

, Friends

by Ray Sanders *Jesus Is Color Blind*

Do you know someone who is color blind? Color blindness is the inability to perceive differences between colors and is usually classified as a disability. I'm not sure I agree. Allow me to explain.

There are tests to determine if you are color blind. But don't worry, color blind tests don't measure your intelligence, they simply determine your ability to distinguish between colors.

In the United States, some seven percent of males and 0.4 percent of females have some form of color blindness. Think about that the next time your color-challenged friend wears different colored socks or even worse, different colored shoes.

I will never forget the day I discovered I was color blind. I was sitting in the cafeteria at college when my friend Cecil sat down across from me. We were laughing, cutting up and enjoying our friendship. We did everything together. We became good friends. We were so close some even got our names mixed up. I'm still not sure how it happened; I was white and he was black.

As I sat there in the cafeteria, it hit me. Despite the fact that we had been friends for a long time, I often referred to Cecil, as my black friend. When we worked out at the gym, I was with my black friend. When we went to ball games, it was with my black friend. When we went to church, it was with my black friend. He wasn't just my friend, he was my black friend.

For some this may seem like an obvious conclusion based on our skin color. But I will never forget that moment, sitting across from Cecil, when I thought to myself, that's my friend, Cecil. He wasn't my black friend, Cecil, but my friend, Cecil. At that moment I discovered I was color blind. Before that moment and despite our deep friendship, I somehow had developed a mental barrier that allowed me to perceive color as something that differentiated us.

Discovering I had developed colorblindness was liberating. It didn't change the fact that he was black and I was white. It didn't change my friendship with Cecil at all. But the realization did help me discover how to be more Christ-like.

No, I don't think Jesus struggled with differentiating between colors of the rainbow when he was on Earth. But I do believe He was more concerned about the color of a man's heart than the color of his skin. Is it time for you to take a color blind test? Remember, a color blind test doesn't measure intelligence, just your ability to distinguish color. Color blindness isn't a disability; it provides the ability to love all people like Christ. When you're color blind you don't see color, you see a person. I pray I'm never healed of my color blindness. But then again, I might be prejudiced, based on my ability to be Christ-like!

In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Colossians 3:11

Shine On

What resources, gifts, abilities, talents and life experiences
Has God given you to fulfill the calling he placed on your life?
The key to discovering a life of purpose
is to focus first on the haves

Rather than the have nots.

Make no mistake about it
Y. You are equipped for the assignment
You've been given.

Be you because nobody is better
At being you than you!
No one can accomplish

What you can accomplish but you.

Don't waste time trying to be something you're not.
God has created you to shine
in the right place in line!
Shine on!

Encager or Encourager

Are you an encager or an encourager ?

Encagers captivate victims with negative energy resulting in defeat.

Encouragers promote positive outcomes leading to success.

Encagers hold us hostage.

Encouragers set us free.

Encagers promote doom and gloom.

Encouragers promote potential and possibility.

Encagers rarely win and call it luck when they do.

Encouragers rarely lose and hope for better luck next time.

Lets engage the negative and encourage the positive. We have nothing to lose and all to gain!

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Going on the Offensive

We've all had it happen. It may have been at a family gathering, it may have been at the grocery store or it may have even been at church. But for whatever reason, we get offended. It may have been intentional or it may have been innocent, nevertheless someone has done us wrong.

Some will choose to take revenge in the form of the silent treatment or by openly putting the offender in his or her place. Others will simply withdraw by withholding affection or kindness, quietly leaving the "evil one" to suffer and regret.

All too often we begin to talk about the incident. We search for sympathizers, those who will take our side and speak to our persuasion.

Left unsettled, things will only get worse. The seed of bitterness will find fertile soil in our souls. Fellowship is broken, our relationships suffer and our witness is jeopardized.

Such doesn't have to be the case. Many times Christian leaders quote Matthew 18 as the model for Christian reconciliation.

Take a closer look at this passage. When I hear most Christian quote these verses they do so on the basis that someone owes them an apology and if the "evil one" was a better Christian they would have apologized a long time ago. Whoa! Stop right there.

Take a closer look. Jesus actually calls on the one who was offended to bring the offense to the attention of the offender.

Has someone offended you? Are you waiting for them to come to you begging for mercy and forgiveness? It might happen but Matthew 18 calls on us to go to our fellow believer and make them aware of how they have caused us grief.

Their response might surprise you. It may very well be that they acted in ignorance or they have been struggling with the issue themselves. The key is to take the initiative, seek healing and move forward in faith together, giving no provision for the flesh, dissension or strife.

Have you been offended? If you haven't you will be. Go to your fellow believer in love, seeking reconciliation. In the end you will have won the person back.

One last thought. A bull dog can always whip a skunk, but it's not worth the stink. You may be right but for the Christian this isn't the issue. The issue is being right with your brother. They will know we are Christians by our love for one another, not our stinky fights. We tend to say we are sorry to those whose relationships really matter to us. We'll be spending eternity together. We might as well go on the offensive and make reconciliation a reality this side of heaven.

*Sensible people control their temper;
they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.
Proverbs 19:11*

Let's Kick the Scuttlebutt

I'm not sure when it started, but not too long ago I found myself checking the news on my smartphone several times throughout the day.

Of late, I have come to realize that my self induced media saturation has had an impact on my mindset.

Throughout history news tended to be an update on what had actually happened in recent days. Time had a way of shaking out the facts and elevating what would ultimately shape our perspective, decision making and outlook on life.

Much of today's news is instant, reactionary and conjecture. It shoots from the hip and dances around as full fledged propaganda. It has become more commentary than reporting. It plays in the hypothetical more than reality. Reading the news has become exhausting as our minds try to decipher between truth and misinformation, better known as bald-faced lies. Who knows what to believe anymore? Spin wins as unbiased reporting has become a thing of the past.

We certainly have a responsibility to be aware of current events and to consider how what was might impact what is and what is to come.

I am determined to participate in a much more regulated media diet. I believe returning to more of a weekly summary of all that makes the world go round might be the way to go. Time with the "Sunday Paper" is starting to have real appeal as I release on my grab-and-go gusto for news.

Certainly the spin will still be present. Bias and a desire to influence my thinking won't give way and the advertisements will forever be a mainstay. But something tells me my mindset, attitude and perspective on life might actually improve as I consider focusing more on living and less on all the scuttlebutt. That might be newsworthy in and of itself!

When it comes to the news and media, I can't help but think that less might actually lead to more, more living, more loving, more laughing and a whole lot less worry

*Teach us to realize the brevity of life,
so that we may grow in wisdom.
Psalm 90:12*

Smartphone Addiction

You might have a smartphone addiction if:

You get a hug and continue to check the latest statuses on your smart phone.

