

REACHING OUT IN HOLY LOVE

Ron Christian, Compiler

**“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series
Book 11 - “Service”**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As compiler of this series, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley J Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscripts of this devotional series. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessing to many persons.

‘GROWING A GODLY LIFE’ - Series (13 Books)

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INTRODUCTION

**By
Ron Christian**

Listen to what Jerry Cook says about Christianity. “Christianity that doesn’t walk around in shoes isn’t worth much. It has to walk in shoes, all kind of shoes - sandals, boots, high heels, and suedes. It has to walk. If we only teach Christians how to think Christianity and how to feel it, but not how to walk it, we are failing.” (Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness; Jerry Cook; pg. 42) “Ask these four questions of any work: Did God initiate it? Is it redemptive? Does it exist for God’s glory? Does it exalt Jesus? If you can readily answer ‘yes’ to all questions, then you may be assured that it is a good work indeed” (God’s Miraculous Plan of Economy, Jack Taylor, pg. 82)

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WORKS

- A. Without Good Works, life is unbalanced. Sensitive Christians are not “Either - Or” persons, but “Both - And” persons.**

**EMOTIONS>HEART>UPWARD IN PRAYER>WORSHIP>FAITH
(Spirit gives assurance to heart.)**

**INTELLECT>HEAD>INWARD IN THINKING>STUDY>INQUIRY
(Spirit gives answers to the mind.)**

**WILL>HAND>OUTWARD IN SERVICE>WITNESSING>WORKS
(Spirit gives power to the will.)**

Notes William Barclay: “In the well proportioned life there must be both prayer and effort. Again it is tempting to divide men into two classes - the saints who spend life secluded on their knees in constant devotion, and the toilers who labor in the dust and the heat of the day. But it will not do. It is said that Martin Luther was close friends with another monk. The other monk was as fully persuaded of the necessity of the Reformation as Luther was. So they made an arrangement. Luther would go down into the world and fight the battle there, the other monk would remain in his cell praying all the time for the success of Luther’s labors. But one night the monk had a dream. In it he saw a single reaper engaged on the impossible task of reaping an immense field unaided and alone. The lonely reaper turned his head and the monk saw his face, and it was the face of Martin Luther, and he knew that he must leave his cell and leave his prayers and go to help. It is, of course, true that there are some who, because of age or bodily weakness, can do nothing other than pray, and their prayers are indeed a strength and a support. But if any normal person thinks that prayer can be a substitute for effort, then his prayers are merely a way of escape. Prayer

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and effort must go hand in hand.” (Daily Study Bible; William Barclay; James: pg. 91)

B. Good Works are the worthy results of genuine repentance.

“First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26: 20)

C. Good Works are the result of a genuine saving faith.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (I Corinthians 15: 58)

“In the same way, faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” (James 2: 17, 18, 24.)

The proper results of an emotional and intellectual response to God’s love is a strong volitional commitment to God’s will. Jesus Christ gave Himself to us “to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2: 14, RSV)

Said John Wesley: “Works do not give life to faith, but faith begets works, and then is perfected by them.” Notes Bishop Leslie Ray Marston concerning Wesley’s understanding of the proper relationship between faith and works: “Wesley made much of the social direction of the Christian religion, insisting that good works must be the fruit of a living faith and a condition of one’s continuing in saving relationship to God, but he protested forcefully against the teaching that works can yield merit for one’s salvation.” (From Age To Age A Living Witness; Leslie Ray Marston; pg. 108)

Summarizes William Barclay: “The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works.” (Daily Study Bible; William Barclay; pg. 87)

“We are not saved By deeds; we are saved FOR deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life.” (William Barclay)

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“No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man’s faith is real until it moves him to action.” (Ibid; pg. 92)

Good Words do not save us, but good works are pleasing to God for they are expressions of love, loyalty, and obedience to God.

D. Good Works are a witness to an unbelieving world.

Notes Donald Bastian, “The verbal witness to Jesus Christ, whether spontaneous or carefully organized, goes poorly unless in the congregation there is an overflow of good works. It goes no better where good works have become a substitute for verbal witness. But where good works are supplemental to the spoken witness, the world gets a multidimensional message and the work of the Lord prospers.” (Adventures In Belonging; pg. 82)

E. Works are the result of a response of obedience to the Master.

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? ‘The first,’ they answered. Jesus said, *‘I will tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.’* (Matthew 21: 28-31)

F. Good Works is the natural evidence of a life committed to love.

It is possible to serve another without loving the one you are serving (example of slavery), but it is not possible to love one without seeking to serve that one in some way.

If we truly love the Master, we will seek to do those things which bring pleasure to the Master. What brings pleasure to our Master? *“There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”* (Luke 15: 7) Winning sinners to Christ brings great joy to the Master! Jesus said, *“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* (Matthew 9: 37, 38)

Service is the natural outworking of love. A heart that is filled with love results in life that is filled with good deeds. A loving heart is what moves the hands to

action. Service that is motivated by love is service that is done in an uncalculating way, service that is done without watching the clock and without keeping track of the cost.

G. One’s eternal salvation is inseparably connected with Good Works.

One’s eternal salvation is inseparably connected with Good Works. Eternal life is gained, not just by believing, but also by doing. Intellectual faith alone is not sufficient for salvation. There must be a heart and life commitment to Christ, evidenced by a life of good works. *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder.”* (James 2: 19, NIV)

A life of compassion is the evidence that one is truly a believer.

“Then he will say to those on his left. ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25: 41-46) *“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.”* (Revelations 20: 13)

H. The Works of believers, performed in life, will be judged in eternity.

Some people falsely reason that if they are saved by grace alone, then they can relax their own efforts in the Christian life. Such thinking is dangerous, however. II Corinthians 5: 10 says that *“We (Christians) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”*

“What purpose, then, will the final judgment serve in the case of such believers? In the words of Paul, it will be ‘the judgment seat of Christ’, and the term indicates something of its purpose for believers. On that occasion, the Savior will measure the quality of the life His followers have lived. Though their salvation is by faith, authentic faith reflects itself in works, and those works must be judged.” (The Mature Church Member; Donald Bastian, 99)

The quality of each believer’s works will be tested in eternity and rewards for one’s works will be given, according to one’s faithfulness. (Note I Corinthians 3: 10-15)

“There is a story of a woman who in this world had been used to every luxury and to all respect. She died, and when she arrived in heaven an angel was sent to conduct her to her house. They passed many a lovely mansion and the woman thought that each one, as they came to it, must be the one allotted to her. When they had passed through the main streets of heaven they came to the suburbs and the outskirts where the houses were much smaller; and on the very fringe they came to a house which was little more than a hut. ‘That is your house,’ said the conducting angel. ‘What,’ said the woman, ‘that! I cannot live in that.’ ‘I am sorry’ said the angel,’ but that is all that we could build for you with the materials you sent up.’” (Daily Study Bible; William Barclay; Luke; pgs. 189, 190)

One’s capacity to enjoy heaven will be largely determined by the degree of one’s faithfulness in labor for the Lord on earth. Notes Leslie Ray Marston, “Man is called not merely to save his soul and insure an eternal destiny in Heaven, but to devote his energies, his talents, all his resources in laying the foundation of his eternity...We acquire here spiritual wrinkles that eternity itself can never iron out. And thus the Christian’s philosophy gives significance to this life, for the work we begin here will be consummated there. This life then becomes important! More than a dressing room for eternity, it is a laboratory of the Eternal.” (From Chaos to Character; pg. 164)

HINDRANCES TO GOOD WORKS

A Christian should be a man both with a heavenly vision and an earthly concern, a man who is concerned both in personal salvation and in social redemption. Many who are very concerned about heaven seem to be very complacent about earthly suffering. Why is this so? Several reasons may be given for this perversion.

- A. Evangelical Christianity has overly reacted to so-called Liberal Christianity which has preached a social gospel with minimum concern about the hereafter. In reacting against the social utopias which the Liberals have sought to build upon earth through human reformation and human progress, Evangelicals have sought to re-emphasize regeneration and the spiritual Kingdom of God, with a consequent de-emphasis upon social problems.**
- B. Evangelicals have emphasized the importance of escaping “*the corruption that is in the world through lust,*” (2 Peter 1: 4) and thus, well-meaning Christians have separated themselves from everything that might pollute**

their pure and spotless lives. Does not the Scripture say “Come out from among them and be ye separate and I will receive you, saith the Lord”? (2 Corinthians 6: 17) Such a Christian has forgotten, that while he is not to be “of” the world he is to be “in” the world. (John 17: 15) In other words, a Christian is to separate himself from the world of sinful practices, but he is not to remove himself from the world of sinful men. Jesus was a man of heavenly vision, but he was also a friend of publicans, harlots, and sinners of all kinds. The Christian must be both a man of heavenly vision and a man of earthly concern.

- C. There are well-meaning Christians who have been taught that one of the “signs of the last times” is widespread lawlessness, social disorder, and intensified evil. Such Christians somehow feel that this is an inevitability, and that, therefore, Christians can do nothing to bring about peace and order and a semblance of righteousness to society. Thus, any motivation for social reform is undercut, and Christians tend to “run to the hills” to escape “the destruction of Sodom.” If society “in the last times” is inevitably going to “go to the dogs”, why exert so much effort in trying to redeem society? Why perform “good works” if the world is under God’s judgment and will be destroyed anyway?**

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAM COOPERATION

It is important that believers individually perform good works, but it is also important that believers cooperate together in performing good works corporately. Believers are to develop individual ministries, but those ministries are to be a part of the total corporate ministry of the church. The context for the performance of good works is the church which is defined as a ‘Force’ of God’s people working together to realize God’s redemptive purposes in His world.

- A. Because the nature of the church (likened unto a ‘Body) demands team cooperation.**

Wrote the apostle Paul: “Yes, the body has many parts, not just one part. If the foot says, ‘I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand’, that does not make it any less a part of the body. And what would you think if you heard an ear say ‘ I am not part of the body because I am only an ear, and not an eye’? Would that make it any less a part of the body? Suppose the whole body were an eye - then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? But that isn’t the way God has made us. He has made many parts for our bodies and has put each part just where he wants it. What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part! So he has made many parts, but still there is only one body.” (I Corinthians 12: 14-20, Living Bible)

No one body part can do the work of another body part; each needs the other body parts, and all the body parts are under the direction of the ‘Head’ who is Christ.

B. Because the ‘Great Commission’ (Matthew 28: 19-20) can only be fulfilled as each believer is doing his part. Jesus gave this command to all believers: *“Go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this - that I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”* (Matthew 28: 19-20, Living Bible)

Someone said, “Prayer works; prayer is work; prayer leads to work.”

There are no shortcuts for true success in God’s Kingdom. Lots of work! God does not do the work FOR us; He does the work WITH us. We are co-laborers with God. If we trust God, He will crown our efforts with success, but there is no success in the Lord’s Church without supreme effort.

What is the answer to success within the Church? Every believer working hard as if everything depended upon his faithfulness in labors, and then every believer trusting God as if everything depended alone upon God! There is no magical or mystical ‘secret to success’ in God’s Kingdom. Faith in God and in His power is no substitute for one’s own hard work. Unless the Lord builds the church, those who labor, labor in vain - true! But it is also true to say that unless believers labor to build the church, the church will not be built, regardless of the infinite power of God. It is the coupling of the believer’s earnest labors and the Holy Spirit mighty power that works ‘miracles’ of church growth!

