

Encouragement for the Depressed

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"For who hath despised the day of small things?"—Zechariah 4:10.

Zechariah was engaged in the building of the temple. When its foundations were laid, it struck everybody as being a very small edifice compared with the former glorious structure of Solomon. The friends of the enterprise lamented that it should be so small; the foes of it rejoiced and uttered strong expressions of contempt. Both friends and foes doubted whether, even on that small scale, the structure would ever be completed. They might lay the foundations, and they might rear the walls a little way, but they were too feeble a folk, possessed of too little riches and too little strength, to carry out the enterprise. It was the day of small things. Friends trembled; foes jeered. But the prophet rebuked them both—rebuked the unbelief of friends, and the contempt of enemies, by this question, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" and by a subsequent prophecy which removed the fear.

Now we shall use this question at this time for the comfort of two sorts of people—first, *for weak believers*, and secondly, *for feeble workers*. Our object shall be the strengthening of the hands that hang down, and the confirming of the feeble knees. We will begin, first of all, with:

I. WEAK BELIEVERS

Let us describe them. It is with them a day of small things. Probably you have only been lately brought into the family of God. A few months ago you were a stranger to the divine life, and to the things of God. You have been born again, and you have the weakness of the infant. You are not strong yet, as you will be when you have grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the early day with you, and it is also the day of small things. Now your *knowledge is small*. My dear brother, you have not been a Bible student long: thank God that you know yourself a sinner, and Christ your Saviour. That is precious knowledge; but you feel now what you once would not have confessed—your own ignorance of the things of God. Especially do the deep things of God trouble you. There are some doctrines that are very simple to other believers that appear to be mysterious, and even to be depressing to you. They are high—you cannot attain to them. They are to you what hard nuts would be to children, whose teeth have not yet appeared. Well, be not at all alarmed about this. All the men in God's family have once been children too. There are some that seem to be born with knowledge—Christians that come to a height in Christ very rapidly. But these are only here and there. Israel did not produce a Samson every day. Most have to go through a long period of spiritual infancy and youth. And, alas! There are but few in the Church, even now, who might be called fathers there. Do not marvel, therefore, if you are somewhat small in your knowledge. Your *discernment, too, is small*. It is possible that anybody with a fluent

tongue would lead you into error. You have, however, discernment, if you are a child of God, sufficient to be kept from deadly errors, for though there are some who would, if it were possible, deceive even the very elect, yet the elect cannot be deceived, for, the life of God being in them, they discern between the precious and the vile—they choose not the things of the world, but they follow after the things of God. Your discernment, however, seeming so small, need not afflict you. It is by reason of use, when the senses are exercised, that we fully discern between all that is good and all that is evil. Thank God for a little discernment—though you see men as trees walking, and your eyes are only half opened. A little light is better than none at all. Not long since you were in total darkness. Now if there be a glimmer, be thankful, for remember where a glimmer can enter the full noontide can come, yea, and shall come in due season. Therefore, despise not the time of small discernment. Of course, you, my dear brother or sister, have *small experience*. I trust you will not ape experience, and try to talk as if you had the experience of the veteran saints when you are as yet only a raw recruit. You have not yet done business on the great waters. The more fierce temptations of Satan have not assailed you—the wind has been tempered as yet to the shorn lamb; God has not hung heavy weights on slender threads, but hath put a small burden on a weak back. Be thankful that it is so. Thank him for the experience that you have, and do not be desponding because you have not more. It will all come in due time. "Despise not the day of small things." It is always unwise to get down a biography and say, "Oh! I cannot be right, because I have not felt all this good man did." If a child of ten years of age were to take down the diary of his grandfather and were to say, "Because I do not feel my grandfather's weakness, do not require to use his spectacles, or lean upon his staff, therefore I am not one of the same family," it would be very foolish reasoning. Your experience will ripen. As yet it is but natural that it should be green. Wait a while and bless God for what you have.

