

## THE POWER OF THE LITTLE THINGS

Zechariah 4:10 “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin”

“I challenge you to grow one inch per day as a person. At the end of one year you will have grown 30 feet and 5 inches. Where I’m from that’s a giant.”

It’s the little things that will make you a great leader. When we look at the lives of what we would classify great leadership, it is because of great achievements. But in each of the lives of the greatest, look back at what got them there.

### PROMINENT EXAMPLES

In the world of sports, no one talks about Larry Bird’s dedication to shooting 500 shots each morning before he would go to school. You never hear about how inadequate the “experts” felt Tom Brady was when he was at Michigan or when he was drafted into the NFL.

In the business world, J.B. Hunt Sr. of Hunt Transport Services, the largest publicly owned trucking company in the U.S., started from nothing during the Great Depression. His first job was at his uncle’s sawmill. He held jobs as a lumber salesman, an auctioneer, and a truck driver. His first stint in the trucking business ended with a \$19,000 loss in the early 60s. But he learned from the little things and ultimately built a trucking empire second to none. The little things were large to him. His focus on the small made him big.

In the retail business, it would be remiss if we didn’t mention Sam Walton of Walmart. Like J.B. Hunt, Sam grew up during the Great Depression with little money to go around. But he dedicated himself to the little things, ultimately becoming the youngest Eagle Scout in Missouri’s history at the time. He milked the family cow, bottled the surplus milk, sold it to neighbors, and had a newspaper route to make a few dollars to help the family. He was voted “Most Versatile Boy” by his peers at David H. Hickman High School in Columbia, Missouri upon graduation. He started in retail with J.C. Penney after college for \$75 a month before entering the military for service in World War II. His first store was a Ben Franklin store in Newport, Arkansas. The rest is history. By committing himself to the small things of business, which he would continually integrate into his business model for Wal Mart, he ultimately built an empire second to none.

### LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

David was a master of the little things. He was “least likely to succeed” as voted upon by his father when we first meet him. “Surely David isn’t God’s chosen one,” was what went through his mind when Samuel came to anoint Israel’s next king. But “man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart,” and David’s heart intrigued God. We’ve already seen that in previous studies. To say he was an overachiever is to understate the obvious.

Why? I believe a great part of what would ultimately be his greatness as a leader began with the “trivial” things that many disregarded as too insignificant to waste time upon. When his brothers were fighting wars, David was on the back side of a barren land finding green pastures and still waters for his “few sheep”. While doing his daily chores he dedicated himself to becoming a better person. We see this in many ways, not the least being mastering playing the harp. Why master a harp? What good was that in the real world of his day?

And why become a master with a sling shot? The world had modernized and real warriors carried weapons of significance. Maybe money wasn't available to provide David with anything but a rod and staff to protect his sheep, but something drove him in his formative years to master the tools he had at his disposal and master it he did. It became his "go to" weapon of choice and was instrumental in making him a great shepherd who protected his sheep as few ever had. It would become a weapon of renown when he killed Goliath.

Why write poetry? Real men don't write poetry. That's for the "girly men" of life, men who are not good at anything else. Being sensitive is not a "manly" trait. That didn't stop David. He wrote as a young shepherd boy, he wrote as a seasoned warrior and leader of champions, and he wrote as the anointed king of Israel. He cared little about what others had to say about him. He cared more about developing himself in the small things of life that others regarded as insignificant. And God decided to publish his poetry in a book called Psalms.

Why take the time for personal grooming? Do sheep care what you look or smell like? Yet David did. We know from the description of him in I Samuel 16 that he was well groomed. It's the little things, the things that "don't matter" that matter to the greatest among us.

He never thought himself too large to grow. He dedicated himself to the small things, even when he became the "big thing." Men sought his leadership. Seasoned warriors followed him. Women thronged to sing his songs. Giants and life's fiercest animals feared him. His enemies respected him. Shepherds and sheep loved him. Prophets admired him. His impact upon Israel is unparalleled in their history.

Little things. Don't despise the little things. Pebbles become mounds, mounds become hills, and hills become mountains. It's the small things that ultimately grow into big things, things that set the Great Leaders from the rest.

It is a true statement that the hardest discipline in leadership is leading yourself. The things we are going to look at are things you choose to do in private. They are not things to boast about. They are the little things of life that will make for big ROI if you will be intentional about them. "I challenge you to grow one inch per day as a person. At the end of one year you will have grown 30 feet and 5 inches. Where I'm from that's a giant." What does that look like in real life? With great humor Mark Twain wrote, *"The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd rather not."* The sad truth is, he's telling the truth. Health requires great discipline and attention to the small things. Here are some thoughts for your health.

