

CHALLENGERS OF HOPE 01 THE TEMPTATION TO TRIVIALISE STUDY GUIDE

Welcome to a brand new series on the challengers to our hopes and dreams.

You can get your hopes up, use your imagination, dream big, but then suddenly – one of these enemies turns up and smashes your hope to pieces. Paul tells us that good warfare means not being ignorant of your enemies' tactics, so we are going to expose the tactics of the enemy to steal your dreams, your hopes – and the good news is that the better you deal with these enemies, the more doors open for you.

Before David faced Goliath, he had to fight the bear and the lion – the smaller threats, still dangerous, still problematic, and he did it in secret, no one knew until David turned up that bit braver, than bit more experienced, that bit more capable. When you overcome these “Challengers of Hope” – you will be better positioned to beat some giants and really help some people.

And the first challenger of your hope – it's one we have all had to face is the temptation to trivialize the tiny. You see God never starts us with our destiny fully grown. You start on the first rung. Read Luke 16.10, preferably in several different translations.

That is how God works. He always starts you off with a little! You want to be an evangelist to the nations – God starts you off sharing your faith with your friends, neighbours and family. You want to pastor; God leads you to go to living church. You want to preach, God says start sharing your faith with people. You want to run your own business; it will start small. Everything God does in our life, He starts off small.

Whether it is being on the main football team, getting your degree, getting promoted at work, having a family, a team, a marriage – they always come from small choices! Everything big starts small. Every one of us started on the planet about 7lb!

David learned how to use a sling on bears and lions. He only turns up at the battlefield to bring cheese and bread to his brothers. The little things are what makes you big!

David got good at sling throwing, and more importantly he got good at worshipping and trusting God, in the little places, in the places where no one saw him and no one knew who he was.

Even Jesus – his first miracle was not in a huge crusade, it wasn't in front of the crowds, it didn't lead to thousands of salvations and the nation shaking. It was at a wedding – He turned water into wine and most guests I reckon had already had so much wine they would never have remembered Him doing it.

It was not a big thing – a wedding without wine. It wasn't someone dying of cancer, it wasn't a dead child, it wasn't thousands of starving people, it wasn't two blind men, it wasn't a man with thousands of demons. But it was a problem, and his mother asked him to deal with it – and he did, and from that point on he did thousands of miracles on the planet.

Now this is how God works, and it is a simple process – you dream of something, then God gives you the dream in a micro-form. You work on the micro-form, are faithful in the micro-form, then you walk in the larger version over time.

But this is the challenge of our hope – rather than rejoice over the micro-form – rather than be faithful and true and committed to it – we are all tempted to trivialize it, and fail

to realize how important it is. But the truth we must realize is this: we cannot GET TO TOMORROW'S BIG DREAMS if WE TRIVIALISE TODAY'S LITTLE REALITY. It's the training ground, it's where you prepare for the big dream!

David could have yielded to that temptation – it's only a little lion, no one is watching, they are only going to steal one sheep, I've got another 99, it doesn't matter.

But it did matter – the lion and bear were the micro-form, it was the preparation for the big dream – it was training for reigning, it was how God saw if you could handle it, it was how to learn how to handle it, it was how you got some credibility. It was all those things. Never trivialize the small beginnings!

Read Zech 4.10. It asks “who has despised the day of small things” (small here means smaller – so the good news is that if there are smaller things there are bigger things. If your living church is too small, if your business is too small, if your influence is too small, if your income is too small, it can be bigger! If there are smaller things there are bigger things! But we must not despise the smaller things!)

The word “despised” in Hebrew is booz, which means to hate because you think it is worth nothing or insignificant, it comes from the idea of throwing something to the ground and stamping on it – it has no value to me.

This is the temptation that we all face – and it is a massive challenge to our dreams – it is the temptation to despise and give no value to the micro-form. We must rather be faithful with the micro-form!

