

To God Alone Be The Glory

Keeping up with current events is a good way to learn about people who are changing life for others. Reporters love to report about those who are making significant contributions to society.

So how significant are you? Quite a number of you have been quoted in the Graphic. A few of you been profiled for a state-wide audience. But if you were profiled in a national forum, would this make you more significant than someone who is profiled only in a small town paper? | If you have lots of likes on your social media, are you more significant than someone with fewer followers? If you're not influencing lives, does that mean you're not significant?

What makes a church significant? Lots of people think that large churches are more significant than small churches, or that growing churches are more significant than shrinking churches. But is that really the case, or is it just what some people think?

Think how many ways there are to be significant. When you come home and your pet greets you, does that not make you feel significant? When your child comes up to you and says, "I love you, Mommy" or "I want a hug, Daddy," does that not make you feel significant?

It works if you're a grandparent too, right? If you have children, one of the most important things you can do for their emotional well-being is to look up and smile at them when they walk into the room; give them your attention. This says, "You are important to me. You are significant."

This search for significance is part of being human. Think how a child's behavior says, "Pay attention to me," as soon as a parent comes home or as soon as the parent engages with a screen. You children in school, you probably work hard to get good grades because you want the approval of certain people. Approval means significance. | If you work or volunteer, you probably gravitate toward those jobs or tasks which you're good at. It's natural to enjoy a job well done. | Gifts you receive may help you feel significant. But if one of your Christmas gifts this year is a vehicle with a bow on top, will that make you feel more significant than receiving a gift card to gas up your current vehicle? | Think about how people spend lots of time on their hair, or fret when they have less hair than they used to—hair is part of that search for significance. | Think how lots of people don't want anyone saying anything bad about them. They want to be significant in the eyes of others.

If your search for significance is self-oriented, and especially if it becomes the main driving force in your life, watch out. You're setting yourself up for one disappointment after another. | People who make it big love to proclaim, "This is what happens when you don't give up on your dreams." But what if you dream of making it big, and then you don't? Are you then worthless?

All these questions are helping us examine our values. You see, what you find significant boils down to what you value. And I'm going to assume that since you are in church on Christmas Eve, or are tuned in from home, you value Jesus. You value the truths revealed in the Bible. So I challenge you: **SUSPEND YOUR SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE.** I didn't say terminate it. Just suspend it, for at least few minutes, while we take the focus off ourselves and put it where it belongs, on Jesus.

We could learn a lot about the search for significance from Jesus. The first 30 years of his earthly life pretty much make him the poster boy for anti-significance in the way the world thinks about it. From eternity to eternity he is always almighty, glorious God—limitless, infinitely significant. Yet he chose to give it all up and contain himself within the limits of the womb

of a virgin. But not just any young woman. A poor woman. But not just any poor, young woman. One from an insignificant village in Galilee—not Judea, the more important of the two provinces.

At least Jesus was born in an important village, Bethlehem, hometown of famous King David. But there too his birth seemed rather insignificant. We don't hear about any relatives coming to coo and fuss over him. In fact, he had to be born in a stable because no one would make room for his greatly pregnant but insignificant mother (Luke 2:1-7).

And who should receive the birth announcement? Some insignificant shepherds nearby (verses 8ff). We don't even know their names. Yet they were told the most significant truth that could ever be told at Christmas: "*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). As those insignificant shepherds get up now and go into Bethlehem to see the baby that the angels just told them about, go with them your mind. Now you're in the stable with the shepherds. Lean in and look over their shoulders into the manger. 🎵 Do you see what they see? That insignificant looking baby is the long-promised Messiah. He will grow up and do something more significant

than anyone ever—he will pay for the sins of the whole world. He will pay for my sins and yours on a cross. For his sake God will declare you and me no longer worthy of punishment in hell, but rather fit for life in heaven. When you look over the shoulders of the shepherds at baby Jesus, ♪Do you see what they see? I wonder how many people look at manger scenes today and stop to think about how significant Jesus really is. But even if the whole world passed by every manger scene without looking, or ignored Jesus' birth because of having too much else to do, that wouldn't change how significant Jesus is. And people will see this when Jesus comes back to earth visibly the second time. We'll all see it then. But for now, if Jesus continues to seem insignificant to the world, well that just fits the pattern he followed in Bible times.

Sometime after the shepherds leave the manger, baby Jesus has to be whisked off to Egypt to avoid being killed by King Herod, who doesn't want his crown threatened by this new King of the Jews. Imagine that! He who watches over us and keeps us safe being carried to safety by his parents, while Herod's significance slips through his fingers.

After Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return from Egypt, they settle in backwoods

Nazareth. For the next 30 years Jesus is basically unknown outside his hometown. How do you like that?! God walking around among people, and almost no one knows.

Then, finally, it's time for Jesus to reveal himself as Messiah to God's people. When one of his first disciples tells a friend about this "Jesus of Nazareth" person, the friend responds, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" (John 1:46). It's such an insignificant place."

Jesus' first miracle is done quietly (John 2). Remember? He changes water into wine to help a newlywed couple avoid the social embarrassment of not providing enough for their wedding guests. Where's the significance in that miracle? | When Jesus heals a disabled man and the man is asked, "Who did this for you and where is he?", the man can't give an answer because Jesus slips away into the crowd. (John 5:13) When he starts getting famous, Jesus asks the people he heals not to tell anyone. But by then they see him as significant and will not keep quiet about him. When Jesus gets really famous, he goes into hiding so he can spend time quietly teaching God's ways to the twelve apostles. Even when it's time to do something really significant like pay for the sins of the whole world, he allows himself to be

treated like an insignificant criminal. Even after he raises himself from the dead—the single-most significant act ever—Jesus shows himself alive only to his disciples.

Do you see how the story of Jesus' birth and life and death and resurrection helps us in our search for significance? It teaches us that significance is not about getting everyone's attention on you. Oh, sure you could go on a show like the Voice or Amazing Race, and a lot more people would know who you are. But any significance that can be achieved in this world will amount to nothing when Judge Jesus makes his ruling on the Last Day. Notice that Jesus never sought out worldly significance. He understood that significance comes from what God thinks about you. He said, "*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again*" (John 10:17).

Do you want to know how significant you are? Then ask yourself, "Why was Jesus born?" He was born because you and I are sinners, and we needed rescuing from hell. God couldn't stand the thought of you suffering forever. So he made a way out. Everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life. Do you see how this, more than anything else, defines your significance? If God sent his Son to be your Savior from

sin—and he did—then you are significant to the One being who really counts, God himself!

After this worship service, you're probably going to go back to the search for significance in your life. It's a known human characteristic. But remember Jesus. His coming means you were already significant to God before you were even born, before you accomplished even one significant thing. Remember Jesus' life and follow his example: you don't have to seek the attention of others in order to be significant. You don't have to be self-centered. Jesus was other-centered. He wasn't born for his own good. He was born for your good. So whatever you accomplish in this life, try to have it benefit others in some way. And most importantly, remember to treat God like he's significant to you, as if his gift of Jesus was the most valuable gift you've ever been given, or ever hope to be given. You'll know you are treating God as significant when you make time to hear his Word. People will notice how important Jesus is in your life. You'll know you are treating God as significant when you look outside yourself and treat others well, as if they are even more important than you.