Probably this, however, does not trouble you so much as one other thing, you have *but small faith*, and, that faith being small, your feelings are very variable. I often hear this from young beginners in the divine life, "I was so happy a month ago, but I have lost that happiness now." Perhaps tomorrow, after they have been at the house of God, they will be as cheerful as possible, but the next day their joy is gone. Beware, my dear Christian friends, of living by feeling. John Bunyan puts down Mr. Live-by-feeling as one of the worst enemies of the town of Mansoul. I think he said he was hanged. I am afraid he, somehow or other, escaped from the executioner, for I very commonly meet him; and there is no villain that hates the souls of men and causes more sorrow to the people of God than this Mr. Live-by-feeling. He that lives by feeling will be happy today, and unhappy tomorrow; and if our salvation depended upon our feelings, we should be lost one day and saved another, for they are as fickle as the weather, and go up and down like a barometer. We live by faith, and if that faith be weak, bless God that weak faith is faith, and that weak faith is true faith. If thou believest in Christ Jesus, though thy faith be as a grain of mustard seed, it will save thee, and it will, by-and-bye, grow into something stronger. A diamond is a diamond, and the smallest scrap of it is of the same nature as the Koh-i-noor, and he that hath but little faith hath faith for all that; and it is not great faith that is essential to salvation, but faith that links the soul to Christ; and that soul is, therefore, saved. Instead of mourning so much that thy faith is not strong, bless God that thou hast any faith at all, for if he sees that thou despisest the faith he has given thee, it may be long before he gives thee more. Prize that little, and when he sees that thou art so

glad and thankful for that little, then will he multiply it and increase it, and thy faith shall mount even to the full assurance of faith.

I think I hear you also add to all this the complaint that your *other graces seem to be small* too. "Oh," say you, "my patience is so little. If I have a little pain I begin to cry out. I was in hopes I should be able to bear it without murmuring. My courage is so little: the blush is on my cheek if anybody asks me about Christ—I think I could hardly confess him before half a dozen, much less before the world. I am very weak indeed." Ah! I don't wonder. I have known some who have been strong by reason of years, and have still been lacking in that virtue. But where faith is weak, of course, the rest will be weak. A plant that has a weak root will naturally have a weak stem and then will have but weak fruit. Your weakness of faith sends a weakness through the whole. But for all this, though you are to seek for more faith, and consequently for more grace—for stronger graces, yet do not despise what graces you have. Thank God for them, and pray that the few clusters that are now upon you, may be multiplied a thousand-fold to the praise of the glory of his grace. Thus I have tried to describe those who are passing through the day of small things.

But the text says, "*Who hath despised the day of small things?*" Well, some have, but there is a great comfort in this—*God the Father has not*. He has looked upon you—you with little grace, and little love, and little faith, and he has not despised you. No, God is always near the feeble saint. If I saw a young man crossing a common alone, I should not be at all astonished, and I should not look round for his father. But I saw today, as I went home, a very tiny little tot right out on the Common—a pretty little girl, and I thought, "The father or mother are near somewhere." And truly there was the father behind a tree, whom I had not seen. I was as good as sure that the little thing was not there all alone. And when I see a little weak child of God, I feel sure that God the Father is near, watching with wakeful eye, and tending with gracious care the feebleness of his newborn child. He does not despise you if you are resting on his promise. The humble and contrite have a word all to themselves in Scripture—these he will not despise.

It is another sweet and consoling thought that *God the Son does not despise* the day of small things. Jesus Christ does not, for you remember this word, "He shall carry the lambs in his bosom." We put that which we most prize nearest our heart, and this is what Jesus does. Some of us, perhaps, have outgrown the state in which we were lambs, but to ride in that heavenly carriage of the Saviour's bosom—we might well be content to go back and be lambs again. He does not despise the day of small things.

And it is equally consolatory to reflect that *the Holy Spirit does not despise* the day of small things, for he it is who, having planted in the heart the grain of mustard seed, watches over it till it becomes a tree. He it is who, having seen the newborn child of grace, doth nurse, and feed, and tend it until it comes to the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. The blessed Godhead despises not the weak believer. O weak believer, be consoled by this.

Who is it, then, that may despise the day of small things? *Perhaps Satan has* told you and whispered in your ear that such little grace as yours is not worth having, that such an insignificant plant as you are will surely be rooted up. Now let me tell you that Satan is a liar, for he himself does not despise the day of small things; and I am sure of that, because he always makes a dead set upon those who are just coming to Christ. As soon as

ever he sees that the soul is a little wounded by conviction, as soon as ever he discovers that a heart begins to pray, he will assault it with fiercer temptations than ever. I have known him try to drive such a one to suicide, or to lead him into worse sin than he has ever committed before. He:

"Trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."