Some people think our ministry came out of nowhere. That makes me laugh. We spent a long time on the micro-form. We rejoiced when we hit double figures in Dagenham, it was awesome.

When we started TREE OF LIFE CHURCH in 2010 it was hard for a number of reasons:

- We could not find a venue, it was really hard
- We had lies spreading about me that made it really hard to progress
- We had a lot of people who were damaged by their previous churches
- We had a few people who did not understand grace at all
- We had one of our trustees walk out the door of the church just before we signed the first ever trust deed. He refused to speak to me, wouldn't say why he left
- We had one of our first people start another church in Dagenham and tried his hardest to get everyone to leave us

It was hard, and on top of that, we only had about ten people who regularly came, people stayed away by coachloads. It just wasn't growing. There was a real temptation to trivialise Tree of Life Church in 2010. There was a real temptation to not take it seriously, to not bother working too hard on praying for the people, on preparing messages. There was a temptation to despise the day of small things.

But I did not do that. What I did was I treated a meeting of three people as important as a meeting of a thousand. I prepared, I studied, I prayed, I believed, I wrote, I edited, I imagined, I dreamed, I worked. I fought some lions and bears.

You know now we are opening another location in Bristol in a few weeks, we are re-opening all these locations, planting new churches – how is this possible? Because I learned what to do in the micro-form and being faithful in the micro-form.

I can find venues; I am an expert now. I can handle being lied about. I can handle people who don't get grace. I can help damaged people. I barely miss a beat when people leave. I have been through it all, and now I am really for a larger dream. **BE FAITHFUL IN THE SMALL THINGS AND GOD WILL OPEN THE DOOR!**

We spent years on TV, on one slot, one programme. I fought for the quality of that programme, I fought for it to be a blessing to people. Now we are all over the world. **BECAUSE I WAS FAITHFUL IN THE MICRO-FORM! So, DO NOT DESPISE YOUR MICRO-FORM DO NOT BE TEMPTED TO TRIVIALISE IT.**

I had some really difficult financial troubles when I went through BIBLE COLLEGE – it was my MICROFORM – now I am believing God for some big numbers. **I DID NOT DESPIRE THE MICRO-FORM!** Some people cannot be pastors because they **CANNOT HANDLE A SMALL GROUP**, they cannot **HANDLE MAKING THE TEAS**, they cannot **HANDLE TURNING UP ON TIME**. They hate small things. They trivialise them, and it is stopping them walking in their dreams, it is actually stopping them from dreaming.

THIS IS SOMETHING PEOPLE DO NOT TALK ABOUT OFTEN, but it is **TRUE – SUCCESS CREATES PROBLEMS**. You have a dozen locations a month, you have more bills than the guy with one location. You have more people in your church, that's more complaining, more difficulties, more problems. **SUCCESS IS NEVER A GOAL**, anything you have in your hand is the **MICROFORM FOR THE NEXT STAGE**, and once you get the **NEXT STAGE**, it's now the **MICROFORM**, the smaller thing to the **NEXT STAGE**. You keep going and growing, learning on the smaller version how to handle the larger version.

If your church is growing – you have a problem. You have new Christians causing a mess. You have space problems. You have more children, so you need more children's workers. You need more money. Any time a family grows, there are brand new problems. Having four children is more problems than three! Having a million pounds is more of a problem than having no money. **THE MORE SUCCESS YOU HAVE, THE BIGGER YOUR PROBLEMS WILL BE. BUT THE BIGGER THE PROBLEMS YOU FACE DOWN, THE BIGGER YOUR SUCCESS WILL BE.**

BUT GOD STARTS US OFF WITH SMALL SUCCESS AND SMALL PROBLEMS – and you MUST NOT TRIVIALISE EITHER OF THEM. WHAT YOU DO WITH WHAT YOU HAVE IS WHAT WILL DETERMINE IF YOU GET MORE. You need to dream big, you need to not shrink back, you need to think big, expect big, but at the **SAME TIME – YOU NEED TO BE FAITHFUL, TO BE KIND, TO BE SWEET, TO BE GENEROUS, TO BE BRAVE WITH WHAT YOU HAVE RIGHT NOW!** Your opportunities from **GOD** are in disguise as **PROBLEMS AND AS HARD WORK!** That's why so few people recognize them!

