

Chronic Gift-Wasting Disorder

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By Tony Stith

ZIMMERMAN, Minn.—Thursday evening my wife and I attended a very inspirational seminar sponsored by my daughter's high school. Courtney had heard the presentation at a school assembly and had been so moved by it that we just had to see it for ourselves. The presentation was called "Rachel's Challenge."

Rachel Scott was the first of 13 people killed during the Columbine High School massacre on April 20, 1999. She was sitting on the grass eating lunch with a friend when one of the shooters approached and opened fire on her before making his way into the school building.

Just weeks before this tragic event, Rachel had written an essay for a school assignment titled "My Ethics, My Codes of Life." Perhaps the most poignant section of her essay reads as follows:

"Compassion is the greatest form of love humans have to offer . . . I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go."

Since her death Rachel's "chain reaction" theory has been a source of inspiration and motivation to thousands who have heard her story. In a desire to curb the damage caused by bullying, schools have rightly championed her message as a means of encouraging their students to show kindness and compassion toward their fellow classmates. One small act of kindness can have a ripple affect that, when multiplied, can ultimately change the environment and the lives of many.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 says much the same thing in a different way. There we read: "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days."

Imagine sitting in a boat on a large lake and throwing a small piece of bread out onto the water. It seems insignificant, doesn't it? Almost meaningless. Yet God says here that it is the seemingly insignificant things we do for others that often have the greatest impact.

The man who cast the bread didn't expect anything in return. He didn't cast the bread and then sit there and watch it like some investment, seeing what might happen. No, it's as if he walked away, never expecting to see it again.

Think about this. If you were to throw a literal piece of bread out on a lake and then come back after several days, what do you think the chances would be of your finding it? Pretty much *nada*, right?

So what has happened? Well, my guess is that, much like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, that small piece of bread multiplied exponentially so that over time there was no way the man couldn't find it. Its impact had spread, was reproduced by others and now was noticeable to all.

Maybe some of you are afflicted, as I have been from time to time, with this disease I'll call chronic-gift-wasting disorder.

Symptoms of this affliction include:

- Viewing oneself as a failure because one feels that God has yet to use one for anything that one deems a significant contribution.
- A sense that one's gifts and abilities are not valuable, or that one doesn't have any gifts or abilities to offer.
- A compulsion to spend one's life waiting for that big event, that big *something*, to happen that will signal that one's life has been meaningful. Waiting and hoping for some validation that one wasn't just needlessly occupying real estate.

It's a disease that can be spiritually debilitating. It causes the sufferer to allow opportunities that might positively impact the lives of others to pass by unseen because the sufferer's attention is riveted on some hoped-for significant event to occur just over the horizon. By always waiting for that *big* thing to happen, he misses the little opportunities to truly make a difference.

I have a friend who pastors a Sabbath-keeping church in a small town in East Texas. I've always had a great deal of admiration and respect for this guy, not only because of his seemingly unending supply of energy but because he has a heart for people as big as the state of Texas is wide.

I always wondered what makes him tick—how he kept going week after week, year after year, serving the brethren as he does. I know he has a love for God and a desire to do His work, but, then, so do a lot of other people.

Something about this guy is different. This summer I figured out what that something was. He let it slip in a message he gave while I was visiting one Sabbath. It wasn't even a major point of the message, only an offhand comment. If I hadn't been listening closely at that moment, I might have even missed it. He said, "The greatest contribution we each can make in life is to do good in our little corner of the world." A very simple, yet very profound, statement.

Rachel Scott was right. Living a life focused on small, often unseen, acts of compassion and kindness can be a challenge. It's so much more rewarding to the ego to make the big splash, the larger-than-life impact. It's difficult to work on the sidelines when our human nature all too often wants to march in the victory parade. Even so, it's the work done unseen on the sidelines, through untold numbers of acts of kindness and compassion, cast unselfishly upon the waters, that gives God the greatest glory and, ultimately, gives our lives the greatest meaning.