## 9 DISCIPLINES OF LIFE

1. **Physical health.** William Shakespear wrote, *"Our bodies are our gardens – our wills are our gardeners."* Another great quote from Jim Rohr says, *"Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live."* I set forth a challenge to each of you. Dedicate yourself to growing 1 inch each day physically. Not a literal inch, but an inch in health habits, eating habits, exercise habits, and any habit you can form to make yourself a better physical you. You might say, "I don't have time." If you don't take time to take care of your physical health, that statement will prove itself true – YOU WON'T HAVE TIME. Time and long life is on the side of the physically fit. The results will astound you if you will dedicate yourself to an inch a day of physical discipline.
2. **Emotional health.** "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord." (II Corinthians 3:18) A short two line poem I read years ago said, "Two men looked through prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars." You will be a reflection of what you decide to focus on in life. If you focus on the negative, you will be negative. If you focus on what's going on in the world, you will reflect what's going on in the

world. If you focus on dark things, your countenance will become dark. If you focus only on yourself, you will be of all men most miserable. However, you can “set your affection on things above” if you so choose and you will become a living testimony to the unseen realm of God. You can set your affection on helping your neighbor and find that it will charge up your emotional well-being. Take a minute to pet a dog or a cat each day. It will make you feel better and you will grow an emotional inch in the process. Danielle Bernock in her book *Emerging With Wings* wrote, “*Perception is reality to the one in the experience.*”

3. **Mental Health.** Danielle Bernock in her book *Emerging With Wings* wrote, “*Perception is reality to the one in the experience.*” Never brush mental illness aside as a “get over it” thing. Your body is a chemical machine. It produces more chemicals that are vital to mental health than you could ever know. If you mess that up, it will mess you up. Mental health is a result of what you put into your body each day. It is a result of taking a few minutes to learn something new. It is a result of not putting certain chemicals into your body that will inhibit your mental development. “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is the greatest myth ever coined. The only thing that holds the old dog back from continued development is a master’s belief that the old dog can’t learn. No matter where you are in your tenure of age, grow an inch a day. Learn one new thing each day and ponder it the rest of the day. An inch of mental development is easy if you will apply yourself.
4. **Social health.** Social health is vital to success and leadership. It is important that you be liked. But it requires an effort on your part to be socially healthy. Take a minute each day to get on a knee and talk to a young child. Take a few minutes to spend time listening to a teenager. Ask them questions and learn from their response. Spend some time with adults in a social setting where the conversation is interactive. Listen to them more than talking to them. Share things with your family each day that you have attained through the disciplines you’ve begun. Take time to be in groups and with individuals. It will require time and effort, but an inch a day will magnify your life and influence tremendously.
5. **Community health.** “*No man is an island.*” That is very true. What you do affects others. What others do affects you. Jesus spoke much about our neighbors. The story of the Good Samaritan is one of His timeless teachings. In the story the least likely of heroes comes along to save the life of a man that would have been considered his enemy. Despite the tag he sees only a person in need and takes the time, the effort, the resources, and the love required to meet the need of the moment. Then Jesus tells us to do likewise. It requires effort to become communally involved. It will take a little time each day to get to know your neighbors. If you will devote yourself to one inch each day to involve yourself in your community health, before long you will be the giant of your neighborhood.
6. **Business health.** Life is a business. It matters not if you are in the business world or not. Each day you will set forth to manage something: your time, your talents, your finances, your habits, and many other things. It is business. It is what you are busy about. Some who are reading this are in the business world. What if you take the time to grow each day businesswise? How much will it affect your business if you grow disciplines that produce a one thousandth of a revenue increase each day? At the end of one year, your business will have increased by one third of a percent. Let’s say your business produces two million dollars of gross revenue per year. That one thousandth of an increase will constitute approximately \$2,000 of gross revenue the first year. Interestingly, that will probably be profit because it required nothing to produce it. What if you grow your business by 1% and dedicate yourself to the discipline for 10 years? You will have increased profits in your company by hundreds of thousands of dollars when compounded annually. One inch a day is all it takes.
7. **Leadership health.** Many years ago, on *Sixty Minutes*, a man was being interviewed who had climbed Mt. Everest. It was a dreadfully difficult climb where 2 of his team had died in the process. The effort and cost of the expedition hardly seemed worth the cost to the person doing the interview, so he asked a simple question, “Why would you endure such cost, hardship, sacrifice, and trial to make the climb?”

The man looked at him and simply replied, **“Obviously you’ve never stood on the top of a mountain.”** Everything in life worth attaining requires a climb. You don’t fall upwards. You climb upwards. It is what separates leaders from the rest of the pack. Few are willing to make the sacrifices necessary for Great Leadership. But it is a process. It doesn’t happen by big advances. It takes the little things, the little sacrifices, the little daily areas of growing that ultimately make the summit possible. An inch a day is all it requires, but you have to be intentional in the growth.