SOMEBODY ELSE

**There’s a clever young gal named Somebody Else.
There is nothing this lady can’t do.
She’s busy from morning ‘till way late at night,
Just substituting for you.**

**You’re asked to do this, or asked to do that,
And what is your ready reply?
Get Somebody Else, Madam Chairman,
She’ll do it much better than I.**

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**There's so much to be done in our services.
So much, and the workers are few.
And Somebody Else is getting tired and worn.
Just substituting for you.**

‘Desire’ and ‘willingness’ - not ‘great talent’ - is all that is necessary to be greatly used in God’s service. It is not a question of ‘capability’, but a question of ‘availability’. Not “Can You?” but “Will You?” As the song says: “Our talents may be few, these may be small, but unto Him is due our best, our all!”

“I am only one but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do.”

WORK, WHILE IT IS DAY

**Work, for the night is coming,
Work through the morning hours;
Work, while the dew is sparking,
Work 'mid springing flowers;
Work, when the day grows brighter,
Work in the glowing sun;
Work, for the night is coming,
When man's work is done.**

**Work, for the night is coming,
Work through the sunny noon;
Fill brightest hours with labor,
Rest comes sure and soon.
Give every flying minute
Something to keep in store;
Work, for the night is coming,
When man works no more.**

**Work, for the night is coming,
Under the sunset skies;
While their bright tints are glowing,
Work, for the daylight flies,
Work till the last beam fadeth,
Fadeth to shine no more;
Work while the night is darkening,
When man's work is o'er.**

Sidney Dyer

CHAPTER ONE

TAKE TIME FOR EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION

Matthew 5: 13-16

VERBALLY AFFIRMING OTHERS AS A ‘WAY OF LIFE’

It was a little past noon when my wife and I arrived at the fast service hamburger joint. The mother who was ahead of us was obviously having a difficult time with her two young children as she was raising her voice at them and commanding them to walk faster and stop misbehaving. When the young boy, who was perhaps six years old, saw my wife and I approaching, he pushed his back against the door and leaned against it in order to hold the door open while we passed through. I looked at this young man, who only an instant before was causing his mother to lose her patience with him, and smiled. As I walked toward him I said, “Thank you. You are a very kind young man. Thank you for holding the door open for us.” There are few things as beautiful as the proud smile of a young child. When I spoke to him, he stood erect and proud of his unselfish deed. I too sensed a moment of joyful self-regard knowing my comment caused him to feel proud.

The next moment I found myself looking at his mother who was also beaming with pride. In that instant she realized that her son was being ever-so polite and that she had raised him well. It was an inspiring moment for all of us.

It takes so little effort to encourage and build up someone. It just takes a watchful eye and the willingness to offer positive affirmation. I believe that every person wants to do good. I believe it is truly the nature of human beings to want to care about others. Unfortunately, because we do not show this respect to others, they lose their self-respect and begin a terrible downward cycle of cynicism and hate. God put us here together to help each other up.

Try an experiment this week. For as many fingers as you have on your hand, give positive affirmations to ten people this coming week. I think you will be pleased at not only how much you encouraged others, but at how good you feel about yourself. I don’t mean trivial compliments like the color of one’s dress. Say something positive about their character or an act of kindness which you saw. Affirm and reaffirm their worth by telling them how wonderful they are and how their actions are so significant.

Get started right away and see, if by the end of the day, you are feeling better about yourself. It’s great! The way to build yourself up is by building up others. Have fun at it! I know you’ll do just great!

“Lord, if I can bring just one smile to somebody’s face, or a ray of hope to one who is discouraged, then give me the opportunity to do so. May I remember how much it pleases You when I attend to the needs of others. And may I be reminded that what

pleases You will always please me. Thank You for the joy of encouraging others. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will begin the joyful discipline of affirming the value of others, and I will start today.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Philippians 1:3-11

TAKING TIME TO NURTURE FRIENDSHIPS

An old friend called me. It’s not that he is old - he and I are the same age. We’ve just been friends for many years. He lives in another town outside of the metro area, so we do not talk very often. I think of him and our relationship quite frequently.

“Hi Tom. This is Jim! I was just thinking of you, so I thought I would give you a call.” We talked for a few minutes and then at his urging, we arranged a date to meet and talk face to face. I am looking forward to that get-together!

In that short telephone conversation my friend accomplished three positive achievements. First, he took the initiative to contact me. This caused me to realize how often I do think of my friends, but how very little I actually do something like write or call them. Instead of just thinking about me, he acted on his thoughts. He then affirmed me by affirming our friendship. To think of a friend is one thing, but to tell the friend about your thoughts means so much more. His words elicited warm feelings of self-worth. Thirdly, he followed through on his thoughts of me and demonstrated that he desired to continue to build our friendship by making an appointment to meet. That encouraged me and generated excitement about the time we are about to spend together.

If my friend can create such positive feelings within me by just making a phone call, I can conclude that others will respond the same way if I contact them. Why not pass on the good feelings or “warm fuzzes” as they are sometimes called? Before the week is through I am going to write a letter to my friend in Kansas City. Why, if I would write or call seven people before the end of this month and encourage them to contact seven of their friends, then over fifty people would have positive feelings of affirmation. Happiness would begin to spread like butter on toast, all because my friend called me!

I think I will start right now! I think I will contact an old friend with whom I haven’t talked for a long time. I bet he will really be surprised to hear from me: “Hi God. This is Tom. I was just thinking about You...”

“Lord, forgive me for being so self-centered. I am sorry if I have forgotten to consider the needs of others. As I think of friends, move me beyond my thoughts to action. Let me be an encourager today. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will pick up the telephone and encourage a friend...now!

- Thomas Duckworth -

**1 Corinthians 12: 25-27; Galatians 5: 13-14, 22-23; 6:2;
Acts 3: 6**

THE MINISTRY OF LISTENING

I saw him through the kitchen window. He was heading for the back door, greasy and angry. I thought of my white woodwork as I caught the vibrations of his negative emotion. I turned to leave and go upstairs. Better that he find an empty kitchen than his fearful, critical mother. An unseen hand gently turned me around and led me back to the sink where I had been paring carrots. I picked up another carrot as he stormed in the back door.

He stood there, silently trembling with the overwhelming burden of bottled-up anger. Love and fear battled with me, but an inner voice settled my conflict. ‘It’s his problem, not yours. Just listen to the person; never mind the content. Do it for him...and for Me.’

I turned toward him to listen. At first he seemed unable to speak. I waited, then spoke quietly, “You seem very angry.” He could not answer except to open his fist, releasing a tool which clattered to the floor, shattering the silence. “I think you are very angry,” I said now without judgment or fear. The Spirit had led me to serve as a sounding board, not judge or problem solver.

As I reflected acceptance of him, hurting, raging, and furious, he was able to open the spigot and release a torrent of emotion. I didn’t understand much of what he said about the car motor, but I understood the outpoured feelings, and it was to these I responded. There was disappointment, outrage, anger, pain. I said almost nothing; he simply unloaded. I nodded, felt the hurt with him, and hung in there. It lasted about ten minutes in all.

Later this wonderful son told me how he had experienced those moments. He had felt like a balloon blown up to six times its proper capacity. He was about to burst. Because I stood there, quiet, accepting him in his anger, only voicing the feeling when he could not speak, it was safe to let it out. The balloon could return to its normal size. Our relationship was strengthened.

The turning point was that still, small voice saying, ‘It’s his problem, just listen. Don’t criticize, don’t judge, don’t even give advice. Accept him and trust Me to lead him. I need you only to accept him, to listen’.

When another person has a problem, the helpful thing I can do is to listen with care and acceptance. Only after the emotion has been let out can he move toward a solution. My natural inclination is to probe, preach, criticize, and offer solutions. But God asks me

only to listen.

“Understanding Father, make me, like You, a person who loves those who are hurting enough to listen without condoning their sins or condemning them as persons for whom Christ has died. Help me to be quick to listen and slow to give advice, and enable me to apply Your ‘salve’ of healing to their deep hurts.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God being my Helper, I resolve to be a good listener - I will give attention to hurting ones without quick advice or insensitive judgment.

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

Matthew 25: 31-40

LAYING DOWN MY LIFE

I was in the midst of a major sewing project with a built-in time crunch. I had planned carefully so that there would be time for a bath, shampoo, and just possibly a manicure. Everything was moving along on schedule when the phone rang. A familiar voice began to pour out a heart full of hurt and disappointment. I struggled to listen and care, but my head was at the sewing machine where a zipper lay, half-stitched.

Torn between my plans and the needs of the person on the other end of the line, I asked myself, ‘What would Jesus do?’ The answer was clear. But I was left with an identity crisis: ‘I’m not Jesus; I’m a human being.’ The words rang back to me with astonishing clarity, speaking to my humanity: *“I demand that you love each other as much as I love you”* (John 15: 12, Living Bible). Jesus was speaking to me as a human being. He wasn’t asking me for an act of divinity. My basic needs had been met. Only the desire for personal convenience prevented me from wanting to take time for her.

I made my decision: the shampoo could wait, my fingernails too, and I had faith for the zipper. So, I listened for fifteen tear-filled minutes. When it was all out and she was emptied of the pain and tears, we prayed together over the phone. It was her problem, but I had been privileged to “lay down my life” for a few minutes to be God’s agent - to listen, to reflect, and to care.

Jesus said to His disciples long ago (and to you and to me - His contemporary disciples): *“I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I’ve done - kept my Father’s commands and made myself at home in his love. I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I love you. This is the very best way to love. PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE FOR YOUR FRIENDS. You are my friends when you do the things I command you...You didn’t choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil.. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. But remember the root command: Love one another.”* (John 15: 12-16, Message New Testament)

Wrote the apostle Paul: *“Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ’s law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.”* (Galatians 6: 2, Message New Testament)

“Heavenly Father, help me not only to be ordered and scheduled in the use of my time, but also quick to accept your divinely-appointed ‘interruptions’. I want to have the joy of bearing the burdens of my troubled ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in Your ‘forever family’. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The God-ordained ‘interruptions’ in my life are my opportunities to demonstrate practical love for God’s hurting people!

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

Philippians 4: 14; Isaiah 40: 31

FROM THE PAGES OF THE DIARY I NEVER WROTE

December 1972. A call came from the superintendent of schools, asking me if I would be willing to finish out the school year, as they had dismissed the science teacher. It consisted of six science classes a day. In one of the classes was a boy, I'll call Adam. All the faculty knew Adam made F grades, with the exception of one D-. They also knew him to be an habitual troublemaker, which resulted in his spending most of his school hours standing in the hallway, or in the Principal's Office. The superintendent informed me that, regardless of Adam's grades, he was to be promoted into high school. In other words, "We want Adam gone and forgotten." For a number of years I had been a pitcher in "fast pitch" softball. One day I saw Adam trying to "Fast pitch." I went over to him and said, "Adam, you could learn to pitch with some training and practice". His reply was, "Mr. Weller, do you really believe I can"? Adam and I became friends. From that day until the end of the school year, Adam caused no more problems in the science class. His grade went from a D- to B- in those last three months of school. How was that possible? Someone told him, "you can."