Read Ephesians 5.15-16. We need to make the most of every opportunity no matter how small or trivial it appears. If you are influencing one person for **JESUS – that's an opportunity – MAKE THE MOST OF IT. You NEED TO DO THE BEST, BE THE MOST DEDICATED TO WHATEVER GOD PUTS IN FRONT OF YOU – NO MATTER HOW TRIVIAL IT SEEMS – THAT WAY YOU CAN BE SURE OF GETTING MORE!**

God wants to know "CAN YOU HANDLE MORE" – so He wants to know CAN YOU HANDLE A LITTLE. But if you look at the little and say "is that it"? You will despise the micro-form and never get to the next level!

I mean I started a church in Dorset – I would drive down for a small handful of people. I know people who could have had that church, but they didn't like it being small. Richard and Jacqui on the other hand, didn't do a head count, but rather they sat me down and said "We believe God wants us there, we are going to move there, and do it" – I know Dorset will keep going – EVERYTIME IT GROWS RICHARD AND JACQUI ARE JUST FAITHFUL WITH IT. Now they are planting in Exeter and we are planting in Bristol. It's called BEING FAITHFUL WITH THE MICRO-FORM! That is what I am talking about!

When you trivialise the micro-form you never walk in your dreams. This is one of the most serious dream killers there is, this is one of the most lethal challengers to your dreams. YOU HAVE TO RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE THE MICRO-FORM AND BE FAITHFUL WITH IT. You have to do this to get promoted.

Let's talk about careers. I know I use ministry as my example, but that is what I know. But in business, in every sphere, people want to see you HANDLE THE MICRO-FORM.

You want to be a pilot; you won't start out with the 747.

You want to be a surgeon; your first surgery won't be a triple bypass

You won't enter the business as a CEO, you won't enter the army as a general, you won't enter the school as the headteacher, you won't enter the church as the pastor, you won't enter the whatever as the boss! And just like the pilot or the surgeon, God is looking for more than just book knowledge, more than just a year or two of Bible College – the question is HOW DO YOU APPLY WHAT YOU KNOW, HOW ARE YOU UNDER PRESSURE, HOW ARE YOU DOING THINGS.

Life is more than just a tick box of learning things – right? YOU NEED TO BE FAITHFUL IN A FEW THINGS TO BE IN CHARGE OF MANY THINGS (You can see this in Matthew 25.23). That means doing, that means getting it done! That means being faithful and being serious about the micro-form.

You start off as co-pilot, you start off as co-surgeon, then you finally get to step up and do something on your own. That is the kingdom way of doing things, that is HOW GOD DOES THINGS – how do you handle doing this and that. There is no short-cut to being faithful with the micro-form. I have seen too many ministries look for a short cut to this, and businessmen too – THERE IS NO SHORT CUT TO THE MICROFORM. There is no shortcut to getting the hours in, to learning the things you need to learn, there is no shortcut to these wonderful micro-opportunities. NEVER TRIVIALIZE THEM, NEVER DESPISE THEM, NEVER RUN AWAY FROM THEM! BE FAITHFUL!

Face your challenges, however small, however hidden. Be faithful no matter how demeaning and tiny the task is. This is a key to your dreams. Mordecai told his niece "WHO KNOWS WHETHER YOU HAVE COME TO THE KINGDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS!" (ESTHER 4.14). Every time you get your MICRO-FORM of your DREAM – I WANT YOU TO SAY "I AM IN THE KINGDOM FOR THIS!" I want you to say: I am designed for this mission. Ok, Lord, I wanted to do it with thousands of people and millions of pounds, but I will do it with 10 people and £5. That's fine by me, watch me be faithful,

watch me take this seriously, watch me do this well. WATCH ME DO WHATEVER IT TAKES.