You now where your phone is more

Than your kids, car keys or spouse.

You check your phone for information every 5-10 minutes.

You cannot go to bed, the bathroom or walk across the room without your smartphone.

Your smart phone usage has irritated a significant other.

You conduct conversation while looking at your smart phone.

You aren't sure what to do with yourself

If for some reason you are without your smart phone.

You think more about checking on your smart phone

Than you do people in your life.

When at a table with others you maintain a :

Hands in lap, head down prayer phone position.

The number of likes on your latest status effects

A your happy indicator.

Answering or seeing who is calling or texting

Interrupts conversations with those you are with in person.

You are always checking you battery life

And have either considered or have purchased an extended smart phone battery device.

Your wrist actually burns from time to time

From holding your smart phone so long.

The first thing you do in the morning

And the last thing you do at night

Is check your smart phone.

You could never imagine completely powering off your smart phone.

You don't wear gloves in the freezing cold because you are not able to

Activate your touch screen.

You have nearly had more than one traffic mishap

Peeking and poking at your smart phone while driving.

You have sat in a room with family and friends

And when you looked up realized everyone was together but looking down at their smart phones.

You have been irritated when someone else's buzzing

Signaled a false alarm for you to check your phone.

A familiar ring has you reaching for your smart phone.

You have experienced phantom vibrations that you thought was a call .

You have been the passenger in a vehicle and spent equal or more time checking you smart phone than having a conversation with the driver.

If you had to choose your smart phone or miss a meal, your smart phone wins.

If you took the time to read this list on your smart phone, there is a real good chance you have a serious smart phone addiction that is likely hindering, ruining or even destroying an otherwise healthy and important relationship.

Lets do the smart thing and set reasonable limits on how we use our “dumb” phones. Holster it or it will hold you hostage

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

***Ephesians 4:32* People Are a Lot Like States**

No matter where I travel throughout the United States, I am always proud I hang my hat in Oklahoma. Sure, New York City has the big city lights; Los Angeles is home to the movie stars; everything is bigger in Dallas and they are always sleepless in Seattle, but as for me, I'm in love with red dirt, thunderstorms, wide open spaces, the absence of traffic and the people of Oklahoma.

You know you are in Oklahoma when you turn on your windshield washer mister and the water never touches the glass because the crosswinds are so strong. Another sure sign is that there are more pickups on the highways than there are cars.

Mention you are from Oklahoma to folks from other states and they are almost always certain to bring up football, the Oklahoma City bombing and Native Americans.

Every state is known for something. Some are nice to visit. Others are considered fly over states. You know the states airplanes fly over to get to more popular destinations.

When you think about it, people are a lot like states. Some people are flashy and require a lot of attention. Others look and act like movie stars appearing to have it all together, when in reality their life is nothing more than a big act.

Some folks just aren't happy unless what they have is just a little bit bigger and better than everyone else. Some people I've met couldn't care less about the needs of others. They are asleep at the wheel when it comes to social consciousness. What matters is them and nobody else.

And then there are the people we love. Those we bare our soul with over a cup of java. Those we choose to take with us on a long road trip. They are the ones who are there for us during life's storms. The people we yearn to live life with.

The state you call home is a matter of choice. The person you become is more of a state of mind. What state are you in? Are you the kind of person others call friend? Is it your telephone that rings in the middle of the night when the person on the other end of the line needs someone they can count on to have a listening ear? Is yours a life that ushers in the presence of Christ in everyday conversation? Is there undisputable evidence that yours is a life yielded to Christ?

What people say and think about Oklahoma is sure to differ. What they say and think about you is much the same. Nonetheless, I can think of no better witness than to be recognized as a follower of Christ living in the great state of Oklahoma!

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Who's Your Timothy?

I grew up in a hardworking Oklahoma family. Unfortunately, alcohol ripped away at the fiber of our home. My parents were often at odds with each other. I went to bed many nights with them yelling and screaming in a literal knock-down drag-out. I loved them both but it was a terrible situation. They eventually divorced. Instability at home hindered my confidence.

Then one day a friend invited me to the local Baptist church. It was there, through the preaching of Charlie Draper, that I discovered God loved me and had a plan for my life. I became a Christian. Because of the loving and caring discipleship provided by youth minister, Michael Catt, I began to grow in my faith and confidence. Michael invested time in me, taught me how to read the Bible, pray and share my faith. He was my mentor, my Paul, and I was his Timothy.

Eventually I was called to the ministry under the preaching of Ted Kersh. Ted took me to the next level in my faith. Like Michael, he invested time and energy into my life. He taught me what it meant to be a man of faith, how to prepare sermons and preach. He opened his pulpit to me and gave me opportunities to share the word of God with the congregation. I was greener than a new banana. But he believed in me and that's just what I needed.

I have often wondered where I'd be with out these men. How would my faith have grown? Would I have had staying power? No doubt they took Mathew 28 seriously when it says, "Go and make disciples." They weren't satisfied with salvation; no they were interested in growing a Timothy.

How about you? Who's your Timothy? Are you investing your life in someone? A little bit can go a long way. I'm forever grateful for the men who invested in my life. Thanks Charlie, Michael and Ted. I hope to make you proud, but the Lord most of all.

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

2 Timothy 2:2

Only the Lonely

They are out there. In crowded coliseums, busy airports, large families, big churches and every workplace. They are in small groups, between the best of friends and even present in good marriages. Lonely people are everywhere.

Lonely people are experts at hiding their loneliness. They laugh, converse and interact with others while masking their desperate need to connect, feel loved and be valued.

During a recent taxi ride with my wife, I struck up a conversation with our driver as he navigated our way through the inner-city jungle. I took a genuine interest in the captain of our vessel. I could tell most of his conversations with passengers were about the weather or sites of interest in the city.

Despite the limitations of a short 20-minute drive, we somehow connected. I learned about his life growing up as an alien in a foreign country, the challenges he faced gaining citizenship and certain details from his failed marriage.

As we neared our final destination, he revealed how lonely he had become. While he interacted with hundreds of people every day, it was clear the man I talked to in the mirror over the back seat of the car was suffering. He was lonely. He yearned to connect. For a fleeting moment, in the middle of the busy city, he escaped his solitude in conversation with me.

The meter beeped, the receipt printed and the taxi ride came to an end. Like those who had come before us and those who would follow, we were left with no choice but to leave our new friend-alone.

Though they rarely ride alone, lonely taxi drivers are everywhere. Their's is the life of Adam as he experienced feelings of loneliness in the Garden of Eden. Only the lonely hurt this way. It was never God's intention for man to be alone. He knew we needed each other and that we desperately needed Him.

