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SMALL THINGS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Every Christian wants to change the world. But it's Tuesday. And so far, you've done nothing but get out of bed, make coffee, and sit at your desk for another day of drudgery. That dream job where you do nothing but incredible, extraordinarily meaningful things all day long has not become a reality. In fact, it is starting to feel like a pipe dream, like some cruel joke marketers play on idealistic college kids. You'd like to find the people peddling that idea and punch them, but you're much too busy and tired to do such a thing, because after all, it's Tuesday and you have to go to work.

After work you'll commute home, reheat leftovers for dinner, and hope that your DVR didn't mess up the recording of your favorite show. This has become your way of life—a nightly ritual of sorts, a thing to look forward to in those moments during the day when you want to throw something or take a long after-lunch nap. All you want is to be home—nestled in with your comforts, at peace with the world.

Whether you are single, married, in college, or chasing 2.5 screaming kids around—home has become a retreat for you. Your home feels like one of the only places where no one is bossing you around or telling you what to do (at least after your kids go to bed, are we right, parents?). Your front door might as well be an armed fortress, because no one who doesn't live there is getting through to disturb the little bit of peace and quiet you've found.

There's *work you*, there's *hobby you*, there's *friend you*, and then there's *home you*. And you'd love for the world to understand that they shouldn't mess with *home you*.

Your home, as much as possible, has morphed into exactly what you think it should be: a refuge from the rat race called life, which you never realized would be so crazy. A retreat, a place to zone out and unplug. After all, don't you deserve that? Don't you deserve a little mind-numbing television marathon and vegging after this Tuesday? It's just what the doctor ordered (assuming you are the doctor, of course).

Before you know it, years pass. The fortress called your home, your personal refuge, hasn't seen a friend walk in, much less a neighbor or a stranger, in you can't remember when. Sure, occasionally you open your home to others when you host events like the Thanksgiving get-together or the youth group movie night. But those times are more the exception than the rule.

You aren't alone. Many Christians have bought into the cultural view that our homes are our personal and private fortresses. In our combined twenty-plus years of pastoring, we have observed that the way a typical Christian thinks about their home isn't all that different from how a typical non-Christian thinks: *It's the place I eat, sleep, relax, and entertain myself—by myself.*

This has led to a divorce between the way we view our homes and the way we view our mission as Christians. We may rightly understand that we are to make disciples as a part of the Great Commission, which Jesus gave us in Matthew 28,¹ but that all feels very separate from what we do at our houses. We think of mission as something that happens outside the four walls of our homes—that, if anything, our homes are even a retreat from any Christian mission that we may be involved in (other than training our children to love Jesus, of course).

In doing so, however, we waste a powerful and God-ordained means of changing the world.

Many Christians have a growing cynicism about any possible role they could play in what God is doing to reconcile all things to Himself (see Col. 1:20). They think, *Change the world? Me? Really? I can barely*

get my five-year-old to brush her teeth. It's all I can do to get myself ready and out the door in the mornings. The world's problems are so big—what could I possibly do to make a difference?

For many whose lives feel ordinary, being a part of God's mission to reverse the curse on creation and introduce those who are far from God to a real and close relationship with Him feels unattainable, impractical, and overwhelming. We've given up on the hope that *we can actually change the world*, because when would we even do so? There isn't much time left between waking up, rushing to work, eating meals, and preparing for the next day.

The secret weapon for gospel advancement is hospitality, and you can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high-rise.

But what if we told you that you *could* actually change the world, right from your own home?

If you desire to join God's mission but have no clue what that looks like in a normal life, we have good news for you. You already have access to the ultimate game-changing secret weapon that will transform the entire way you think about your life as part of God's mission.

The secret weapon for gospel advancement is hospitality, and you can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high-rise.

It takes only your willingness to open your home and life to others. Many Christians believe that in order to be part of God's mission, they have to do something drastic. (And God may call you to that. By the way, if He does, say yes.) But the reality is you can be an integral part of God's mission from right where you are, without leaving the home you sleep in each night.