We need to not just resist this temptation we need to aggressively resist it and move in the opposite direction. Here are some counter attack moves on this temptation we should all bring into our life.

COUNTER ATTACK 1: TREAT THE MICROFORM AS VITAL

This is your secret weapon against the TRIVIALISING OF THE MICROFORM. You untrivialise it, you treat it as the most important thing in your life, you take it super seriously, you treat it as your KINGDOM DESTINY. You dig deep and develop the attitude that says: if I never get promoted from this position, I will be the best you have ever seen.

- I will be patient with everyone around me, and I will be patient with myself
- I will give generously no matter how much or how little money I have
- I will not prophesy failure over my MICROFORM
- I will celebrate everyone that is in my MICROFORM
- I will treat this like my KINGDOM TASK until I am asked to do something thing else. If God gave me this, ONLY GOD WILL MOVE ME ON. If God put me here, I am not moving.

THIS WILL OPEN THE DOOR FOR YOUR DREAMS. This will stop you trivializing the small. YOU see how MUCH YOU HAVE IS NOT IMPORTANT, not really, it's WHAT YOU DO WITH WHAT YOU HAVE. You know whenever I am thinking of moving someone into a new position, I look at what they are doing, and I ask questions such as:

- What are their energy levels with their microform?
- What is their punctuality like?
- Does it impact their family life?

So many people do not link the MICRO THINGS with their destiny. They do not realise Paul told Timothy don't make someone an elder who cannot look after their children. If they have 2.4 children and cannot make time for them, you are not helping those people if you give them 10 adults to look after! We need to look after whatever the Lord has give us.

COUNTERATTACK 2: NEVER BE AVERAGE

Never be average. Don't be average in the way you dress, the way to live, the way you parent, the way you pray, the way you shave – all of it, DO NOT BE AVERAGE. MOST PEOPLE THINK THEY WOULD BE EXCELLENT WITH A HUGE TASK BUT ARE AVERAGE WITH SMALL TASKS. They do not embody the SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE. Sadly, MOST PEOPLE ARE MEDIOCRE when it comes to HANDLING THEIR OPPORTUNITIES – their MICROFORMS.

One way you can tell is someone is mediocre is if they get offended when you call them mediocre. But the truth is it is not often someone decides to be more than average, to be excellent.

So, you need to make some choices to BE ABOVE AVERAGE in YOUR ATTITUDE. Make a choice to not just do the minimum possible. When you put the effort in and start being a winner not a whiner – then you get to move from the SMALLER TO THE LARGER!

Now listen – GOD LOVES YOU – HE REALLY DOES – HE IS ON YOUR SIDE. God doesn't want anyone to fail. God wants to give you big dreams and HE WANTS YOU TO WALK IN THEM – BUT IT IS UP TO YOU IF YOU WALK IN YOUR DREAMS. It is up to you if you trivialise the small things, if you despise the day of small things, if you despise the small things, if you just do mediocre work because it's only a little thing, and no one is looking.

Some of you have been in meetings when I preached to 6 of you, and I think you would all agree – I preached this well every time. I put the work in, I wrote the sermon, I studied the Bible, I studied the Greek and Hebrew, I did my exegesis, I prayed, I thought of how to best illustrate the message. That is CALLED GETTING AN A when no one is looking, that is called slaying the lion and the bear. That is called EMBRACING THE DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS. That is called NOT BEING AVERAGE.

Now I can almost hear the attitude of the age coming against me here. You know the attitude that we all should be rewarded and promoted and get big things – everyone is an A before God, everyone is loved so everyone gets promoted, all the school children get a medal, everyone is rewarded

LISTEN – I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God's love is utterly unconditional. HE LOVES YOU JUST THE WAY YOU ARE. HE CARES ABOUT YOU – and GETTING SAVED IS A FREE GIFT, GETTING HEALED IS A FREE GIFT!

