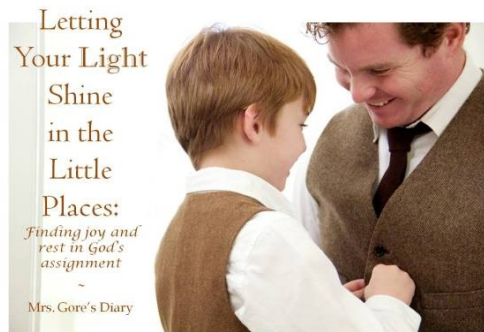


Letting Your Light Shine in the Little Places

From: Mrs. Gore's Diary <https://www.facebook.com/Mrs-Gores-Diary-176668112386138/>



"I'm so proud of him. He has given up so much to be here . . ." I said, for perhaps the 18th time in as little as a year.

And although it escapes my memory who I was talking to, I know exactly who I was talking about: my husband.

A hyperintelligent young man, he was accepted into Princeton University as a high schooler and had plans of graduating with a law degree, undoubtedly at the top of his class. And with his nearly perfect test scores, he could have accomplished it all without paying a cent.

But God had a different course for his life, and after several sleepless nights and the heaviest spiritual wrestling matches he has ever experienced, his plans were rerouted: he would become a minister. That acceptance letter to Princeton was discarded and to Oklahoma Baptist University he went, where he graduated with honors before continuing his education at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

I knew he was a smarty-pants all along, but it wasn't until after we married and I joined him at SBTS that I realized exactly how brilliant he was. He excelled in all of his classes on the advanced track to a Master of Divinity, and was a shoo-in for the prestigious Ph.D. program. On several occasions, I heard his friends make light-hearted predictions that he would be the next president of the seminary.

I was certainly in awe of him. Because not only was he as bright as a 200-watt, he was down-to-earth. Humble. Kind. A magnificent speaker. Wise. And one of the funniest people I knew, with a wit so sharp it could cut the blues right out of you. Everyone liked him. He always knew what to say. He never took a wrong step.

He could have done *anything*.

But one semester into his very exciting and beloved Ph.D. studies, God tapped him on the shoulder with another unmistakable call, and after seeking guidance from his professors, with bittersweet resolve, he walked away from his very bright future, for three reasons . . .

1. God was strongly compelling him.
2. I was pregnant and he wanted to give me and our baby more than his work load would allow.
3. Our tiny church back home needed help.

Fast forward seven years. He has been senior pastor of that church now for five years. Attendance: 100, on a good day.

Growing up, he probably expected that by the age of 33 he would be a well-established lawyer, and I have no doubt in my mind that we would be bathing in dollar bills by now.

And even after he surrendered his life to the ministry, I'm sure there were dreams. A big, thriving church with thousands of podcast subscribers. Magazine articles and book deals. Big-time speaker at SBC conferences and church camps. Board member at OBU and SBTS . . .

instead, he willingly and passionately oversees this tiny flock that God has bound to his heart.

He creates tissue-paper poofs for baby showers, he keeps nursery on some Sunday mornings when our other pastor is preaching, he drives elderly congregants to the hospital, and he unclogs church toilets.

The work is challenging, and the results are slow.

No one really cares what he *could* have been.

And the only writing he does these days is the daily Bible reading guide that he crafts specifically for our congregation to help us meditate on the expositied Sunday text.

There are no book deals. No interviews. No headshots. No board meetings.

And what I didn't realize was that there were hidden parts of me that struggled with this until I heard those words come out of my mouth yet again: "*He has given up so much . . .*"

the Spirit pricked me.

What, exactly, my dear, has he given up?

Money?

Prestige?

A name?

All passing fancies and possible traps that could lead to the ruination of Mr. Gore.

Ten thousand people instead of a hundred?

As if the one hundred were not worthy of a life laid down for them . . .

as if the one hundred deserved someone less smart, less wise, less qualified, less caring.

I would never have said it in so many words, but what God uncovered in my heart that day was the lingering (and toxic) idea that big gifts needed to be used in BIG places, and that anything less was sort of wasteful.

Silly me.

Indeed, from a worldly perspective, Mr. Gore *has* given up much to obey God's call on his life, and I have watched him continually lay down his life to pursue difficult things and to crucify the parts of him that could have been used to build up a kingdom for himself.

It is never easy to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Christ.

There is great loss involved.

But how *twisted* was my underlying thought that there was any import in the number of people someone impacted, rather than in the impact itself?

As if success could be gauged by how many church members one had, or how many baptisms, or how many students, or how many awards, or how much money, or how much exposure, or how many Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/Pinterest followers, or how many subscribers, or how many fans . . .

as if the unseen work of God could be measured and weighed and calculated.

It is important to note that this belief I was harboring in my heart was nearly undetectable. I LOVE our church (*almost* as much as my husband does). I love my life. I pursued these people and cried out to God to spend my life with them. You would have to move me from this place kicking and screaming, and there is nowhere on earth I would rather be than walking alongside the brothers and sisters God has placed on my path. But my constant acknowledgment of what Mr. Gore had given up was a red flag, and, once I examined my heart, I found a root of pride twisting its way through my belief system.

And, as we all know, roots of pride must be demolished.

As usual, God has been faithful to uproot and rebuild me, and it is for this reason that I am so eager to encourage you today.

To the mom who chases after toddlers. The blogger with fifteen subscribers. The pastor's wife who disciples two young women. The pastor who never receives a plaque at the associational meetings. The church body whose building is outdated and embarrassing. The layman who sees the same two employees all day, every day. The photographer who has seven clients. The teacher in the small classroom in the small school in the small town. The musician who sings and plays on the smallest stage. The grandmother who invests in her handful of grandchildren. The prayer warrior in the tiny church. The homeschooler whose college diploma gathers cobwebs in a cardboard canister while she teaches her children how to read . . .

Never let the miracle escape you that, even though your light is shining in seemingly small places . . . *you have a light.*

Your work is no less important to the Kingdom and no less assigned by the God of the universe.

And if you lined up all of our rural towns and our private homes and our homeschools and our classes and our ministries and our prayer meetings and our blogs and our tiny churches where God is being made much of day by day, and you flew up into the clouds and you looked down at night, you wouldn't be able to differentiate the big lights from the little lights . . .

you would just see one giant, beautiful remnant that reached all across the world and back again.

A light is a light is a light.

Don't be ashamed that yours is shining in a place that no one else knows about.

Don't feel like a failure because you're not moving on to "bigger" and "better" things.

Don't be afraid to live and die in a tiny church in a nameless town.

And don't think that your gifts are wasted because the recipients are few.

Your light is a vibrant and necessary part of God's story, whether you are shining on the biggest platforms in the world . . .

or the smallest.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16