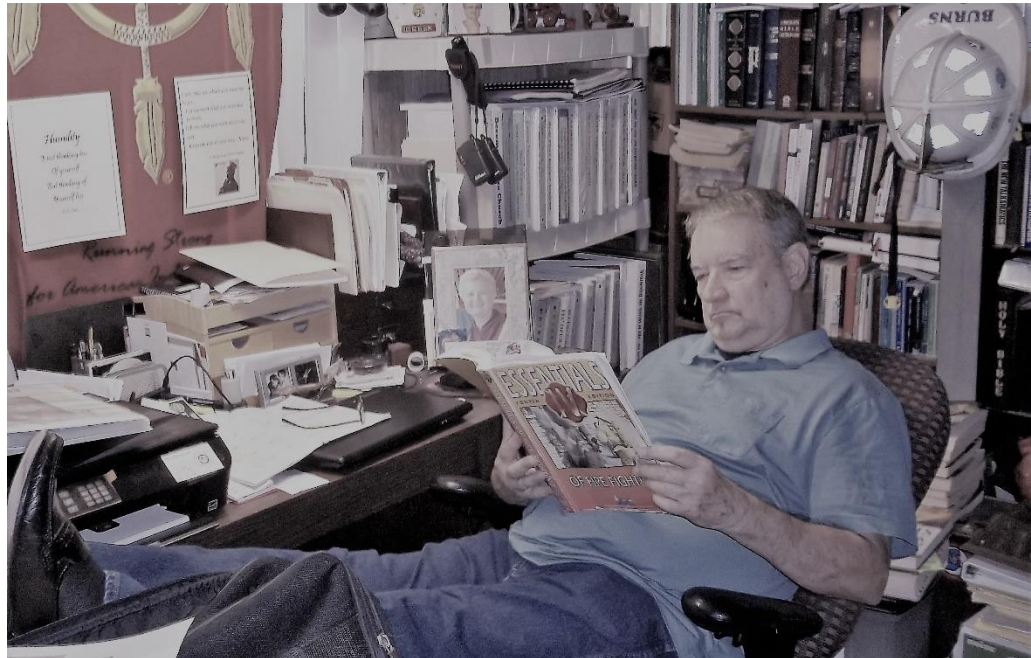


Jim Burns 2017

Jim's Ramblings



Some words of encouragement from an ole fire chaplain

Jim Burns

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Jim Burns spent more than 50 years in ministry as a pastor and fire chaplain. These articles were developed from his years of experience to be shared with fellow fire chaplains, and to other of his friends who have influenced his life over the years.

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Dedication

To my wife, Susan Elmore Burns, my two sons, Chris and Joel Burns, to my three step daughters, Heather Stuart, Jill Crocker, Liza Richardson, to my grandchildren, Kirsten, Sawyer, Hunter, Ashton, Conner, Faith, Kylie; two great grandchildren, Wyhatt and Octavia; to John and Kate Burns and all the Burns and Smith extended family.

To my chaplain mentor, whom I served under for a number of years, Edward M. Stauffer; to the fire chiefs I've served under as chaplain, Robert F. Rehfus and Gerald (Jerry) Morgenthal; to all my fire chaplain colleagues across this great country and around the world who are serving those who serve.

To all my fellow ministers I have served alongside over the years serving day in and day out to the glory of God.

To the people in the churches I have served over the years as pastor and friend, and last but not least to My Father who saved me and called me into this awesome opportunity of ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jim's Ramblings are a series of articles written over a period of several years primarily directed toward fire chaplains. The articles come from a product of many minds - friends, colleagues, students, adults, youth, teachers, those ministered to in crisis, grief, death, and a lot of other people whom I have interacted with over the years.

John and Kate Burns gave me my start in life and taught me the basics of living life. I was taught to respect others, to be responsible, be honest, to be loyal, do the best you can do, finish what you started, keep your word, do what you say you will do and many other character traits that have kept me going all the ups and downs of my life.

Many others have guided me in my life and tried to keep me on the straight and narrow. If I started to name names, the whole book would contain nothing but names. People I've worked with, people I've went to church with, people I've pastored during my pastoral ministry, people I've worked with in the fire and police service, people I've share the chaplaincy with have all influenced my life. All of their influences have made up a compilation of who I am today, and I'm so grateful for each of them. I hope you know who you are and mean to me.

I have probably never had an original thought in my life. I've been an imitator most of my life. I've been taught to follow those who have succeeded in their particular vocation, calling, those who have built good relationships with their fellow workers, their customers, their suppliers, their family members and their neighbors. So, I've followed. I've taken hold of whatever seemed to be a good idea that ever came across from my reading, from conversations with what I thought seemed to be informed people, and a lot of practical experience – sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful, and sometime just plain old failures.

Again, I acknowledge all that I am, all that I have been, and all that I will ever be (good or bad) to those who have walked before me and allowed me to follow in their steps. All these ramblings are to their credit, not mine. I am just the instrument who put the thoughts down on paper.

Thank God for all those brave souls who allowed me to walk in their footsteps.

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Introduction to Jim's Ramblings...

4

To ramble is to wander around in an aimless manner; to take a course with many turns or windings in a random, unsystematic fashion, to write in an aimless way, straying from one subject to another merely for the pleasure of doing it.

I don't really know how this Jim's Ramblings thing got started. I guess it was from writing to my chaplain friends about some practical suggestions to be helpful to them in their chaplaincies. After I had been writing for some time about these little bits of experience to my chaplain friends, I picked up a post from a friend about an ole farmer's advice. These little bits of advice were in a kind of a rambling fashion, unrelated to each other with some sort of unsystematic fashion, but very powerful and sage advice. I picked up on some of those great ideas from the ole farmer, and began writing about some them as the sage wisdom of the ole farmer.

In doing my Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy classes I always seemed be asked about things like "How do I get my firefighters to talk to me?" "How do I get them to trust me?" "How can I get them to accept me as their chaplain?" and things like "Am I just treading water; am I making any real difference at all?"

From a sense of need I started sharing things like, "It takes time to be accepted," things like, "how to sell yourself in Selling 101," "Talk about some of the nuts and bolts of your chaplaincy," "Talk about the path to Great Leadership" "Self-care," "On character," "On character-building" and things like that. These subjects seemed to be kind of like the ole farmer's advice – in a random way, not particularly in any systematic order, yet had some degree of wisdom from real life experiences.

I felt a need to share from my years of experience to my fellow chaplains from my heart. These little random ramblings just sort of developed into Jim's Ramblings. I thought of putting the work together as "Words of Sage Wisdom of an Ole Farmer," and I even thought about putting the articles together under the name of "Jim's Philosophical Meanderings" but, in hindsight that would not be true to any stretch of the imagination because I've never had an original philosophical thought in my life, and certainly have no systematic philosophy at all. So, the articles became known as "Jim's Ramblings." Hope to share some words of encouragement.

...about Acceptance

I was recently reading through my instructor guide in preparation for an Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy class. Reading through my notes I was reminded that I usually spend some time at the beginning of the class asking the students what they want to learn from this experience. A subject that almost always comes up in those classes is – How do I get accepted as their chaplain by the firefighters?

I want to readdress the subject of acceptance of the fire chaplain here today. In my first chaplaincy (wet behind the ears and wanting hard to please my firefighters), I asked that same question from my old chief who had been a veteran firefighter for many years, to which he responded, *“It takes time! I think it is just the nature of the beast. It takes firefighters time to warm up to new firefighters and it takes time to warm up to a new fire chaplain too. Get to know each of them as an individual.”* Well-chosen words of wisdom from a veteran fire chief, helped a green-horn chaplain a great deal in that first fire chaplain experience. He went on to serve several years of a very fruitful ministry in that department and in that community. Even though I've been gone from that community and that department for years now, when I visit that department, even those who never knew me personally, say, “Yes we know you. We remember the stories of those who served with you as their “walking-on-the-water” chaplain.” Makes me pleased to know I've left a little mark on the lives of some of those guys and gals. Looking back on it, I can say absolutely, it was worth taking the time to get to know them and working with them, allow them get to know me and become one of them.

I heard a little story from a leadership class about “Don't squeeze the orange to death to get the juice” that I think applies here. We all know that orange juice is in an orange and you can get juice from the orange sooner or later by squeezing the orange. You can also squeeze the orange to death in the process. You can push yourself onto the firefighters as their chaplain, and you can squeeze the very life out of your chaplaincy.

Over the years I've seen some good intentioned, would-be chaplains that have pushed themselves right out of their chaplaincy. If you push too hard, you can easily push yourself out of their lives and your chaplaincy. Low key, slow pace, being there, listening and loving the firefighters will bring *great* dividends. I'm so glad I listened to the voice of experienced wisdom. In a sense, the chief was saying to me, don't squeeze the orange to death to get the juice.

If you want to be a trusted chaplain, make a difference in the lives of your firefighters and your community, don't squeeze the orange to death to get the juice. It takes time to get the juice out by putting a little pressure on the orange, but don't squeeze it to death. The “ministry of presence” is the way to get there. Be there, listen and love, and in time, you are accepted into the firefighter family and your ministry will begin to be fruitful, and your ministry will multiply. And, in time (I don't know what that time will take) you will probably be looked at as one of those walk-on-the-water chaplains, kind of a hero and perhaps even a legend in time.

