

When You Feel Unappreciated and Belittled

I walked into the building, my heels clicking on the church sidewalk and my arm loaded with my Bible and a stack of handouts. As a mom of three little ones, it was no small task to arrive on time, with my heart and message ready to go. But ready I was!

When I got inside, I was surprised to learn that another speaker had *also* arrived and was ready to go. Apparently there had been a scheduling error. And now there was the awkward decision of how to proceed. “Well, I’m completely prepared,” the other speaker said. “I have my PowerPoint loaded on the computer, and I’m all set. I’m not sure how this mix-up happened, but I think I should speak today.”

Outwardly, I acquiesced graciously, but inwardly I was fuming.

Did this woman think I *hadn’t* prepared? That I wasn’t *also* ready? I had spent about twenty hours that week, laboring over my message! Had *she* sacrificed as much as I had to be here? I doubted it. She was in her fifties. Certainly, she hadn’t been up comforting a child in the night, one nightmare after another. Surely she hadn’t gotten anyone else dressed that morning or changed any diapers before showing up at the church. How dare she belittle me by being so dismissive!

Being Dismissed

During his ministry, John the Baptist experienced something that probably seemed even more disparaging. Once when he was baptizing, some of his disciples reported that another guy had shown up to do baptisms that day, too. They said. “Look, He is baptizing, and everyone is going to him” (John 3:26).

I wouldn't blame John for feeling threatened by this. He had sacrificed so much to do this ministry. He lived alone in the desert, eating bugs and wild honey, and spent his days preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). And now the people were flocking to the *other* guy's baptism spot. How disheartening!

Yet John speaks with warmth and clarity that are often lacking in my own heart when I feel threatened or underappreciated. John says this is exactly what he hoped for! Yes, people are turning away from him, but it's Jesus they are turning to! John compares himself to the best man at a wedding. Why would he be threatened to see the bride turning her attention to the just-arriving groom? Instead, John says he is filled with joy (John 3:29).

Unfortunately, I often lack John's perspective. Even though I've shown up as a "bridesmaid," ready to help make this wedding between Jesus and His Bride happen, it's hard for me when I'm told, "We're all set. You aren't needed." Rather than being filled with joy, I'm filled with outrage. I forget that I'm here to facilitate a wedding, not my own ego trip.

A Jealous Suitor

It's important to note that the Bride of Christ has a jealous suitor who loves to capitalize on moments like these. Satan himself is insatiably jealous of King Jesus and would love to steal the Bride and cancel the wedding. So here's what he does. He tries to infect the wedding party with his own jealousy and selfish ambition (James 3:14–15). He tempts us to make the wedding all about *us*.

So when two bridesmaids go toe to toe with eyes flashing—each outraged at being discredited or devalued—a sly grin spreads over the devil's face. If a bridesmaid (or two) is preoccupied with establishing her own importance, she won't be devoting much time to wedding preparations, which suits Satan just

fine.

See how the enemy tries to distract us from going into all the world, making disciples and baptizing them (Matt. 28:19)? He wants us to do anything but get the Bride to the aisle.

John's Resolve

John, however, is undeterred. When his disciples came saying, "Look, He is baptizing, and everyone is going to him," Satan would have been delighted to see John—the best man—stamping his foot, getting sulky, or becoming territorial. But John's goal all along had been to elevate the Groom, not himself.

Sure, it was probably fun when the people were flocking to him and hanging on every word. But now, John's baptismal class is shrinking. The voice crying out in the wilderness is being drowned out by a new voice—that of Jesus, the Groom.

And how does John respond? With a big ol' grin on his face, he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). In other words, he's fine with fading into the background. The Bride has turned toward the Groom. That's what John wanted in the first place.

John's words beg the question: Is that what I want? Am I fine with my voice fading into background noise, as long as people are turning to to Jesus? Am I okay when:

- My Bible study group dwindles while another group grows?
- My testimony has no obvious effect while somebody else's testimony sparks revival?
- My decades-long ministry is being eliminated by a young leader, launching something new?
- My message isn't needed because another speaker showed up on the same day?

In moments like these, Satan would love to see me inflate myself, demand recognition or fall into jealous comparison. He

would chortle with glee to hear me say, “I must increase!”

But every occasion to insist on my own importance is also an opportunity to exalt Christ. In fact, those moments I feel marginalized and belittled in my kingdom work are often my *best* opportunities to exalt Christ. When I repeat after John and say, “He must increase, but I must decrease,” I make *much* of King Jesus. And if I say it as John did—with a grin on my face—it serves as a living, smiling, wedding invitation.

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come” (Rev. 22:17).

Are you struggling with feeling marginalized, unappreciated, or belittled in your kingdom work? Perhaps this is your best opportunity to do exactly what you’ve been wanting to do—exalt Christ! What is one way you will choose, this very week, to smile and say, “He must increase, but I must decrease”?

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