December 21, 1998. I awoke at 4 A.M. I was very dizzy and had some chest pain. I sat quietly, though in pain, reflecting on the three operations I had had within a period of eight months. One of those was a four-way bypass. My pain was increasing and soon I found myself weeping. Normally when I cry, I do not shed tears, as my tear ducts seldom produce tears. This morning, however, I wiped tears from my eyes. They continued to roll down my cheeks. Around 4:30 a.m. something very special happened. I felt God call me by name. "Lowell Weller, what does my Word say in Philippians 4:13?" Then God seemed to answer His own question. Again He said, "Lowell Weller, you can." "You can endure this with my help". In fact, "You can endure all things." Soon the dizziness subsided and the chest pain ceased. There, all alone at 4: 30 a.m., I realized again the truth of God's Word, *My Grace Is Sufficient*.

Date...Today. Perhaps you, or someone you know, is going through a very DIFFICULT time. Their load and their hurts are too heavy for them to bear. Perhaps their pain is so severe the medication given by their physician is not lessening their discomfort. In solitude, tears are coursing down their cheeks and they feel like giving up. Like Adam, all is useless so why try? They're thinking, "Quit, give up, I'm beaten." As my words to him, "You can, Adam", altered his grade and attitude, your kind and compassionate reminder of Philippians 4: 13 may mean that their defeat and hurt will be turned into victory and joy.

“Dear Jesus, my Great Physician, please help my unbelief, and may my entry tomorrow read, “YES, O, YES, GOD’S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT. THROUGH CHRIST I AM MORE THAN A CONQUEROR.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I agree with Mosie Lester’s song...“O His grace is sufficient for me, and His love is abundant and free. And what joy fills my soul, just to know, just to know, that His grace is sufficient for me.”

- Lowell Weller -

NOTES:

Matthew 5: 14-16; John 8: 12

LIGHT A LITTLE CANDLE

I was exhausted when I arrived home, but the girls were still waiting for me. “Hurry, Mom, we are late”, said one. Quickly I changed from my long underwear and slacks to a dress. I sighed, glad that this was the last day of my job at Salvation Army Christmas Center. We had rushed all day taking interviews, writing food vouchers and handing out toys. Our job was frustrated because many of the people could not understand English.

My girls and I trudged two blocks to church. We slipped into the crowded balcony as the congregation finished singing “When Lights Are Lit On Christmas Eve.” Bone weary, I leaned back in the pew and tried to relax. The service was beautiful with Christmas carols and the Christmas story.

Then came the time for the candle lighting. From the large candle which represented Christ, the Light of the World, the pastor lit his candle, then he lit an usher’s candle. The ushers lit one candle at the end of each row. In turn, each person lit one more candle. Watching from the balcony, we saw the whole lower floor, light after light, row by row, come ablaze.

In the balcony, we all waited. However, no light appeared for our candles. Engulfed in darkness, we had been forgotten. Why doesn’t someone just go downstairs and get a light? It would be so simple. I looked around, hoping to see someone walking toward the stairs. No one stirred. Everyone sat waiting expectantly. Then they all started looking around, probably thinking the same thing I was thinking. Again I thought, why doesn’t someone...?

Suddenly, I moved. I bounded down the stairs and asked the usher if he would please light my candle. “Oh, we forgot the balcony,” he said. “Here, take this,” and he handed me his large candle.

I flew back up the stairs. The first man I approached had no candle, so I handed him mine. Quickly I lit the candle of the first person in each row.

The last man, alone on the last pew, motioned me past, indicating that he had no candle. I handed him the large one. I joined my daughters and placed my hands over their hands as the lighted candles were lifted. We all sang together, “Joy to the World, the Lord is Come.” I felt refreshed. The weariness of the week had disappeared. There was strength given to me, not only for the duration of my service, but enough left over to carry away.

Daily we pray for the Lord to use us, to give us an opportunity to serve Him. Little do we realize what Jesus meant when He said, “As you go into the world, preach the gospel...”

Jesus had been a light in the darkness; he came to show us the way to God. We sometimes forget that Jesus also said, “You are the light of the world.” We may not realize that whatever we do, we are being a witness, positive or negative. The world is seeing Jesus in action through our deeds.

Sometimes, doing the obvious thing, meeting an immediate need, becomes a way to light a candle and push back the darkness.

“Cleanse me, oh Lord, that your light might shine forth from my life. Help me see clearly needs around me and give me the courage to step out and help, even in little ways, that your name may be glorified.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Light of God in us is greater than the darkness of the devil in the world.

- Laura Drewery -

NOTES:

Isaiah 43: 1-13; Romans 8: 28-39

BRINGING HOPE TO A DESPAIRING WORLD

It did not happen to me. It happened to all of us. Individually, I think I am guarded from its consequences, but collectively, we all suffer together. There have been bombing and explosions in America. There have been murderous attacks on airplanes and in schoolyards. Disasters have left thousands homeless, desperate or dead. Suddenly, our right to pursue happiness has been thwarted. Our belief in peace in our land is being challenged.

Yes, when these tragedies happen in another country, we are saddened, but we are not threatened. That has too quickly changed. We are people now held hostage by our fear that a terrorist attack could happen at any time and at any place. And somehow, we need to vent our feelings about these fears.

I never realized how much these events were affecting me until I started to recognize how often I have been thinking about them. I am angry. I am confused. I am helpless. Answers will not remove the anger. They may alleviate my confusion, but I am still left feeling helpless. I have a voice and am able to speak out against these violent acts of aggression, yet my words of frustration cannot change what has happened.

So, I took a little walk. The sounds and sights during my stroll drew me back to my depression. A young child crying...the pain. A broken water sprinkler leaking...the waste. A yard dead for lack of water...the loss. The marigolds growing in a crack of a driveway...wait a minute. What was that? I paused to look again. There, growing in a most unlikely place, with no other flowers surrounding it and nothing to give it shade, a petite flower shouts out an important message. In the midst of adversity there is still beauty. Through the hard, concrete path of life, God sends His message of hope. Despite all the pain in life, God whispers still, “I am here!”

We must never give up hope, not just hope in God, but hope in ourselves as well. For God may just be able to use us as a marigold in a cracked driveway: a blossom of love to the loveless...a fragrance of joy to the hopeless...a foundation of strength to the helpless.

Grow!

“Father, there is much I do not understand about the world. Hatred, prejudice, anger, violence surround me every day. Yet, I will trust in You, for You are my strength and redeemer. Deliver me from despair into hope that I may show my confidence in my Savior, in whom I pray. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will be a beacon of hope in this world by affirming the love of Christ.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Give an example from your own life (or from the life of a friend or relative whom you admire) that illustrates the truth of the following statement: “It takes so little effort to encourage and build up someone. It just takes a watchful eye and the willingness to offer positive affirmation.”**
- 2. Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I believe it is truly the nature of human beings to want to care about others. Unfortunately, because we do not show respect to others, they lose their self-respect and begin a terrible downward cycle of cynicism and hate.”**
- 3. Try an experiment this week. For as many fingers as you have on your hands, give positive affirmations to ten people this coming week. (Think of how wonderful your life will become when you practice affirming people as “a way of life”.)**
- 4. What changes do you think would take place in our local churches (and in the ‘world in general’) if each day every Christian would say something positive about another person’s character or another person’s observed act of kindness? Why is a critical and judgmental and negative spirit (attitude) so hurtful in the local church (and in the ‘world in general’)? (Carefully read Galatians 5: 13-16 in several ‘translations’, especially ‘The Living Bible’)**
- 5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The way to build yourself up is by building up others.”**
- 6. What are some of the positive results which you can anticipate when you take the time and exert the effort to call a friend (or write a letter to a friend) and express your love and appreciation to that person (especially if it is a ‘friend’ with whom you have not had contact for several months or even years)?**
- 7. How can the fact that you are an empathetic ‘listener’ (rather than a person who is quick to offer advice and criticism and ‘solutions’) help another person who is greatly troubled and confused and perhaps ‘angry’ because of life’s difficult losses and sorrows and disappointments? (Note Galatians 6: 1-3; James 1: 19)**
- 8. Do you believe that, at times, God asks you (as one of His followers) to ‘set aside your own personal convenience and comfort’, and, instead, to ‘put your life on the line for your friends’ (and perhaps even for mere ‘acquaintances’ and ‘strangers’)? (Note John 15: 12-16; Galatians 6: 2) (Do you believe that the God-**

ordained ‘interruptions’ in your life are your opportunities to demonstrate practical love for God’s hurting people?)

- 9. Share an experience from your own life (or from the life of your friend or relative) in which you developed a close ‘Big Brother -Little Brother’ relationship with a younger person who was battling with ‘self-doubts’ and a ‘low self-esteem’ and with ‘multiple failures’, and, as a result of your involvement with that younger person, you witnessed an ‘amazing transformation’ in his actions, attitudes, and level of achievement.**
- 10. Share a ‘low time’ (of discouragement or grief or loss) when, in the depth of your brokenness, you called upon God for help and guidance and understanding and comfort, and, as a result, you ‘heard’ the voice of God tell you “My grace is sufficient”.**
- 11. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Sometimes, doing the ‘obvious thing’, meeting an immediate need, becomes a way to light a candle and push back the darkness.”**
- 12. In the midst of adversity and despair and cynicisms in our society, what should be the Christian’s reaction (response)? Do you believe that these are “no hopeless situations in life, only people who have grown hopeless about those situations”? Why should a Christian never give up hope - in God, in himself, in other people? Do you see yourself (a follower of Christ) a ‘light in a darkened world’, ‘a blossom of love to the loveless’, ‘a fragrance of joy to the hopeless’, ‘a foundation of strength to the helpless’? What specifically can you do (perhaps this following week) to encourage the discouraged, to give guidance to the confused, to give comfort to the bereaved, to give friendship to the lonely, to give relief to the poor, to give hope to the despairing?**

CHAPTER TWO

BUILD 'BRIDGES' FOR EFFECTIVE WITNESS

2 Corinthians 2: 1-11

BRIDGES AND PATHS

I remember seeing a program on the ‘discovery channel’ about a jungle tribe in New Guinea. Of particular interest was the portion pertaining to the marriage rituals. This documentary show described the bargaining process of a man who wished to obtain a bride. The bride, who belonged to another tribe, lived across a river in a distant part of the jungle. The groom-to-be and his father, along with other male members of his tribe, traveled to the bride’s village, and, after stating their purpose, they engaged in a long and complicated bargaining process. After the transaction was completed, the groom and his group returned to their home. Upon their return, their entire village began to make preparations for the arrival of the new bride and her tribe. At a point closest to the village, the men began to build a bridge, high across the raging river. The women and children began to gather stones from the river to build a solid path to the village for the bride. All the while that the men and women and children labored, they laughed and sang and they seemed to actually enjoy their hard toil. Why? Because they were all working together toward accomplishing a ‘common goal’ - proper preparation for the arrival of the new bride who would soon become a member of their tribe.

