

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 12 FEBRUARY 2017

“Minimalism is a philosophy that promotes sparseness and simplicity in living one’s life. Minimalists seek to get rid of unneeded or unused things and live in an uncluttered environment...”

www.gotquestions.org

“A minimalist would probably focus on doing less, on having a less cluttered schedule, but what’s on his or her schedule would be important...A minimalist would also save a lot of time because of having less clutter and fewer possessions.”

Leo Babauta

“Living with less means you have more to give.”

Francine Jay

“[It] has been popping up everywhere lately...minimalism presents a cure-all for a certain sense of capitalist overindulgence.”

Kyle Chayka, The New York Times Magazine



Is God a Minimalist?

James Ellis

For a long time now I have deliberated if perchance God is a minimalist, a proponent of the principles of minimalism entrenched in simplicity.

Like any other, the concept is taken in different directions by people, but nevertheless in broad terms it is a proactive, provocative clarion call back to the basics where our lust for excess is put in check.

The world over, but especially in America all the more, we could benefit significantly from learning to do more with less, and in so doing stop evaluating things in such a way that says bigger must be better, wherein we must go big or go home.

Our bent toward sin reveals a disordered penchant for material abundance that abounds in discontentment.

There is no refuting that we adore gargantuan-sized, gas-guzzling vehicles, able to take a licking and keep on ticking, or so we hope.

We like our meals extra-large too, so in procuring the best super-sized bang for our buck, we will scour the globe to locate the most cost-effective all-you-can-eat buffets.

We are a society of very proud multitaskers, endlessly shuttling children to umpteen activities while we eat fast-food, send text-messages and type away on our tablet device keeping abreast of our legion of Facebook friends and Twitter followers, all while operating a 4,500-pound automobile with the power to end our lives or others' in the blink of an eye.

Although we may still find ourselves there, it is a given that most of us don't aim for increased girth in our body or ballooning debt, but it is harder to not believe in practical ways that bigger is better.

With few body parts off-limit, implants are all the rage today, as we seek to artificially upgrade that which doesn't tickle our fancy.

Starbucks has become a conglomerate in the coffee business precisely because we love our one, or two, or more cups of high-priced java.

Even our fruits and vegetables today are mammoth, injected with synthetic preservatives and hormones that enable us to eat strawberries and pumpkins produced well outside of the agrarian calendar's natural limits.

And you know that Jesus' disciples and seekers don't want to be left out of this quantitative excitement, so we have the megachurch model of ministry that has exploded in recent years.

Defined as 2,000 or more people in average weekend worship attendance, salivating over anonymity and freedom, we like feeling one church – maybe ours – is better than another church – maybe someone else's – simply because of the grandness of its edifice or the rising number of ministries it boasts.

Contrary to popular belief, quality is not quantity's illegitimate child.

Is it not better to have a congregation of 300 committed Christians than a stadium-sized assembly of 30,000 churchgoers who are there to be served rather than to serve?

Of course, yes, I know those are not mutually exclusive comparisons.

There are small churches devoted to cheap discipleship and big churches substantively on fire for Jesus.

Even so, the lesson still remains that deciding to live below our means, to slow-down and take stock of what matters most, and to never devalue small things is God's expectation.

And the more we scramble, bite, scratch, and claw for more significance in this life, the more we are actually missing the life that Jesus intends for us.

Using what you have no matter how small, in obedience to God in faith is a beautiful thing to see because God is found most powerfully in life's small things.

This is precisely why the Christian life is fundamentally about doing more with less.

It is a sad day when we dare turn our noses up at God's capabilities or workmanship, deeming it beneath our inflated wants.

This is why God says to Zechariah, to tell the people, more as a statement than an inquiry, "Who despises the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).

Therefore, it is key that we as people of faith, in faith, refuse to be defined by our circumstances, but by God, by what God can do rather than what we cannot do, or what we struggle to do well.

Whether the issue is financial resources, relationships, education or faith itself, God can do a lot with a little.

I still wonder if God is a minimalist.

I likely will never know, though, but what I do know is that God expressly values small things, and Zechariah's example is just one of many found throughout the Bible.

The Lord's words of warning to sixth century BC believers rebounding from Babylonian exile are the same words of warning to us today.

Unconvinced that more can be accomplished with less, more of everything is what we pursue, often leaving God and God's principles only for what we deem to be emergency situations that render us desperate and available for intervention.

Therein is our problem, this quandary of faith where we value only that which to human eyesight looks adequate and glamorous.

I am more apt to root for a team of hard-nosed, hardworking players of average talent than one chock-full of extraordinarily gifted prima donnas who think they are God's "frozen chosen."

This matter of bestowing unmerited value, however, is far from something that somehow only affects Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists or other "mainline" denominations (or groups of non/inter-denomination).

It also doesn't only affect one racial, ethnic, cultural group or gender.

It doesn't only affect Christians for that matter.

Between Adam's blood flowing through us (Genesis 3:17-19) and the societal mist we all inhale, every woman, man and child is touched by this tragic way of thinking and living.

And so God says, "Who despises the day of small things?" – challenging us to do more with less, as an example of values that are not of this world.



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Source: www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-james-ellis-iii/is-god-a-minimalist_b_3246616.html

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