Why is hospitality essential? Phil Vischer, the successful creator of VeggieTales, sums it up well through his unique perspective on the need for Christians to open their ordinary lives and homes to those around them:

I am growing increasingly convinced that if every one of these

kids burning with passion to write a hit Christian song or make that hit Christian movie or start that hit Christian ministry to change the world would instead focus their passion on walking with God on a daily basis, the world would change. . . . Because the world learns about God not by watching Christian movies, but by watching Christians.²

We love this quote because it hits a countercultural, but hard-hitting, truth: the world could use more ordinary Christians opening their ordinary lives so others can see what life in light of the gospel looks like. And what better place to watch Christians than in their homes?

It doesn't seem that hard, does it? But too often we miss opportunities to practice hospitality.

If you were to break your life into very rough thirds, you could say that you'll spend about a third of your life sleeping, somewhere close to a third working (or going to school), and the other precious third doing whatever you choose. For many of us, a great deal of that last third winds up being spent in our homes—eating, relaxing, enjoying hobbies, and entertaining ourselves. So if you divorce God's mission from your home and see your home essentially as a refuge *from* mission, you've just knocked out two-thirds of your life from any kind of missional possibility.

Brandon and I (Dustin) had the privilege of starting and pastoring a church together for almost seven years, and during that time we witnessed Christians build a culture of mission where hospitality served as one of the primary pillars. We saw firsthand that no matter who it is—from the college student to the young family to the empty nesters approaching retirement—joining God's mission can be as straightforward as opening your door and inviting others inside.

ORDINARY DOES *NOT* EQUAL INSIGNIFICANT

I (Brandon) don't remember what day it was, but I think it was a Thursday. A meaningless-feeling Thursday.

I walked out of my house to grab the mail from the mailbox, and

I saw a neighbor in his thirties I hadn't met yet who was walking his dog. I was tempted to do what I—and so many others—normally do: quickly wave or nod, or somehow acknowledge that I saw him crossing my path, but make it quick enough that we both could go about our business without distraction.

I've done that move many times. But on this Thursday a "nudge" prompted me to try something different. I changed course and walked directly toward the neighbor. "Hey!" I said, smiling. "I don't think I've met you yet. What's your name?"

He told me his name, Stuart, and we struck up a brief conversation. You know, the normal stuff. "How long have you lived here? Do you have kids? Is that your dog that's always loose and roaming the neighborhood?"

I knew what was coming: "What do you do for a living?" Stuart asked.

I hesitated. I could have blurted out, "I'm a pastor," but that answer tends to shut down conversation. I've learned that when I meet people I try to delay letting them know that information (it typically helps to build my reputation as a normal human before dropping that bomb). But as he waited for my response, I decided to go ahead and 'fess up. He nodded and then his dog dragged him away from our chat. I didn't think much of it, other than that he'd be a good person to continue building a relationship with and that he was someone my wife and I should have in our home to share a meal.

The next time I saw Stuart in our neighborhood, I noticed he had a serious look on his face.

"I have a question for you," he told me. "When you came out of your house that day and beelined toward me, why did you decide to talk to me? No one does that."

I was taken aback by his question. "We're new to the neighborhood and I'm just trying to meet our neighbors."

"Oh, okay," he said. "It was just weird, especially with you being a pastor and all. I was having a bad day and I was grumpy, but then you came up and we had this really good conversation." He went on to tell me about some relationship trouble he was having, and how his therapist

had recently asked him if he thought getting involved in a faith community might help him with some of his issues. “I don’t know what I believe about God and I don’t know anything about Mary or Martha or Lucas or any of those characters, but it was just really weird. I thought maybe God sent you to talk to me that day.”

I smiled. “Well, I don’t know Stuart, I was just trying to meet you. But I do believe God works that way, so maybe He did.”

I left that conversation with Stuart that day encouraged at what depth of relationship God had opened so quickly. (That doesn’t happen every day, trust me!) But I also was disturbed by this thought: *how many relationships and opportunities right here at my home have I missed out on because I just smiled and waved?*

No matter who we are, walking to our mailbox from our house or apartment feels like the most ordinary, insignificant thing we could possibly do. Nothing that could happen on a trip to the mailbox could be part of what God’s doing to change the world, right?