This tribal custom reminded me of what the ‘family’ of God should be - a group of loving and happy souls, all working together for the advancement of God’s Kingdom! ‘Building bridges’ to many lost persons who are called by God to become ‘new members’ of the ‘tribe’ of God! Are you excited about ‘building bridges’ to the lost ones through loving friendship? Are you cooperating with your ‘fellow believers’ in earnest effort to bring new persons into the fellowship of God’s family (tribe)? Are you actively trying to meet the spiritual needs of hurting (lost) persons? Christ is called the ‘Bridegroom’. Sinners, through conversion, become members of the church, and the church is called the ‘Bride’ of Christ. As a Christian you must do what you can, in cooperation with other fellow believers, to prepare for converted souls (who are called the ‘bride’ of Christ) to become ‘incorporated’ and ‘assimilated’ into your local church(as new members of the ‘new tribe’ - ‘the tribe’ of Jesus Christ!). Make it easy for new believers to ‘feel at home’ in your local fellowship (church). Introduce them to other believers who may have something ‘in common’ with the new believers. When the new ‘bride-to-be’ arrived to become the new wife of a man of another tribe, she was welcomed with enthusiasm and zeal! Are you excited and enthusiastic when you see new persons who ‘appear’ in your church meetings? Do you accept them with ‘wide-open’ arms of welcome and warmth and love? The greatest ‘service’? Acceptance of new people!

“Father, help me always to welcome the newcomers into the local church where I regularly worship. Help me, like the men in the jungle tribe, to work hard and joyfully in preparation for the ‘grand incorporation’ of new believers into the ‘tribe’ (church) of Jesus Christ!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I determine always to work with my fellow believers to make room for more new believers in the ‘circle of fellowship’ in my local church!

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

Galatians 2: 2; Hebrews 13:16

BRIDGE BUILDING

Joseph Dies in his book, Bridges and Men says: “Few of man’s inventions are more basic than the bridge. The oldest engineering work devised by man, it is the only one universally employed by him in his precivilized state.”

A bridge is to a road what a diamond is to a ring. Bridges have been the object of writers, poets, and painters. A bridge is always an interesting engineering feat of study and to look upon. Throughout the world there are famous bridges built by men who have become famous as a result: Verrazano-Narrows in New York completed in 1965 and 4260 feet long; the Golden Gate in San Francisco, in 1937 4200 feet; Mackinac Strait in Michigan, 1957, 3800 feet; Oakland Bay in San Francisco, 1936, 2310 feet; and Chesapeake Bay, 1952, 1600 feet. Each one has a story to tell.

Bridges are built for the purpose of communication. They allow traffic to move more rapidly from one place to another, whether by car, train, or on foot. They carry loads, transportation of freight from one city to another.

In our concern for others we should build bridges of communication. We want to share Christ with them; to tell them of what He can do for them, just what He did for us. Paul did this in his ministry: “*And I went up to Jerusalem by revelation, and COMMUNICATED unto them the gospel.*” (Galatians 2: 2). “*Let him that is taught in the word COMMUNICATE unto him that teacheth in all good things.*” (Galatians 6: 6) “*Willing to COMMUNICATE*”. (I Timothy 6: 18) “*But to do good and COMMUNICATE forget not*” (Hebrews 13: 16)

The price for building bridges is expensive. The Verrazano-Narrows bridge cost \$325 million. The bridge which God built to span the great distance between Himself and man was costly, very costly - the death of Jesus Christ.

In some areas demolition is first necessary, the tearing down of invisible walls. Through the years barriers and walls have been erected. Demolition is often very costly and time consuming, but necessary. To build a bridge of communication from yourself to an unsaved acquaintance will cost time, planning, and prayer.

The possibilities of building bridges are always present. Someone had to dream, envision the need, and make plans and blueprints to build a bridge across the river. Otherwise, it would never have been accomplished.

There are people in every community who are broken, frustrated, lonely, without God, habitually- bound, living in little islands alone. There is always the possibility of bridge-

building there. “Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness; chords that are broken will vibrate once more.”

A man would ask a person applying for a job the question: “Would you like to build a bridge?” If he answered in words similar to these, “Why, yes, I would,” he was hired on the spot. The man saw possibilities and was able to dream of doing something beyond his ability.

Bridge building. What an exciting assignment!

“Dear Lord, in my bridge building between myself and others, help me not to forget the purpose of such a structure. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: By God’s grace, today I will seek opportunities for building bridges for the purpose of communication.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Luke 10: 25-37

CARING FOR A NEIGHBOR

A lawyer once approached Jesus with a question, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus took this as a cue to speak from the Shema (Hear) that great distillation of moral law given in Deuteronomy 16: 4-9, with its two tables of the LAW, first, ‘Love the Lord you God’ and second, “Love your neighbor as yourself.’

He then illustrated what it meant to be a neighbor by telling the story, Luke 10: 25-37, of the Good Samaritan.

A man in trouble on the Jericho road was helped by a stranger manifesting a true and living faith, having compassion and showing mercy.

The Biblical episode has been repeated countless times to support the Christian ethic of social concern, regardless of the social status of those involved. Thus, a Samaritan helped the man though Jewish men of standing spurned the opportunity to help.

My wife and I were in Israel on holiday a few years ago and witnessed a re-enactment of this old story, on site, as it happened. We were in a taxi driven by an Arab guide, “Driving Michael” by name, who was taken to be a Christian as he worked for Christ Church Hospice in Jerusalem.

We had been to the ancient sites of Qumran and Jericho where we saw the very ruins of places where vital events happened in Bible history, and were on our way back to our hotel, traveling up the highway as it parallels the very old pilgrim road that descended from Jerusalem to Jericho.

On a lonely stretch of that historic track, our car passed another taxi, stalled by the roadside. As we passed, we could identify it as having a Jewish driver, and that it needed water for a steaming radiator.

Suddenly, Driving Michael slowed our car to a stop and began to reverse until he was alongside the stalled vehicle. “Do you need help?” he asked.

“Yes,” the Jewish man replied. “Do you have any spare water?”

“No, Michael replied. “But if you go to that abandoned inn by the old road just a few yards away, you will find a cistern that still has water in it.”

After receiving the Jewish driver’s thanks, our driver again headed for Jerusalem, having given us a living illustration that Jesus’ words still had deep meaning, evidenced when an Arab man paused to give vital help to a Jewish man - on the Jericho road, in 1972!

“Dear Lord, open my eyes to opportunities to give loving care to a neighbor in need. Bless him with words and acts from your servant that will carry your love into his life.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To be a ‘Good Samaritan’ I must be ready always to be God’s instrument of healing.

- Eugene Stewart -

NOTES:

I Timothy 6: 1-5

THE 'FORGOTTEN GROUP' IN THE CHURCH

The position of many churches in general is to focus on nuclear families. However, a sizeable number of adults in the United States and Canada are single. And the number is growing. Single adults comprise four basic categories: the temporary single who expects to marry when the circumstances are right; the career single, unmarried by choice, design, or because the "dream-mate" didn't appear; the widow or widower without responsibilities of children; the divorced or separated person with or without children.

A single adult is a unique individual for whom Christ died. He or she has the same basic needs, wants, and desires as other persons. Today's local churches should be addressing many of these needs.

There is the need for relationships. Loneliness is generally identified as the primary concern of single adults. Often they have no one who is "special" - no one who really cares about them. Christ can provide an atmosphere so those who are alone are not lonely. Relationships with others in the "Family of God" are greatly valued.

There is the need to communicate. Situations are valuable where people open up to each other with no strings attached. Brother/sister relationships based on unconditional acceptance are essential. These need to be free from romantic implications or pressures.

There is the need for increased self-esteem. It's okay to be single. Every person has validity in himself and not just as part of a larger unit. 'One' is a whole number. Each person is a unique, unrepeatable miracle of God.

There is the need to overcome bias. Society imposes a strong bias or pressure for persons to marry. But singleness is not a holding pattern for something else. It is not a time for treading water until marriage. God has called every person to live 'now'. The challenge is to be His man or woman now in the situation life has dealt each one under His direction.

There are spiritual needs. All of us need to develop the richness of the interior self committed to Christ. A widow I know related that once in a while she feels blue and feels like crying. But she says to herself on those occasions, "I can't cry now because of the children. But just wait until tonight." Then she said, "At night, the Lord puts His loving arms around me and there just isn't any thing to cry about."

"I am grateful that You, Heavenly Father, are a person's 'complete sufficiency', whether that person is married or single. Regardless of circumstances, 'in Christ' one is always

a ‘whole and complete person!’”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Through Christ “*I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation.*” (Philippians 4: 12)

- Dorsey Brause -

NOTES:

Galatians 6: 1-5; I John 3: 10-16

“REACHING OUT IN LOVE” TO SINGLES

The average church family is family, couple, youth, and child oriented. Special programs are planned and implemented for them. Of course, this is not all bad. But when there is a lack of vision or desire to do something for singles, many may be lost to Christ and His Church. Many may fail to develop their spiritual potential.

Any ministry to adult singles should not completely segregate them. They need the specialized activities of a separate singles program to help them find fellowship and develop maturity within the particular conditions of their lives. However, they also need to be integrated as a welcome part of the full church family. There need to be opportunities for singles to be involved with couples and families in church-sponsored and other activities.

Some churches utilize cluster family activities in connection with family month, family night during the summer, or as part of any evening vacation Bible school. This is a group of twelve to fifteen persons including one or more nuclear (biological) families, single adults, senior adults, and children or youth whose parents are not active in church. Relational and worship experiences requiring personal interaction are done as a cluster group. Sunday school classes exclusively for singles should be provided for those of college and career age. Older singles may want to be integrated into classes with other adults.

Social events such as an all-church picnic or potluck dinner should involve singles. Such events should be promoted as ‘total’ church affairs for everyone regardless of age, sex, marital status, membership, or attendance record. I’ve seen the positive results to singles of regular Sunday fellowship after the morning worship service. Coffee and doughnuts provided the setting for meeting visitors, lively discussions of the sermon, and keeping up with current happenings. Churches can organize procedures whereby singles are invited to the homes of effective, loving families. Singles should be encouraged to entertain in return.

Care for widows is a responsibility of the church (see I Timothy 5 and Acts 6). Several years ago my church was paid a fine compliment when a mother and her three sons moved back - some eighty miles - into our area upon the death of the husband and father. The move was made so they could resume their previous involvement in the church.

In working with single adults in a local church, here is a ‘basic guideline’: Don’t be a matchmaker. Don’t imply in speech or prayer that the norm is to be married. It may not be the norm for many in your church. Creatively ‘reach out in love’ to all singles!

“Heavenly Father, I thank you that Jesus, the ‘expert of life’, perfectly understands all persons and all circumstances, even singlehood, for Jesus Himself was a ‘single’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: By God’s enabling grace, I will ‘embrace’ all - including ‘singles’ - as members in my ‘forever family’!

- Dorsey Brause -

NOTES:

John 13:34; John 15: 12

A LOVING GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE

I've heard that 'cats hate meeces to pieces.' This was a quotation from a cartoon. It's just the nature of cats to chase mice, and mice to fear them.

Today as I watched a television newscast, a true story was told about a cat and mouse in Thailand. The cat, who loved to chase and catch mice, found a tiny mouse in the cupboard of its owner's home. Instead of acting on its natural inclination to kill and eat the mouse, the cat adopted the little fellow. They became buddies. The owner places them together in a cage where they share their meals. After they have eaten, the cat cleans the mouse's face and the mouse licks the cat's feet. They even lie down and sleep side by side. Apparently they are inseparable. This caused me to give thought concerning Biblical teaching. If natural enemies are able to become friends, why aren't all Christians friends? Romans 12: 18 reads, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."*

Some may argue, since we have different personalities, it is 'just fine' to behave as enemies. The Scripture, however, indicates that God's children are to live in peace with all people. It is easy to love people who love us, but Jesus says we are to love those who hate us, and to pray for those who spitefully use us. (Matthew 5: 44)

The Apostle Paul said if we are in Christ we are new creatures: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5: 17) I understand this to mean our new self no longer responds to our old nature. Christ commands us to love one another. Our new creation in Christ enables us to love one another. It thrills me to know when God gives an order, He gives the ability to obey. The Lord is giving me a love and new appreciation for those of different denominations. I see Christ in them also.

