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I Dare You to Get Involved in a Small Assembly

by David Dunlap

Over and over again, God reveals in the Bible that He loves to use small things. He would rather use weakness over strength, humility over pride, brokenness over self-confidence. God used five smooth stones from the sling of a shepherd boy to bring down the mighty Philistine giant Goliath. God used Moses, without an army or weapons, to break Egypt, the most powerful nation in the known world. Jesus was born in an obscure village in a forgotten land and changed the world. Although He never owned a home, never had a bank account, never did things associated with human power, He came the greatest figure in all of history. Through weakness and humility, He accomplished far more for eternity than all the generals, presidents, educators, and philosophers who have ever lived. We must learn that smallness is not despised by God. In fact, may I suggest that God desires humble men and women, devoted Bible teachers and leaders with little training and education, in thousands of small church gatherings scattered throughout cities, villages, deserts, and jungle clearings to transform the world for Christ.

God Loves to Uses Small Committed Assemblies of Believers

I am going to dare you to get involved in a small devoted, assembly or church of believers. Why? Because God loves to do things which the world has written off as impossible. That is His trademark. Whenever God starts a work, He likes to start with something so small that people don't even notice. Think about it. When God created the universe and everything that is in it, He began with nothing. When God was about to save the world from a universal flood, what did He do? God looked for a "small church" made up of one man named Noah and his family, just eight people. Under God's direction they built the ark and the rest is history. When I say I dare you to get involved in a small assembly, I am asking you to do what God loves to do. To be involved with a small group of Christians is not an easy thing, but God has not called us to do easy, convenient things. Few worthwhile goals in life are easy, indeed they are usually very hard!

It is a risk to get involved with a small church. It takes faith in the living God. There are few people and few resources. In fact, there can be next to nothing—except God and His Word. However, our Lord promised, "Where two or three come together in My name, there am I in the midst with them" (Matthew 18:20). And His parting promise to His disciples did not depend on larger numbers

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Director of
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either— “Surely, I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

It seems as if you would be taking a big gamble to join a small church. But God loves what is small and delights to show His glory through it. And if, by His grace, He decides to save some, and the small group begins to grow in number and spiritual strength, then all the praise goes to Him. In human terms, when God begins to work in a small church, you are witnessing a miracle. It will be inexplicable in terms of human resources, cleverness, and wisdom. If you are a part of a small work from the beginning and the Lord causes it to grow, its growth cannot be attributed to the people, the resources, or the preaching, the increase is all of God.

So, believer, allow me to set out five reasons for you to get involved in a small church.

1. The “Big Box” Mega Church Can Spare You

We thank God for the large godly churches of our nation, and indeed throughout the world. There are gifted Bible expositors whom God has used to establish large churches and ministries. But most of those same great sincere preachers would agree that the last thing in the world that they want to do is to make believers spiritually dependent upon them. Their goal is to build up mature believers who will be involved in fruitful ministries with other believers. Spiritual leaders know that ten churches of 100 believers will accomplish more than one church of 1,000 believers. A mature church leader knows that the small church can reach more people, disciple more believers, and give more opportunities to serve than the big church will never be able to do. The work of the pastor/ teacher is to “equip them for works of service” (Ephesians 4:11-12). Many large churches and ministries have programs and training courses for leaders desiring to start or to get more involved in other local churches. There are believers who are growing in their mid-sized local churches who are now ready to step out and be involved in small church and a new church plant. Presently, there are many opportunities to serve the Lord in your community. The number of those who attend larger churches is so great that you should feel free to serve the Lord as He leads.

2. The Small Church Needs You

The big church doesn’t really need you. There are plenty of others to fill your shoes. But the smaller church does need you. Many small fellowships are on the brink of closing down. The believers there, need your help, support, and encouragement. They need the breath of fresh air that you perhaps can bring. They need the spiritual gift that you have to build up the believers. They need your gift of preaching and evangelism.

There is a principle in physics called “critical mass.” Nuclear physics teaches that as the amount of radioactive uranium builds at a certain point a chain reaction will occur. It can be like that in a local church. Just two or three extra servant-hearted Christians can cause a spiritual chain reaction, and good things begin to happen. Things turn around and, instead of facing closure, the church can be looking through an open door into the future.