Feeling lonely in a room full of people is like suffocating in a tank full of oxygen. The very thing we need most is readily available but totally unattainable, so close and yet so far.

Life was never meant to be lived alone. God gives each of us the unique ability to eliminate loneliness. When we take an interest in others, we release them from the prison of loneliness. The challenge is to recognize the lonely people in our lives and to love them as Christ has loved us.

Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.

1 Corinthians 10:24

Loving to Hate

There are just some people who love to hate. If you are not like them, then don't expect any favors. Being different triggers the release of their venom. They often operate under the radar. They are subtle, sly and deliberate. They are kind and smile with warm regards in your presence, but the moment your back is turned, they hiss like a snake in the grass.

Hate lovers are masters of innuendo. Implication is their favorite modus operandi. They are clever in pointing out your shortcomings to others. Seeing you succeed or gain recognition boils the juices of bitterness that brew beneath the surface of niceties.

It might be your personality, beliefs or confidence that sets them off. While cordial on the outside, condemnation and resentment cannot escape their thought life. Life for them would be better if you would just somehow disappear and go away.

Have you ever felt hated? Have you ever sensed comments were disingenuous? Have you ever felt punished for caring? Rejected for taking a stand? Have you ever felt misunderstood or hunted? You aren't alone.

Now hear this. Not everyone likes you, and some people even hate you. Truth is, you just rub some people the wrong way. Are their feelings justified? No. Is it going to change the circumstances? I doubt it.

Jesus called it persecution. He learned to live with it. As Christians, we are called to join Him in His suffering. If you take a stand for what is right, then some people are going to think you are wrong. And some will even hate you for it.

There has been a lot of Baptist bashing in the media lately. When you take a stand for family values and call sin what it is, then there is a great possibility things are going to start heating up. The key is to return evil with good. Being hated is not a license to sin. Jesus was hated by many. Yet, He only granted us the right to hate sin, not the sinner.

Sharing the love of Christ, while being hated, is a tall order. I hate to be the one to tell you, but as Christians, our only option is love.

And all nations will hate you because you are my followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 10:22

God Is Love

God has one modus operandi
Only o -- love!
That's it! Get over it. His only motivation
Fis love.

When he disciplines us? LOVE.
When he blesses us? LOVE.
When has us wonder and wait? LOVE.
When you see love you see God. God is LOVE.
When you experience love you have encountered God!
To all the God is love naysayers . . . STOP misrepresenting God! God is LOVE. Period. Even
when he hates something he does so because he loves us. No wonder he hates sin. Never ever
forget God loves you. Don't confuse his correction and disciple with a lack of love. He loves us
to much to let us wholler in the muck.

The Forgotten Text

Most of us have done it; the text you typed but never sent.
You waited. You wondered. You fretted, pondered and got frustrated. Why haven't they replied?
Are they ignoring me? Did I offend them? What is taking so long?
Having enough, you decide to give it another try. And then you make the discovering. There it
sat. Perfectly typed, thought out and crafted. There is only one problem. The text was never sent!
Then it dawns on you. Yes, the text was never sent but how many encouraging words were never
spoken? Messages never left? Flowers never delivered? Apologies never made? Hugs left
unextended? Love never expressed?
Have you ever stopped to wonder why you haven't heard back from someone? Maybe the text
was never delivered or perhaps there are a few other open-ended expressions left undone.
There is no better time than the present than to look back, reach out and touch somebody you
love!

Where Are You?

Recently I spent some time playing around on Google Earth learning more about GPS coordinates. It was fun punching in something other than my mailing address to learn of my whereabouts. Then it dawned on me, where am I? No, really, where am I? No, I'm not suffering from amnesia but do I really no where I am? No I'm not lost. I know where I'm standing in relation to Google Earth but where am I as a person, husband, father, friend, leader and follower of Jesus? If I know where I am I have a better chance of knowing where I'm heading. Growing up a friend use to say, "You can't get there from here." To get to where you are going you have to know where you are. If you don't know where "you is", you can't get there from here! So often we spend our thoughts thinking about where we are heading when in reality we're not real sure where we are. Take some time today and determine your personal geo codes. No, not where you are standing on planet Earth but where you stand on the big issues in life. Where you are heading is heavily influence by knowing where you are.

Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5

noticing the problem

Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

The Power of Personal Influence

Ask nearly any successful person the key to their success and they will most assuredly mention a person who has had an incredible influence on their life. Behind every success story is a person of powerful influence.

Take a moment to reflect on your life. Who has helped make you who you are today? These are people who, either by word or deed, made a difference in your life. Without their influence you would be a different person on a different track in a different time and place in life. These are people that for whatever reason decided to invest a part of who they are in you. They used the power of personal influence to impact your life.

I think back to my 6th grade math teacher who pulled my mom aside one day and said, "Your son will be a leader someday." I was never prouder than the day my mom shared the news.

I remember my 9th grade basketball coach who saw in me something no one else had ever discovered. As we left the gym together one night he said, "Sanders, you keep your work ethic and you are going to do great things." He saw past a boy with average athletic skills from a single-parent home where the boys worked to help mom out. Rather, he saw the potential of a person to grow beyond their circumstances and make a difference in the world.

I think about the influence of a youth minister who was willing to take time to invest in a young man whose family was known for alcohol abuse and violence. This was a man who taught him about peace, unconditional love and the keys to a fulfilling life.

I think all the way back to a pregnant 15 year old girl who despite the shame of being kicked out of high school her freshman year, because she was with child, made the brave decision to deliver her baby and give him the opportunity of life, a wonderful wife and a family with six fantastic kids.

The same boy now asks, "What kind of difference are you making in the lives of those you meet? No doubt there are those who have influenced you, but how are you influencing others? Have you been awakened to the power of personal influence, the power each of us has to make a difference in the lives of others?"

Sometimes it is something small. Sometimes it is something big. Sometimes it means noticing someone without a smile and giving him or her one of your own. Sometimes it means simply listening. At other times it means having the courage to speak the truth in love. Sometimes it means giving of ourselves or giving of our resources. Whatever the case, something happens when we give our lives for others. We tend to gain much more than we give.

Each of us is given a sphere of influence. There are different groups of people in our lives that we touch in many different ways. Our sphere of influence begins with family and friends but goes far beyond those closest to us. It includes our neighbors, co-workers, customers, culture and nation. It may not seem possible but each of us in one way or another is making a difference in the world either by doing nothing or doing something of significance.

