
“Few, Little, Small”

When God Does His Greatest Work in the Least Expected Places

by Oludare Akinbo

“For who has despised the day of small things?” – Zechariah 4:10 NKJV

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” – John 6:44 NKJV

This reflection explores a recurring biblical pattern that challenges the human tendency to equate size, visibility, and numbers with divine approval. Scripture consistently presents God working through the few, the little, and the small, especially among His people. Rather than encouraging anxiety about numbers, the biblical wisdom and evidence calls believers to faithfulness, discernment, prayer, and loving stewardship of those God Himself draws.

It is a deeply human reflex — one that runs almost instinctively through every culture and generation — to associate greatness with magnitude. Large crowds feel significant. Full rooms feel like success. Numbers reassure us that something is working. But God's economy has always operated on a different logic: one that is not irrational, but radically counter-intuitive, and one that Scripture documents with striking consistency from the very first pages of Genesis all the way through to the letters of the early church.

When God chooses to act, He does not usually reach for the largest army, the most visible platform, or the most populated gathering. He reaches for the faithful remnant, the obedient individual, the overlooked minority. He works through mustard seeds, not cedar forests. Through a shepherd boy's sling, not a professional soldier's armour. Through a borrowed stable in an obscure village, not a royal palace in the capital. This is not accidental. It is intentional, instructive, and profoundly liberating for every believer who has ever felt disheartened by small numbers.

From Genesis to Revelation: A Kingdom Pattern

From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture gently but firmly confronts the human instinct to measure value by magnitude. Kingdom thinking runs counter to natural thinking. Where people look for abundance in crowds and influence in visibility, God often reveals Himself through remnant, seed, and minority.

Jesus Himself taught this principle with great care and deliberate repetition. The Kingdom of Heaven, He said, is like a mustard seed – the smallest of all seeds – which grows into a tree large enough for birds to nest in (Matthew 13:31–32). He compared it to a small measure of leaven that quietly and invisibly transforms the whole loaf (Matthew 13:33). He did not say the Kingdom begins with a great impressive start and grows proportionally. He said it begins small, almost imperceptibly, and expands through hidden, organic, divine process. Learning to honour the small beginnings is not resignation. It is alignment with how God actually works.

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For who has despised the day of small things?

— **Zechariah 4:10 NKJV**

The prophet Zechariah asked this question in the context of a discouraged people rebuilding a temple that seemed laughably small compared to what Solomon had built. But God called it significant because it was being built by His Spirit, not by human power or might. The smallness of the visible thing did not diminish the greatness of the divine work being done through it. In fact, God was saying something stronger than that: to despise small things is to despise the very method by which He most often works.

The Pattern Was There From the Very Beginning

The pattern was there from the very beginning. At creation, humanity began with two, instructed to walk with God in simplicity and obedience. God could have created multiple humans from the outset. He knows mathematics, and 'be fruitful and multiply' could more easily have been accomplished with a larger starting number. Very quickly, numbers increased – but faithfulness did not. By the time of Noah, Scripture describes a world filled with corruption and violence, yet one man is singled out:

“*Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*

— **Genesis 6:8 NKJV**

Eight souls were saved through the flood (Genesis 7-8; echoed in 1 Peter 3:20). The Bible does not present the small number as failure. It presents it as faithfulness preserved. God's work continued not through the many, but through the obedient few.

Anyone watching from outside might have concluded that God's plan had catastrophically failed. A global flood. One righteous family. Eight survivors. By every human metric of success, this looks like total loss. But God was not measuring what the bystander was measuring. He was preserving faithfulness, covenant, and the thread of His purposes through history. From those eight, the whole earth was repopulated. From that remnant, everything that followed was made possible.

A CONSISTENT PATTERN

This same pattern – apparent smallness concealing divine significance – recurs throughout Genesis and beyond. Abraham was one man called out of all nations. Joseph was one rejected son, sold into slavery, through whom an entire family was preserved. Moses was one fugitive shepherd, tending flocks in obscurity for forty years. In every case, the choice confounded the logic of appearances.

“*For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*

— **1 Samuel 16:7 NKJV**

God's Dealings With Israel: Chosen Despite Being Small

This pattern continues in God's dealings with Israel. The nation was chosen not because of size, but despite being the 'least of the nations':

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The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you.