I'd like to share another little metaphor from Dean Jackson about "the cheese and whiskers metaphor" in regards to the time factor in acceptance to your chaplaincy. The metaphor has three scenarios. In the first scenario of the metaphor is a cat who wants to get a mouse (a chaplain who wants to get accepted by his firefighters). The cat puts out a piece of cheese and sits right by the cheese with his big whiskers waving in the wind. Plenty of cheese, lots of whiskers, but only a starving mouse will ever take the bait. (The chaplain who pushes his way into the department constantly *telling* the guys that he *is* the chaplain will probably never become their chaplain).

In the second scenario, the cat puts out the cheese and goes and hides, but keep peeking around the corner to see if the mouse is there. The mouse can spot the whiskers appearing and disappearing; there is plenty of cheese, far few whiskers, and some trigger happy cat can get a mouse every now and then. (The chaplain who passes out tracts and pushes his way into a Bible study, constantly talking about religion, he gets a few firefighters to follow him) but he never becomes the department's chaplain.

In the third scenario, finally, the cat puts out the cheese with whiskers nowhere in sight. The mouse wants the cheese; the mouse likes the cheese; the mouse eats the cheese... and lives to see another day. The cat doesn't pounce. The cat doesn't even make an appearance. The mouse has received the cheese. So, what does the cat get out of this? The cat gets the mouse one step closer to the goal (the chaplain takes the time to get to know the firefighters, helps them do menial tasks, cooks a meal with them, demonstrating his caring service in the midst of critical incidents, being there, listening and loving firefighters and their families, caring for crisis victims, not trying to make them into religious freaks but showing the love of God through his humanity). And, in time they will open up to him/her and start sharing their own deepest spiritual and emotional needs (that's the chaplain's goal). His goal is to serve them in a deep and meaningful way, not on a surface level but to serve the inner man of their lives. By being a representative of God through sharing His love by example, many will come to know God as you know Him through that example (you). That's witnessing. To witness by example, and only when we have use words.

As you are building a fruitful chaplaincy; getting to be accepted by the firefighters in the department; to be a trusted advisor, you probably want to use the third scenario in this metaphor. You want the mouse to want the "no-risk" cheese. The mouse takes the cheese because the mouse is abiding by its own self-interest, provided by no risks. The mouse comes again and again to the place of the cheese with no risk of being pounced on. The chaplain should never have an ulterior motive for serving firefighters and their families. The chaplain's goal should never be to seek a platform for evangelism, never to grow his/her congregation, never to find a preaching platform or winning others to his own religious views. Those things are always to be only a benefit of the goal of the chaplaincy – serving others.

The metaphor actually breaks down in that the cat's goal is not to catch the mouse. The cat simply wants to be of service to the mouse. But the metaphor can help the chaplain build an attraction, build a relationship with the firefighters to just simply be the cheese with no whiskers. In other words, the chaplain is not there to catch them, not to corner them, not to coerce them,

not to pin them down with a big furry paw and watch them squirm, you are there to be there, listen and love them. And, ladies and gentlemen, that kind of relationships, that kind of make-a-difference chaplaincy, takes time. What you really want to do is find out how your firefighters WANT to grab the cheese. It is hard work, great patience, there is no EZ button for this one.

Be patient like the cat in scenario three. Take *whatever time it takes* to become that “walk-on-the-water” chaplain you would really like to be.

JB 032017

...about Character

8

A chaplain friend, Robert Kerry Ash¹ told me the other day he is doing a series of classes on Character, and asked me if I had any ideas. Well, my first inclination was to go where I go when I can't remember something or never knew it, Google. Google is wonderful invention. I wish I had had it first, I'd probably be wealthy today. Anyway, I did a search on Goggle about Character, and I was astonished. I found 234 posts on Positive Character Traits. Wow! Then I went a little more down the page and I saw "Primary personality Traits," "List of Character Traits," "Character Orientation," "Character Examples" which included things like honest, loyal, devoted, sincere, patient, determination, persistence, respect, integrity, commitment, etc., etc. I even saw 50 positive character traits in the work place. Wow!

With all of this vast storehouse of knowledge about character, I thought back on my root knowledge about character. My root knowledge about character was from my Mom and Dad. Things like "If you start something, finish it." "If you tell someone you're going to do something, do it." "Make your word your bond." "Don't cuss, lie, steal, or run around those who do." "Don't go biting off more 'an you can chew." And, the one I'll never forget when my dad sat me down before I went off to college. He said, "Son, hope you learn a lot of good stuff that will help you in life, but don't let them turn you into an educated fool up there. Don't ever forget where you came from." My parents build upon their character base from their theological foundation as they understood it in the Bible. They were not overly religious, but they practically served God in their own simple "farm smarts" way. They were never overbearing with their "smarts", nor did they do that with their kids either. They simply said "Yes, that's the way I see it" and "No" that's the way I see it, and that's it. Period. And, they stood by their word, until they were made to understand that they had made a mistake. And, they acknowledged their mistakes and made amends if and when possible.

Thinking about those simple bits of practical information, if I had listened to and acted upon those golden nuggets of wisdom, my life would have been much more fruitful, successful, and happy. And, looking back at all the successes I've had, the real fruits of happiness, has built upon those simple character traits.

Actually, when I first started doing these little rambling I thought about calling them: "Philosophical Meanderings" because that sounds pretty intelligent, but in hind sight that would just not be true with any stretch of the imagination. I've never had an original philosophical thought in my life. My parents were simple people. They didn't have much formal education and had no philosophy at all, but they had a world of "farm smarts" (that means what they say today as "street smarts.") and they instilled in me those core values in life we call character. Character is not something money can't buy. Morals, respect, common sense, patience, trust,

¹ Robert Kerry Ash, Chaplain with the Galvez-Lake Volunteer Fire Department, Prairieville, LA

integrity, love, honesty, loyalty, and all of those other 234 positive character traits has to be modeled by someone who has lived it out in practice. That statement is my sum total of philosophical meanderings.

I did learn a little stuff from all my schooling (BBS, MBS, ThM, D.Min., PhD, MFC) and others, and I didn't let them turn me into an educated fool. The core knowledge base that has carried me through all the ups and downs of my life and ministry, my successes and failures, my sickness and health, is the little bits of character my parents instilled in me as a child. Those simple character traits make a fruitful life. No matter how much your life goes downhill, how many times you've made serious mistakes and paid the consequence of them, if you have character - core values in life - honesty, respect, commitment, integrity, service, trust and love your life will sooner or later come uphill again.

A very good friend, Dr. Bruce Greene² (selected as *Professor of the Year 2016* at Tennessee Tech University), some thirty years ago, after he had finished his PhD, married Nancy, got his first job at LSU, taken on several ambitious projects at the university, and Nancy had just announced she was pregnant, said to me, "Preacher, I didn't know how to be a husband, I didn't know how to do this job, and now I'm sure I don't know how to be a daddy. Looks like I've become a career out of biting off more than I can chew." Sounded like Bruce was overwhelmed at the time. However, Bruce has character. Bruce is a plodder. He was never a sprinter. He took all those commitments and chewed on them one at a time. And, over those 30+ years, he has become a shining success in his career, in his family life, and in his "Daddying." And, now in his "Granddaddying." I saw a picture on Facebook a few days ago with Bruce, Nancy, Mary Elizabeth and Mary's little child being held by Bruce, with a grin on his face from ear to ear. He looked like he actually had done pretty well of biting off more than he could chew. How did he do it? Character. Bruce is one of the most solid-core-characters I know. If you drove up to Bruce's house today, you'd think he was a poor farm hand way up in the hills. He is one of the most highly intelligent persons I know, but he has "farm smarts" with character to a fault. I can truthfully say, "They never turned him into an educated fool", and he's done pretty well for himself as an educator too.

Before leaving these rambling about Character, I want to share a little about character orientation. In the dictionary it says that character is the aggregate of features and traits that form the nature of some person or thing; are all the aspects of a person's attitudes and behaviors that make up that person's personality.³ Everyone has character traits, both good and bad.

Character orientations are described as dominant character traits - non-productive and productive traits, like receptive orientation, exploitative orientation, hoarding orientation, marketing orientation, and productive orientation.⁴

² Bruce Greene, Professor, Tennessee Tech University, School of Agriculture, Cookeville, TN

³ Random House College Dictionary, p 225

⁴ Wikipedia, Character Orientation from Goggle search

The **receptive orientation** people receive satisfaction from outside factors who passively wait for others to provide them with things they need and want. Sometimes we call them “takers,” or those who use people for things. Therefore, those people often build relationship but lose them quickly because their “taker” character traits.

The **exploitative orientation** people aggressively take what they want rather than passively receiving it. These people do whatever they can to get what they want; even if it includes stealing or snatching something away from someone else just to get it.

The **hoarding orientation** people save what they have already, including their opinions, feelings, and material possessions. They may hoard someone's love, power or someone's time. These people wear on the nerves of others and therefore have fewer and normal good relationship.

The **marketing orientation** people who see themselves as commodities and value themselves against the criterion of their ability to see themselves. They are always trying to sell you something and selling themselves. These people wear others out and tend to have few real positive relationships.

The **productive orientation** people are said to have a healthy personality as well. Erich Fromm refers to as “the person without a mask”⁵ This type of person does not avoid his/her freedom and responsibility. This type of person most likely comes out of a family that loves, which prefers taking personal responsibility, doing what they say they will do and all those other positive character traits we talked about earlier. I didn't explore those 50 positive character traits in the work place, but I just imagine with my simple practical deduction that those who make a positive difference in the work place are those who have the productive orientation, whether in their homes, with their family and with their work place - church, fire station, on the emergency scene, sitting around the fire house chewing the fat.