Many are getting to the point in their life where they are asking, "Is this all there is? I have earned the degree, I drive the car, I live in the house and make the six-figure income but there has to be more to this life than personal success." I propose to you today that the inquirers are correct. There is more to life than this. We can have success and significance in life but not until we discover the power of personal influence, the power to make a difference in the lives of others.

True happiness comes when we give our lives away. When we hold what we've been given with a loose hand and invest back into the lives of others just as others invested in us.

It has been said, "Anyone can count the number of seeds in an apple but no one can count the number of apples in a seed." How many lives will your life impact? No one may ever know but what a tragedy to never discover the power of personal influence.

You were created for a purpose. To use the time, talent and treasure you have been given to go, give and grow the seeds of influence in the lives of others. You can make a difference. Oh the joys of being awakened to the power of personal influence. Your life matters. You can have success and significance when you give what you've got to others who don't have a lot, the power of personal influence.

Complete Confidence

When reading a passage of scripture always try to place yourself in the story. What if Paul had been speaking of you in 2 Corinthians 7? What if he had expressed his confidence in you? Who has high and complete confidence in you today? Your boss, customers, wife, kids or friends? Why? In what way?

Good intentions are not the same as delivering on what we say we will do. Doing what you say you will do is a matter of integrity that builds confidence. Do others have complete confidence in you? Do you under promise and over deliver or have you built a reputation on good intentions? What a great goal. To earn someone's complete confidence is an honorable thing.

(See 2 Corinthians 7:4 & 16).

True Story / Hot Air Happenstance

Last week I met a young man in DC who grew up as a missionary kid in China. Today I met a lady in my office who has been a missionary in China since 1986. Following the meeting I received a follow up email from the young man I met in DC. I asked him if he knew the lady I met today in my office. He responded, “Absolutely! I went to high school with her kids.” Sometimes life imitates fiction and I really do believe the world is shrinking. I also think God smiles when we experience such unusual connections.!

I now know the world is shrinking! I talked last week about meeting two people in two separate cities in the USA who knew each other in China. Well ... last night Stephanie and I were cruising around in our convertible in Oklahoma City when a beautiful hot air balloon flies right over us. I snapped a pic on my iPhone and posted it on Facebook. In less than an hour a friend living in Abi Dhabi, United Arab Emirates posted a comment that the people in the photo were her husband’s parents! I tell you the world has shrunk! God must really laugh when he winks this big! I’m starting to get a feel for the connectivity of humanity and His incredible love for each and every one of us.

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, “The man I worked with today is named Boaz.”

“May the Lord bless him!” Naomi told her daughter-in-law. “He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers.”

Ruth 2:19-20

My Forever Hero

We rarely have the opportunity to pick who influences our lives most.

Truth is, heroes aren't highly selective. They simply see a need and meet it.

Where would we be without the amazing real-life heroes that step in and save the day?

The choice they made to intervene in our lives is nothing short of life changing.

Unexpected and out of nowhere there once was a hero that stepped into my life.

I was a scared, traumatized young boy growing up in a single-parent home with confidence as deep as a thimble.

My life was heading one way when, because of no effort of my own, a tall lanky Mississippi preacher boy walked into my world.

He took an interest in me, invested in me, inspired me, and most of all, loved me for who I was and saw who I could become.

He was my first and lifelong mentor. He taught me about life, the Lord and the way that few will follow.

He set the example, the standard and the direction for a life well lived. He was strong, principled and loving.

He took me places physically, mentally and spiritually I never imagined or dreamed were possible.

He challenged me to be the best that I could be without compromise or complaint.

For years I thought I was special, unique and held the esteemed position as his Timothy as he was my Paul.

The older I got and the more I matured, I came to realize I was not alone in my admiration for this man of deep dedication and devotion.

Turns out, like most heroes, I was but one of thousands his life had influenced and impacted.

This realization took nothing from my affinity with him. If anything at all, it made me proud to know I was among the privileged who experienced the joy of knowing him.

Somehow, somehow, despite all the lives his life has touched, I have never spoke with him or was in his presence that he didn't make me feel as though I was the center of his universe.

He has been my spiritual daddy, my mentor, my confidante, my cheerleader, my coach and most of all, my friend.

Michael Catt is a legend and his legacy will live into eternity for his has been a life worth following. A life that has been duplicated time and time again as he has led legions to follow Jesus.

No life has he impacted more than mine. It is my hope and my desire to live as he has taught me to live and to somehow somehow be a Michael Catt in the lives the Lord brings my way.

I love you Michael. You are my forever hero!*As iron sharpens iron,
so a friend sharpens a friend.*

Time for Something New

Discovering and experiencing something new
and inspiring Brings vitality
to life.

Stay where we are and things become
all too familiar, predictable and mundane.
Placing ourselves in a curious posture
broadens our perspectives, opens our minds,
stimulates our senses and warms our hearts
to what might otherwise appear
unattainable and unimaginable!
Stepping out and wander about, the
thrill is revealed as we realize
all of creation is ours to explore
without pretense or agenda.

You've Got Mail

Remember when the phrase "*you've got mail*" had something to do with the postman? It wasn't all that long ago that "*snail mail*", as my kids call it, was the cheapest form of long-distance communications.

There was a time when my wife and I suffered through a long distance relationship. I worked for the U. S. Senate in Washington D. C. as she worked on her college credits back home. I won't soon forget the day I was stopped by the U.S. Capitol Police shortly after my "*suspicious package*" made its way through the x-ray machine.

"What's in the box?" the officer asked. "Oh, that is a compact-cake kit sir," I explained. I wanted to wish my soon-to-be wife a very special birthday so I concocted my very own portable birthday cake kit from cup cakes, candles and matches! That's right, matches! No wonder they stopped me. I made it through the security line after further explanation and she loved me for it. Oh, those were the days. I still have my wife's love letters stuffed away in a shoe box. They are even in her handwriting! Try that with email!

Don't get me wrong, I love email but there is just something special about seeing that unique handwriting and knowing that the person that sent it took the time to stop and think of you.

Certainly "*snail mail*" has its challenges but email is like "*snail mail*" on nitro. The chance for a mistake and a breakdown in interpersonal communication is inherent. Email is fine for facts, figures, short messages and those endless around the world, 600 times, goofy Internet jokes. But for sharing your real thoughts, forget it!

More than once I have had to clarify what I really meant following a misunderstanding brought on by an email. I have a new motto. Face to face or phone to phone don't rely on email alone.

Did you know the Bible has something to say about mail in general? Perhaps you overlooked it in 2 John 1:12 when it states, "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete."

I know it's not practical and I too can't imagine life without email, but when it comes to sharing your true feelings or if there is the slightest possibility that you might be misunderstood, hit the delete button. And as John said, your joy will be made complete.