8. **Pass it on health.** “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” (II Timothy 2:2). When Jesus met the woman at the well in John 4 he told her that the “water He would give her to drink would be like a fountain that would gush forth.” What you have attained in life is not to be hoarded. It is to be given freely to others. The Great Leaders of life are always busy about developing the next great leaders of life. General Electric spends over 500 million dollars per year training and developing their leaders. Many of the fortune 500 CEOs came from General Electric’s training. John Maxwell said that if you make yourself dispensable by developing others who are better than yourself, you make yourself indispensable in the process. I think of Nick Saban of Alabama football. Every year he has to replenish his staff with new assistant coaches because he has developed those under him into people who are so highly respected in the football world that they are hired by other universities as head coaches. Develop those under you one inch a day.
9. **Family health.** This might be the hardest. For some reason, we have the attitude that family will always be there no matter what, so we spend far too little time developing our family health. Think about your spouse for a moment. When you first met them, how much time did you spend listening to everything they had to say? How much time do you spend now? What about the time to develop your children? In this, I mean teaching them life lessons and taking the time to care about the things that matter to them. Many experts say the dinner table is the most important piece of furniture in a home. Has a computer or television taken its place? Go places together you’ve never been. Learn things together you’ve never learned. Sing songs together you’ve never sung. Laugh together. Weep together. Rejoice together. One inch a day is all that’s required. Nothing will benefit you more.
10. **Spiritual health.** This is probably the most neglected discipline in most lives. God made man in His image and after His likeness. In this analogy, I think about the old plaster casts of a person’s face. Plaster was placed upon a face and allowed to dry. When it dried it would be removed with a perfect likeness of the person. People would then put plaster into the cast and when it would dry they would have a bust of the person’s face true in every detail. Here’s the point. You are the plaster mask of God. You are designed to be His likeness to an onlooking world. When life is poured into you it should come out looking like God. If you do this, it will feel right. If you don’t, it won’t feel right. Take the time to learn one thing about Jesus every day. It only takes a few minutes to do this. If you will dedicate yourself to this discipline you will have learned 365 new things about Jesus in one year which is more than most people will know in a lifetime. A commitment to an inch a day is all it takes.

If we look at the life of David, do we see these disciplines in action? Yes. No one can question his dedication to physical superiority that came from the disciplines he chose to develop. His ability not to crack under the horrific onslaught of Saul’s unjust wrath is testimony to a man who had emotional health. Mentally, few have ever come close to the brilliance of the writings he wrote or the arts he mastered. From a social standpoint, people wanted to be around him and follow him. His whole life was about being busy doing the tasks in front of him. Never has Israel had a greater leader king. He developed others under him to be “mighty men of renown.” Though he had times where he failed his family, one need look no further than Solomon to know that he spent time with his family while running a kingdom. Spiritually he had the heart of God.

If ever a man lived who didn’t have the time, it was David. But he was disciplined and his discipline produced rewards. He was intentional in his development as a man. He made the sacrifices necessary to attain greatness.

We get it wrong when we speak of Goliath as the giant in the valley of Shocoh. The giant that day was David. He proved it with courage to stand where others dared not stand and go where others dared not go. He proved it with a sling and a stone. He proved it with his words to a king and a giant. He proved it by inspiring an army to be the army it was trained to be. He is proof that dedication to the little things reaps giant rewards.

He did it one inch at a time. Each day he arose with the little things becoming the priority of his life. A little thing here. A little thing there. Before long, the little things added up and produced a giant of a man.

A great quote from Wayne Fields is, *"The best six doctors anywhere and no one can deny it are sunshine, water, rest, air, exercise and diet."* I would add to that "relationship with God." God put all these things at your disposal. Get out and "smell the roses." Take time for you. It is essential if you want to give something worthwhile to others

There is no magic wand to greatness. You can't "faith" your way to greatness. You can't "name it and claim it." **If you desire greatness, there is one way only to achieve it. You will have to dedicate yourself to the task, discipline yourself to accomplish the task, work hard to achieve the task, be intentional about the little things to perfect the task, and stay focused on the "why" so you do not abuse the task.**

God intends great things for you. He called you out of darkness into His incredible light with purpose for your life. He did not save you to take you to heaven on day. He saved you to show the world what heaven looks like on the earth. He is "why" you exist. If you stay true to the "why", you will dedicate yourself to the accomplishments that lie ahead. It is one day at a time, one step at a time, one decision at a time, and one prayer for strength at a time. People hunger to follow such a person. Be that person!!!

**GREAT LEADERS DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO THE LITTLE THINGS.**