Character is who you are and what you do. Do it well and you will receive a great reward in heaven.

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⁵ Erich Fromm, Personality Theories

...about Conviction vs Assumption

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Someone posted this a few days ago from Denis Waitley, "*Stick by your convictions, but be ready to abandon your assumptions.*" Waitley was very popular several years ago as a motivational speaker – consultant and had several popular books. His audio presentation "The Psychology of Winning" was popular in the 60s, and his books "Seeds of Greatness," and "The Winners Edge" sold a number of copies. Waitley was born in 1933, graduated from the Naval Academy and served as a naval aviator during his service, then set out to be a motivator.

I am not here to endorse Waitley's career or his character, but I believe the statement above has merit of taking a little more closely at. In my earlier ramblings about character I talked about sticking with what you started. Do what you say you will do. Make your word your bond. Those things are positive character traits. I talked about my parents having the tenacity of standing by their convictions until someone showed them they were wrong and then they acknowledged their mistake and made amends as well as they could.

That's what Denis is talking about. Stick by your convictions, but be ready to abandon your assumptions. In my lifetime I've had a lot of convictions. As a preacher and pastor I preached my convictions. I stuck by them until someone showed me that I had some bad convictions. I never just took someone else's word that I was wrong. I did my own research. I looked at the issue from all sides, then when I was convinced that I was wrong, I admitted my mistake then started moving ahead with my new found knowledge with the same strong conviction I had had before except with more knowledge than I had before.

As I said before, my parents built upon their character base from their theological foundation as they understood it in the Bible. They stuck by their convictions, they practically served God in their own simple "farm smarts" way. They were never overbearing with their convictions. They simply said "Yes, that's the way I see it" and "No" that's the way I see it, and that's it. Period. And, they stood by their convictions, until they were understood that they had made a mistake they were ready to abandon their assumptions.

I said in my last piece, I mentioned that those simple bits of practical information, if I had listened to and acted upon, would have made my life much more fruitful and happy. Those basic bits of wisdom has carried me through all the ups and downs of my life and ministry, my successes and failures, my sickness and health.

I have to admit that I have had to eat crow more times than you can ever imagine. For me, it was hard to do at first. In fact, it was hard for me to do, the second time, the third time, the fourth, time and one hundred-and-twenty-fifth time. Now days, they call that a strong-willed child, but the truth of the matter is I was hard-headed, stubborn and determined. I thought I was right. And I was right until you convinced me differently.

If you are like me, the first part of this -*Stick by your convictions*, is pretty easy. The second part is more difficult -*be ready to abandon your assumption*. It is hard to admit that you might be wrong. I pretty much assumed that I was right, not matter what. What I said was the truth, solid and strong truth. I believed it with my whole heart, I was convicted to the core of my being, but

the more I learned the more I realized that I *could be wrong* once in a while. The more I learned about life and even more about my religion, the more I learned I needed to be ready to abandon my assumptions, and embrace the new truth I had learned. Hey, we don't know all the truth, we can never know all the truth. Like God. We can never know God because God is beyond our comprehension. We can only know a little glimpse of God because we are not God. God gives us a glimpse of Him in many ways – in His created order, in the universe, in His unconditional love, in His mercy and grace. Other than that we are just looking at Him like a multi-faceted glass. We can only see the side we see, we cannot see what we cannot see. The same is truth. We can only see what we can see. We cannot see what we cannot see.

Those little bits of character, convictions and little bits of truth my parents instilled in me is invaluable over the years. Character is who you are. Conviction is the motivation that moves you. Being ready to abandon your false assumptions brings you closer to the truth.

Stick by your convictions, but be ready to abandon your assumptions toward the truth.

JB041317

...about an Ordination Charge for a Chaplain - Protestant (Fire, Police, Emergency Services)

Normally when a church's member is recognized to be called of God to ministry, he or she is usually set aside, recognized and confirmed by the church as evidence of the call to gospel ministry. The Old Testament has many examples of God's call to men and women to special service. In the New Testament, Jesus chose a select group whom he "ordained" or "appointed" to be his special representatives.

In the Catholic tradition, the church confers special status, ecclesiastical powers and special rights as deacons or priest who is called to ministry. However, in the Protestant's view of the New Testament, ordination confers no status, no ecclesiastical powers, and no special rights of office not possessed by any other devout and trusted member of a church by its authorization. However, ordination meets certain legal requirements in the performance of wedding ceremonies, in service as chaplains, missionaries, and such.

Charge of a Chaplain

A charge is usually given to the candidate like that of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 as a pastor, church staff personnel, missionary, music minister and so forth. However, as a public safety chaplain, I like to view a charge to a chaplain found in the 23rd Psalm... **Representing the Lord, we are a shepherd; our ministry is to restore the weary soul. We sit by those in trauma in green pastures** (bringing calm from the storm); **and we seek to still their emotions beside quiet waters** (some sense of peace in turmoil)... **As chaplains we seek to give them a sense of restoration of life** (to restore some degree normalcy). **We as chaplains walk with them** (be there, listen and love), **leading along the right path** (how to do what they must to do at the moment). **Even though the griever goes through the darkest valley of death** (one of the most anguishing experiences of their lives), **Chaplains, as God's representatives, walk with them in their fears and remind them that God keeps them from danger. The chaplain, (The Lord's rod and staff) is there to be leaned upon, to comfort; to carry them** (if need be); **to put his own cape around them and to love them. Even in the worst of times, as a chaplain, (as God's representative), we are sharing God's ministry of presence...sharing faithful love in the midst of crushing and horrible crisis.**

The chaplain's role of ministry is to provide spiritual and emotional support to members of the (fire, police, emergency) services and victims of emergency crisis. Our ministry is different from most all other ministers – we are not pastors, not evangelists, not prophets, not teachers. We are to be there, to listen and to love those who are having the worst day of their lives.

The word chaplain comes from a Medieval Latin word, *cappella*, which means "cape" St. Martin of Tours is said to have shared his cape with a beggar on a cold wet night, and he gave

him shelter. The famous cape was displayed as a relic in a small building called the "chapel." The guard of the chapel was eventually called a chaplain.

The chaplain is then one who shares his/her cape in time of need wherever he finds the need. Chaplaincy is not about making people feel good, not preaching, not proselytizing. Rather, it is about being a strong spiritual presence in some of the most difficult situations in life.

The public safety chaplain is a spiritual presence in the world of fire, police and emergency services. He/she is trained to be able to deal with a variety of emergency crises. The public safety chaplain is a servant -- first, last, and always, a servant.

Normally appointed by the fire/police/ems chief and endorsed by his/her religious affiliation, the chaplain's mission is NOT to compromise his/her own individual convictions, but he or she MUST be ready to serve all faith-groups unconditionally and without reservation, serving non-denominational and non-sectarian groups -- Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and those who have no faith at all.

It takes disciplined awareness along with prayerful and patient endurance to be present in the most horrible situations in life. A public safety chaplain sees more in his daily routine, than most other people can ever imagine in a lifetime -- mass casualties, injury and death of children, tragic accidents, loss of homes and everything people have in the ravages of fire...and many other tragedies.

Regardless of religious or theological background, there is NO substitute for "being there." The "ministry of presence" is the gift of hope in an otherwise hopeless situation.

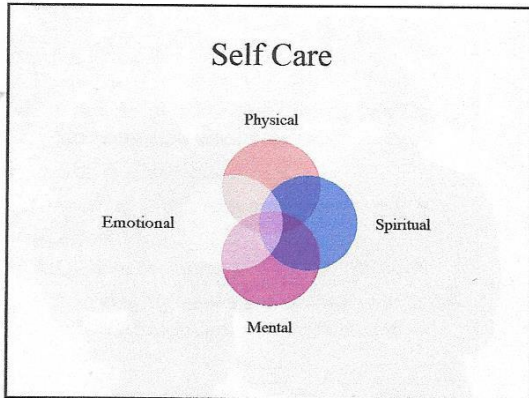
I must solemnly charge you, conveniently or not, to hold tightly to your Shepherd, as you walk with those through the valley of death time and time and time again; and keep for you a clear head about everything, enduring hardship, doing the work of a chaplain; be there, listen and love, fulfilling your ministry.

God bless you as you serve those who serve.

...about Self Care

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In the Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy class, the session on the Personhood of the Chaplain we talk about the most important element in the chaplaincy – you the chaplain. We talk about the chaplain's balancing acts. Balancing role responsibilities with the church and the fire department, balancing the role responsibilities between the chaplaincy and his/her family. We talk about what the chaplain is supposed to be and not to be; the chaplain's responsibilities as a chaplain; we talk about the importance of accountability and how the chaplain operates within a command system of accountability; we talk about the legal and ethical accountability of the



chaplain; and we talk about another important aspect of the chaplaincy – self-care of the chaplain.

To be an effective chaplain, we need to take care of ourselves. We will not be able to serve others if we don't have a reasonable degree of health ourselves. As chaplains we need to take a look at our own multi-dimensional self – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self. All humans, including chaplains, have a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual

dimension that makes up the total person.

