

Sermon: Facing Down the Fear of Living an Insignificant Life

Text: Romans 8:15-16; Esther 3-4 ESV

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Introduction: **Romans 8:15-16 ESV** ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Have you ever wondered what difference your life makes? What real contribution am I making on this earth? “Do I dare ask the question of the measure of how much I matter for fear of discovering the answer?” At the heart of it all is the base-level fear of living and leading lives of insignificance. Our culture has its own measure of significance, but God’s relationship with us provides an eternal affirming friendship, one that lasts and never disappoints (s. **v.16**).

Leonard Woolf, a well-known British author and politician, echoed these sentiments when he wrote these words: “Looking back at the age of eighty-eight over the fifty-seven years of my political work in England, knowing what I aimed at and the results, meditating on the history of Britain and the world since 1914, I see clearly that I have achieved practically nothing. The world today and the history of the human ant hill during the last fifty-seven years would be exactly the same as it is if I had played ping-pong instead of sitting on committees and writing books and memoranda. I have therefore to make the rather ignominious confession to myself and to anyone who may read this book that I must have in a lone life ground through between 150,000 and 200,000 hours of perfectly useless work.” (quoted by Tom L. Eiseman in *Temptations Men Face*, IVP, 1990)

This is a sad commentary on mankind in general. We are busier and maybe even accomplishing more (multi-tasking), but it is not satisfying our deepest needs.

Illus. Forrest Gump accomplished great things. In spite of being born with crippled legs and a below-average intellect, he became a football star, war hero, table-tennis champion, and entrepreneur. But the thing he wanted more than anything was LOVE. He traded everything for that. Love is what makes you significant.

Our search for significance has more often than not led us to pursue unsatisfying activities like Woolf. Is that what my life will count for: mounds of paper, heaps of effort, molehills of searching for nothing?

J. B. Phillips illustrates this definition so clearly as he alters the Beatitudes to the way most of us live them:

Happy are the “pushers”: for they get on in the world.

Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them.

Happy are they who complain: for they get there own way in the end.

Happy are the blase: for they never worry about their sins.

Happy are the slave-drivers: for they get results.

Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around.

Happy are the troublemakers: for they make people take notice of them.

(Quoted by Charles Swindoll in *Improving Your Serve*, p. 35, Word, 1974, from J.B. Phillips, *When God Was Man*, pp. 26-27, Abingdon, 1955)

If we want to be the pushers, the players, the slave drivers, if we buy that being a celebrity is equal to significance, if we see power as equivalent to prestige, or if we equate public image with personal significance, then we are on the world’s track; and our quest for significance will be one of frustration and futility. God never designed us to gain significance from these fleeting pursuits.

Somebody has switched the price tags on us. And we bought it! Solomon (one of the wisest guys around) discovered centuries ago that in all of these pursuits there was no satisfaction, But all this does not need to leave us living in fear that our lives will be insignificant and unimportant.

The Good News is that living lives that really matter is within the grasp of every Christian. The only thing necessary is to restore the value system of God in our lives.

In a short narrative in the OT book of Esther we can find attributes (definitions) of significance that will make each one of us realize the value of our individual lives and contributions. If we will live by these three simple attributes, we will be able to remind ourselves daily that we have purpose and importance in God’s eyes.

Let’s look at three ways of achieving significance in life:

I. Being in God’s Place

Years ago Michael W. Smith sang a song that gained popular recognition and attention titled *A Place in This World*. The song still reflects the rootless wanderings that are so much a part of our lives. There is no sense that we are where we are because God has placed us in a particular place.

You have heard people say, “Well, I was just in the right place at the right time.” Are our lives really that fatalistic? Can it really be that God who knew us before we were formed in our mother’s womb and numbers the very hairs on our head would then set us on this earth in senseless wandering looking for purpose and design? I don’t think so!

I am more apt to think that we are often discontented homesteaders of the turf that God has placed us on. We are the grazing cow that sticks his head through the fence to get to the grass that is just on the other side, oblivious that a whole field on this side is just as tasty. It is the greener-grass syndrome. It is seen in job switching, divorce, church (s)hopping, and many other kinds of uncommitted life decisions.

When we read the story of Esther, we think of what it must have been like to be Esther, the queen, faced with such dilemma and opportunity. We think of a celebrity. But have you ever considered how many people were necessary to allow this miracle of preservation of God’s people, the Jews, to occur? Take note of the number of people in different positions who all were vital to what took place.

Esther 3:8-9 ESV ⁸ Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes), “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. ⁹ If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents[750,000 lbs] of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries.”

Esther 4:1-5 ESV ¹ When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ² He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was.