If a cat can love a mouse, and that mouse falls in love with the cat, surely Christians can love one another.

“Dear God, I want to thank you for awakening me again to our Scripture for today. Some times I need to be reminded of Your commands.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To allow the love of God to flow - to me and through me.

- Lowell Weller -

Acts 6: 3-6; 8: 4-8, 26-40;

Acts 21: 8-9

‘BRIDGING THE GAP’ BETWEEN DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES AND RELIGIONS

Often the routine tasks, our coming and going, make us routine. Likewise the attendance of church services can become a commonality in our lives. So after while we become “groovy” people, like a record that goes around and around. But the routine of the commonplace can be transformed if we make our comings and our goings, places of consecration to God and others.

Here is Philip of the book of Acts. A common man. The Philip of the Acts was a pioneer; he stood alone. He took the common, the routine and made it into a place of consecration. The Philip of the Acts was of the seven, one of the first deacons. Because of a potential problem in the early church, the twelve decided to appoint seven men to take care of the situation. But there were certain criteria - “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”

So they “chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and... These they set before the apostles, and they laid their hands upon them.”

Faithful in table service, the horizon of service was extended to Samaria where Philip proclaimed Christ. He was the first missionary - the first to preach the gospel beyond the walls of Jerusalem, in Samaria of all places. “Just a layman” - full of the Spirit and wisdom; but “multitudes gave heed to what was said...and saw signs which he did.” Unclean spirits were cast out, many were healed, and “there was much joy in the city.” Not bad for a table server!

Let’s go back to the table service! Here was a conflict! Greeks and Hebrews not getting along. So men were needed - men big enough in spirit and attitude with practicality to bring a reconcilable solution in this possible breach within the early church. So Philip was chosen and he served well. Question: “Are churches and communities in need of such persons today?”

The twelve did not believe it was right for them to cease preaching and serve tables. They were probably right. Nevertheless, Philip served tables and later preached effectively and became the only one in the New Testament titled as “the evangelist” - “Philip the evangelist.” Successful in Samaria-evangelism, he was willing to “step down” from the multitudes, listen to an angel, go to Gaza, and get on a chariot (a bus today). There he and an Ethiopian met. He had previously bridged the gap between the Hebrew and the Greek; now he does the same between an African and himself and Jesus

Christ. Tradition says that this Ethiopian minister/treasurer became the founder of the Abyssinian Church. This was the beginnings of what David had said: *“Let Ethiopians hasten to stretch out her hands to God”*. (Psalms 68: 31)

Whatever our lot in life, whatever task, however common it may seem, however routine, when consecrated to God, can be transformed into a sacred ministry.

“O God, may this day with all its ‘coming and goings’ be a time of sacredness in my service to others and to You. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today I will realize anew that my common tasks are opportunities of service to God and others.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. As an active member of your local church, what can you do (in cooperation with other committed members) to make it easier for new converts to ‘feel at home’ in your church (i.e., what can you do to enable new converts to more quickly and effectively to be ‘incorporated’ and ‘assimilated’ into your ‘church home’)? What evidence is there that a local church, whose long-time members refuse to warmly and lovingly include new converts and new attenders into the ‘circle of fellowship’, is a church which is slowly (and perhaps even quickly) ‘dying’?**
- 2. What can you do to ‘tear down walls and barriers’ which have willfully or unwittingly been constructed “to keep sinners out of the local church”, and what can you do to ‘build bridges of loving communication’ to the broken and lonely and isolated people in your community, for the purpose of stimulating a ‘hunger’ in them for God and for fellowship in your church?**
- 3. What attitude and actions are required if you (and fellow Christians) are to be a “Good Samaritan”, as recorded in Luke 10: 25-37?**
- 4. Would you agree that in most (typical) local churches, the ‘single adults’ are too often overlooked and ‘forgotten’, that very few (if any) meaningful activities are specifically planned for the ‘singles group’ of adult in most local churches? What are several of the many needs which ‘single adults’ have which could be ‘addressed’ and perhaps even ‘filled’ through the programs and fellowship of a local church? Are these specific ‘programs’ that you (as a married person) would like to inaugurate in your local church which would ‘address’ some of the needs of this special group of persons (i.e., ‘single persons’ who have never been married, or who have been divorced or who have been widowed)?**
- 5. According to Romans 12: 18, are you (as a believer) strongly committed to living “peaceably with all persons”? Does living at peace with all persons imply that you “agree with the viewpoints and actions” of all persons? Why or why not? With persons with whom you strongly disagree (in terms of philosophical and theological viewpoints, or in terms of behavioral expectations and practices), do you maintain a ‘charitable attitude’ of tolerance and acceptance and respect? Have you learned to “disagree agreeably” with certain persons who are ‘very different’ from you in attitudes, and personality, and convictions, and lifestyle? What specifically have you done (or that you intend to do) to affect a ‘reconciliation’ between you and another person with whom you are presently ‘alienated’ (because of ‘differences’ which have resulted in ‘hurt feelings’)?**

- 6. What can you do to avoid the ‘trap of complacency’ and the ‘temptation to casualness’, in your routine attendance of your local church services and in your frequent contacts with regular members in your local church? What can you do (in terms of your actions and attitudes and ‘speech’) to bring a renewed sense of appreciation and excitement and ‘enthusiastic fellowship’ to the congregation of your local church?**
- 7. As a ‘lay person’, who works actively in your local church, is it your desire to be a person “of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, full of grace and power”? (See Acts 6: 3, 8)**
- 8. Do you think that some of the ‘misunderstandings’ and ‘disputes’ in local churches could be resolved if every believer was willing humbly to serve (without a desire for ‘recognition’ and ‘applause’), using the various talents and gifts which God had distributed according to His sovereign will? (Acts 6: 1-7)**
- 9. What characteristics did Philip manifest which made him such an effective servant of God, such a ‘fruitful and useable layman’? (Note Acts 8: 4-40)**
- 10. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Whatever our lot in life, whatever task, however common it may seem, however routine, when consecrated to God, can be transformed into a sacred ministry.”**

CHAPTER THREE

SERVE HUMBLY FOR GOD'S GLORY

John 13: 3-17

THE MASTERY OF SERVITUDE

Last Supper accounts are given to us in all the Gospels. One enduring story is told in Matthew and Luke about a temporary regression in the disciples' spiritual development. In the thirteenth chapter of John, another story appears. Splicing them together, we see the whole picture. After listening to a childish disagreement among His disciples as to who should have the most elevated position in the Kingdom of God, Jesus took off His sandals and put on a towel and gave them a divine example to follow. In one evening, He turned the caste system upside down by becoming a Master of Servitude!

Shock prevailed in the Upper Room when the Master became a servant and instructed them to do the same. Disobedience would have carried the day except for Jesus's stern but loving rebuke of Peter. Compare Peter's reaction in Verse 8 with his second reaction in Verse 9 following a life-changing encounter with the Living Christ. The self-reservation in Verse 8 (“You'll never wash my feet”) is replaced by the total commitment in Verse 9 (“not only my feet but also my head and my hands”). I often hear criticism of these disciples for their lack of insight into divine character, but put yourself in their place. Can you imagine God waiting tables and washing feet? Can you imagine you doing it?

Jesus said: *“When a disciple is fully taught, he will be like his teacher”*. Every day that I live in this world, I have to ask myself the challenging question: “Am I like Jesus?” Am I in this world to get or to give, to be served or to serve? Am I in this world to make a profit at the expense of others or to sell everything and follow Him? Am I in this world to make a name for myself or to exhalt His name? Am I in this world to find a safe haven or to risk everything for His kingdom? Have I taken off my shoes and put on my towel and waded into life unreservedly? Have I accepted the challenge of service and discovered the secret of The Cross? Am I a disciple?

“Dear God, shatter my status quo and give me the spirit of a servant and the courage of the Christ.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To be a disciple is to be comfortable in the inner circle of Jesus!

- Loretta Jenkins -

Luke 22: 24-27

“I AM AMONG YOU AS ONE WHO SERVES”

Jesus told His disciples: *“I am among you as one who serves”*. (Luke 22: 27) I first learned this lesson in the ninth month of my third pregnancy. My husband was pastoring his first church in Midland, Texas. I was “great with child” and toddling around after two other pre-schoolers.

The ladies of the church planned a mother-daughter banquet as an evangelism outreach, and I was elected chairman of the committee because of my elevated status as pastor’s wife. My grumbling began. Why me, Lord? My back hurts. My body’s cumbersome. My sinuses are infected. Others are more physically equipped to do this job. Some of my best lessons have come out of complaining. Old Testament characters come alive in similar experiences. Here I was a kindred spirit with the children of Israel. Nevertheless, God tapped me on the shoulder and looked me in the eye and said: “You’re the one”. No matter how illogical it seemed to me at the time, He was right.

Obviously, someone had been in prayer because a large group of ladies arrived. A wonderful meal was prepared; but, as I had suspected, there were few servers. I was elected. As I served when I wanted to sit, God taught me a powerful lesson which has clung to me through the years. With every glass of tea I poured, I felt His hand in mine. In every friendly word I spoke, I felt His smile warm on my shoulder. When the night was over, I knew that I had walked with Jesus on the common road.

That little church grew and thrived in our 2 ½ years of ministry, but today it is no more. Who’s to say what other lives were touched that night by my small service? I only know mine was, and it will never be the same again.

“Dear God, help me not to neglect the ministry of small things. Blessings break through everywhere.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Serving God satisfies the soul. Serving self shrivels it.

- Loretta Jenkins -

Philippians 4: 1-3

LOVING LABOR

Labor Day is the only holiday on which we celebrate something by ignoring it. On Thanksgiving we give thanks and eat turkey. On Christmas we celebrate Christ’s birth and exchange gifts. On Memorial Day we memorialize our fallen soldiers. On Mother’s Day and Father’s Day we honor moms and dads. On Labor Day we take the posture of Jerome Jerome who said, “Work fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours”.

Have you noticed that most of the work that is done to keep the world going is done anonymously? I woke up this morning and my digital clock was blinking off and on. The power had gone off during the night; but somebody, somewhere turned it back on. Yesterday there was a break in the water line that supplies our house. I know because the water was brownish in color indicating dirt in the line. A few hours later the water was clear again. Somebody somewhere repaired the line. I don’t know who these people are who took care of those problems, but I am thankful for them.

It is equally true that most of the work that is done to keep the church going is done anonymously. Paul Henderson was communion steward at his church for over 20 years. Month after month, year after year, people came to partake of the Holy Sacrament and never gave a thought about who had lovingly prepared it. Do you know who prepares The Lord’s Supper at your church?

