

## Little Foxes!

### The Little Sins That Mar the Christian Character

By [John Colwell](#)

1882

*"Catch the foxes — the little foxes that spoil the vines,  
for our vines have tender grapes!"*

*Song of Songs 2:15*

#### Chapter 1. Introduction. The Importance of Little Things.

Those who affect to despise the importance of little things, are in danger of becoming little people. Certainly no great man will ever do so. He will the rather prove his greatness by a hearty recognition of the truth of the wise saying, "He who despises little things, shall fall little by little."

The Great Teacher drew some of His most beautiful and important lessons from little things, such as little flowers, little birds, little dew-drops, little children. He insisted on faithfulness in littles.

My friend, life is great because it is the aggregation of *littles*.

As the coral reefs which rear themselves high above the crawling sea beneath, are all made up of minute skeletons of microscopic animalcules; so life, mighty and solemn as having eternal consequences — life that towers over the sea of eternity, is made up of these minute incidents, of these trifling duties, of these small tasks; and only those who are faithful in the least are, or can be, faithful in the whole.

Little things make either ... the joy — or the sorrow, the success — or the ruin, the safety — or the danger, the grandeur — or the smallness — of human life. Illustrations of this principle abound.

#### Little NEGLECTS lead to great ruin.

A captain who should say, "I have my vessel well built and well manned, my cargo is well secured, my men are at their posts, my charts and compasses are of the best, and all bids fair for a safe and speedy voyage; true it is, that I have no helm, but then that is such a little matter that I can well dispense with it" — would find neither passengers nor sailors to voyage with him. But would he be more unwise than those Christian moralists, who overlook the little things on

which the safety and completeness of all true Christian morality turn?

**Little PRECAUTIONS lead to great safety.**

The Syrian warrior refused to wash in Jordan according to the prophet's direction, because he could not see how so little a thing could effect his cure; but, when persuaded to it by wise and faithful servants, he found that, as little as it was, it wrought his salvation.

**Little WASTINGS make great losses.**

If we waste the pennies, we shall never save the dollars. Wasted moments make lost minutes and ill-used hours. So many lives are thrown away because their possessors do not understand the value and utility of *small portions of time*. "Gather up the *fragments*" said our Lord, "that nothing be lost." Henry Martyn, the martyr missionary, earned the noble reputation of being "the man who never lost an hour." What wonder, then, that his life, as a whole, was, despite its brevity, so complete and effective. How did Wesley accomplish so much? "*Leisure and I have parted company!*" he said; and yet again,

"No period lingers unemployed,  
Or unimproved below."

**Little SAVINGS make great gains.**

He would be a good friend to mankind, who would teach them how to save the littles. "Only a penny," is thought to be a sufficient excuse for spending it on any trifling folly.

**Little TROUBLES make us miserable.**

Great ones do not often come, perhaps only once in a lifetime, and rarely more than two or three times in any life. When they do come, we brace ourselves up for the occasion — like a man who is about to carry a heavy burden, and bring in all the aids of philosophy and religion. The most treacherous of life's ills are the small cares, the petty annoyances, and the little irritations that attend our daily path. For not only do they come more frequently than larger troubles, but they have, for many reasons, far more power to embitter life.

The sting of a wasp is much more serious than the buzz of a fly, and yet, we suppose, the man does not live who has had a fraction of the annoyance from wasps that he has had from flies. "Do go away," said the dog to the fly; "I hate you."

"Why?" replied the fly, "I never bite you."

"I wish you would bite, and have done with it," retorted the dog. "I would rather have one bite than this everlasting buzz."

Happy the man who is free from little ills; happier still he who is blessed with so equal a temper, or who has cultivated so serene a piety, that these *small annoyances* fall upon him with as little effect as snowflakes upon the rock.

### **Little JOYS make us happy.**

He is not the happiest man who has a large fortune, large possessions, large connections, who measures his money by the peck and his estates by the acre, but rather he who enjoys —

"The sober comfort, all the peace which springs  
From the large aggregate of little things."

Take ...

the feathers out of my bed,

the sugar out of my tea,

the buttons off my clothes,

the children out of my nursery,

the books out of my study,

the smile out of my wife's eye,

the "kind regards" from the end of my friend's letter

— and how poor and miserable you make me. Yet each one of these is "a little thing."

### **Little VIRTUES make us godly.**

How anxiously and earnestly Christianity inculcates them. In the New Testament we are not taught to cultivate the dashing and gigantic heroism which is so insisted upon in the classics, both ancient and modern; but rather the gentler, the sweeter, the more enduring, the more blessed virtues of every-day life.

"Be strong," says the Scripture; but it does not forget to add, "Be pitiful, be courteous." One beautifully tells us to, "cherish the little virtues that spring up at the foot of the Cross. Like unobtrusive violets they love the shade, are sustained by dew, and make but little show — but, like them, they shed a sweet fragrance upon all around." No character will be imperfect that excels in little virtues.

### **Little VICES make us wicked.**

They sadly mar our virtues. Just as little scratches will spoil a fine painting, and little defects rob an otherwise perfect statue of its exquisiteness and finish — so small vices will disfigure a noble character.

Therefore, says inspired Wisdom, "Catch the foxes — the little foxes that spoil

the vines," which is equivalent to saying, "I know you will keep out the more hateful and destructive full-grown foxes by stopping all the large holes in the vineyard fence; your danger lies in overlooking the smaller gaps by which the little foxes may enter, and thus spoil your vines by robbing them of the tender grapes."

How forcibly may this advice be urged upon Christian people! They will be almost certain to secure the vineyard against the intrusion of shameful vices, destructive sins, great scandals; but are they always so careful to stop the smaller breaches in the fence of their Christian character against the little foxes, lesser sins, smaller vices, and trifling moral blemishes which, nevertheless, spoil the loveliness and perfection of their lives? Judging from observation and experience, we fear not.

In the following chapters we will point out some "little foxes" that do much damage in the Christian vineyard, and invite our readers to hunt them down!

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).