At least eight individuals and groups played a vital and important role in seeing God's plan carried through. If any one of them had been a weak link, it would have been as Mordecai later stated: **Esther 4:14 ESV** ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

God's plans depend on people in all positions at all levels doing their very best where they are, in order to see God's wonders unfold. Each person is a part of the Body working together for the well-being of the whole. **I Corinthians 12:18-22 ESV** ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts,[members] yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

I will never forget the words of Joni Eareckson Tada in her film's life-story: "I would rather be in this (wheel) chair knowing God than out of it without him." God has placed us in a variety of settings for a host of reasons, and He has a plan. And that gives each of our lives significance. You *can* find your place in this world.

Another way of achieving significance in this life is:

II. Being in God's Timing

Let's pick up our story at **Esther 4:6**. This is one of the most powerful statements in Scripture relating to our lives and their significance.

Esther 4:6-14 ESV ⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷ and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction,[annihilation] that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. ⁹ And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹ "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

12 And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. 13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

I can almost hear Esther protesting, “Well, couldn't there be another time, a less-threatening time? Can't I sit this dance out and wait for another moment in time?” You know there are no sadder words than “I could have,” or “if only I had...”

Some of us spend the majority of our lives waiting for our ship to come in, our day of importance, and our moment in the sun. And the sad thing is that in all those days of waiting, we are missing many opportunities to discover our significance. Significance is not gained in trumpet blasts, but in faithfulness, It is not in the grand moments, but in the mundane sometimes, and in our daily activities.

Listen to the words of Edith Schaeffer: “The thing about real life is that important events don't announce themselves. Trumpets don't blow, drums don't beat to let you know you are going to meet the most important person you have ever met, or read the most important thing you you are ever going to read (*transformative stuff*), or have the most important conversation you are ever going to have, or spend the most important week you are going to spend. Usually, something that is going to change your life is a memory before you can stop and be impressed about it” (*L'Abri*, p. 53, Tyndale, 1969).

It is just a matter of being in God's place for you, at God's time, and most importantly, ready to do what God has designed.

So a final way of achieving significance in life is:

III. Doing God's Design

Let's again pick up from our last text in [verse 12](#) -

“When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: “Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:15-17 ESV ¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”[a] ¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Footnotes: [a] **Esther 4:16** Hebrew if I am destroyed, then I will be destroyed

Mordecai was so down-to-earth. Esther may have been the queen, but she was first his adopted daughter, and she was not above a little instruction. “You may be the queen, but don’t think that this is not going to affect you.” Mordecai was not influenced by her royalty. He saw God’s signature on her position. Her significance was not drawn from the powerful position she held, but her willingness to use whatever position she held for God. She even had the resolve, “If I perish, I perish!”

At times we put ourselves above doing certain things. We build little pedestals of importance for ourselves, and we see certain tasks as below our level of significance. We think a person of position would never stoop to do that kind of menial task. Sometimes we need to be reminded that any accomplishment outside of God’s design will ring hollow. The wisest man in history learned that lesson well as he related to us in Ecclesiastes - “All is vanity,” unless God gives meaning to our activities.

Illus. I recall a wonderful family example of removing pedestals. Years ago, Michael J. Fox had just won an Emmy for his performance in one of his starring roles. He came home late after the parties and glitz and glamour of the event, walked into the kitchen at his parents’ home and placed his Emmy in the center of the kitchen table. This way the other family members could admire it when they got up the next morning.

The surprise came for Michael when he got up the next morning. All around his Emmy were the trophies that other family members had earned. Bowling, speech, volleyball, and track trophies all adorned the table. The message was clear: “Don’t think that you are exceptional or so special. You are still a part of the family.

Mordecai is telling Esther the same thing. “Hey, don’t think that just because you are the queen you will escape this. We are in this together! You are not above even this, because it may cost you your life, too.

Conclusion: Esther is significant in history and in life, not because of what she did so much, but because she was obedient to the design of God, no matter what the cost.

Would we be (are we) so obedient to God's design?

Listen to these words from Ruth Harms Calkin:

You know, Lord, how I serve You

With great emotional fervor

In the limelight.

You know how eagerly I speak for You

At the women's club.

You know how I effervesce when I promote a fellowship group.

You know my genuine enthusiasm at a Bible study.

But how would I react, I wonder

If you pointed to a basin of water

And asked me to wash the calloused feet

Of a bent and wrinkled old woman

Day after day

Month after month

In a room where nobody saw

And nobody knew.

This is the significance we have been searching for, and our Savior one day saying:

“Well done, good and faithful servant!”

I hope you can say: “That will be enough for me.”