



## **Your Sweet Spot**

### **Are You Ready to “Be Your Best Self”?**

When I was much younger, I decided to take up tennis for a while. I bought a nice racquet and several cans of tennis balls and started after it. Several friends were interested in playing and none of us were very good. It seemed like an easy sport to pick up and we played several times a week. We never got any good at it. None of us. I hit the ball all over the court, mostly out of bounds and into the net. I had some great shots over the fence which would have been terrific if I were playing baseball instead. There is a sweet spot on each tennis racquet where you are supposed to try to hit the ball, but I cannot say I found it very often. When I did hit the sweet spot, I was powerfully hitting the ball mostly out of the court. The Bible says that you have a sweet spot and if you hit it, you will have the best possible life. Just exactly what is that sweet spot? Let's hear from James, the brother of Jesus.

**The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.** (James 1:9-11 NIV) Verse 9 is a most unusual approach to life. If you are in humble circumstances, meaning you are not rich, famous, or highly successful, you are to take pride in that exalted place or dignified and eminent position in the world. That to many if not nearly all of us sounds odd at best. I can't think of a single person who would see things that way. Everything in our culture...at least here in the U.S. points in the opposite direction. If you want to be happy with yourself, get rich, have millions of Instagram followers or be at the top of your chosen profession. Literally James orders those in humble circumstances to glory in their valued and exalted place. We are commanded in fact to see ourselves that way. The term translated “humble” describes those who are lowly, modest, perhaps even depressed and just plain humble. This is how those who by the world's view of life aren't doing so great and yet in fact, God says they are.

It still makes me pause in wonder at how much attention God gives to what are seemingly the small ones in life. **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.** (Matthew 10:29 NIV) Yes, He cares about what happens to sparrows and even decides how long they will live. Consider what Jesus has to say about the little flowers that spring up in Palestine each morning and wither at night. **See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?** (Matthew 6: 28-30 NIV) Of course there is the little mustard seed God made that in its time develops into a great and stately bloom. Such an inauspicious start results in a symbolic representation of the great Kingdom of God. **It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.** (Mark 4: 31-32 NIV) Consider this! Jesus spoke of a little wheat seed as representing Himself and His death on the Cross for the salvation of us all. Talk about a lowly, mundane comparison. The humble, forgotten little seed is more like Him than a

lion or a mountain range. **I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.** (John 12:24 NIV)

God is impressed by small seeds, small creatures, and seemingly insignificant people. In fact, He says we are better off that way. Pay attention to that statement James makes. **The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.** (James 1: 9 NIV) That means in God's eyes it is great to be unnoticed and unknown. This is not the first time that it has been noted but Jesus' disciples were all unsung, ill-equipped messengers of the great Gospel when He called them to be disciples. Jesus didn't care how their resumes would have looked on Zip-Recruiter, He wanted them to be His friends and torch bearers. Of course, except for Judas, they lived up to His expectations magnificently. Yet at the time no one would have expected anything out of a single one of the twelve.

I must admit that I am just as intrigued today by the account in John 8 of the woman caught in the act of committing adultery as I was the first time I stumbled upon it decades ago. It remains a blazing testament to God's undying love for the rejected, despised and inadequate. When she was brought before Jesus by the crowd of lawyers and zealots who wanted Jesus to render judgement on her soul, He demurred. Instead He voiced one of the most oft-quoted replies found anywhere in literature. **When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** (John 8:7 NIV) Imagine being the one defended by Jesus! Having Him stand up for you! And who is this person who was so important that Jesus gave us one of His most famous quotes in pushing back on her accusers? We don't know. She has no name in the text. In fact, she is only known through the ages as "the woman caught in adultery". How is that for a name tag you have stuck on your lapel at every preaching conference and Bible class? No one who was there seems to have remembered her name or else John certainly would have given it to us. She just quietly slipped off into the night, never to be heard from again. And yet, would you say she did not matter? Her only qualification for being added to the Bible account of Jesus is that she was caught sleeping with someone. Small life you might say but of great value in God's eyes.

There is something great in being unnoticed by the world, being poor, not achieving the success craved by so many. We have a strong desire in us to be recognized and shown proper respect. When it doesn't happen, it can be a crushing blow to our ego. Many suffer from mental illness, broken relationships, and self-destructive lifestyles because they are dismissed or discarded. Sarai, the wife of Abraham pitched a fit because she felt Hagar her slave wasn't respecting her enough. Absalom, the son of David tried to strip his father of the kingdom because he was infuriated by his father's seeming rejection of him. You have known family members and friends over the years who fell apart because they were not valued enough by others. Yet, James says, "Don't worry about it.." In fact he goes one step further. He tells you to boast about it when no one notices you, when you are ignored, your accomplishments aren't enough, your finances are inadequate. Be happy about it. Chuckle inside at how blessed you are.

I think there are three wonderful benefits to having a humble life. The first is that it narrows your focus. All that really matters in the end is the Kingdom of God and how you can exalt Christ wherever you go. Emotional, psychological, and spiritual health are dependent on keeping just two priorities front and center. Love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself. Second, it is greatly valued by God, faithfulness and good living that is maintained without an eye for what you get out of it. Jesus' parable of the servants who were blessed by the king because of how they cared for others is a lovely description of the humble. They did not even know how valued their help had been when they took care of strangers and the poor. The King had to remind them of what it meant to Him. **"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"** (Matthew 25:40 NIV) Third, humility makes you open to sharing your world with the God who saved you and gives you eternal life. The humble life is made infinitely large and joyous when Christ is admitted in and you let Him live through you. Humility enables you to see how wonderful it is to share your life with Jesus and what a great joy it is to have Him there.