

Community Church of Issaquah  
March 2, 2025  
Does One Life Really Matter?  
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When I read the scripture from Matthew recently, there were several things that struck me. First, here was a man of high prominence in the military who came to Jesus not for himself, but for his servant. Obviously, he was familiar with Jesus and what he had been doing in his ministry, or he wouldn't have come to him believing that he could help him. The other thing that impressed me was the fact that the centurion had come on his own. There's no evidence that the servant asked him to go to Christ and see what could be done. He came on his own belief to do something compassionate for his servant. It was most unusual if a story like these were one of a kind, but that's not what we find in the Bible. The Gospels particularly are filled with stories of one individual doing something noteworthy. One person doing one thing.

Another passage of scripture that we could read is simply a personal letter from John the disciple to his dear friend Gaius, which we can find in the Third Letter of John in the New Testament. We have read these before, but they still speak to me about the truth of one person being important. The verses praise Gaius for what he was doing in the name of Christ even for strangers. Let me repeat one of the verses. "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing

for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love.”

Each time I read this letter from John I selfishly wish someone would write such a nice compliment about me, but that sounds much too close to having an ego issue. There is a message here for each of us and it is this – each of us is important in doing God’s work. Gaius had made his ministry to assisting and converting those who were strangers to his home village and to Jesus Christ. Yet it was those strangers who told the church how much Gaius loved them and how grateful they were. There are surely other examples of people who were converted to Christ and did significant work, but this story about a man named Gaius is a wonderful example of the importance of one person.

Today, as we remember our beautiful faith sister, Charlotte, the reality of how one person can make a huge difference came as comfort for me. She was a remarkable woman who gave years of service to this church. And we certainly want to acknowledge that. But there were many, many others who also gave of themselves to this faith community who gathered here today. If I were to ask if you could name one person in addition to Charlotte who has been an important member of our faith family, could you think of one? Would you like to share the name of that person so that we can celebrate them as well?

**Pause to share:**

If I were to try to recall how many times someone has told me, “Oh, I’m not important.” Or “What I’m doing doesn’t really matter.” Or “It’s just me doing my thing.” I would have long, long lists of individuals. How is it that we learned from somewhere or someone that what we do and who we are doesn’t matter because we are just one. Even as a minister for many years, I sometimes wonder if what I am doing or what I have done matters. I am, after all, just one among millions of ministers.

A truth about the importance of one person hit me hard years ago when I was asked to deliver a eulogy for the father of a dear friend. I was sitting at my desk and decided to turn on some music to encourage my brain to get to work. It wasn’t long before a song came on that jolted me and caused me to listen and caused me to look that song up and record it. I listen to it often, even though not for a funeral or memorial service – just as a moment of inspiration. I’ve shared these words with you before but they deserve repeating. It’s a song written by a well-known musician of the past, Jimmy Webb. The title of the song is “Only One Life,” and here are some of the words.

*Only one life, just a single spark.  
Only one life, what does it mean?  
It’s only birth and death and everything between.  
If living is a pointless chore,  
Just existence, nothing more,  
Why does only one life leave such an empty space?*

*Only one life – make it right or wrong,  
Only one life.*

*Just another soul among so many,  
So, who cares if one should fall?  
But though we're small, we're full of magic.  
When we touch the world, we change it all  
With only one life.*

*We only have one chance to fight,  
But if we live it right,  
All we need is one life to make a difference here.  
One life – it's such a small amount.  
One life – to say we care so loud and clear.  
We have to make it count after all  
With only one life.*

There are millions of examples of the contribution one individual has made, but we don't have to look outside our own congregation to see the importance of only one life. If you will tolerate me, I'd like to share again a personal encounter I had with one person who did one thing that made a huge difference to others and who inspired me to focus on doing one thing in life that helps others. That is why for 61 years, I have felt as if the one thing God has asked me to do is be a pastor and try to minister to people who need to hear the Word and who might need a kind person to help in their life journey. Here's my little story again:

*I recall an incident which I experienced while riding a train on my way to my first year of college.  
As I sat half awake, I noticed a rather aged conductor coming down the aisle. His worn uniform spoke of a bygone day of passenger trains that his wrinkled face*

*and slow step tried to deny. I wondered why he stopped and carefully picked up and refolded every discarded newspaper he passed. As he punched my ticket, his two big pockets seemed ready to burst with papers from almost every stop along the way. He continued this for several hours and by this time we had begun our long slow winding route through the hills of rural Alabama and Mississippi. I began to notice shacks and small cabins along the tracks and people standing on their porches as if they were waiting for something to happen. I glanced back down the tracks and saw white bundles being thrown from the train. I thought I knew what was happening, so I hurried to the opening between cars and there stood the conductor – delivering yesterday’s papers to these little cabins. People waved or nodded, and the train rounded another curve, and they were out of sight. One curve when there are millions in this world; one conductor where there are thousands in the world; one isolated family when there are millions in the world, but what a void there would have been if one man had not cared enough to do consistently what is reasonable for one person to do.*

Does one life matter? I think you know the answer to that question. And what is the answer to the question, “What is the importance of one?” I hope you were at least given some things to reflect on to understand that YOUR own life matters. You matter to each of us, and I hope you will never forget that. We often sell ourselves short thinking that we’re not important. I do that, and I think others do too. The messages from both Matthew and John today

have a strong message for you – you matter. That is a truth you must never forget.

I know I will never be famous like Billy Graham, my name won't be listed in the 100 Most Famous People, and my obituary might probably be one paragraph on the last page of the news, but I need to keep reminding myself that simply doing God's work was enough to make me important to Him. Let me close with the words John wrote in his personal letter to his dear friend Gaius. "I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face-to-face. To that, I will add an Amen.