Each of those dimensions contain an energy reserve, like an interconnected series of batteries. When one of our dimensions is drained, we draw from another dimension to re-energize us. Once we drain too much from each dimension without recharging our batteries, we tend to fizzle out. We tend to experience what we sometimes call “burn out.” When we are burned out, we are worth much to ourselves or anyone else. When we experience burn-out, we need to have a time of re-generating our energies.

As a fire chaplain we need to think about developing a self-care plan for all dimensions of our self – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. We need to pay attention to each of those dimensions of our self.

We need to take care of our physical dimension. We need to take care of our physical health by eating right – the right kinds of food, and a reasonable time. Being an emergency services chaplain makes it often difficult to eat that the right time. However, when we are able to keep a regular eating habit, we should do so. With the difficulty of regular eating habits, it is more important that we eat the right kinds of foods to keep our physical bodies regulated. Another important thing is to get adequate sleep in order for the body to rejuvenate itself. If we go too long without sleep, it takes a toll on our body.

Another things is physical exercise. The human body is built for action. We are an action oriented system. Too little exercise can be detrimental to the body. A balance is important here. Neglecting any one of these, proper food, proper exercise, and proper hydration can bring our physical endurance down; when our endurance is weakened we are more vulnerable to disease

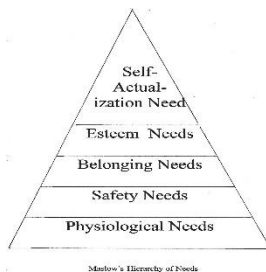
and physical exhaustion. We normally look at the person on the outside and think he/she is physically exhausted. However, there are other dimensions involved.

We need to take care of the mental side our being. Mostly our mental dimension is energized through learning. Man is a learning animal. Psychologists have long taught that learning affects learning; that learning one thing affects learning other things. Learning is as much a part of living as is breathing. The human mind is composed of faculties that can be strengthened through mental exercise, much in the same way as muscles are strengthened by physical exercise. You retain what you use on a regular basis. That is why firefighters train on a regular basis. Don't cram your mind with a lot of stuff you never plan to use, but keep your mind sharp in areas that will plan to use. I have long been a proponent of life-long learning. If we don't keep our minds sharp, we will soon go the way of the horse and buggy before we know it.

Our mental dimension should also include breaking old habits and trying new things in new ways. Someone said, "A rut is a grave with both ends kicked out of it." It is easy to get in a rut. Those of you who are pastors have no doubt heard the "famous last words of a dying church is 'We ain't never done it that way before.' If you get in a rut mentally, you might as well be in a grave.

We need to take care of our emotional dimension. Our emotional dimension is an affective state of consciousness in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate or the like, is experienced. Emotional health is energized through giving and receiving love, respect, and acknowledgement as a person in a positive light. When our emotional needs are not met, we see some physiological changes like increased heartbeat, quick respiration, sweating, crying, shaking, and even a tendency to display or respond with undue emotions or unwarranted expression or display of emotion. We often deal with those in trauma when their emotions are not in control, with intense anxiety following a traumatic loss, loss of a home by fire, a natural disaster, the suicide or homicide of a family member or friend. People are not created equally in terms of their psychological vulnerability. The chaplain needs to take care of his/her own emotional health in order to be a calming effect with those we normally respond to. Our goal is to help, not hinder those we are called to serve. It is most important that we develop our own emotional support system to help us keep our emotional balance in check.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs we need to have our physiological needs met, then we move toward having our emotional needs, then we meet our self-actualization needs.



According to Maslow when our physiological needs gain some degree of gratification, a second stage arises, a need for security and safety. If I can't breathe, you can't try to sell me a Mercedes-Benz or even a house. Once I get my breath, and attain some degree of safety, I will then move up toward the next level. My physical needs are basic. Self-esteem needs, status, respect, love and acceptance, a sense of belonging, then we move on toward our self-actualization needs. Self-actualization is the desire to be everything we are capable of becoming. This is the stage that

we are ready to be a chaplain, becoming a giving person with no thought of reward. We need to be emotionally, mentally and physically healthy to move toward that level in our person.

We need to take care of our spiritual dimension. There is another dimension that is vital to a balanced life. That is our spiritual dimension. The spiritual dimension should be the lead-instructor of the other dimensions of our self. The spiritual dimension of our life is energized through worship and service to our God and our fellow man. To develop a healthy spiritual dimension of our being we can be fed and fueled by establishing and building a strong, loving relationship with our Creator, which overflows into establishing and developing strong and loving relationships with our fellow man. How can we love God without loving our fellow man? The Bible says it cannot be done. If we cultivate a strong, loving relationship with God, we will have a strong, loving relationship with those around us – those who need our ministry as a chaplain.

To be effective chaplains, we need to take care of ourselves. We can't serve those who serve if we don't have balanced health in our lives. Watch for disturbances in each of our dimensions which will show up in energy drain on each of those dimensions. These disturbances often come upon us unawares. These disturbances are often gradually and we suddenly feel out-of-sorts, tired, listless, just don't feel like doing anything. So, it is good to watch out for each of those dimensions.

Watch out for changes in appetite (eating too much or eating too little).

Watch out for sleep patterns (if we seem to sleep too much or too little, or times when we can't sleep).

Watch out for your mental acuteness (forgetfulness, loss of ability to concentrate, lack of will

power.

Watch out for signs of emotional changes (signs of detachment, withdrawal, anger, highly agitated, spells of crying, depression, etc.).

And take care of our recreational dimension.

Seeing any of these symptoms indicates that it is time to take a break and spend some time re-energizing. It is a good idea to talk to your primary physician, your mental health professional, to your pastor or to a fellow chaplain when any or all of these dimensions are



out of kilter, but there are times when we just need to go fishing like my friend, Chaplain Russell Aucoin down in Sabine Fire District #1 in Florien does. Sometimes we just need to re-charge our batteries and chill. Sometimes we just need to unwind; do something that is fun, something that is relaxing. Something that to others might be completely stupid or silly; whatever helps you unwind and relax.

We are not alone in this world. Humans are community based animals. We all need a support network in taking care of ourselves. We often have our primary care physician, our mental health professional, or spiritual advisor, a prayer group, Sunday school class, church, our financial advisor, insurance advisor, family, friends, co-workers, the community and several others. Being a member of the chaplain family, I hope you are developing a strong, loving

relationship with some of your fellow fire chaplains as part of your support network in your self-care plan. And, keep your relationship current with God. By the way, Jesus went fishing with his friends. It's biblical to go fishing with your friends.

Disclaimer: I can't actually attest to the fact that Russ caught that fish or if he borrowed it from one of his friends for the picture, but he is a real fisherman.

JB041917

...about ramblings from his hurt

19

A few weeks ago, my heart was made heavy; hurt to the core because a hacker used my name to hurt others. The hacker had lied in my name to members of my family and dear friends. The hacker had deceived them in my name and with my picture to scam them of their hard earned money, and God only knows what else.

I had developed a positive attitude toward people – I believed that people were generally good, honest and sincere. I believed that people treated others as they wanted to be treated. I was taught as a child to develop character- to be honest, sincere, loyal, respectful to others; integrity in my speech and actions. However, my experience in life has taught me that everyone is not like that. After this hurtful experience I began to look back at the scriptures.

In my search, I went to Psalm chapter 12 which says, “Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception... O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.”⁶

I have been so distressed that hackers have hacked my Facebook and used lies to hurt some of my family and friends. They have been hurt because they *trusted me*, when in reality they had been lied to in “my name and my face.” They had lied to with flattering words of deception. I spent the better part of a day trying to find out what was going on. The hackers cloned me (set up a site with my Facebook header, my name and my picture of which I could not see) and they made my name MUD telling deceitful lies and persuaded people to send money to them. What hurt me most was because these people were hurt by trusting me. I had spent a lifetime building trust and in one day my trust was violated and others were hurt by the deception.

I felt so helpless. My family and friends were deceived by others who thought they were trusting me and were hurt very badly by it. All I can do is trust in the Lord to make it right in His own way and in His own time. In chapter 10 of Psalms he gives me direction in these kinds of situations. “Arise, Lord! Lift up your hands, O God. Do not forget the helpless (I was pretty helpless at the time). Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, “He won’t call me to account”? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. The Lord is King for ever and ever.”⁷

As I said before, my parents built upon their character base from their theological foundation as they understood it in the Bible. I said in my last piece, I mentioned that those simple bits of practical information, if I had listened to and acted upon, would have make my life much more fruitful and happy. Those basic bits of wisdom has carried me through all the ups and downs of my life and ministry, my successes and failures, my sickness and health. At this juncture of my

⁶ Psalm 12:2-4; 7-8;

⁷ Psalm 10:12-16

life, I have nothing else to do but hold on to the character I have been taught and modeled from my parents, my teachers and my family and friends.

People lie to their neighbors. People are vile and wicked. People hurt other people and they hurt other people in your name. God know about that. Many people hurt others in His name. The more I have learned about life and about my own religion, the more I need to be ready to abandon my assumptions, and embrace the new truth I have learned. By my own nature, one of my greatest desire is to hold people to the same character I live by, but I am learning to be ready to abandon my assumption that all people are good. People will tell lies on you, people will hurt others through you, and hurt your name in the process. It happens.

I have just been reminded a new truth about what my Momma told me a thousand times over, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."⁸ God will bring about something good out of this hurtful, sorrowful experiences in life. And, God will bring something good from the hurt that my friends have been hurt from. One thing I know, they've learned that they will never take it for granted that they are talking to me if it seem wrong to them. They have learned they will call me on my phone or see me in person before getting involved in something in an internet media that seems unlikely.