— Deuteronomy 7:7–8 NKJV

The Gideon account is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this principle in the entire Old Testament. Gideon began with thirty-two thousand soldiers — already vastly outnumbered by the Midianite coalition. God told him the army was too large. He reduced it first to ten thousand, then to three hundred. Three hundred men against an enemy 'as numerous as locusts' (Judges 7:12). And then God said: now you are ready.

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The LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"

— Judges 7:2 NKJV

God was not interested in a victory that Israel could attribute to superior manpower. He wanted a victory so clearly beyond human explanation that the only honest conclusion was divine intervention. That kind of glory can only come through insufficiency made sufficient by God. It is worth noting, too, that Gideon himself — before the army was ever reduced — was the least in his family, from the weakest clan in Manasseh (Judges 6:15). God chose the small person before He used the small army.

Elijah: When One Faithful Voice Felt Like the Last

The prophet Elijah, after the great triumph on Mount Carmel, collapsed under a juniper tree in the wilderness and told God he was the only one left – the sole remaining faithful voice in all of Israel (1 Kings 19:10). His exhaustion was real. His discouragement was genuine. But his assessment was wrong. God's quiet answer cut through the despair with stunning precision:

“*Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.*

— 1 Kings 19:18 NKJV

Seven thousand. Hidden, uncelebrated, unnamed in the public record – but known to God, faithful to God, and preserved by God. Elijah thought he was alone in a collapsing world. He was actually part of a remnant that God had been quietly keeping all along. The lesson for discouraged believers in every generation is unmistakable: when it looks like only you are left, it is never the whole picture. God always has His remnant.

The Widow of Zarephath: When a Handful Was Enough

During the same drought that preceded Elijah's crisis of faith, God directed His prophet to a widow in Zarephath who was down to her very last resources – a handful of flour and a little oil, enough for one final meal for herself and her son before they expected to die (1 Kings 17:12). God did not send Elijah to a wealthy merchant with storerooms full of grain. He sent him to a destitute woman with almost nothing.

“*The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.*

— 1 Kings 17:16 NKJV

God chose the smallest possible provision – a handful, a little – and made it the vehicle of sustained miracle. The widow's obedience in giving what she had was not the cause of the miracle, but it was the vessel through which God chose to display

His faithfulness. What you have may look impossibly small. In God's hands, it becomes inexhaustible.

Throughout the prophets, God also speaks of a 'remnant' preserved by grace (Isaiah 10:20–22). This remnant theology is not a theology of failure. It is a theology of divine faithfulness operating through apparent smallness. The remnant is not what is left after God's plan went wrong. It is the instrument through which God's plan goes right.

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Though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

— **Isaiah 10:22 NKJV**

The New Testament and the Small Beginnings of the Church

This same counter-cultural pattern marks the New Testament at every turn. Jesus fed thousands (Matthew 14:13–21), but He did not build His church on spectacular crowd moments. He invested in depth with a few. After His resurrection, Paul records that He appeared to over five hundred people at once (1 Corinthians 15:6) — yet the prayer gathering in the upper room that preceded Pentecost numbered only about one hundred and twenty people (Acts 1:15).

Five Loaves, Two Fish: The Theology of Offered Insufficiency

When Jesus looked at the crowd of five thousand with no food to give them, the disciples' instinct was to send the people away. The resources on hand were laughably inadequate: five barley loaves and two small fish, brought by a single boy (John 6:9). Andrew's honest assessment was 'but what are these among so many?' — a question that many churches and many believers have asked when surveying what they have to offer.

“*And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.*

— John 6:11 NKJV

The miracle did not begin with abundance. It began with a boy willing to give what little he had, and a Saviour who received it with thanks. The five loaves and two fish were not multiplied in the boy's hands or the disciples' hands. They were multiplied as they were distributed — in the act of giving, not before it. This is a theology of offered insufficiency: you bring what you have, however inadequate it seems, offer it to the Lord with thanksgiving, and trust Him to do what only He can do with it. Twelve baskets of fragments remained. God's abundance always exceeds what the small offering could have produced.

One hundred and twenty people. That was the total gathered strength of the movement Jesus had birthed through three years of public ministry, miracles, teaching, and personal discipleship. And yet within weeks, three thousand were added in a single day (Acts 2:41). Within a generation, the gospel had spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. The small beginning did not limit what God could do. It became the seedbed from which He did it.