He may tell you that the little grace in you is of no account, but he knows right well that it is the handful of corn on the top of the mountain, the fruit whereof shall shake like Lebanon. He knows it is the little grace in the heart that overthrows his kingdom there. "Ah!" say you, "but I have been greatly troubled lately because I have many *friends that despise me*, because though I can hardly say I am a believer, yet I have some desire towards God." What sort of friends are these? Are they worldly friends? Oh! Do not fret about what they say. It would never trouble me if I were an artist, if a blind man were to utter the sharpest criticism on my works. What does he know about it? And when an ungodly person begins to say about your piety that it is deficient and faulty, poor soul, let him say what he will—it need not affect you. "Ah!" say you, "the persons that seem to despise me, and to put me out, and tell me that I am no child of God, are, I believe, Christians." Well then, do two things: first, lay what they say to you in a measure to heart, because it may be if God's children do not see in you the mark of a child, perhaps you are not a child. Let it lead you to examination. Oh! Dear friends, it is very easy to be self-deceived, and God may employ, perhaps, one of his servants to enlighten you upon this, and deliver you from a strong delusion. But, on the other hand, if you really do trust in your Saviour, if you have begun to pray, if you have some love to God, and any Christian treats you harshly as if he thought you a hypocrite, forgive him—bear it. He has made a mistake. He would not do so if he knew you better. Say within yourself, "After all, if my brother does not know me, it is enough if my Father does. If my Father loves me, though my brother gives me the cold shoulder, I will be sorry for it, but it shall not break my heart. I will cling the closer to my Lord because his servants seem shy of me." Why, it is not much wonder, is it, that some Christians should be afraid of some of you converts, for think what you used to be a little while ago? Why, a mother hears her son say he is converted. A month or two ago she knew where he spent his evenings, and what were his habits of sin, and though she hopes it is so, she is afraid lest she should lead him to presumption, and she rejoices with trembling, and, perhaps, tells him more about her trembling than she does about her rejoicing. Why, the saints of old could not think Saul was converted at first. He was to be brought into the church meeting and received—I will suppose the case. I should not wonder before he came, when he saw the elders, one of them would say, "Well, the young man seems to know something of the grace of God: there is certainly a change in him, but it is a remarkable thing that he should wish to join the very people he was persecuting; but, perhaps, it is a mere impulse. It may be, after all, that he will go back to his old companions." Do you wonder they should say so? I don't. I am not at all surprised. I am sorry when there are unjust suspicions, I am sorry when a genuine child of God is questioned; but I would not have you lay it much to heart. As I have said before, if your Father knows you, you need not be so broken in heart because your brother does not. Be glad that God does not despise the day of small things. And now let me say to you who are in this state of small things, that I *earnestly trust that you will not yourselves despise the day of small things*. "How can we do that?" say you. Why,

you can do it by desponding. Why, I think there was a time when you would have been ready to leap for joy, if you had been told that you would have given you a little faith, and now you have got a little faith, instead of rejoicing, you are sighing, and moaning, and mourning. Do not do so. Be thankful for moonlight, and you shall get sunlight: be thankful for sunlight, and you shall get that light of heaven that is as the light of seven days. Do not despond lest you seem to despise the mercy that God has given you. A poor patient that has been very, very lame and weak, and could not rise from his bed, is at last able to walk with a stick. "Well," he says to himself, "I wish I could walk, and run, and leap as other men." Suppose he sits down and frets because he cannot. His physician might put his hand on his shoulder and say, "My good fellow, why, you ought to be thankful you can stand at all. A little while ago you know you could not stand upright. Be glad for what you have got: don't seem to despise what has been done for you." I say to every Christian here, while you long after strength, don't seem to despise the grace that God has bestowed, but rejoice and bless his name.

You can despise the day of small things, again, *by not seeking after more.* "That is strange," say you. Well, a man who has got a little, and does not want more—it looks as if he despised the little. He who has a little light, and does not ask for more light, does not care for light at all. You that have a little faith, and do not want more faith, do not value faith at all—you are despising it. On the one hand, do not despond because you have the day of small things, but in the next place, *do not stand still and be satisfied with what you have;* but prove your value of the little by earnestly seeking after more grace. Do not despise the grace that God has given you, but bless God for it: and do this in the presence of his people. If you hold your tongue about your grace, and never let anyone know, surely it must be because you do not think it is worth saying anything about. Tell your brethren, tell your sisters, and they of the Lord's household, that the Lord hath done gracious things for you; and then it will be seen that you do not despise his grace.