A lot of my friends shop on-line exclusively. People say, "Why don't you get this great deal from the internet?"

I simply don't purchase something from a source I do not know. There are hundreds of scams out there on the internet and telephone marketers; those who lie to you for their own benefit. There is a scam out there preying on older people who are impersonating the IRS. They say you owe a tax bill and if you don't pay up you will be taken to jail. If you'll pay them now, they'll call it even. Another one is calling pretending to be you and tell their friends you are in some foreign country, been robbed, and need money to get home. Another scam is the hacker pretends to be you and say they've found a lot of money and they want you to get in on it for just a few dollars. You send them your money, and you never hear from them again.

I fell for a scam the other day. A friend, whom I trusted completely, sent a prayer request that turned out to be a hoax. My friend was hoodwinked because of his compassionate heart; I was hoodwinked because I knew him and trusted him. With a heart full of love and compassion, I sent out an urgent prayer request which turned out a hoax and I had egg on my face. I am learning if someone sends me an urgent request, I'll usually ask the person making the request if he or she actually knows the person, or I'll check it out with Snopes.

Jesus said to his disciples before he sent them out, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."⁹ Shall I stop sharing prayer request? Shall I continue to trust people? Shall I continue to follow my calling?

⁸ Romans 8:28

⁹ Matthew 10:16

Jesus told me I would be abused, misused, lied about, deceived in my name, but He sent me out to serve even those who hate me and despise me. My calling is to serve others, not to harm them, not to abuse them, but to love them, even the hackers who have brought so much sorrow to my own heart. Jesus died for the ungodly.

What will I do? With that little bits of character, convictions and little bits of truth my parents instilled in me as a child and the teachers who have taught me over the years, I will keep on keeping on.

Stick by your convictions, be ready to abandon your assumptions toward the truth, and watch out for those who will lie to you and deceive you. The hardest of all, pray for them. Jesus prayed for those who hung him on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"¹⁰. That's hard, but He did it. As a follower, I strive to do what He did. God help me!

JB050117

¹⁰ Luke 23:34

...about a New Dimension to Your Chaplaincy

22

Sometime ago, last year some time I did a rambling about "Stepping over the Edge in Faith." That article prompted me from something Jason Leister said about getting out of our walled up comfort zones. The fact is most of us have worked all our lives building up walls around our comfort zones. We simply don't like to get out of those zones. We're comfortable in doing the same old things. We're comfortable in wearing the same ole clothes, same ole shoes, same ole hat, go to the same ole restaurants, shopping at the same ole stores. Hey, we're human, right! We're just a "same ole" kind of person.

Take a look back at history, even pre-history and you'll see human being do the same ole things over and over again. And, I'm one of them. I'm actually human, after all. Sometimes I've wondered about that, but I'm actually a real, live, human, and have characteristics of mankind. It's great to be a human. We're called the highest of the species. Humankind is said to be the highest animal in prehistory, before events were recorded. The Bible says humans began with being created by God in His image. One of the first accounts of humankind, after he was created was that he rebelled against God, resulting in his expulsion from the Garden of Eden (paradise on earth), a place of comfort and protection. The first pair lived in their comfort zone until they rebelled. Stepping out of their comfort zone, they rebelled through building up evil in their hearts. Humankind just doesn't like to be pushed out of his comfort zone. Humankind became evil and wicked beyond measure. However, in God's goodness and grace He called Noah to build an ark to offer humankind a new beginning. There again, humankind didn't want to step over the edge to accept God's gracious gift of safety and a new beginning. It was not long before the flood, humankind in his arrogance started to build a tower to heaven so he could get his comfort zone back. God confuses their languages, forcing them to disperse. It's just tough for humans to stay in our comfort zones when God has another idea. In the beginning He created humankind to be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth, not to sit in a protected paradise and twiddle their thumbs.

However, looking back on prehistory and history we see God's grace working to get them out of their comfort zones. Sometimes it was bad situations that pushed them out. God having pushing them over the edge again, He made it possible for humans to fulfill his created purpose. They began to live in communities. Having God pushing them over the edge again and again, they developed stone tools, then they discovered an ability to make clay vessels. Stepping over the edge again, they learned to use bronze; and in need of food and support, humans moved from small family groups of hunting and gathering, they developed farming and domesticated animals to help them tend their farms, all of this stepping over the edge from their comfort zones. After pushing them over the edge again and again humans developed larger communities, then small towns, then large towns, then small cities, and then large cities, and then technologies that made life easier for them, and eventually into a global community.

And, because humans have been pushed out of their comfort zones and pushed over the edge into the unknown, we now have all the so-called modern convenience we have now – washing machines, dishwashers, air conditioners, automobiles, telephones, cell phones, computers, airplanes, space exploration, modern medical equipment and medical treatments which prolong

life and all of those things. There were conflicts between hunters and shepherds, between shepherds and farmers. Conflicts that pushed them out of their comfort zones and over the edge again and again. All because humans have been pushed over the edge. In God's creation of humankind, He intended humankind to be more than all the animals of the earth. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."¹¹

God in His infinite wisdom had to make one restriction in order to get humankind to follow his purpose of creation. Everything in the garden was there for the benefit of humankind, except one – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and you should not eat of it. One restriction. Only one. The man ate the forbidden fruit, and everything went downhill from there. Humans became sinners. Every imagined evil came forth from the human heart. All the murders, all the wars, all the hate, all the mistrust, all the deceit, all the unfaithfulness was emitted from the deceitful heart of humankind. That's the bad side of it all. But, God stepped over the edge and brought grace. And, humankind can step over the edge and bring good out of something that seems to be bad.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have called according to his purpose."¹² God works even in bad things of life for the good of those who love Him and have answered His call to step over the edge for *His* purpose.

And, as I said in the first article on Stepping over the Edge, looking back over my life and ministry, I have been to the edge, I've stood on the boundary line between my reality and the unrealized potential many times in my life. As I said then, I wanted to stay close to the center line of my comfort zone; I wanted to live in that comfort zone because it gave me a sense of security, I loved to live there in that secure place with my wall around me where I felt good and comfortable and have no sticks and stones to throw at me. As I said, I finally realized that I am human. That's where humans like to live, to be invisible, not risking anything and not doing much of anything else.

On the other hand, we can stay safe near the center of the comfort zone and do nothing, or we can step over the edge and make a difference. I told you about an experience where I was pushed over the edge and had a very fruitful ministry. My chaplaincy has been "stepping over the edge" as well. I was happy to be a local fire department chaplain. I was in my comfort zone there. I loved being a department chaplain, relating to my firefighters at SCFD. Then I was pushed over the edge to respond to the county sheriff's office, then to the New Pal town police, then to the local Pendleton area of the state police, then the county coroner's office, then to the Recruit Command for the US Air Force, then to the president of the Indiana Fire Chaplain Corps, then to the Regional Director for the Great Lakes Region (IL, IN, MI, OH and WI), then I was pushed over the edge to be Regions Chaplain for the Federation of Fire Chaplains coordinating Regions

¹¹ Genesis 1:28

¹² Romans 8:28

in the United States, Canada, South America, Germany, Australia and Namibia. I must admit that I was totally inadequate, way over my head in all of these new endeavors, but by the grace of God and my stepping over the edge, my world opened up to a whole new avenue of service to Him and my fellowman. Then, after I thought I was going to retire and came home to Louisiana, sit on my long porch with a rocking chair and relax, I was pushed over the edge again to help start a state fire chaplain organization in the state. What a pleasure to serve with you guys in Louisiana. What a blessing for me to get to know your guys, building relationships with you and serving God together with you. Had I not taken that step over the edge, I would have missed out on one of the great pleasures in my life; serving with you.

One thing I'm learning in all of this is that God wants us to keep pushing to the edge of our comfort zones. If we settle down too long in our comfort zone, He'll give you a little nudge. If you don't move toward the edge, He'll give you more than a little nudge, He'll push you right to the edge. When you see the edge, you'll get a vision of what's out there and build up your courage to take the plunge. God will not push you over, you have to take the plunge. He sets you up, gives you opportunities, see the visions, to see what's out there, and give you the grace to take the plunge, but you have to take the first step over the edge.

Like with my new dimension in my chaplaincy. A chaplain friend remarked to me one day that my dog, Miss Dolly, would be a great therapy dog. I checked out several therapy dog organizations online, researched some of the options out there, some of the opportunities like hospitals, nursing homes, foster homes, homeless shelters, schools, disasters, accidents, house fires, homicides, suicide survivors, defusing with firefighters and police officers, hospice, cancer victims, domestic violence victims, military veterans, stressed travelers, children in court, libraries, pediatric wards, jails and correction institutions and many other opportunities. I was on the edge. I saw the vision.

But, I had to take the first step over the edge. I finally took that first step, I did an evaluation with my dog, Miss Dolly. Basically therapy dogs must have certain characteristics like being friendly, well-tempered, gentle, well socialized, liked to be handled and petted, enjoy human touch, extremely patient, loving, great companionship, comfortable in busy or stressful situations, able to tolerate children, other animals and crowded places. After Miss Dolly passed the initial evaluation, I took the next step. I checked out the opportunities locally and began working on getting us to the testing and observation process. We contacted the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, one of the major national therapy dog organizations, and I inquired about getting us tested and observed. The therapy test includes: an initial meeting test, canine-human behavior test, the physical handling of the dog and dog response test, required by an approved ATD tester/observer at a medical care facility, have verification from a veterinarian that the dog has all its shots and a complete physical exam, several reference letters from people who know the handler and the dog, a complete evaluation from the tester/observer and an essay from the handler. We contacted ATD and are now in the process of getting our testing and observation which takes several weeks.