The early church understood that growth, in the biblical sense, was not primarily about the expansion of a visible institution. It was about the internal formation of people being shaped into the image of Christ, and the organic outreach that flows naturally from transformed lives. They were not anxious about empty seats. They were focused on faithfulness to the Word, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The growth came from God as they were faithful to what He had given them.

“*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

— Acts 2:47 NKJV

Notice who was doing the adding. Not the apostles. Not a programme. Not a strategy. The Lord. Paul planted, Apollos watered — but God gave the increase (1

Corinthians 3:6-7). The church's role is faithfulness and love. God's role is the harvest.

Rahab: One Red Cord, One Act of Faith

Before Israel crossed the Jordan, two spies slipped into Jericho and found shelter with a woman named Rahab — not a priest, not a soldier, not a person of standing in any conventional sense. One woman. One red cord hung from a window. One act of faith that defied her city and her culture to align herself with the God of Israel.

“*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.*

— **Hebrews 11:31 NKJV**

James honoured her. The writer of Hebrews placed her in the great hall of faith alongside Abraham, Moses, and Gideon. And Matthew, in the very first chapter of the New Testament, listed her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). One woman. One cord. One city whose walls later fell. The small act of one faithful person can find its way into the lineage of redemption itself.

John 6:44 — The Sovereignty That Anchors Everything

Perhaps no verse cuts more deeply to the heart of this question than the words of Jesus in John 6:44. In the middle of a chapter that begins with the feeding of five thousand and ends with most of His followers walking away, Jesus makes a statement that reframes the entire conversation about numbers and outcomes:

“*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

— **John 6:44 NKJV**

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No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me first draws him to me, and those he draws I will raise to life on the last day.

— John 6:44 TPT

This is not a counsel of passivity. It is a counsel of sanity. Jesus is not saying that we should not share the gospel, or that evangelism is pointless. He is saying that the ultimate act of drawing a soul to Himself belongs to the Father alone. No amount of clever programming, emotional manipulation, social pressure, or human persuasion can accomplish what only the Holy Spirit can do. We scatter seed. God determines where it falls and what it produces.

This is a word that many zealous believers — especially those with a burning heart for their families and communities — deeply need to hear. The anxiety that comes from feeling personally responsible for whether a loved one comes to faith is one of the most quietly exhausting burdens a believer can carry. You do not have to manufacture conversion. You do not have to manufacture a crowd. You are called to be faithful, available, prayerful, and genuinely loving. You are called to give a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15). And then you are called to trust God with the outcome.

ON THE REMNANT AND GRACE

The remnant theology of Romans 9–11 carries this same anchor. Paul's extended argument is that God's word has not failed simply because Israel as a whole has not responded — because a faithful remnant remains, preserved not by human effort or religious achievement, but by grace alone. 'Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace' (Romans 11:5 NKJV). The remnant is never an accident. It is always a grace.

The Danger of Measuring the Wrong Things

It would be careless to address this subject without acknowledging the context in which it most commonly arises. Many believers today sit in congregations that are smaller than they expected, or smaller than they feel they should be. They look at empty seats on a weekly worship day morning and feel something between grief and guilt. They watch family members and friends decline invitations year after year and wonder what they are doing wrong.

These feelings are not wicked. They often come from genuine love for people and genuine desire for God's Kingdom to grow. But feelings, even sincere ones, can attach themselves to wrong interpretations of what God is doing – or not doing. The early church would have puzzled at our modern preoccupation with institutional size. What they cared about was whether the Word was being proclaimed faithfully, whether the body was growing in love, whether the poor were being cared for, and whether they were living in ways that bore credible witness to the resurrection.

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But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

— 2 Timothy 3:1–4 NKJV

Paul was not saying this to discourage mission. He was saying it to calibrate expectation. In the last days, the gospel will be contested. Culture will pull in the opposite direction. Some will fall away. Some will never come. But the faithful remnant who hold the Word, love genuinely, and endure to the end will be saved – and will be the means through which God's purposes advance.

A Warm, Loving, Open Church: The Environment God Blesses

None of this means the church should become complacent, inward-looking, or cold to newcomers. Quite the opposite. The New Testament picture of a healthy church is one that is warm, loving, and genuinely open – a community whose quality of life together is itself a form of witness.