That logic gets applied to all the routine parts of our lives. We spend most of our ordinary days with our level of intentionality hovering around zero. The majority of our existence (especially the great percentage we spend in our homes) just feels so very . . . ordinary. We cook, we clean, we rest, we walk to the mailbox with tunnel vision. And quietly, unknowingly, we come to believe that if something is ordinary, it must be insignificant. We think,

- *How could my house be part of anything meaningful? It’s just where I eat, sleep, and relax.*
- *How could a simple meal have any lasting value? I eat three of them a day, after all.*
- *How could the ordinary parts of my life be significant in any way? They feel so small.*

I (Dustin) have been amazed by how the simple act of rolling my grill to my front yard (not the backyard) and grilling burgers has effectively allowed me to meet neighbors, hear their stories, share our lives, and point to truth. I’ve never printed flyers or sent out mailers.

I've simply heated the charcoal and watched people show up. One of the most ordinary things we do every day is eat a meal at our homes. We do this small act with intentionality and usually with other people, and we simply watch the Holy Spirit bring about the significance.

Too many of us mistakenly think that in order for something to be significant, it has to be big, different, drastic, or extraordinary. It has to be something that doesn't happen on a Thursday, because Thursday is just Thursday. Nothing could be meaningful about an ordinary day in our ordinary life . . .

Those deeply held beliefs, however, quickly fall apart when viewed through the lens of God's kingdom. Consider author Skye Jethani's argument:

We've fallen into the conventional thinking that a big mission demands big tactics, but we forget that in the economy of God's kingdom, big does not beget big. It's precisely the opposite. The overwhelming message of Jesus' life and teaching is that small begets big. Consider, God's plan to redeem creation (big) is achieved through his incarnation as an impoverished baby (small). Jesus feeds thousands on a hillside (big) with just a few fish and loaves (small). Christ seeks to make disciples of all nations (big) and he starts with a handful of fishermen (small). Even Goliath (big) is defeated by David with a few stones (small).

This pattern is also repeated in Jesus' parables about the nature of his kingdom. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

All of this affirms the counter-intuitive nature of God's kingdom.³

Jesus said that in His kingdom, the "smallest of all seeds" will leave a lasting impact much larger than expected (see Matt. 13:31–32). In the same way, the "smallest" things in our lives—ordinary days and

meals and homes—can have a much larger impact than you'd ever imagine when harnessed with gospel intentionality.

If we are ever going to join *all* our lives to God's mission to change the world, we need to reclaim *all* of our ordinary pieces as a part of that gospel mission. We will have to reject the notion that something has to be big or unusual to be significant. We will have to view the ordinariness of our lives as significant and allow God to use our homes as a seed to be planted and grown, not something to be discarded or devalued.

If ordinary doesn't equal insignificant, then even a walk to the mailbox or grilling burgers matters. Everything about your everyday, ordinary, small-feeling life matters.

Your meals matter.

Your hobbies matter.

Your work matters.

Your home . . . it matters.

A WEAPON FOR THE GOSPEL

Thinking about our homes in this way is a wonderfully freeing concept. As it turns out, we have a more fulfilling and rewarding purpose for our homes than using them exclusively for our benefit and comfort. Instead of thinking of them only as a personal refuge, they can be opened as spiritual hospitals for the hurting around us. Instead of being an oasis of self-interest, they can be transformed into a weapon for the gospel—a four-walled tool to wield in God's cosmic battle against evil and sin. As we do this, we become the type of counterculture that puts God's generosity on display.

My (Dustin's) friend Landon, who is a local photographer, actually moved into a new home with the purpose of being a missionary to his neighborhood. (Fun fact: Landon's home is pictured on the cover of this book.) Part of his goal was to build relationships with other neighbors and to start a crime-watch Facebook group for the neighborhood. This was so successful—along with his and his wife's efforts at hosting others in their home—that they actually became known as the go-to people when anyone had a problem. We joked that he was

the neighborhood's unofficial pastor. That joke came to light clearly when a few years ago someone was killed in a tragic accident in that neighborhood, and in such a devastating moment, the community rallied to have a memorial service for the man. Guess who they asked to lead the memorial? Their unofficial neighborhood pastor, Landon.

Another night, while Landon was walking through the neighborhood after dark, he noticed that a teenage boy was breaking into a vacant house. When he saw how young the boy was, instead of calling the police, he approached the boy to talk to him about what he was doing.