And now let us run over a thought or two about these small things in weak believers. Be it remembered that little faith is saving faith, and that the day of small things is a day of safe things. Be it remembered that it is natural that living things should begin small. The man is first a babe. The daylight is first of all twilight. It is by little and by little that we come unto the stature of men in Christ Jesus. The day of small things is not only natural, but promising. Small things are living things. Let them alone, and they grow. The day of small things has its beauty and its excellence. I have known some who in after years would have liked to have gone back to their first days. Oh! well do some of us remember when we would have gone over hedge and ditch to hear a sermon. We had not much knowledge, but oh! how we longed to know. We stood in the aisles then, and we never got tired. Now soft seats we need, and very comfortable places, and the atmosphere must neither be too hot nor too cold. We are getting dainty now perhaps; but in those first young days of spiritual life, what appetites we had for divine truth, and what zeal, what sacred fire was in our heart! True, some of it was wild fire, and, perhaps, the energy of the flesh mingled with the power of the spirit, but, for all that, God remembers the love of our espousals, and so do we remember it too. The mother loves her grown-up son, but sometimes she thinks she does not love him as she did when she could cuddle him in her arms. Oh! the beauty of a little child! Oh! the beauty of a lamb in the faith! I daresay, the farmer and the butcher like the sheep better than the lambs, but the lambs are best to look at, at any rate; and the rosebud—there is a charm about it that there is not in the full-

blown rose. And so in the day of small things there is a special excellence that we ought not to despise. Besides, small as grace may be in the heart, it is divine—it is a spark from the ever-blazing sun. He is a partaker of the divine nature who has even a little living faith in Christ. And being divine, it is immortal. Not all the devils in hell could quench the feeblest spark of grace that ever dropped into the heart of man. If God has given thee faith as a grain of mustard seed, it will defy all earth and hell, all time and eternity, ever to destroy it. So there is much reason why we should not despise the day of small things.

One word and I leave this point. You Christians, don't despise anybody, but specially do not despise any in whom you see even a little love to Christ. But do more—look after them, look after the little ones. I think I have heard of a shepherd who had a remarkably fine flock of sheep, and he had a secret about them. He was often asked how it was that his flocks seemed so much to excel all others. At last he told the secret—"I give my principal attention to the lambs." Now you elders of the church, and you my matronly sisters, you that know the Lord, and have known him for years, look up the lambs, search them out, and take a special care of them; and if they are well nurtured in their early days they will get a strength of spiritual constitution that will make them the joy of the Good Shepherd during the rest of their days. Now I leave that point.

In the second place, I said that I would address a word or two to:

II. **FEEBLE WORKERS**

Thank God, there are many workers here tonight, and maybe they will put themselves down as feeble. May the words I utter be an encouragement to them, and to feeble workers collectively. When a church begins, it is usually small; and the day of small things is a time of considerable anxiety and fear. I may be addressing some who are members of a newly organized church. Dear brethren, do not despise the day of small things. Rest assured that God does not save by numbers, and that results are not in the spiritual kingdom in proportion to numbers. I have been reading lately with considerable care the life of John Wesley by two or three different authors in order to get as well as I could a fair idea of the good man; but one thing I have noticed—that the beginnings of the work which has become so wonderfully large were very small indeed. Mr. Wesley and his first brethren were not rich people. Nearly all that joined him were poor. Here and there, there was a person of some standing, but the Methodists were the poor of the land. And his first preachers were not men of education. One or two were so, but the most were good outdoor preachers—head preachers, magnificent preachers as God made them by his Spirit; but they were not men who had had the benefit of college training, or who were remarkable for ability. The Methodists had neither money nor eminent men at first, and their numbers were very few. During the whole life of that good man, which was protracted for so many years, the denomination did not attain any very remarkable size. They were few, and apparently feeble; but Methodism was never so glorious as it was at first, and there never were so many conversions, I believe, as in those early days. Now I speak sorrowfully. It is a great denomination. It abounds in wealth: I am glad it does. It has mighty orators: I rejoice it has. But it has no increase, no conversion. This year and other years it remains stationary. I do not say this because that is an exceptional denomination, for almost all others have the same tale. Year by year as the statistics come in, it is just this. "No increase—hardly hold our ground." I use that as an illustration here. This church will get in precisely the same condition if we do not look out—just the same state. When we have not the means we get the blessing, and when we seem to have the