The world knows who the Apostle Paul is. His letters are read in the New Testament every week in almost every language. Quite often Paul will mention the name of some obscure person or even provide a list of names as in II Timothy 4. In our reading, we hurry past these names, much as we ignore the credits at the end of a movie. Yet these names were important to Paul; they were his supporting cast. In I Corinthians 16: 8 Paul says: “*I will stay in Ephesus till Pentecost...*” Where will he be staying in Ephesus, at the Holiday Inn? Whose home will he be a guest in? Who is providing hospitality to this great Apostle as he writes his letter to Corinth and preaches the Gospel in Ephesus? We can’t say for sure, but I vote for that person whose name we barely notice in the first verse of the first chapter, “Sosthenes”.

In the New Testament only a few names are recorded of those who were laboring in the Church as it was being born. We can be sure that many more were behind the scenes helping things along. It is that way today, and perhaps you are one of the “behind the scenes” persons. The Apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians “*to respect those who labor among you...Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work.*” (I Thessalonians 5: 13, 23)

It may be that the Church historic has rallied behind the voice of the preachers, been inspired and encouraged by the musicians, but it has made its way these twenty centuries on the shoulders of the laborers. Look around the place where you worship and wonder about the things that are done there. Who opens up on Sunday morning?

“Heavenly Father, give me a servant’s heart, that all I do will be done for a smile from Jesus.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not take for granted the little things done for Christ in His church.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Psalm 19

TO SERVE UNHERALDED

Last night I saw the stars spangled upon the black velvet of space. Yesterday I saw castles of clouds floating in the sky. “The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

Today the earth was bursting with color. I saw red berries shining in the sun. I saw green leaves waltzing with the wind. I saw a flower, tiny and delicate, beautifully blue, growing in the mud. It seemed so out of place there.

It had no reward in that place, except to be what it was where it was.

I may have been the only person ever to see it, so it gave me all its beauty and all its blue.

If a careless shoe were to crush it underfoot, it would bear no grudge against the world.

It would rise as best it could to receive the warmth of the sun and smile at the sky.

Perhaps it knows its Creator.

In an old cemetery overgrown with brush and weeds, there are forgotten graves within an acre of forgotten sacred ground. No one ever visits; only the wild hogs, squirrels, or deer occasionally pass through, disinterested in the lives laid to rest underneath their feet.

I was taken to this forgotten place by an elderly gentleman who stumbled across it while hunting. All of the headstones are fallen over and illegible save one. It stands straight and proud marking the resting place of an unheralded Methodist circuit rider. This inscription is carved on the stone:

**Sacred to the memory of the
Reverend William O’Conner
Itinerant Missionary of
The Methodist Episcopal Church
From Ohio who died
October 10, 1843**

A December entry in the minutes of the Fourth Session of the Texas Annual Conference simply notes: “...and the first death occurred when William O’Conner passed away.” I wonder, who were you, William O’Conner?

“Dear Lord, teach my heart to be like that flower and that circuit rider who served You well, unnoticed and unknown to all except You.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will measure my worth only by my value to God.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Matthew 24: 1-14

HUMBLE SERVANTHOOD INSTEAD OF FIERCE COMPETITION

Parent’s day for marching band is always delightful. The band director has the parents hold their son’s or daughter’s instrument and practice a couple of “sets.” This is a lot of fun. Since I had the pleasure of being the parent on the field for the past two years, my wife finally took her turn. I will refrain from making remarks about how my son’s sousaphone (a bloated tuba) is taller than my wife. Proudly, this tuba totin’ momma marched the pattern, walking ten steps forward, and sixteen steps angling back. It was a moment to remember and forever captured on videotape.

After the mayhem on the field, the band director asked the students and parents to sit together on the field and philosophized with us. Although they are preparing for competition, the only competition is with themselves. He believes the band can only compete against itself in an attempt to improve and do its best. We agree.

We live in an age where competition is bitter and fierce. Everyone is looking for an edge or an angle by which they may accomplish more than others. To come out on top is the world’s goal. Sometimes we can really get caught up in this pursuit. We will forsake everything for an advantage to come out first. I once read of a “successful” CEO who commented that, in order to get ahead, one might have to get a new family. He then admitted, “that’s what I did.” His pursuit of power and becoming the best cost from his family. He just traded them in for another.

It is time to rethink our values in competition. Being the best or being first is not worth the price, if it costs us our integrity or hurts another along the way. Jesus was a radical teacher who taught us to regard others as more important than ourselves. The apostle Paul added that we are to look to the interests of others and not just our own interests. You can never reach the top without helping others along the way. It is the doorman who ushers everyone else into the building who will truly be honored. Jesus also said, “*The last shall be first.*” Those who are truly humble will be the real winners. A competitive spirit is good when we realize that we are our own competition.

“Merciful God, forgive me for thinking I am more important than others. Forgive me, also, for trying to improve my station in life without improving my relationship with You. You have made me who I am and I am most grateful to be Your humble servant. May I become better than I am without feeling more important than someone else. Humble me, Lord, that I may exalt You! In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I may not be better than someone else, but I can be a better me!

- Thomas Duckworth -

Esther 4

WHO KNOWS?

Life is filled with small activities. Most days they turn out to be small in consequence. They are necessary but seldom noticed. Then there are days when the delight of The Divine breaks through and destinies of men and history are shaped. It was such a time when Mordecai said to Ester: *“Who know but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”* Esther replied, *“I will go...and if I perish, I perish.”* Thus an orphan girl became a savior. It was one of God’s best surprises.

Have you ever wondered how God is able to make such marvelous events come to pass by using such small vessels? Throughout the scriptures examples abound. As Queen Esther stood trembling in the presence of King Ahasuerus, I wonder if the small, dark-eyed Jewess knew her meager supply of courage would deliver a nation from annihilation. Did David know that protecting sheep would equip him to kill a giant and disperse the Philistine army? Did Daniel know that his small obedience in prayer would close the mouths of lions? Did Moses’ frail arm tremble as he raised his rod to part a sea for a path to the new life of a nation? Did the little boy know that his small lunch would feed 5,000 people when he offered it on the Mount of Beatitudes? Could Peter, the disciple cowering in the shadows on Crucifixion Eve, contemplate baptizing 3,000 souls on the day of Pentecost? Did Paul have the faintest suspicion that the letters he wrote would inspire you and me twenty centuries later?

Consider I Corinthians 1: 27: *“God has chosen foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and weak things of the world to confound the mighty.”* Small things are God’s tools. A handful of dirt created the first man. A baby brought salvation. One book can shape a nation. One word can turn aside a mob. One vote can defeat a dictator. One shot can fell an assassin. One prayer can get the attention of God. One life —well, the possibilities are endless. Let it be yours. The answer to life’s most puzzling problem may not come from the name in the headlines. It may come from you. Who knows?

“Dear God, help me to be ready at all times to do Your will. Give me the courage to carry through.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God has a plan for my life. I will trust in Him.

- Loretta Jenkins -

Mark 10: 17-29

THAT ANSWER CAN'T POSSIBLY BE RIGHT!

The little newspaper quiz asked, “What part of the world produces the most food per square mile?” I first thought of the rich farmlands of the American Midwest. The Amazonian rain forest, the pineapple farms of Hawaii, a rice-growing region in Southeastern Asia, or somewhere highly specialized such as a catfish farm in Mississippi? Not so. According to them the region that produces the most food per square mile is the ocean around Antarctica. It got me thinking again about God and his design of our world.

God uses places we would overlook.

With all the universe to choose from, he picked a barn in an obscure back-country Roman province as the birthplace for his son.

God uses things we think would not be valuable.

The jawbone of a donkey became an avenging weapon in Samson’s hands and he killed a thousand men (Judges 15). Donkey jawbones are not in the Pentagon’s budget, but God is the creator of creativity who can do anything with anything; he does as He chooses.

He had a donkey talk to Balaam (Numbers 22), ravens bring bread and meat to Elijah (I Kings 17), and a dove with a fresh olive leaf in its beak brings hope to Noah (Genesis 8: 6-12).

Jesus’ disciples looked at the five thousand hungry men and calculated that they would need a pile of food the size of a house to feed them. The five loaves and two fish they had were worthless to meet the need, they thought until Jesus took them, blessed them, and fed the throng (Mark 6: 30-44). Later he fed four thousand with five loaves (Mark 8: 1-21). What was thought to be insignificant became, in the hands of faith, worthy and sufficient.

The cross, as cruel an instrument of slow death as ever devised by sadistic men, was used to make possible life - *life to the full* (John 10: 10) - for all who will believe. The weapon of the executioner has become our symbol of life. That is remarkably odd to the natural mind, but not in the reconstructing plan and power of our sovereign Lord.

God uses people we think could not be useful.

Would you have chosen a prostitute for a trusted task? God advanced the work of his kingdom on earth through the Old Testament harlot, Rahab, who became a woman of faith listed with Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and others in the “Honor Roll of Saints” (Hebrews 11).

If you were on the search committee to find someone to inspire the Israelites to leave Egypt would you have chosen a man who fled the land after committing murder? Would you choose a shepherd hiding in a foreign land to defy the Egyptian armies? Would you choose a man who has difficulty talking (Genesis 4: 10) to confront the king of Egypt? God chose Moses.

If you were selecting someone to introduce the world beyond Jerusalem to Christianity would you have picked the most feared persecutor of Christians? But Saul the terrorist became Paul the evangelist; the man who stood and watched as Stephen was beaten to death with rocks wrote the definitive essay on love (I Corinthians 13).

“Dear God, my resources seem weak and ordinary, my gifts so meager, my commitment is often shallow, my determination weak, and my self-control limited. Do I have anything you can use? If so, take it. If I can be part of your cause, I will. I want to praise you through word and deed. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus said, “*With God all things are possible.*” (Matthew 19: 26)

- Richard Walters -

NOTES:

I Peter 4: 7-11

THE “BEAR LADY”

I am privileged to know a ‘young’ woman in my church named Crickett. I say ‘young’ because, although Crickett is 86 years old, she is one of the most ‘young at heart’ persons I have ever met. And even in a body that is sometimes frail, God gives her the strength to accomplish amazing things. When the weather is nice, she thinks nothing of walking the 7 blocks to church for prayer meeting or Sunday School. She plants and maintains a beautiful garden of all kinds of ground flowers and two tubs of water lilies. She always has an ‘iron in the fire’ and is constantly ‘on the go.’ When she was younger, while working as a janitor in a school, her coworkers named her ‘Crickett’ because, instead of talking, she was always hopping off to do the next job. Her smile and laughter encourages everyone she meets.

This is somewhat remarkable because she has gone through some difficult times in her life. In an abusive relationship as a young wife, she struggled with depression and the feelings that come from that kind of suffering. Over the years, she has had to rely upon God and his strength; and, in spite of the valleys she has gone through, she is not bitter about the struggles, but thankful for the many blessings she has received. She is one of the most thankful people I know, and one of the most loving. I remember her saying, “I wish everybody could just love each other. I love everybody.” She often thinks about how God loves her and that causes her to love others as God loves them.