We did our first debut with health care facilities, a hospital and a nursing home and had our first therapeutic visit with a nursing home and had a very positive experience. After having

completed our first therapeutic visit, we left believing that we had made the wise choice in adding this new dimension to our chaplaincy. Seeing the smiles and relaxed faces on the residents, the interaction between Miss Dolly and the residents, all the people saying, "Thank you for coming," and the people telling us to come back real soon made us a believer that we had taken the right step. We still have a lot of other steps to take, but that first step over the edge was a real fruitful experience. One of the first things I do every morning of my life is to ask God to help me make a difference in some person's life today. After that visit, I felt Miss Dolly and I made a REAL difference in some lives during that visit.

This may or may not be something for you. You may not like to interact with animals and serve others with them, and that's completely fine. There are probably some other things that will be just right for you. A chaplain who loves motorcycles can be an added dimension to your chaplaincy by becoming the chaplain for a motorcycle club. If you are an avid golfer, you can become the chaplain for the country club. If you love fishing or hunting, you can add a dimension to your chaplaincy by serving as chaplain for your hunting or fishing club. The avenues are endless. The opportunities are only blocked by you. You have only to step over the edge in faith and God takes it from there. Boy, I'm glad I didn't decide to sit in my rocking chair and twiddling my thumbs. Looking forward to seeing you step over the edge into a new dimension of your chaplaincy.

JB061117

...about - It's never too late!**26**

I know you don't think I look my age, but yesterday I celebrated my 77th birthday (June 4). Too old to do much except sit in a rocking chair and think about days gone by, reminiscing about the good ole days, right!. Well, that's one way to retire and simply sit back and do nothing, but there is another way to make your retirement time more fruitful and beneficial to others. When you do something for others, it makes you feel good on the inside and probably makes them feel a little better and maybe even makes a difference in their lives..

At church yesterday my pastor said in his sermon that the most important things we can do in life is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves. Hey, I agree with that whole heartedly. It's not a lot of money you've earned and stored up for retirement, it's not all the things you've done or not done in your life – gone to church every week, read your Bible every day, didn't cuss, drink, steal, or lie and all those things that most people think about that makes you a good person, is not the important things in life. It's the simple things that are important. Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor. And, redeem the time. Don't sit and soak. Don't waste your time. Don't just sit and reminisce. God gives you and me an allotted time on this earth, and if he gives us another day, don't waste it, do something of value with it.

It's not too late to start another undertaking; start a new ministry; put a little zip in your chaplaincy; to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself while you have the time. As I said earlier, I celebrated my 77th birthday yesterday. I actually took the day off and enjoyed my family yesterday.

However, two days before my 77th birthday (June 2), Miss Dolly and I celebrated our debut of a new ministry, a little zip to my chaplaincy with my family dog, Miss Dolly, which we have been developing for several weeks after a chaplain friend mentioned that Miss Dolly would be a great therapy dog. I started looking about what therapy dogs do and the kinds of qualifications they need. After evaluating the characteristics of a therapy dog, Miss Dolly fit the bill to a T and we began the process. We began a Therapy Dog – Chaplain Team to go out and love our neighbors. On June 2, we actually launched the ministry.

What do therapy dogs do? Actually, sometimes they just sit or lie quietly while being petted and listen while someone tells their stories about their former dogs. Sometimes they visit with an elementary school and help children relax during their studies. Sometimes therapy dogs visit a child in a hospital who is getting ready for surgery, going through chemo, etc. to help them feel better about the surgery or the treatment. Sometimes they just show up by reducing stress relief from a person who just lost their home by fire. Sometimes they respond to a serious accident, to a disaster or other traumatic events to help the victims reduce stress. Sometimes therapy dogs share smiles, love and joy with patients and residents of hospitals, senior citizen centers, nursing homes and hospice visits in the community.

The systematic use of therapy dogs is attributed to a nurse, Elaine Smith, who noticed how well patients responded to visits from the chaplain with his Golden Retriever. In 1976, Smith started a program to train dogs to visit institutions.

Medical science shows that interaction with a therapy dog can reduce blood pressure and promote physical healing; reduce anxiety, fatigue and depression. Therapy dogs love human contact and have no language barriers. A visit from a therapy dog with people in medical and nursing care settings can be less lonely, less depressed, reduced stress and can actually feel better after a therapy dog visit.

With Miss Dolly and me during our very first visit with a therapy dog – chaplain team, we experienced a lot of joy and fulfillment from the visit. Our first “official” visit as a therapy team, we visited a nursing facility where we interacted with about 35 or more residents in a large activity room. We witnessed a lot of relaxation, smiles, laughter, and very talkative people. The highlight of the visit was witnessing a lady speak for the first time after her stroke. I had no idea she had not spoken in months, when I said to her, “Her name is Miss Dolly (referring to the dog); Can you tell Miss Dolly your name?” Almost immediately she spoke up loud and clear, “Louise.” Those in the group gasped. Many were amazed that Louise could even speak at all. Somehow, she spoke to Miss Dolly loud and clear. I don't know how it happened. I just know she told Miss Dolly her name.

I'm not trying to toot my own horn, but if you want to be an effective chaplain, make a difference in the lives of your firefighters and your community, keep on doing your “ministry of presence” no matter how old you are. Be there, listen and love. Even if you get tired of doing what you do, step back a step. Regain your balance. Rest a little while and hit it again. Just keep on keeping on. It's never too late to start over again. It's not too late to add to or change the avenue of your ministry. If you seem that your ministry has lost its luster, doesn't seem to have the zip it used to have, maybe you need to tweak your chaplaincy a little.

Remember the little metaphor from Dean Jackson I shared a few months ago -about “the cheese and whiskers metaphor” in regards to the time factor in the zip to your chaplaincy. The metaphor has three scenarios. In the first scenario of the metaphor is a cat who wants to get a mouse (a chaplain who wants to get a little zip in his chaplaincy). The cat puts out a piece of cheese and sits right by the cheese with his big whiskers waving in the wind. Plenty of cheese, lots of whiskers, but only a starving mouse will ever take the bait. (The chaplain who pushes the zip into his chaplaincy by hook or crook the chaplain will probably never get a new zip in his chaplaincy).

In the second scenario, the cat puts out the cheese and goes and hides, but keep peeking around the corner to see if the mouse is there. The mouse can spot the whiskers appearing and disappearing; there is plenty of cheese, far few whiskers, and some trigger happy cat can get a mouse every now and then. (The chaplain who passes out tracts and pushes his way into his new avenue of chaplaincy, he gets a few firefighters to follow him) but he never regains that zip in his/her chaplaincy.

In the third scenario, finally, the cat puts out the cheese with whiskers nowhere in sight. The mouse wants the cheese; the mouse likes the cheese; the mouse eats the cheese... and lives to see another day. The cat doesn't pounce. The cat doesn't even make an appearance. The mouse has received the cheese. So, what does the cat get out of this? The cat gets the mouse one step

closer to the goal (the chaplain takes the time to develop his new, changed, or tweaked chaplaincy) while he keeps doing the menial tasks, cooking meals for the firefighters, demonstrating his caring service in the midst of critical incidents, being there, listening and loving firefighters and their families, caring for crisis victims, stop by the nursing homes and share your time with them, along with your dog. And, in time they will open up to him/her and start sharing their own deepest spiritual and emotional needs (that's the chaplain's goal). His goal is to serve them in a deep and meaningful way, not on a surface level but to serve the inner man of their lives.

By being a representative of God through sharing His love by example, many will come to know God as you know Him through that example (you). That's witnessing. To witness by example, and only when we have use words. If you feel that you're getting too old, forget it. It's not too late to revitalize your chaplaincy, you might just need to tweak it a little bit that makes it a more valuable asset to those we are seeking to serve.

As you are revitalizing a fruitful chaplaincy; getting a little more zip to your chaplaincy, just keep being a trusted advisor, to do this you probably want to use the third scenario in this metaphor. You want the mouse to want the "no-risk" cheese. The mouse takes the cheese because the mouse is abiding by its own self-interest, provided by no risks. The mouse comes again and again to the place of the cheese with no risk of being pounced on. The chaplain should never have an ulterior motive for serving firefighters, their families or those in the community. The chaplain's goal should never be to seek a platform for evangelism, never to grow his/her congregation, never to find a preaching platform or winning others to his own religious views. Those things are always to be only a benefit of the goal of the chaplaincy – serving others.

The metaphor actually breaks down in that the cat's goal is not to catch the mouse. The cat simply wants to be of service to the mouse (to people who needs him/her). But the metaphor can help the chaplain build an attraction, build a relationship with the firefighters, patients in hospitals, residents in nursing homes, etc. to just simply be the cheese with no whiskers.

In other words, the chaplain is not there to catch them, not to corner them, not to coerce them, not to pin them down with a big furry paw and watch them squirm, you are there to be there, listen and love them. That is the motive that Miss Dolly and I wanted to develop in our therapy dog team. Miss Dolly never ever has any ulterior motive except to love people. That's the way to be a truly effective chaplaincy. Just love people, and it's never too late to do that.