A Giving Person

How would you define a giving person?

Would someone who prepared not one but *two* Thanksgiving feasts in one week, followed by preparing all the homemade food and desserts while opening her home for a large wedding shower for a family member, followed by the next week traveling to her safe house in Honduras to deliver Christmas gifts to special young ladies rescued from deplorable conditions do it?

What if I told you that just before she drove 3 hours to catch a 5 a.m. international flight to the murder capital of the world she was in line buying gift wrapping and noticed an elderly gentleman didn't have the funds he needed to buy groceries. What does she do? She covers the bill, of course, and wishes him a Merry Christmas!

If you haven't figured it out, I'm talking about my wife because in no way would she ever tell you about her acts of random kindness.

I am telling you because she is my inspiration and I hope she inspires you too.

It is truly more blessed to give than to receive but I'm not sure how much more blessed it could be to watch someone you love so dearly love and give so much to others all year long!

Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

James 2:15-17

Yeah, she's a giver. Santa knows which list to put her on. I just hope some of her goodwill keeps me from getting a lump of coal again this year!

Live Spelled Backwards Is Evil

You may not have noticed, but evil is live spelled backwards.

Evil messes up our lives.

When our lives head in the wrong direction

The life we live becomes evil,

Topposite of the life we want to live.

When making bad choices, to live becomes evil.

We can turn back evil

By choosing to live apart from evil.

2/2 Repentance turns evil into

The life we want to live.

We can choose to live well

Or we can choose evil.

We spell out our lives through the choices we make.

When we turn our backs to evil

Do we only then begin to truly live!

A

Little Buddy

I made a new friend this week. He is just over three feet tall and full of life. We hung out together for more than an hour during Sunday School as we read a book, sang a praise song and even built a craft together. It was fun and enlightening.

During one of the group activities, he sat beside me. I noticed he kept peeking at me. The curiosity was killing him. Finally he reached up and touched the hair on my chin. He must have been wondering if it were real considering the absence of hair on my head. "You have hair on your chin," he said as he giggled and turned away.

A few minutes passed. I was looking straight ahead as his curiosity got the best of him. He grinned and said, "You have hair in your nose." It was all I could do to keep from bursting out in laughter.

Not considering the three cups of coffee I had consumed, I leaned over and whispered in his ear, "We better be quiet or the teacher might get upset with us." He pulled me close, turned my head away and whispered in my ear, "Your breath stinks." I nearly fell out of my chair. Like a schoolboy with a bad case of the giggles, I struggled to maintain my composure. His brutal honesty was alarming, hilarious and refreshing all at the same time.

My little buddy had dared to venture where few adults rarely go. Did he realize the profoundness and maturity from which he operated? Did he realize the level of transparency and honesty required to speak so freely? And to think he did it with such innocence and grace.

I never questioned his intentions. I wasn't offended. I never even considered a cunning comeback. Unlike many adults, this kid had mastered the principles of Ephesians 4:15, the Christ-like ability to speak the truth in love. I not only accepted his rebuke, I was grateful for it.

Somewhere between first grade and our first real job, despite our book learning and social skills development, we lose our ability to relate with each other in openness and honesty. We learn diplomacy and confuse tolerance with truth. Rather than risk going deeper, our relationships survive in shallow and meaningless chatter.

Instead of opening our lives to valuable, life-changing critique, we construct coping mechanisms that desensitize us to our need for improvement. Seeing no change, those who do risk speaking the truth in love grow weary and give up on us. In the end, we are left to ourselves to rot in a pool of self-pity and mediocrity. We never become half the people we were meant to be because we alienate ourselves from clues to improve.

Who is your little buddy? Do you have someone who will speak the truth to you in love? Age has little to do with it. You can survive without a little buddy. But if you do, you better carry a roll of breath mints. You're going to need them.

Give a Kid a Chance

Nearly 45 years ago, back in 1962, a young, 15-year-old girl from a very small town had to make a critical life-or-death decision. It's not every day that a bright, beautiful and popular teenage girl is faced with such a tough decision.

A considerably older and handsome hometown boy took particular interest in the new pretty girl at school. She appeared much more mature physically than she actually was. Mutual attraction and the fun they shared as neighbors led from one thing to another. Before long, they were spending more and more time together, alone. Looking for love, they compromised their convictions and gave way to their passions.

The lapse in judgment and subsequent moral failure resulted in an unplanned pregnancy in a day and age when nothing but shame was associated with such actions. Accepting the consequences and hiding the obvious was only one of few options. Terminating the pregnancy was the easy way out. No one had to know. The family's little secret could remain at home. Life as usual could continue.

She may have been young, but she was incredibly courageous. The thought of facing her classmates in maternity clothes was almost unbearable. Like most small towns, everyone knew everyone else's business. Being pressured to drop out of school was almost more than she could take. Despite the temptation to take care of the problem with a simple doctor's office visit, she did the honorable thing and gave her baby a chance at life.

The young couple married, and a nine- pound baby boy was born in the winter of 1963. Holding the baby in her arms melted any doubt that she had made the right choice. Certainly, the actions that led to this day had disappointed many. Nor was this the life she had always dreamed of. But how could anyone claim this bundle of joy cooing at her side was nothing but a gift from God?

The baby boy she held in her arms was me. I am incredibly proud that my teenage mother gave her kid a chance. Sure, she made a mistake, but she also realized two wrongs don't make a right. My life became a living testimony of Romans 8:28. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." How could she have ever known that her little boy, conceived in sin, would someday become the executive editor of one of the leading faith-based publications in the country? She didn't, but God did.

Unfortunately, many misguided doctors, politicians and parents don't give kids like me a chance. Instead, they shed innocent blood in the name of choice. The only choice, according to God, is life. We must do all we can to encourage mothers to give kids a chance. This is one kid who is glad his momma did!

Releasing the Hurt

The longer I walk through life the more I realize it is impossible to not encounter hurting people everyday. I can press on oblivious or I can do my best to lighten a load, bring a smile or comfort a heart. Some days it is me who is hurting. Interesting enough, remaining sensitive to the needs of others makes me less sensitive to my own hurts. Yes, hurting people do often hurt people but hurting people are often healed when they choose to help the hurting. The hurting are out there today. Their confidence, facial expressions and words often give little hint to the hurt they endure but it is there nonetheless. Let's not live oblivious! Let's look beneath the surface to help release the hurt.

Love Will Show the Way

Lord send us people to love. That is to be our heart. That is to be our calling. That is his will. The world is crazy right now. Love will show the way. The link to the song below sums up the desperate need of the day. We are to be his hands and feet, to be the change our family, friends and the world needs. Find the one today. The one that needs a hug, a smile, a word of encouragement or just someone to be with. May our prayer simply be: Send us people to love Lord. Send us people to love.