3. Smaller Churches Give Opportunities to Serve

If you attend a large church which runs like a well-oiled machine, often all the key jobs in the church are filled. Indeed, those key posts may not even be open to

ordinary Christians without Bible college and seminary degrees. Paid staff with counseling diplomas and formal theological training is the order of the day. Perhaps, without intending to the big church frequently invites you to simply be a spectator. Show up on Sunday, do your homework for the fellowship group, pray, and give to the offering, but that is about it. Meanwhile, you may have a gift which is never really used. You might be someone who is able to counsel those who have spiritual problems, but you are not given much opportunity in the big church. You might have the gift of preaching or have talent in music, but you would never be invited to preach or use your musical talent for the Lord. However, in the smaller church you would be a true God-send to help in those areas. So, think about getting involved in a smaller assembly. Don't let the big church or larger assembly bury your talent (Matthew 25:18). Don't allow yourself to sit on the sidelines and never shine for the Lord through lack of opportunity.

4. Smaller Churches Enjoy Close Fellowship

Even the larger congregations recognize the value of intimate fellowship. That is why we find cell groups, prayer groups, area fellowship groups, and support groups in the larger church's offerings of programs. Close fellowship with people who we know very well is of enormous value. In these groups we can share our hearts, our joys and our troubles, without the whole world knowing the intimate details of our lives. Here we find friends who understand us, who will keep confidences and will pray for us. It is just not possible for everyone in a large church to have that depth of intimacy with one another. But it is in a smaller church. And because of that closeness there is often a richness of shared life which is very special in a congregation with less numbers. As a general rule, quality does win out over quantity.

5. Smaller Churches Will Stretch You More As a Christian

If you enjoy athletic sports or adventures in hiking outdoors, you will enjoy a challenge. Great athletes develop only if they are prepared to push themselves. These athletes will train themselves to run faster, to build greater endurance, and to go farther in a race or contest. Spiritual development is similar. That is why the writer of Hebrews uses the Greek marathon race as a great picture of the Christian life (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Being part of a small fellowship brings a greater challenge to our walk with Christ. It is easy to feel encouraged when you are standing in a vast congregation. It is more difficult to have faith that God can work when you look around and there are so few of you. Our love is also tested. It is easy in a big church for problems between Christians to fester and never be resolved. People simply avoid speaking to each other and make sure their paths never cross amid the Sunday crowds. But in a small church you can't avoid each other; you have to sort things out.

So it is that your Christian graces will be stretched. You will be spiritually stretched. You will have to learn to pray publicly. You will have many opportunities to join with others in neighborhood evangelistic outreaches. You will have to share your love for Christ in times of participatory worship. I am not surprised that some of the finest Christians I know are from small churches.

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Jimmy Valvano
(1946-1993)



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Conclusion

The legendary basketball coach of North Carolina State University, Coach Jimmy Valvano (1946-1993), often used to say,

"God must love ordinary people. How do I know? He made so many of them. But God wants to do extraordinary things with ordinary people."

We can make the same statement about small churches. "God loves small ordinary churches. How do I know? He made so many of them, but He wants to do extraordinary things through ordinary churches."

When I was a missionary in Belgium in Western Europe, I was told that the average size of a church in Belgium was 23 believers. Today, church researchers in North American say that 70% of all evangelical churches are 75 persons or less and 90% of all churches are 200 persons or less. Most church leaders, gospel preachers, and Bible teachers will serve in small churches. God knows that there is something in the refining fire of a small church that can equip and train a servant of God better than almost anything else.

The well-known preacher H. A. Ironside acquired the skills of preaching by spending years teaching the Word of God in small Salvation Army churches and gatherings in southern California and the southwest United States. George Verwer, the long-time director of *Operation Mobilization*, honed his skills as a preacher, motivator of young people, and evangelical leader by preaching in small churches in Mexico for many years. Luis Palau, the great evangelist from South America, gained experience as a gospel preacher by preaching in small Plymouth Brethren chapels in Argentina for many years as a young man.

God knows how to equip, train, mature, and teach future leaders and ordinary laborers in His vineyard through laboring in small churches. In a small church one learns humility and patience, pride is kept in check, and opportunities in every area of service abound. A servant learns that "little" people are important, that no task is too small. He learns to work with his hands, to pray with fervency, and to trust God with all his heart in every area of the work. God knows how to train a man or woman for His service and He loves to use small things.