Sage wisdom from the ole farmer

*Have you ever listened to
some folks for a minute
and thought their
cornbread ain't
done in the
middle?*



I've done several articles from the sage wisdom of the ole farmer. Some of the wisest things I've ever heard did not come from highly educated professors or an acclaimed statesman or a prize-winning author. Some of the wisest things I've ever heard was from common sense farmers, loggers, saw mill hands, country store owners, and other simple people who had lived life in the *real* world; things that said, "*It don't take a very big person to carry a grudge*"; "*Always drink upstream from the herd*"; "*The biggest troublemaker you'll probably ever have to deal with is the one you watch from your mirror every morning*"; and "*Meanness don't jes' happen overnight.*"

This one is one of the best ones I've ever seen: "***Have you ever listened to some folks for a minute and thought their cornbread ain't done in the middle.***" This one has helped me limp along in my "called" profession for some fifty plus years. Remembering this has helped me keep my sanity when I ran across some of those folks and had to deal with them.

Now I want you to know that I am not a psychology scholar. I'm just a student of human psychology. I only had several classes in psychology. I had a couple of classes in psychological counseling, one in the philosophy of psychology and a couple of others, about 4 or 5 classes in all. In those classes I learned a little about normal human behavior, abnormal human behavior [everyone seems to be normal until you get to know them], some of the psychological problems in the church, the basics of psychological counseling, how human behavior is influenced with drug

addiction, alcoholism, about some other deviate behaviors [which are now just normal human behavior] and how human behavior is influenced by the traits you were born with [heredity], and what happens to you as you go through the real world of life [environment], how through counseling we can sometimes work on resolving some of the problems we have developed in life. And, I studied about types of crises, response to crisis, conflict resolution and stuff like that. So I'm not much of a psychology guru, I just dabble in it a little bit.

My training for the ministry while studying theology and psychology added a little bit more to my understanding of human behavior and the fact that a person's religion or world view is at best only incomplete and that very often we are unaware of how we actually view the world. I am most grateful for the little bit of enlightenment I received in my academic career, but the academic world is not a very reliable axiom as we trek along the hills and valleys of the *real* world.

However, we live in a *real* world. To make it to some degree in this real world it is necessary to come to understand the *reality* of the world as best we can. Coming to this understanding doesn't come easy. It can often be painful; through great effort and suffering. As a child [because my mother loved and encouraged me to a larger degree than need be] I thought *everyone* loved me. I thought I could do anything I ever *wanted* to do. I thought the American dream was at *my* door.

However, it was not long when I realized that not everyone loved me and that I could not do everything I wanted to do. I finally realized that I needed to understand to a greater or lesser degree that we will not be able to avoid effort and suffering in this *real* world; that there would be some obstacles, roadblocks, and steep hills to be climbed. We have to face up to the real world, sooner or later and there are some hills we can never climb. In the real world we relate to other people, and some of them are trying to stop our dreams from coming true; throwing us off track toward our dreams; it is an effort and brings about more than a little suffering in dealing with normal and abnormal people as go through life in this *real* world.

Spending most of my adult years relating to people, I have learned most about the real world by interacting with common people – the farmers, laborers, craftsmen, public servants, teachers, etc.- all kinds of people. People with varied personality types and temperaments; people of good and bad character traits. I have interacted with some of the kindest, most pleasant, unselfish, loving, sacrificing and caring

people in the world, and I've interacted with some of the most unkind, unpleasant, clearly hateful, selfish and vindictive people in the world.

And, I imagine you have some of both kinds in your church and in your fire department, as well. You have some people in your group who would give their shirt off their backs for one who needs a shirt. I know you have some who are the most jovial, happy go-lucky, caring and loving people who would do anything they could do to make you feel good. There are some people in your group that seem just to live for others, they are fixers, givers, encouragers, and make every other person in the group to be encouraged and feel good about themselves. What a joy to work with such people. These are people in the real world; people who have found their purpose for living. These people have their cornbread done on the outside and in the middle. These people are a real joy to be around.

I've spent many years in the pastorate, a public safety chaplain with law enforcement, fire and EMS and with other chaplains. God has blessed me to have developed some great relationships with some of the most intimate and overwhelmingly joyful people in those congregations, and public safety personnel. I have been helped to renew and rebuild my relationship with God, and to become a better person by the love, support and friendship of those people. I am most grateful for all the people who have positively influenced me in my life.

On the other hand, I have interacted with some people whose cornbread just ain't done in the middle. They seem to have been born in an ugly mood and are getting uglier by the day; people who just seem to live to bring my spirits down in any way they can. It seems that no matter what I'd say or do, they had to disagree with me and tend to put "me in your place." It was like their calling from God was to tear me down any way they could.

In every church I pastored I had some of those people who were there to keep the pastor straight. Some who challenged every scripture I used and pointed out that my interpretation is all wrong. Some thought that in God's eyes the pastor MUST have a tie on in the pulpit or coat on, or the pastor's hair must be combed in a certain way or a pastor shouldn't wear his hair that long, and on and on. You can only imagine the complaints I've had over the years just because their cornbread was not done in the middle. These people have a religious addiction.¹³ Religious addicts give others no choice, no room for differing opinions or beliefs with them.

¹³ Jim Burns, Religious Addiction and Abuse (send me an email and ask for an attachment to this paper)

These people live by dogmatic statements, black-and-white thinking in their belief systems and they believe that you must see it their way or no way.

Those people tend to live in a religious fantasy that all members of the family love one another and are always happy [as long as they all behave according to their ideas and beliefs]. That's not possible in the real world. People are different.

Jesus didn't have much difficulty in his earthly ministry from the rank and file sinners in the world; rather it was the religious leaders that literally tormented him. It's the religious addicts in your church that will torment you. It will be those who have a calling to make you cross the *Ts* and dot the *Is*.

I don't care if you are Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Jewish, or a part of any other religious group, you'll have some religious addicts whose cornbread is just not done in the middle and they'll try to keep you on your knees.

In reality, basically *religions* are a set of man-made principles about God developed by a teacher, prophet or pastor. I'm here to tell you I believe in God, the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but I detest religion. I don't believe in religion Religions do not bring people together, they divide them into man-made camps of beliefs and principles.

And, sometimes those who detest each other will come together to pounce on you to tear you to pieces. "Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an *expert* in the law, tested him [Jesus] with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."'¹⁴

Always remember, some folk's cornbread just isn't done in the middle. They never intend to help you. All they want is to usurp your authority [to undermine, seize and hold your position, office or power] and bring you down. Don't waste your time on them except to pray for them. Their goal is the love of power, and they don't care much about the power of love. Just Love God with all your heart, soul

¹⁴ Matthew 22:34-40

and mind; love your neighbor, and pray for them.
JB 062617

...about Sharing your Dash**35**

To ramble is to wander around in an aimless manner; to take a course with many turns or windings in a random, unsystematic fashion, to write in an aimless way, straying from one subject to another merely for pleasure.

Well, I just got another one of those ramblings. I recently received a Thank You card from a friend. On the wording of the card started me thinking (some of you are saying, oh, no he's thinking again). The words on the card were: *"In life, there are many paths you can take and many people who share the journey... but it's the special people who help you along the way, and it's the most important people who care enough to give of themselves unconditionally."*¹⁵

As I thought about those words, I thought about life itself. In life, there are many paths you can take. On those paths, there are others who will share in the journey with you. My rambling thoughts were that it's not just you on the journey, it's about those who share the journey with you, good or bad. My life matters. Your life matters. You and I can lead others toward the path of great wisdom or we can lead others toward calamity, disgrace and even death.

I thought about the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs are mostly ramblings of Solomon. Proverbs are short, pithy, axiomatic sayings; ramblings that are wholly disconnected sayings of practical ethics, to promote wisdom, instructions, understanding, right living, sound counsel, justice, equity, prudence, knowledge, discretion, the fear of God, the avoidance of bad companions, how to bring up a child, avoidance of laziness, importance of industriousness, morality, chastity, and self-control – a guide for living. Proverbs is said to be one of the best guidebooks to success a young person can follow. I believe it is the best guidebook for adult persons as well, even for older persons like me, too! In the prologue of Proverbs it gives its purpose: "...for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young..."¹⁶

As a young man Solomon was consumed with a passion for knowledge and wisdom.¹⁷ Solomon's intellectual attainments were the *wonder* of the age. We still use the axiom "the wisdom of Solomon" as a one of the best ideas around. Following the guidebook from "the wisdom of Solomon" can make a real difference in one's life.

Have you ever noticed a – (dash) between two dates on a tomb stone? That dash is between the person's birth and the person's death. *The dash is one's life.* Think about that for a minute. You may live only one year or a hundred years, when you're gone, on your tomb stone your life is only a dash. That dash represents all you have done and all you've been in your life. Sobering thought isn't it. The only really important things in life are touching the lives of others; sharing

¹⁵ A Thank You card given by Donna Wilson after her aunt's funeral. American Greetings, Cleveland OH

¹⁶ Proverbs 1:2-4

¹⁷ 1 Kings 3:9-12

God's love with those around you. All who walk by your tomb stone, all they see of your life is a dash, except those whom your life has been touched. It is only the lives you have touched will remember anything about you except a dash. Think about that. Reach out and touch someone who needs a smile, a hug, a word of encouragement, a helping hand, or a prayer. Give a listening ear to one who is struggling physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. Take a moment to acknowledge someone who feels lonely; when a friend is sad; when a neighbor is sick; when a lonely elderly person needs a friend; one whose heart is aching from a wayward child. Take a minute to listen to them, to hold their hand, to give them a hug; when an elderly man is struggling to get his trash to the curb, take a minute to wash away his problem by putting his trash on the curb for him; take a moment to hold the door for a woman who is struggling with a toddler, a diaper bag and a sack of groceries (not a big thing, but for the woman it's a big deal).