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By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

— John 13:35 NKJV

Jesus did not say the world would know His disciples by their growth strategy, their building programme, or the size of their weekly worship day attendance. He said they would be known by their love for one another. The quality of fellowship within the body is both an end in itself and the most powerful ongoing invitation to those outside it.

When people who do not yet know Christ encounter a community of genuine warmth, honesty, care, and joy – a community that bears one another's burdens and forgives one another and chooses each other deliberately – they encounter something they cannot find anywhere else in the culture. That contrast is a form of apologetics. It does not need to be manufactured. It simply needs to be true.

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I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

— Revelation 3:8 NKJV

To the church at Philadelphia – a church with 'a little strength' – Jesus did not say: I have given you a closed door because you are small. He said: I have set before you an open door that no one can shut. Little strength. Faithful word. Undenied name. That was enough for an open door. It is still enough today.

A Reflection: Staying Faithful, Joyful, and Grounded

For every believer who feels the weight of empty seats, unanswered invitations, and the seemingly slow pace of visible growth – and especially for those who carry a burning love for family and friends not yet in the fold – here are seven practical anchors. These are not techniques for manufacturing growth. They are ways of staying rooted in the wisdom of John 6:44, continuing to love well, witnessing freely, and remaining fully alive in the body where God has placed you.

1 Anchor your identity in faithfulness, not outcomes

The New Testament commends us to be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2), not to be found fruitful by any particular measurable standard. God will produce the fruit. Our call is to be good soil, faithful stewards, and consistent witnesses. When anxiety rises over numbers, return to this: Am I being faithful to what God has given me to do today? If yes, that is enough. Trust the rest to the One who draws.

2 Let John 6:44 be your daily reset

Memorise it, meditate on it, return to it whenever you feel responsible for what only God can do. Pray it over the names of people you love. The Father who draws is more eager for your loved ones to come home than you are. It is not a door you can force open – but you can stand faithfully at that door, praying, loving, and remaining available. Rest in that.

3 Pray for people, not just for seats

There is a subtle difference between praying 'Lord, fill our church' and praying by name: 'Lord, draw John, draw Amara, draw my sister.' The first can become anxiety with religious clothing. The second is intercession. Stand between specific people and the throne of grace. Name them. Pray for their particular resistances and needs. Let your prayer life be populated with faces, not numbers.

4 Seize every opportunity to share, but hold it loosely

First Peter 3:15 tells us always to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us — but to do so with gentleness and respect. Every conversation, every shared meal, every moment of honesty about your faith is an opportunity. Take it. Offer it freely. Then release the outcome to God. You are a witness, not a Holy Spirit. Share the reason for your hope clearly and lovingly, and trust God to do what only He can do in the heart.

5 Invest deeply in the body you have been given

One of the most effective antidotes to discouragement over who is not there is to pour genuine love and attention into who is there. The people present in your fellowship are not a consolation prize. They are your assignment. Serve them. Know them by name. Pray for them. Build genuine, lasting friendships that become part of the testimony you offer to the world. A church where people are truly loved is a church that people outside want to come to.

6 Guard your heart against comparison and competition

It is easy, especially in the age of visible platforms and published attendance figures, to measure your church's faithfulness by comparison to another congregation. This is almost always unhelpful. God has not called every church to the same expression, the same size, or the same season. Some are called to plant seeds another generation will harvest. Be faithful to your specific calling, and trust God to honour it in His time and in His way.

7 Let your worship be full regardless of who is watching

Perhaps the most powerful witness a small congregation can give is the witness of genuine, wholehearted worship in a room that is not yet full. When searching people encounter a community that worships God with real joy and abandon — not performing for a crowd but genuinely encountering the living God — they encounter something that no programme can manufacture. Bring everything to God in worship, every time, whether ten are present or ten thousand.

A Final Word

Before He lit a burning bush, God waited forty years with a fugitive shepherd in a desert no one watched.

Before He opened the Red Sea, He let His people stand with their backs to the water and an army behind them.

Before He fed five thousand, He received five loaves and two fish from a boy who had nothing more to give.

Before He saved a city, He used one woman and one red cord.

Before He filled the upper room with fire, He gathered one hundred and twenty people to pray.

He has never been limited by the size of what He began with.

He has only ever asked for what is faithful, what is honest, and what is offered.

The God who works through the few, the little, and the small is not planning to change His methods. He is waiting for His people to stop being embarrassed by them.

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Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

— Zechariah 4:6 NKJV