Important

My Beautiful Bride and I were on the way to church last Sunday when she said a quilting customer asked her if she thought what she did was Important. She was wondering about her answer to that question.

Am I doing something that is Important? This is a question I have thought about often, and I told her so.

Am I Important? Or--are only famous people important? If you are a politician in Washington, DC, if you are a star athlete, if you are a celebrity, you are important. That’s what we seem to think.

First, let me get my Old Guy Rant out of the way: Back in my day, a politician in DC was a *statesman* not just a money-grubbing do-what-it-takes-to-get-reelected, self-important, headline-grabbing narcissist. A star athlete was talented, committed, and hard-working, a role model, not some hipster completely covered in body ink riding a piece of wood with wheels down a fake hill. And a celebrity was a good actor, not some physically attractive but talent-starved rich idiot who got herself videotaped while doing things people are supposed to do in private. End of Rant.

If only famous people are Important, almost none of us will ever get there.

I remember wanting to be Important when I was in college. My dream was to go to law school, ace all my classes, make the top score on the bar exam, and end up on the Supreme Court, where I would help everyone have a better life. OK, that was just one dream—another was to get a spot in the World Burping Championships. College students, right? SMH (for you other Old Guys, that means “shaking my head”). Johnny Manziel (a Fightin’ Texas Aggie famous for being a darn good football player and the Village Idiot) explains away his “mistakes” by reminding everyone he is a college student. Nuff said.

Seriously, here’s a real dream that came out of my college daze: I met this girl. She was beautiful, and nice, and smart, and she would talk to me and spend time with me. I somehow convinced her to marry me. She helped me graduate law school, even though I never aced a class. Thirty years later, neither of us has ever been famous, but over the years we have helped lots of people. Yes, we hurt some too, but I am very glad that number is much smaller. We raised two great kids. We paid our bills and our taxes. We have tried to be honest and we love our families.

I do not think of myself as Important—I’m just a guy. Is it enough, though, to be a regular guy? A great movie illustrating the importance of a routine life is “Mr. Holland’s Opus.” Mr. Holland’s dream was to be a musician but he took a job out of college as a high school music teacher, just to pay the bills while he wrote his masterpiece. He stayed in that job for his whole life. He wasn’t perfect. Over the years he hurt a few people, but he helped many more. He overcame fears and problems and temptations. In the end, it turned out that his Opus, his Great Work, was not a piece of music but was the people he encouraged and helped. It’s a movie that will make you cry, no doubt about that.

I think it is important to show up to work every day. It’s important to work hard. It’s important to come home and love your family, to help the kids with homework, and to show up at the soccer games. It’s important to financially support causes you believe in. No, Hollywood is not going to call, and neither is Washington. But when your son or daughter says “Thanks, Dad. I love you”—well, that’s going to make you cry too. It’s important to hang on through tough times. You won’t win every time, and when some really hard things happen an Important Person may get knocked down, but he gets back up. He may take some time off but then he shows up at work again, because there are bills to pay and those folks in Washington aren’t going to work for themselves, are they?

Am I Important? I don’t know. By every standard out there no, I am not. I can’t sing, dance, or play sports and I’m not the sharpest tack in the box either. I’m reasonably intelligent, but if you’re building a team to find the cure for the common cold, or the solution to the [name your crisis here], well, I’m not your guy. There are some things I do well, but lots and lots of people can do those same things. One hundred years from now, I’m pretty sure no one will remember my name.

But…my wife and kids love me. My family and a small circle of friends respect me. I believe that God wants the best for me. I have a good, no a great job, where people think I bring something to the table. I can string a few words together to get a point across. As the great poet Alice Cooper once said, “That’s enough for a workin’ man. What I am, well that’s what I am. I tell you baby, that’s just enough for me.”