

Recently I came across a book I’ve had on my shelf a long time, “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff,” by Richard Carlson. I started leafing through it because I am the “poster child” for sweatin’ the small stuff! I bet there are people here this morning who are just like me: you too “sweat the small stuff.” Think of the things you “sweat over”, keep you up at night, slam a door, drive you nuts(!)

Whatever the “small stuff” is, when we’re irritated, annoyed, frustrated, we overreact, blow things out of proportion, massage old resentments, let our imaginations run wild. It’s not a pretty sight, right? So to survive we need to keep things in **perspective**: “Life is NOT fair.” One of the first obstacles in dealing with any adversity (big stuff or small stuff) is the illusion that Life should somehow be fair (at least to us!) and when it’s not we feel betrayed, resentful, and throw ourselves a “pity party”—“how dare God would put me through this!”

Personal sidebar: when I needed a transplant I wanted to throw myself a big pity party until a friend intervened and put everything in a new perspective. He said, “Yes, life is not fair....but it is equal.” Which is to say, no one is immune, no one gets a free pass, not even me. It was an extraordinarily humbling moment, finally realizing EVERYONE “sweats the small stuff,” challenges, injustices, heartbreak, disappointments. People sometimes think it is our successes, our achievements, our prestige that unite us as human beings. I believe the contrary: it is our frailties, losses, vulnerabilities, defeats, that truly unite us one to another. So the first step in not “sweatin’ the small stuff” is to accept the fact, “life is not fair.” But having said that, how we respond to that reality makes all the difference in the world. Our response is the “game changer.” So a second perspective is: “live

in the here-and-now.” The regrets of yesterday and the anxieties of tomorrow are the twin thieves that rob us of the gold mine that is in the here and now. The solutions we seek are not found in the “coulda/woulda/shoulda’s” of yesterday or the “sky is falling” of tomorrow but in the “here-and-now.”

Carlson observed that “God has his fingerprint on everything.” So look for God’s fingerprint in every here-and-now experience and things will change dramatically; no challenge or difficulty will quite be the same again. It works like this: when all of our attention is on the problem, the problem has all of our attention. With God’s fingerprint on the experience God redirects our attention to his power within us, and it’s a game-changer because suddenly God and I are in it together and I’m not “sweatin’ the small stuff” all by myself. And that’s a big difference.

Third perspective when “sweatin’ the small stuff:” remember the quickest way to get out of your adversity is to reach out to someone in their adversity. I’m talking “compassion” here. Sometimes the small stuff makes us so self-absorbed in worry we forget loved ones, friends, strangers who may need us. Who knows, by reaching out in our adversity we might be an answer to someone’s prayers, or a calming, reassuring presence. Sometimes it’s as simple as getting out of our own shadow because “everyone is fighting a hard battle,” and we need each other, more than we dare to imagine, more than we even dare to admit. Remember the Proverb, “two are better than one, because if one falls, the other is there to pick them up.” Compassion is perspective; compassion lifts us out of our funk.

Lastly, it is very easy for my mind to slip into a lot of negativity, to take people and life for granted. When I “sweat the small stuff” my faith, love, and hope is replaced with fear, resentment, and negativity. Which brings me to “gratitude.”

This is our “ace up the sleeve.” Faith is grounded in “Thanksgiving” not in resentment and bitterness. Practicing thankfulness everyday forces a perspective on us to look at a difficult situation and choose whether this will make us a bitter person or a better person. Think of it this way: most people “have” to get up in the morning; “have” a job; “have” important responsibilities; “have” to work with people; “have” opportunities for fun and leisure; “have” food and shelter; “have” people who love and care about them; “have” opportunities given to them. Now I want you to change one word. Change the word “have” to the word “get.”

You and I “get” to rise up in the morning; “get” to have a job or career; “get” to have important responsibilities; “get” experiences for fun and leisure; “get” food and shelter; “get” people who love and care for us; “get” opportunities to live life with meaning and purpose. Those things aren’t burdens, actually they’re blessings in disguise because most people on this earth do not “have” or “get” what you and I “have” and “get,” so we should be more Thankful! When we’re thankful we won’t waste a lot of time “sweatin’ over the small stuff” because in reality “it’s ALL small stuff!” Gratitude grounds us because we finally realize life really is too short, relationships don’t last forever, God has a dream for us, so live out your dream. Believe it: God has bigger and better things to do with our lives.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let everyone know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand and with you. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication and with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your minds and your hearts in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Philippians 4:4-7) Amen.