In addition to being thankful for her blessings, Crickett is a blessing to others in a special way. God has given her a special gift that she uses to show God’s love in a concrete way. She is an accomplished seamstress, not of clothes, but ‘teddy bears’. Her business and ministry is making stuffed animals, and she has, on more than one occasion, been called “The Bear Lady”. She receives orders for bears from all over the country. Former President George H. Bush even has one. Often, people bring old fur coats to her and she transforms them into cute ‘teddy bears’ or whatever animals they fancy. In spite of poor eyesight and occasional aches and pains, she is able to make about 2 bears a day. She always considers her talent God’s gift and she desires to use that gift for others. If someone cannot afford a bear, she makes sure that they get one. She gives them as birthday gifts. I have seen many children’s eyes light up after receiving one of “Crickett’s Critters.” And she gives silky, ‘snow white lambs’ to her many friends and acquaintances who are sick. Often she is prompted by the Spirit to send a card or bear to encourage someone that the Spirit has laid upon her heart.

Crickett loves to laugh and she finds joy in the Lord each day. She shows what it means to serve God, by serving others. God has given each of us gifts and talents to use, not for our benefit, but to build up the Body of Christ and to show God’s love to the world. Crickett’s life is a testimony that God can fill us with his love for others, inspire us to

serve others, and that, no matter where we are in life, He can give us strength to “glorify Him in all things through Jesus Christ.”

“Father, cultivate in me that kind of constant love for others which you showed to me through Jesus Christ.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will use my God-given gifts in glad service to those around me.

- Martin Adamson -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **From reading the account of Jesus’ actions in “The Upper Room” (John 13: 3-17), would you conclude that you (as a follower of Jesus) are in this world ‘to get’ or ‘to give’, ‘to be served’ or ‘to serve’, ‘to make a profit at the expense of others’ or ‘to give generously to relieve the needs of others’, ‘to make a name for yourself’ or ‘to exhalt His name’, ‘to find a safe haven’ or ‘to risk everything for His Kingdom’? As a Christian, do you sometimes find it difficult to take ‘the towel and the basin’ (i.e., to assume the place of a humble servant)? Why or why not?**
2. **Have you ever fallen into the ‘trap of self-pity’ when you have felt that you were ‘overworked’ in your local church (and you felt that others were not assuming their ‘fair load’ of responsibility)? When you served willingly and lovingly in the ‘ministry of small things’, did you find unexpected blessings as a result of your faithfulness?**
3. **Have you noticed that most of the work that is done to keep the world ‘going’ is done anonymously? Have you recently expressed appreciation to those persons who work ‘silently’ and ‘anonymously’ in your local church (‘preparing the Communion’, ‘scrubbing the floors’, ‘mowing the lawns’, ‘attending the nursery’, ‘typing the bulletin’, etc., etc.)? What would a ‘word of encouragement and appreciation’ from you mean to those ‘obscure servants’ in your local church who faithfully ‘attend’ to their simple (but important) responsibilities, week after week? Was it important to the well-known church leader - the Apostle Paul - to give appropriate recognition and appreciation to the obscure and ‘behind-the-scenes’ persons in the local churches where he preached and taught? (Note II Timothy 4 and I Thessalonians 5: 12, 23).**
4. **Share the name of, and tell something about, the heroic character and ministry of an unheralded and forgotten saint (servant) of God from your past life, whom you greatly loved and who strongly influenced you to follow Christ.**
5. **Why is it vitally important for you to ‘measure’ your own worth, not by the applause of fellow humans or by your professional achievements or wealth, but by your value to Almighty God (your Creator and Redeemer)?**
6. **In an age where there is fierce and bitter competition, what should the Christian’s attitude be towards his peers? (Note Philippians 2: 1-8)**
7. **Does it give you great encouragement to know that God has a plan for your life, and that God is able, through your obedience and cooperation, to accomplish more through your life (for the ‘glory of God’) than you can even imagine? (Note**

Ephesians 3: 20-21) Can you cite illustrations from the Bible (or from ‘Church History’) which demonstrate the fact that God often uses ‘small things’ or ‘insignificant things’ to accomplish great miracles? (Note Judges 15; Numbers 22; Genesis 8: 6-12; Mark 6: 30-44; Mark 8: 1-21; I Samuel 17: 49; Exodus 14: 16, 21-22)

- 8. Cite examples of times in Biblical history (or in contemporary life) when God chose ‘unlikely’ people (i.e., obscure or weak or ‘ordinary’ people) to accomplish important tasks or to influence important decisions which helped change the course of history. (Note Hebrews 11: 31)**
- 9. Even though your talents may be small, your formal education may be limited, your physical strength may be ‘spent’, your resources may be small, and your ‘vision’ may be blurred, do you believe God has a ‘place’ for you in His “Master Plan”? Do you believe that, with God all things are possible? (Matthew 19: 26)**
- 10. Give Scriptural evidence that God has given each of us gifts and talents to use, not for our benefit, but to build up the ‘Body of Christ’ and to show God’s love to the world.**

CHAPTER FOUR

PERFORM 'ACTIONS' OF PRACTICAL COMPASSION

Isaiah 41: 6-7; Acts 4: 36; Acts 11: 22-24

THE ELECTRIC SPARK

Captain Arthur Rostron was known as The Electric Spark, by those who served with him. He had the ability to make quick and proper decisions and to transmit his energy to those serving under him. History records that he did not smoke, drink or use profanity. When he prayed, he would tilt his cap, and move his lips in silent prayer. His ship, the Carpathia, was in the area when the Titanic ran into an iceberg. During the crises, the second officer observed Captain Rostron, in prayer. The decision was made! He turned the Carpathia around, and headed into the icy waters, endangering his own ship, as well as himself and his crew. Preparations were made to take as many survivors aboard as possible. He became the spark of encouragement needed during this great tragedy.

According to Doctor Luke, Barnabas was a New Testament ELECTRIC SPARK. If we knew nothing more about this man of God, we would know enough to realize he was to be admired and respected. There are scholars who suggest his name means, Son of Refreshment, or Encouragement. His life resembled the life of Christ, for Christ truly lived in and through him. What would our lives be like without the Barnabases, the Encouragers, the Electric Sparks who help us through the foreboding times?

History is of little value, without lessons learned. Who do we know that needs An Electric Spark of Encouragement? Perhaps a family member, a neighbor, a Sunday School teacher, or pastor. Are there missionaries who need a letter assuring them of our prayers? What about the widow or widower who lives far from family? Maybe a child who attends church without a family member.

Now at this time in my life, I find I am not able to preach and teach as I once did, but the opportunities of encouragement are boundless. A word, telephone call, letter, or just a smile and ‘God Bless You’ can touch someone’s life and make them want to be an Electric Spark too.

“Dear God, lay some souls upon my heart, and help me to encourage them.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will strive to be a Barnabas, an Electric Spark to those I meet today.

- Lowell Weller -

Genesis 4

THANKSGIVING ATTITUDES OF MY HEART

The announcement was made in church that the Thanksgiving offering would be given to a group of Native Americans that was having some real difficulties. The U.S. government had not officially recognized them as an Indian tribe.

Then the pastor’s sermon was about Cain and Abel and the gifts they brought. In Genesis 4, we are told that after Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, they had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. In process of time, Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. Cain brought an offering of what he had; Abel brought the best of what he had. The Lord accepted Abel and his offering. The Lord did not accept Cain and his offering.

Watch Cain’s reaction: Cain was more than angry; he was highly incensed and his attitude showed on his face.

Now watch God’s reaction: *“Why are you wroth? And why is your countenance fallen?”* God shows concern, like any parent would with an upset child. *“If you do well, shall you not be accepted?”* God gives Cain a second chance. *“If you do not well, sin lies at the door.”* God confronts Cain’s real problem. *“And unto you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him.”* God challenges Cain to be victorious, to change his attitude. This is a battle with the devil.

But Cain allowed his rage to roar in harbored resentment. Cain showed no respect for God, his parents, or his brother. Cain killed his brother, Abel. When God asked Cain, *“Where is Abel, your brother?”* Cain sinned again by lying, *“I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?”*

The story could have turned out differently if Cain had dealt with his thoughts and attitudes rather than letting them have revenge. The offerings both boys brought to God were Thanksgiving offerings; they were not demanded to bring them. Cain’s gift was not accepted because of the attitude of his heart.

As I sat there listening to the sermon, I started considering my own attitudes about giving. How do I feel about the proposed Thanksgiving offering this year? I pondered.

“It’s Thanksgiving time and I bring my gift of food out of duty; it’s the thing to do.

But I think, can’t the government provide for the poor man?

Am I my brother’s keeper? Looking within, I discover there’s a bit of Cain in me.

It’s Thanksgiving time and I bring my gift of food thankfully, glad I can share.

From the abundance of my cupboard. Reaching out to my poor brother,

I am my brother’s keeper. Looking within, I discover there’s a bit of Abel in me.

It’s Thanksgiving time and I bring my thoughts and attitudes,

Dear Lord, and lay them at your feet.

Cover them with your love; Channel them through the mind of Christ.

You look deep within me, there’s a bit of Cain, there’s a bit of Abel.

I am my brother’s keeper.”

“Father, forgive me for thinking only of myself. Help me to examine my thoughts and attitudes whenever I give a gift.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The attitudes borne of the thoughts rule the actions.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

Luke 15; I John 1: 9

WHAT I REALLY WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

It was the first time in four years that the Blevins family had been together for Thanksgiving. There are ten now with the two in-laws, Mom and Dad, and the six children. Everyone sat around enjoying the pumpkin pie and coffee.

Mother said, “While we are all together, let’s go around the table and say what each one would like to have for Christmas.”

Each person named a gift he or she would like to receive. Then it was Ned’s turn, but he just slouched in his chair with his head down. “Well, Ned, what would you like?” asked Joy.

Quietly Ned said, “What I really want for Christmas is a clear head. I need help. I have to get out of the drug scene.” Ned had just recently returned from the Army and had found four other guys to live with. He had gotten caught up in their lifestyle.

His mother looked into his eyes and asked, “Ned, do you believe that God can help you?”

“Yes, I know He can because I know I can’t help myself. I thought I just wanted friends but now I know I was wrong to try drugs. I’ve had a headache for months. I can’t think clearly anymore.”

“Everyone, come and let’s pray together,” said father. They all reached out and touched Ned, encircling him with love. Father prayed, asking God to touch his son, forgive his sin, and restore his health. Then Ned prayed, confessing his sin and asking God to cleanse him and restore his fellowship.

Ned’s sisters cried and sat on his lap, hugging him. The brothers asked, “How can we help you? What can we do?” Ned said, “I want to move, to get away from where I am living now.” So they rose up and went immediately. The waterbed was emptied, clothes and belongings were carried to the cars.

“I’ve never moved so fast in all my life.” smiled the youth. “I didn’t really want to return home, but I’m glad I did. I feel safe again.”

The next few days were difficult as Ned suffered from withdrawal; he sweat one moment, had chills the next. Fitfully, he slept. His head throbbed and ached. Slowly his body returned to normal, his vision cleared, he could once again think clearly.

Then he paced the floor; he drank coffee. “I need a job, I’m restless”, he said.

He volunteered at The Salvation Army Christmas Center. He interviewed scores of people: the homeless, the hungry, the immigrant. He heard stories of unemployment, abuse, and helplessness. He sent each person away with a cheerful “Merry Christmas, and God bless you.” While helping others, Ned found the true gift of Christmas.

