us to be deliberately careful not to choose a place too big for us. We all tend to emphasize big works and big places, but all such emphasis is of the flesh. To think in such terms is simply to hearken back to the old, unconverted, egoist, self-centered Me.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:26 – "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant."

Again, the issue is that each of us must be a consecrated person, a person consecrated to God and serving in the place where God would have you to be, and to do it faithfully. The size of the place does not matter.

Schaeffer points us to a parable in Luke 14 to show us the mindset that we should have. Let me read Luke 14:8-11 (NIV) where Jesus says this – "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. <sup>11</sup> For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

We should seek the lower place. If we later are invited to take a higher place, then we may humbly accept the honor.

There are No Little People and No Little Places. No one is little in God's kingdom – everyone is unique and valued. Everyone has a part to play ... everyone has a spiritual gift to exercise in the Body of Christ, the church. And there is no little place. If you are where God wants you to be, then that is the right place to be and you need seek no other place.

I began this sermon with the story of Moses. What did he have in his hand? He had a rod, a shepherd's staff. What do you have in your hand? Whatever it is you have, God can use it for His purposes. The rod of Moses became the rod of God. Whatever you have in your hand, whether it is some possession or some ability you have or something else, give it to God and let Him work His purposes through you. Nothing is too small to give Him. There are no little people and no little places in God's kingdom. We all have a part to play in God's kingdom, and I pray that you all will find your place and dedicate yourself and your resources to God's work.