After confronting him, Landon walked him home instead of turning him in. When he got to his house and talked to his mother, he learned that she was a single mom and some of the older kids had become a negative influence on her son. So Landon, led by the Holy Spirit's prompting, said, "I would love to hang out with your son and try to be a good influence for him. He can come to my house any time he wants." Through tears, the mother graciously accepted his offer.

The story gets better, but let's pause to think about something. If someone views their home exclusively as a refuge for their own comfort and relaxation, there is no way their response to finding a neighborhood kid breaking into a house would be the same as Landon's response. To think like that, you need an altogether different view of your home as primarily a weapon for the gospel before it is anything else. Standard cultural values will never cause you to invite a thief into your home, but the Holy Spirit very well may do just that.

Over time, Landon built a relationship with the boy, TJ, and eventually he met other neighborhood kids who were TJ's friends. Landon started playing kickball with them on Sunday afternoons. Then he got his small group from church involved and every week they all played kickball and loved these kids who, in many cases, were fatherless. After kickball each week Landon and his wife, Jordan, invited the kids to their house to eat ice cream or cake and spend quality time asking about their lives.

About a year after he met them, Landon and Jordan borrowed a van to pick up all the kids and take them to his church's student ministry. Not long after that, they all attended a youth camp where Landon led

Biblical hospitality chooses to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, initiate rather than sit idly.

four of the neighborhood boys (including TJ) to put their faith in Christ.

Landon's example is one of the most beautiful ways to use our homes as a weapon for the gospel. And Landon is still pouring into those kids to this day.

At that same camp, one day TJ walked up to Landon and said, "Do you remember the first time we met?" Landon responded that yes, he did indeed remember. Then TJ pointed at a group of ten kids from the neighborhood who were also there and said, "I'm really glad I met you that night. None of this would have happened if we wouldn't have met."

That story, as good as it is, may feel unrelatable to you. You may not live next to disadvantaged youth liable to break into vacant homes. But then again, if you don't know your neighbors, how would you know if you do or not? The point remains the same, however: things similar to that do not happen if we view our homes solely as a refuge for ourselves. If that was the case for Landon, then that night when he was out walking late, he would have called the police to report his boy's crime and that would have been the end of the story.

BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY IS . . .

Landon listened to the Holy Spirit's nudge and opened his home and life to the possibility of TJ experiencing Christ's love and forgiveness. That's biblical hospitality in the truest sense. Biblical hospitality is the polar opposite of cultural trends to separate and isolate. It rejects the notion that life is best spent fulfilling our own self-centered desires, cordoned off from others in the private fortresses we call homes. Biblical hospitality chooses to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, initiate rather than sit idly.

At its core, the practice of biblical hospitality is obeying the command in Romans 15:7 to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you." It's receiving others into our lives—into relationship and, yes, even into our homes. It welcomes Christians as a way to walk in

the truth that we've been made family through the gospel, and it welcomes non-Christians in an attempt to model and extend the gracious invitation we've received from God in Christ. Leveraging our personal refuges for this mission of welcoming others may feel like a great cost (more on that in the next chapter), but it is a cost that is repaid with an abundance of superior joys. Loneliness is traded for community, comfort is surrendered for an eternal purpose, and detached apathy is left behind for a mission meaningful enough to give your life to.

If we walk in this biblical hospitality and view our homes foremost as a gospel weapon, offering our homes for the Holy Spirit to use as He sees fit, then there's no telling what could happen. It may not transpire fast and it may not be some glamorous story that goes into a book, but God will do what He promised: He will build His church and draw people to Himself through our ordinary faithfulness to leverage our homes for His mission. It's just that simple.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do you view your home? Are you more prone to see it as a place of retreat or as a weapon for the gospel? Why do you think that is?
- Why do most of us assume that ordinary steps of obedience are insignificant? What biblical evidence do we have that this is simply not true? And if it isn't true, in what ways could you begin this week to see your ordinariness as something worthwhile to God and His kingdom?
- Why did you decide to read a book on hospitality? What assumptions about hospitality did you bring with you as you began this book? What do you hope to gain as you continue reading?