Worth It?

Winning on and off the field requires life and work harmony. Sadly, Tom Brady and Gisele Bündchen have announced they are divorcing after 13 years of marriage. Brady, 45, had retired from the NFL in February, only to later reverse that decision.

Based on comments from his podcast below, it becomes pretty clear that work has a way of affecting life. Given Brady's recent series of losses with his NFL team, one has to recognize the impact life has on work. Life and work require harmony to do well. Winning at home is just as important as winning at work. Neither is easy but both are worth it.

In a recent conversation on his podcast, Brady talked about some of the personal costs of playing in the NFL for two decades. "I haven't had a Christmas in 23 years and I haven't had a Thanksgiving in 23 years, I haven't celebrated birthdays with people that I care about that are born from August to late January. And I'm not able to be at funerals and I'm not able to be at weddings," Brady said. "I think there comes a point in your life where you say: 'You know what? I've had my fill and it's enough and time to go on, to move into other parts of life.'"

It is hard to imagine that any job would be worth the sacrifice that the Brady family has endured. We can only hope that somehow reconciliation for the family can be found. It may not be Monday night football that keeps us from our family but long hours at work, cold dinners, cell phone interruptions and the inability to not be distracted by work obligations has the same net effect that the Brady family is suffering. We have to unplug and choose to be in the moment with those we are working so hard to care for. No one ever says on their death bed that they wish they could have spent more time at the office.

Something tells me Tom Brady is starting to wonder if coming out of retirement was really worth it. We may never know the full story but we can learn from it either way. Set some boundaries between life and work. It may not show up in your paycheck, but quality time with those you love will be worth it!

A Suit for Strong Personality

Why is it that in nearly every aspect of life strength is a strong suit. We want strong bodies, strong teams, strong buildings, strong countries, strong character, strong leaders and strong resolves yet mention a strong personality and it is often viewed as a weak trait.

We tend to put strong personality into the same category as strong winds, strong breath and strong odor. Strong personalities are like onions and garlic. A little bit goes a long way. They make other things taste better but by themselves, well, they are just way too strong!

In essence, too much of a good thing is bad. Less of me and more of you is what is needed in the salad bowl and the sandwich shop we call conversations in life. People are like fruits and vegetables. Together they make beautiful culinary things. By themselves and with too much of any one thing, and your palate grows weary and your taste buds wane.

Who doesn't like watermelon, avocado, bananas or strawberries? Truth is, there are a lot of folks that not only despise them, they are allergic to them! We sometimes forget that onions and garlic aren't the only portions of the pie that have limits. We've heard them all. It is too sour, too sweet, too tart, too mild, too coarse, too slimy, too hot, too cold, too bland, and you guessed it, too strong! It helps knowing when your contribution to the overall dish is needed. Sometimes it's a dash of this or a dash of that. Rarely is it a lot of any one thing. Embrace who you are while embracing the other fruits and nuts in the salad bowl! Even cabbage and celery have a place in the kitchen. What is good Italian food without plenty of garlic? Onion burgers have a huge following but not everyone's tastes are the same, nor should they be. You be you and let them be them and when it is your time to shine, flip on the switch. Otherwise wait your turn in line and be ready to contribute your unique traits and qualities at the appropriate time.

A Cheerful Heart Does Good Like Medicine

Have you ever stopped to think about what makes you laugh? According to the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, humor is an experience of surprise and incongruity. Something is often funny when someone does something unexpected, absurd and out of the ordinary.

How many times do you laugh each day? A recent study published on the Discovery Health Web site indicates that by the time a child reaches nursery school, he or she will laugh about 300 times a day. Adults on the other hand laugh an average of 17 times a day. Adults are way too serious!

Playfulness doesn't just entertain; it frequently helps to lighten others' loads. A good hearty laugh can reduce stress, lower blood pressure and even boost the immune system. So go ahead, laugh a little, even better, laugh a lot. Solomon was right, a cheerful heart does good like medicine.

Here are a few tips for increasing the fun factor in your life.

Start looking for the absurd, silly, incongruous activities that go on around you each day. For example, Oklahoma City is the only city with two airports named after men who died in plane crashes. It's true! If you hear a good joke, share it.

Don't take yourself so seriously. Lighten up. Laugh at yourself. But remember, laughing with others is an ice breaker while laughing at others is an ice maker.

Spend time with those who look on the bright side of life. Some people brighten a room by leaving it. Are you a buzzard or a butterfly? You tend to get what you're looking for.

Never underestimate the power of a smile. A smile is a smile in every language.

Finally, "*Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.*" Philippians 4:8. When you do, your life will be full of good cheer.

A good sense of humor is a gift, a ray of sunshine and a boost to the spirits of many. If you find a joker today, laugh out loud. Encourage him or her with a hoot! Share the joy, bend a grin and tickle someone's funny bone for free.

Peace Principles

1. Don't assume people know you have been hurt, offended or insulted. Family, friends and associates are at the top of the list. There is a good chance the source of the conflict is either a misunderstanding, a miscommunication or misbehavior. Whatever it is, don't "miss" the opportunity to make things right. People are often oblivious to how their actions have affected you. If you can't overlook the offense, kindly make the offender aware of your perspective. They may become defensive at first but the more you talk it through and make them aware of how it made you feel, the more likely they are to want to make amends. Not always, but most often.

2. Some people don't care but most people really don't desire conflict. Peace is preferred by the majority. So much as it depends on you, be a peacemaker. Take the initiative towards peace. Your willingness to seek peace will pay big dividends towards unity and harmony.

3. It's not a matter of if, but when. Someone will ruffle your feathers. Choose to overlook and forgive or choose to seek resolution and forgive regardless of the outcome. Failing to forgive holds you hostage and denies you freedom. Otherwise, the other person controls you and holds you captive.

4. You may not be able to be at peace with others but you can be at peace with yourself knowing you have made every effort to be at peace. Don't pretend you've tried your best. You know in your heart of hearts if you are holding out. But once you have given it your best, only you will know, then move ahead never closing the door for peace to return.

5. Peace today doesn't guarantee peace tomorrow. Peace takes effort. No one is perfect. Peace is fragile. Maintaining the peace will likely require a bit of compromise but it will be worth it. It may require a piece of you in order to gain peace. It doesn't have to be your way in order to be peaceful. To keep the peace you will likely have to accept the fact that you can't change people but you can change you and your perspective.

6. Separation is a last resort. Sometimes you simply have to walk away from unteachable repeat offenders in order to find peace. Be careful not to walk away or to give up too soon. Even the best relationships aren't always peaceful.