However, there is a reward for hard work in this life and the next, there is a harvest for what we sow, there are CONSEQUENCES TO ACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES TO ATTITUDES. If you deny this, it's probably because you are naïve, or you have never been fruitful, and you are defending your lack of fruitfulness! YOU ARE STILL ON THE MINI-MICROFORM because you have never been FAITHFUL, never been excellent, never cared about it really.

The world right now is calling out for a strange system of equality that wants everyone to always get the same level of increase. It is a strange system because it denies the BIBLE – it denies the fact that we are all different, God has given us all different dreams, different ideas, different callings, we are all creative but I can create a sermon, I cannot create a chair, I cannot create a song, I cannot create a spreadsheet. WE all have different creativities, different passions.

If you embrace that we are all victims held back by a structure oppressing us – you are denying that you have GOD given potential, you deny that we HAVE AUTHORITY AND DOMINION AS CHRISTIANS that outweighs our past and outweighs everything.

I am not being political here; I am being BIBLICAL. Jesus had a lot to say about unproductive lazy servants – and the most important thing he said about them is that they did not get promoted. Unproductive servants LOSE WHAT LITTLE THEY HAVE AND IT IS GIVEN TO SOMEONE ELSE! God is not rewarding the nice and the sweet, HE IS REWARDING THE PEOPLE WHO CARE, WHO DO NOT DESPISE THE SMALL THING AND THEY ARE FAITHFUL AND HONEST AND TRUE AND EXCELLENT WITH THE SMALL THING.

COUNTERATTACK 3: SEE EVERY PROBLEM AS AN OPPORTUNITY

This is a chance to be above average, to be faithful, to roll up my sleeves and get it right. I will embrace it and take it.

COUNTERATTACK 4: MAKE NO EXCUSES

Every responsibility you have been given, no matter how small, no matter who notices – that is to be treated like it is the most important thing in the world and the whole world is watching. THAT'S THE STANDARD OF DILIGENCE YOU SHOULD HAVE.

Look at your life – where are you unmotivated. Are you at least showering every day? Are you studying right now for where you want to be? Are you investing in yourself? Are you doing the small things, are you on time? BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF – COME TO YOUR SENSES. If you are trivializing the SMALL THINGS, the MICROFORMS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU – then you will never increase.

Excuses is the condition of the non-achievers. People who make excuses NEVER are excellent. Well, it was this, it was that it was society, it was my boss, it was my family, it was life, God put me on the shelf. Do not make excuses. THERE IS NO EXCUSE – DO YOUR BEST! DO NOT LET YOURSELF MAKE EXCUSES TO YOURSELF. DO NOT TAKE EXCUSES FROM YOURSELF! HOLD YOURSELF TO A HIGHER STANDARD!



CHALLENGERS OF HOPE or THE TEMPTATION TO TRIVIALISE STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

- I. What does Ben mean when he says God gives us our dream in micro-form?
2. Was Jesus first miracle in front of a huge audience or not? What has this to do with our message on Sunday?
3. Why are people so easily tempted to despise small things?
4. Why and when are you tempted to despise small things?
5. Why does God give us "very little" at first? What is His plan?
6. What kind of problems can happen when you are being successful and doing something big?
7. What does it mean to make the most of every opportunity?
8. What can we do when we are tempted to trivialize a tiny thing that God has given us? What does that mean in your life, calling and circumstances?
9. What measures can we take to resist and counterattack the temptation to trivialize the tiny?
10. Is there a micro-form God has given you in your life that you are not being faithful with? What do you need to do about it? How can you repent and change today?
- II. Are you struggling to dream big and be faithful right now? Both are possible. Is there something you would like the group to pray with you about with this area of micro-forms?
12. What about this message challenged, inspired or encouraged you the most?