“Father, thank you for receiving us just as we are. Thank you for the love and peace you give us when we confess our sins and come home to you.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will help my brother rather than criticizing him.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

Luke 10: 25-37

“WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

Jesus demonstrated that many people have the following philosophy in life: “What’s thine is mine.” The world is full of self-centered people who have the basic idea that everything belongs to me, and it’s mine for the taking. It’s ME first! This is pictured in the response of the robbers who had no regard for the impersonal others they encountered. They simply saw them as persons to be exploited. Christians are continually bombarded with the philosophy that they should go after every ounce of gusto the world offers.

The second attitude that is expressed in this story is this: “What’s mine is mine.” The interesting fact is that there were very religious persons who observed the half dead man and, no doubt, were somewhat moved in their hearts about the plight of the man. However, they were so disgusted that this kind of thing could happen in our civilized world. They might have even said a little prayer for the man like this: “Lord, please send someone to help this man;” or “Lord, put it on someone’s heart to bring him some clothes and medical attention.” But, somehow it never quite dawned on them that they were responsible. They had the same attitude that millions still have today: “What’s mine is mine.”

But what does God say about that attitude and response? God’s response is this: “You are not your own; you are bought with a price.” We are only stewards of what God has allowed us to have. God said to the rich man: “This night shall thy soul be required of thee, then who shall all these things be?” His problem which cost him his eternal soul was the attitude: “What’s mine is mine.”

There is also a third response here, and that third response was expressed by a very unlikely individual. The response was simply this: “What’s mine is thine.” Here was a man who had no heritage, no good name, no good reputation, but his heart was that of a true Christian. His attitude was a responsible attitude that made him take some pretty radical measures. What caused him to be that way? It was simply a basic philosophy that can only be attained through full surrender of ourselves to the purposes of Jesus Christ. We, too, need to come to the point where our philosophy is: “What’s mine is thine.”

God will likely provide many opportunities even today for us to express our love and care for others with whom we come in contact. If we live out this philosophy of “What’s mine is thine,” we will reap many benefits and assist many individuals.

“Dear Lord, make me aware of those around me who need my help. Give me the courage and the grace to give the best I have to assist others even today! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When God calls, I intend to be prepared to give the very best that I have to the neediest of our world.

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

Hebrews 12: 1-4

“SPECTATORS OR PARTICIPANTS?”

The “spectator syndrome” has had a very negative effect on our world in this century. James Garlowe in recent years stated that the Church has become like a major sporting event where there are only 22 men on the field who desperately need rest and 100,000 people in the stands who desperately need exercise.

Those who watch televised sporting events make up audiences of millions of people. Among those millions are thousands of “arm chair” quarterbacks, goalies, pitchers, and other players, who know better how to play the sport than anyone on the field. In fact, they can get angry and scream at the participants and give all kinds of advice without ever leaving the comfort of their chair. In addition, the game becomes the point of discussion in millions of conversations for days following the event.

But despite all of the emotional and verbal energy expended by millions of people, they are still just spectators.

In our leisure, we and millions of others will sit and watch one to five people make fools of themselves in front of a TV camera and we call it entertainment. While those 1-5 people make millions of dollars, we are simply spectators content to be entertained.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us a rather shocking perspective. As Christians we are not to be spectators - we ARE the participants. Christianity is not a spectator-oriented activity. There are no exceptions!

God’s agenda is for every person to be involved in the race of the Christian life.

For many people, to live the truth of this scripture will require some major adjustments in their lives. First of all, we’ll need to set some new priorities. The scriptural admonition is that we need to lay aside many, actually “ALL”, of the things that hinder us and weight us down so that we can be viable participants.

Secondly, we need to make some proper preparations. Again the scripture instructs that we must “lay aside,” or be cleansed from the nature of sin which is the heart condition that leads to the sins of our lives. We can never be viable participants in God’s great plan until He makes us clean.

Thirdly, we need the proper participation. The scripture commands that we “run with patience or perseverance the race that is marked out for us.” There is no provision for spectators – only participants.

“Dear Lord, I want my life to count for you. Help me to commit myself to be a committed participant in your Kingdom work today!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To be a spectator requires no discipline, no commitment, no accountability, and no performance. Being a participant in God’s plan requires all of these things.

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

James 2: 14-26

WHATCHA GONNA DO?

Do you ever watch the popular TV show, Cops? Some people enjoy it because it lets them see, in raw form, violent or defective lifestyles radically different than their own. Other people like it because, as a friend said, “I like to see the bad guys get what’s coming to them for a change.”

How about that theme song? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you? Bad guys, bad guys. Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3: 23). “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53: 6).

Jesus had a brother who was not a believer until after the resurrection. Eventually that brother, James, had to answer the whatcha-gonna-do question for himself. He answered wisely, and went on to be an influential leader in the early church. In a letter that was widely circulated in his day he gives very specific directives that can help us answer the same question.

(1) Faith is not only essential, he tells us, but it is also practical. *“He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind;” a person who, trying to walk in two directions at the same time stumbles and falls (1: 6-8).* James must have been listening when Jesus taught, *“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” (Luke 16: 13).*

Faith is powerful: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,”* James writes, using Elijah’s prayers that resulted in a three-and-a-half-year drought, followed by his prayer that led to rain, as examples of the power of prayer (5: 16-18).

(2) Deeds are equally essential, James writes, because without them faith is not powerful. *“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”* he says (2: 17). Actually, doing increases faith. Pointing back to Abraham’s faith, James says, *“You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (2: 22).*

And, just as belief (faith) is practical, so also is the practice of the faith (deeds). *“The man (or woman) who looks intently into the perfect law that*

gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does” (1: 25).

“Father God, I confess to you now that I have been short in both faith and doing. My sins of omission are indeed great. Greater still are your love and mercy, for which I offer my simple, inadequate thanks. Your work in my life, and around all of my circumstances has been so mighty, my response so pitifully weak. Your patience with me has been so enduring, while my attention has flown from one trivial thing to another like a restless fly. My faith has been wobbly, my deed skimpy. Guide me into greater faith and more significant service, for your greater glory because you alone are worthy. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus had enough faith in me that he was willing to die for me. This being so, I will put my faith in him into action in this day.

- Richard Walters -

NOTES:

James 2: 12-20

CARING ENOUGH TO ACT!

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class who was walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, “Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd.” I had quite a weekend planned (Parties, etc.), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on.

As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him and, as he crawled around looking for his glasses, I saw a tear in his eye. As I handed him his glasses, I said, “Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives.” He looked at me and said, “Hey thanks!” There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books. I asked him if he wanted to play football on Saturday with me and my friends. He said yes. We hung out together all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him. And my friends thought the same of him.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship. Kyle was valedictorian of our class. Graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He had more dates than I did and all the girls loved him! I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, “Hey, big guy, you’ll be great!” He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. “Thanks,” he said. As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. “Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story.” I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn’t have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. He then said, “Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable.” I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us about this weakest moment. I saw his Mom

and Dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person’s life. For better or for worse!

- Author Unknown -

“Lord, be pleased to love someone through me today. Open my eyes that I may behold the downcast look in someone’s countenance today. Loving Heavenly Father, break my heart with the same things that break your heart, and give me both desire and power to bind up some broken heart on life’s pilgrimage today! Thank you! Amen.” (written by Ron Christian)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is my desire to be self-forgetful and to befriend some lonely and hurting person today! (written by Ron Christian)

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you know any fellow Christian whose words and actions demonstrate that he is an ‘Encourager’ - i.e., a ‘spark of encouragement’ to many persons around him, during tragedies or crisis or emergencies, similar to Barnabas in the New Testament? (Note Acts 11: 22-24) Would you like it to be said of you, by your closest friends, after the time of your death, that you were a ‘Son of Consolation’, a ‘Rallying Point for Faith’, a ‘Fountain of Perpetual Encouragement’, a ‘Constant Edifier’, and ‘Electric Spark’?
2. What can you do to be an “Electric Spark of Encouragement” to someone (like a weary pastor, or an unheralded Sunday School teacher, or a discouraged missionary, or an invalid elderly person, or a neglected child, or a confused teenager)?
3. Tell what is meant by the statement: “There is a bit of Cain and a bit of Abel in the heart and attitude of many Christians.” When you are tempted to hold grudges against ‘your brother’ (as Cain held against Abel), and are tempted indifferently to say ‘Am I my brother’s keeper’, what can you do to ‘stem the tide’ of jealousy in your heart and to embrace your ‘brother’ in love and with compassion?
4. Put a check beside the statement which best describes your own personal reaction (response) to a friend or a relative who has ‘hit the bottom’ morally or socially or spiritually:
 - _____ a. A sense of pity.
 - _____ b. A sense of repulsion.
 - _____ c. A sense of anger.
 - _____ d. A sense of alarm.
 - _____ e. A sense of contempt.
 - _____ f. A sense of ‘secret satisfaction’.
 - _____ g. A sense of sorrow.
 - _____ h. A sense of compassion.
 - _____ i. A sense of love.
 - _____ j. A sense of hope.
5. How did Jesus treat persons whose lives were ‘broken’, whose moral condition was despicable? (Note Matthew 9: 10-13; Luke 7: 36-50; Luke 15: 10-32)
6. Share a time (occasion) in your life when (as in the case of the “Good Samaritan” - Luke 10) God provided opportunities for you to express your love and practical compassion and care to a ‘hurting wayside traveler’ on life’s pathway.

7. **Identify each of the ‘characters’ in the story of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10: 25-37) in terms of the three following philosophies:**
 - (a) **“What’s thine is mine.”**
 - (b) **“What’s mine is mine.”**
 - (c) **“What’s mine is thine.”**

8. **At times in your “Christian life” do you find it easier to ‘sympathize’ with the suffering ones around you (even to the point of ‘praying’ for them), than to actually DO something concretely and practically and materially and visibly for them?**

According to the Scriptures, what should be the Christian’s response to the needs and hurts of people around him? (Note I John 3: 16-18; James 2: 15-18) As a Christian who seeks to live obediently, what have you done to ‘translate’ your ‘good intentions’ into ‘good actions’, regarding Christ’s call upon your life to ‘feed the hungry’ and to ‘clothe the naked’ and to ‘heal the sick’ and to ‘visit the imprisoned’? (See Matthew 25: 31- 40)

9. **Do you think it is ‘fair’ (rational and accurate) to compare the church to a ‘major sporting event’ where there are only 22 men on the football field who desperately need rest and 22,000 people in the stands who desperately need exercise? Do you think that most inactive and uninvolved Christians who are members of local churches honestly wish they could become active participants (workers) in the local church, but that they feel ‘inadequate’ or ‘unworthy’ or ‘unwanted’ and ‘not needed’? What can you do, as an active participant in your local church, to encourage some of the uninvolved ‘spectator-type’ Christians in your local church to become participants?**

10. **According to Hebrews 12: 1-4, what must an uninvolved ‘spectator-type Christian’ do to become a participant in the ‘race of life’?**

11. **As a participant (runner) in the ‘Christian Race’, share how you have personally ‘come to terms’ with the following:(a) Discipline, (b) Commitment, (c) Accountability, (d) Performance.**

12. **In light of the fact that the entire human race comes ‘short of the glory of God’ because of sin and rebellion, what can a person do (according to the teachings of the Book of James) to find peace with God, and how is the authenticity of one’s peaceful relationship with God demonstrated and attested?**

13. **Are you willing to be ‘used by God’ to rescue a fellow human being from possible (and even certain) moral and spiritual catastrophe and ruin?**