7. The bottomline? Peace is a state of mind. You can experience it no matter the circumstances because peace is found from within not from without.

Remember, when it comes to peace, you can make it and you can break it but you can't fake it.

Follow the Leader

Are you called to live a life worth following? A challenge for those who desire to lead: Are our lives scalable and duplicatable?

“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” 2 Timothy 2:2 We are called to produce reproducers. Classes produces classes. Lectures produce lecturers. Disciples produce disciples. Faithful men produce faithful men. Purpose-driven leaders produce purpose-driven leaders.

A life worth following is caught more than taught. It requires life on life. One on one interaction as we are called to duplicate ourselves. Are we worth duplicating? Would we want others to model our lives? If they really knew us, what would they discover? What dark realities linger in the shadows of our lives? Are we leaders worth following? You can't share what you don't have. What do we have to share? Are we who we say we are? Are we able to say as Paul, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.”

We have been forewarned. “Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.” James 3:1 We must take our calling very seriously and ask ourselves in silence before the Lord, are we leaders worth following? What makes us creditable? What well of experience are we drawing from? Are we walking the talk? How close is our mouth to our feet? Faking it until we make it is not an option when aspiring to lead others into battle. The risk of casualty remains forever an unmeasurable reality. “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6 -7 NIV

What example are we setting? Are our lives models for other believers? Does doing so require perfection? Are we capable of living without fault, error or mistake? What criteria disqualifies us from leading? We are called according to His purpose, to be filled with the Spirit and led by His word. Without this daily commitment we have become derelict of our duties and deemed unfit to serve. We would do well to take seriously the roles we play in the lives of others as we practice spiritual disciplines essential for living a life worth following. *So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.*

2 Thessalonians 1:11

They Just Don't Get It!

To my millennial friends who are prone to think the older generation just doesn't get it and to my generation and older who think we know it all and they just don't get it, let's pause and give some consideration to the wisdom of King Ahab of old. It is not that the Boomer and X generations don't get it or think they know better just because they are older.

It is not that the older generations aren't excited about and don't want to raise up the next generation of leaders. To the older generation it appears the next generation is unwilling to be apprenticed, mentored or pay their dues and often fail to respect and at least honor what those that have gone before them have sacrificed and accomplished in order for the next generation to take the ball and run with it.

Unfortunately, the older generation gets set in its ways, overlooks its youthful foolishness or outright failures and is unwilling to take the time to unlearn bad advice or change when new ways are better. All too often, the old dog really isn't willing to learn new tricks. Being a life long learner could very well be the secret to finding the fountain of youth! There might be a reason that fountain has never been found!

Too often, millennials simply assume they know better when in fact they are unconsciously incompetent. They may possess knowledge but they lack the experience to take full advantage of what they may or may not know.

On the other hand, the older generation tends to believe it solved the puzzle long ago but fails to realize they are missing a few critical puzzle pieces as the table has shifted!

Wisdom is needed in order to fully understand and act on the knowledge we have gained. A wise person puts knowledge and understanding to work for good. This applies to ALL generations!

“That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” Psalm 1:3

The key is to fully understand, in season, as we are firmly planted. You can't rush wisdom. Otherwise the sapling becomes arrogant, puffed up and proud. And unlike an old oak tree, it is unable to sustain the winds of life that are certain to come unless it is properly pruned from time to time. There are times we need to learn the lesson and then we need to be willing to adapt and unlearn lessons that are no longer relevant.

We need only look to the King Ahab for valuable insight on this issue. It is not a new issue and not one unique to the next generation. It is an age old issue. A generational issue, indeed. “The king of Israel sent back this answer: A warrior putting on his sword for battle should not boast like a warrior who has already won.” 1 Kings 20:11

There is a lot to be learned and some amazing relationships to be built when the old warrior and the young warrior take the time to share war stories as iron sharpens iron. Not to judge, but rather to join forces and focus on the battle to be won. There within is the inspiration to fight new battles together as both generations strive to make the world a better place as they draw from real life experiences and new insights that shape the strategy for victory. The willingness to listen and the willingness to learn can truly work together for the win!

Through Me?

In Acts 14 it is clear that Paul and Barnabus had been through some rough times. I love what verse 27 says when we read that they reported all that God had done through them.

When I let that sink in it gets my attention. What has God done through me lately? It is pretty humbling. Then I remember, I am his hands and feet and when I have done unto the least of these I have done unto him.

Done what? Love. It is easy to think we have to do something grandiose. But Jesus made it simple. Love God. Love others. Love yourself. Let's not over complicate it.

Let's love somebody today and when we do, like Paul and Barnabus, we will soon be reporting what all God has done through us!

Outsmarted

Are we being outsmarted? Give some thought to this passage. I am taken by the last line that basically says : We can't let the enemy outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes. Surely we are aware of his schemes. Together we can help each other not be outsmarted by the enemy. Are we being outsmarted? Love isn't always easy. I heard recently that our quality of life is built on the quality of our relationships. Relationships get really messy. Often times those we love the most hurt us the deepest. Nonetheless, we have to move on. Enough is enough. We have to reach out. Try again and be ready to be disappointed, yet committed, to loving unconditionally.

Stupid is one thing. Being stubborn and bull headed is another. Boundaries are good and sometimes walls are required. Here on the Praire we like to say that good fences make for great neighbors. But let's not get punked by the enemy and miss out on precious years and memories that can never be regained simply because we were outsmarted by evil.

Pick up the phone. Make the call. Send the text. Begin again. Say you're sorry. Those three words are often the best way to say, "I love you." These are the words the enemy hates the most! Let's turn the table on him!

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 NLT When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes.

Better with Him

Seeing a loved one suffer with a chronic disease or a debilitating health issue is hard to accept and understand. Even worse if you are a natural born “fixer.” Somethings just can’t be fixed. Issues such as these hang in your head. Especially when that person is one of your children or your spouse. Sunday School answers don’t hold here.

I once went on a 40-day fast begging God to heal my daughter of her Type 1 Diabetes. Nothing changed. It wasn’t that God owed me but I didn’t want to miss this healing opportunity if it was available. I have to admit, I still hold God accountable. I’m not sure it is right to do so but I just can’t help it.

I will be first in line with my questions for God when it comes to kids and suffering. Somehow I know that like Job, it won’t matter then. But as for now I can’t help but want to ask God, “Why?”

I have learned that God doesn’t waste pain. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t come at a high cost. My daughter says she wouldn’t take her disease away. She says it has helped her experience God in ways she never imagined. That is a deep one. I lean more toward a song that references the fall in the garden. Why plant the tree if you know it’s poisoned? I know that even a tree that brings knowledge of evil has purpose. But it also comes with pain.