might and power, then the blessing does not come. Oh! may God send us poverty; may God send us lack of means, and take away our power of speech if it must be, and help us only to stammer, if we may only thus get the blessing. Oh! I crave to be useful to souls, and all the rest may go where it will. And each church must crave the same. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Instead of despising the day of small things, we ought to be encouraged. It is by the small things that God seems to work, but the great things he does not often use. He won't have Gideon's great host—let them go to their homes—let the mass of them go. Bring them down to the water: pick out only the men that lap, and then there is a very few. You can tell them almost on your fingers' ends—just two or three hundred men. Then Gideon shall go forth against the Midianites; and as the cake of barley bread smote the tent, and it lay along, so the sound of the sword of the Lord and of Gideon at the dead of night shall make the host to tremble, and the Lord God shall get to himself the victory. Never mind your feebleness, brethren, your fewness, your poverty, your want of ability. Throw your souls into God's cause, pray mightily, lay hold on the gates of heaven, stir heaven and earth, rather than be defeated in winning souls, and you will see results that will astonish you yet. "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

Now take the case of each Christian individually. Every one of us ought to be at work for Christ, but the great mass of us cannot do great things. Don't despise, then, the day of little things. You can only give a penny. Now then, he that sat over by the treasury did not despise the widow's two mites that made a farthing. Your little thank-offering, if given from your heart, is as acceptable as if it had been a hundred times as much. Don't, therefore, neglect to do the little. Don't despise the day of small things. You can only give away a tract in the street. Don't say, "I won't do that." Souls have been saved by the distribution of tracts and sermons. Scatter them, scatter them—they will be good seed. You know not where they may fall. You can only write a letter to a friend sometimes about Christ. Don't neglect to do it: write one tomorrow. Remember a playmate of yours; you may take liberties with him about his soul from your intimacy with him. Write to him about his state before God, and urge him to seek the Saviour. Who knows?—a sermon may miss him, but a letter from the well-known school companion will reach his heart. Mother, it is only two or three little children at home that you have an influence over. Despise not the day of small things. Take them tomorrow; put your arms around their necks as they kneel by you—pray, "God bless my boys and girls, and save them"—tell them of Christ now. Oh! How well can mothers preach to children! I can never forget my mother's teaching. On the Sunday night, when we were at home, she would have us round the table and explain the Scriptures as we read, and then pray; and one night she left an impression upon my mind that never will be erased, when she said, "I have told you, my dear children, the way of salvation, and if you perish you will perish justly. I shall have to say 'Amen' to your condemnation if you are condemned"; and I could not bear that. Anybody else might say "Amen," but not my mother. Oh! You don't know—you that have to deal with children—what you may do. Despise not these little opportunities. Put a word in edgeways for Christ—you that go about in trains, you that go into workshops and factories. If Christians were men who were all true to their colours, I think we should soon see a great change come over our great establishments. Speak up for Jesus—be not ashamed of him, and because you can say but little, don't refuse, therefore, to say that, but rather say it over twenty times, and so make the little into much. Again, and again, and

again, repeat the feeble stroke, and there shall come to be as much result from it as from one tremendous blow. God accepts your little works if they are done in faith in his dear Son. God will give success to your little works: God will educate you by your little works to do greater works; and your little works may call out others who shall do greater works by far than ever you shall be able to accomplish. Evangelists, go on preaching at the street corner—you that visit the low lodging-houses, go on. Get into the room and talk of Jesus Christ there as you have done. You that go into the country towns on the Sabbath and speak on the village-greens of Christ, go on with it. I am glad to see you, but I am glad to miss you when I know you are about the Master's work. We don't want to keep the salt in the box: let it be rubbed into the putrid mass to stay the putrifaction. We don't want the seed forever in the corn-bin: let it be scattered and it will give us more. Oh! Brothers and sisters, wake up if any of you are asleep. Don't let an ounce of strength in this church be wasted—not a single grain of ability, either in the way of doing, or praying, or giving, or holy living. Spend and be spent, for who hath despised the day of small things? The Lord encourage weak believers, and the Lord accept the efforts of feeble workers, and send to both his richest benediction for Christ's sake. Amen.

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