And such is the way of love. It cuts both ways. I saw an image of a man sitting with a dog recently. The comparison was made about the way a dog thinks and how a man thinks. The dog enjoys the moment and the man thinks of a thousand other things. I had another thought. Being with a dog just makes life more fun and bearable. He can’t talk and provides limited interaction but somehow we know life without him would offer less.

Certainly God can intervene and he can speak to us but sometimes I feel like I hear from my dog more than I do from God. Yet, I have learned life is better with Him. After all, dog spelled backwards is still man’s best friend. If you don’t have one, it might be time to get one. A dog that is. Cat’s don’t count.

As for God, he is available too. He is happy to walk through life with you. He’s the quiet type but when he speaks, it’s worth the listen.

Who’s with me? Let’s kick the scuttlebutt!

Ending Strong

I had the privilege recently to spend precious time with a dear family member that is dying. There were no words shared between us. Just the joy of being in each other's presence one last time. The breaths were labored and grew more faint as the tears flowed and hearts broke.

I reflected on a life well lived as I stood at the bedside of this one that got it right. We had laughed a lot, had more fun than most, teased and talked religion, politics and family. We always looked forward to being together but never as much as we had hoped.

A perfect person? Certainly as close as I have ever seen. But no one makes it through this life without a few regrets. However, in this case, they are far and very few between. Not enough to fill one hand. What a saint. If there ever was one, the requirements have been met.

"How so," you might ask? It's simple. Live your life constantly focused on loving and serving others. Set your interests aside and sacrifice your desires for the desires of others. Learn that giving always trumps getting and that when you serve the least of these, you are serving the King.

Yeah, I spent sometime with a dying person today. And then I realized, she had been dying for years. She died to self each and everyday I knew her. Truth is, she's ready. She has been ready for years. She died while she was here. It just so happens that now I get to see her transition from death to eternal life. No doubt she will be greeted with those welcoming words we all hope to hear, "Well done my faithful servant." Well done indeed.

Ending strong isn't an easy task but when you have the privilege to love someone who has loved you back even more, it only makes you miss them more, want to be more like them and look forward to the day you will live forever with them celebrating a life well lived.

How Many More Times?

How many more times will you watch
The sunset and the stars fill the western sky?
How many more times will you talk with an old friend,
Make a new one
And laugh until you cry?

How many more times will you wake up to the smell of bacon
And enjoy a stack of buttermilk pancakes
As you push your fork into a perfectly fried egg?

How many more times will you hear
A sparrow sing,
A cricket chirp
And a baby burp?

How many more times will you hear
Your mother's voice,
Your daddy's snore
Or your siblings' latest news?

How many more times will you wish you would've,
Known you could've,
And felt you should've?

No one knows how many more times they have.
Dance when you can,
Laugh without reserve
And live without regrets
So that however many you get becomes just enough.

Easier Done Than Said

On a recent ride from the baseball park, I overheard my sons in discussion about how to perform a particular function on their Ipods. Unable to get his point across, my youngest son, Isaac, proclaimed, "It's easier done than said." "Don't you mean it's easier said than done?" came the reply from my older son, Joshua. "No, trust me. It's easier done than said," Isaac replied.

Do you ever feel that way? Ahhh, rather than hassle with an explanation, I'll just do it myself. It's just easier that way.

For example, have you ever tried to explain a software function or Web site feature to a friend over the telephone? More times than not, it is easier done than said.

Or how about trying to explain how to make a repair on your car to the service manager at the car dealership? Yeah, this too is easier done than said.

Have you ever heard someone say, "He can talk the talk, but he can't walk the walk." Have you ever heard this one, "Do as I say, not as I do?" For these folks, it's easier said than done. But the Lord has a higher standard for His kids. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." James 1:22 NASB

As followers of Christ, we are called to be doers. For us, actions do speak louder than words. We can talk about what we should be doing, but it is when we do it that we are putting feet to our faith.

How long have you been talking about talking with your neighbor about your faith? How many times have you promised to hang that picture for your spouse? Are your kids still waiting to play with you at the park? One hundred good intentions are never as good as one follow through.

Remember the old NIKE slogan? Just do it! I have this image of Jesus sitting on the edge of his seat in Heaven shouting, "Just do it! Just do it! It's easier done than said! Quit talking about it. Just do it!"

It's not the typical way in which we order these words, but the message is still true nonetheless. It's easier done than said. Talking about it doesn't get it done. Doing it does. If talking about it never gets it done, but doing it makes it happen, then without a doubt it was easier done than said.

You can do it! Paul got it right when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Knowing the Lord is my strength makes any task easier. That's what I'm talking about. Oops! That's what I am doing. How about you?

Up in Smoke

It was desperately cold outside. We were under siege by "Old Man Winter." As young high school students, my brother and I recognized the need in our community for firewood. With an opportunity to make some quick cash, we powered up the chainsaw and started slaying fallen trees. By the end of the day, we weren't rich, but we were definitely seeing the green.

My brother always had a sweet tooth. On the way home, we stopped by the grocery store to raid the Brach's candy bin. We stuffed our mouths with dark-chocolate morsels. These were the fruits of our labor. We smiled as the chocolate covered our teeth.

Back at home, a cozy, crackling fireplace greeted us. We kicked off our boots and thawed from the bitter cold. As we turned our backs to the fire, my brother threw his remaining candy wrappers into the flames. Scaring me half to death, he jumped to his feet. "Oh no!" he said. "Hand me the stoking fork!"

Not sure what was happening I immediately obeyed. I assumed a hot coal had popped from the embers and rolled down the back of his pants. But then again, a stoking fork would have been of little use to him in that situation.

The reason for his panic soon became crystal clear. In a rush to regain his body heat, my brother had not only thrown his candy wrappers into the fire, he also threw a wad of cash into the fiery flames.

The wrappers were instantly vaporized. But like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, it looked as though the cash may have survived. Realizing time was not on his side, my brother screamed for the stoking fork in an effort to rescue his full day's wage.

I watched with great anticipation as he plunged the stoking fork into the flames. A \$20 bill appeared to have survived the gates of Hell as it rested casually on top of the log pile. The instant the fork touched the greenback it went up in smoke!

At first my mouth dropped open wide, and then I struggled not to laugh. I was sympathetic, but momma didn't raise two fools! Sorry, no consolation prize. My cash is staying safe in my pocket where it belongs!

Thinking back on that experience I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

There will come a day when the Lord will test the quality of our work. Left to ourselves, we will no doubt face the flames, but as we rest in the arms of our sweet Savior, we will survive.