Your life can be more than just a dash. Cook a casserole for a grieving friend; walk a dog for a shut-in; smile at a stranger (could be the only smile he's had in days, weeks or months); talk to a person on an elevator. These are simple things but they can greatly lengthen your dash. The simple things Jesus did are the things He is remembered for during his earthly ministry. No matter if our names are never plastered on billboards, if we never win a Nobel Prize or never get our name on the front page of a newspaper, our simple acts of kindness never goes unnoticed by our Creator, Lord and King. Even a cup of cold water doesn't go unnoticed by the Father. My friend, you can do more than a dash in life. You can make a difference. AND, God will reward you for it. I have that on good authority from the Man.¹⁸

Fact of the matter is, it's never too late to add something to your dash. Recently I turned 77 years of age on June 4, 2017. On June 2 [two days before my 77th birthday], I debuted a new adventure¹⁹ to my chaplaincy to people. Miss Dolly, my family pet, and I became a Therapy Dog – Chaplain Team to give cups of cold water to people who are struggling in life – we visit hospitals, senior citizen homes, hospice care, funeral homes, and disasters to bring some degree of comfort and companionship to people. As it has turned out, it is an exciting and remarkable experience for us. Bringing just a smile, a few minutes of sharing love with an animal is a great dash for Miss Dolly and me. It is amazing that Miss Dolly seems to have a “calling” for this. She loves people and she loves the opportunity to share that love with them. What a dash!

Finally, friend, someone is looking at your life. Someone is going to share your journey. The thing is you don't always know who is following your example. I heard a story about an old man who proclaimed to be an atheist. He loved to torment pastors. He was well versed in the Scriptures and he loved to get the better of pastors. The old man had his granddaughter who was the apple of his eye visiting him one day when a pastor came by. After the old man had whipped up on the preacher so much that the preacher tucked his tail and ran, the old man's granddaughter jumped up on his lap and said, “Papaw, we don't believe in God and we don't care if we go to

¹⁸ Matthew 10:42

¹⁹ Adventure is defined in several ways: as an undertaking involving a great risk; an exciting or remarkable experience.

hell do we?" To make a long story short, the old man called the preacher back and professed his faith in God.

Think about it. Who will follow your example? Who will share your journey? Who will succeed or fail because they have shared your journey?

While you travel on your journey, will you leave crumbs along the way toward wisdom, success and heaven or calamity, death and hell? I challenge you to read the Book of Proverbs at least once every year, let some of that wisdom sink into your heart, and follow the outstanding wisdom there.

Have an awesome dash [adventure] and leave some positive crumbs along the way.

JB 070417

...about on changes

I've heard it say from my youth that "you can't go home." In other words, things don't stay the same. Things change. I believe that is true. Things change for better or worse. In my rambling today is that I have seen a lot of changes in my years for the better. When I was a child growing up in Central Louisiana we didn't have air conditioning. When the heat got too hot for us we used a folded up newspaper or a funeral home fan to stir up the heat. I hear a lot of people say, "I sure wish it was like it used to be." Well, I don't want to live in that far off days with no air conditioning. I'd say, the advent of air conditioning is one of those better changes. I'm thankful for the change from the funeral home fans to the air conditioning.

A few days ago, our air conditioning went on the blink. The squirrel cage hit the fan and it sounded like a train wreck in the air handler unit. A bracket on the motor broke. The repair man tried two different brackets and they lasted for a few days, then a few hours. They had to order another unit to replace it. Thank God it was still under warranty. Anyway, we had to live without air conditioning for the part of several days. We didn't have any funeral home fans either. In those few hours of living without air conditioning, I realized that I didn't want to go back to the "good old days" with no air conditioning. Yep, there are some things change for the better, for sure. Air conditioning for one.

Internet is another one of those changes that has brought a lot of changes. I remember the time when we had to write a letter [put it on a five cent stamp on it and mail it], then wait for the postal system to deliver the letter and wait for the recipient to read the letter and then respond, go through the postal system to deliver the mail to us and then finally we received our message. That was the good old days [a five cent stamp part] when it took weeks to communicate with a friend. Now days, with the internet, we can compose a message [like this rambling] and push a button and send the message throughout the world in a matter of minutes and receive a response within a few days or hours [depending on the time people look at their emails]. This is one of the things that has become better, in a way. The internet now gives us information at a click that we used to have to dig through book after book to get that information. Immediate access of information can be a better change. On the other hand, the internet has become one of the worst inventions known to man. There are more misinformation on the net than a person could imagine. A lot of advances in modern man have a two-edged sword. It can be good or it can be bad according to the person who operates it.

For example, air conditioning is a better change. The internet can be a better change or it can be not so good of a change. The computer, the cell phone, and all the modern technologies of our time can be a good change. I use the computer, I use the internet, I use the cell phone, I use the satellite technology every day of my life, and I am thankful for those devices. On the other hand, I am having some difficulty with a lot of the modern technologies.

For example, we went to a church the other day looking for a wonderful worship experience we had experienced at that church a few years ago. Guess what, things have changed. The church has changed so completely that we hardly even realized the same place. Everything is technologically operated. There are no ushers passing out visitor cards and talking to people, the

pastor says, "If you are visiting, take out your cell phone and text to the number on the screen and we'll send you information about the events of the church." If you'd like to make a contribution, text this number, set up your bank routing number and account number and put in the amount you'd like to give. If you have a prayer request, text this number and ask for a prayer request. On and on it goes. The pastor does a little sermonette on the screen, does a benediction and ask those to come again. What happened to the interaction of people in that church? In deciding to visit that church we remarked to each other, "We'll hear some good music there." Well, we were sorely disappointed. All we heard was jump, wave, dance and shout through the waters [they never said what waters, the Red sea, Jordan River or the creek down the road] with some electronic music and percussion.

Not a single worship hymn did we hear. Not anything remotely inspiring to us that would draw us near to God and make us want to go back to that church. After we walked out to our car [we didn't even stay to the end of the service] my wife said, "It's true, you can't go home." We will probably not go back again. The one thing we did like was they have a good air conditioner. I will give them that, they have a good air conditioner. People are comfortable in doing what they are doing, whatever that is in air conditioned comfort

To be honest and fair to the church, I'm just not into the groove of the day. I'm getting older. I just don't like technological church. I just like "people" church. I like people singing hymns from the heart without all the strobe lights and all that stuff. I like to hear the [real live] preacher talk to the folks in the pews [real live people]. When I was preaching, I liked to see people's faces, I liked to see them respond in their eyes, and I talked with them not at them. Yes, I'm just an old-time preacher that has done his do, and need to shut up about what's going on, or what's not going on in the church today. OK, now let's look at something else.

I'm off my soap box on that subject.

As I said a few weeks ago, Google is a wonderful invention. I wish I had invented it, I'd probably be wealthy today. In another article a few months ago I did a search on Goggle about Character. I was amazed about the posts on Character Traits. I saw "Primary personality Traits," "List of Character Traits," "Character Orientation," "Character Examples" which included things like honest, loyal, devoted, sincere, patient, determination, persistence, respect, integrity, commitment, etc.

With all of this vast storehouse of knowledge about character traits, I'm having difficulty with real character today. Probably just my old thinking, but as I said in my rambling a few weeks ago, my parents instilled in me some basic ideas about character. "If you start something, finish it." "If you tell someone 'you're going to do something, do it.'" "Make your word your bond." "Don't cuss, lie, steal, or run around those who do."

One of my pet peeves [annoyances, irritations] is people who tell me they are going to do something and don't do it. In my calling I have to deal with people every day of my life. Most of the time, I love to work with people. I love people. My life is doing for people. And, when I tell people I will do something, I'll do it with the best of my ability. On the other hand, I have to work with other people to get some of my work done through others. Often times, I have to get a commitment to others to do something for another, and I often learn that that commitment has

not been made. That's my pet peeve. I have given my word as my bond, and the other person has not fulfilled his/her commitment, which leaves me with egg on my face, have broken my word and my bond to the person I made a promise to. Most of those people who break my word are good people, they don't cuss, lie [intentionally], steal or run around with those who do, but they simply don't keep their commitment. That's a character flaw. I have character flaws. We all have character flaws. There are all kinds of circumstance that keep us from making our commitments. At my age, I don't remember like I used to do. I forget sometimes. However, if we can't fulfill our commitments, let the person know that you cannot fulfill the commitment. That's a positive character trait. I learned from my parents and in the fire service that if I was assigned to do a job, I was to do a *sitrep* [a situation report] to the person to whom I had been assigned. The report should include who, what, when and where and how the job was progressing or how the job went. The job is not finished until you give a situation report back. That's just a simple positive character trait.

Character traits - integrity, love, honesty, loyalty, and all of those other 234 positive character traits has to be modeled by someone who has lived it out in practice. That statement is my sum total of philosophical meanderings. Like an old preacher told me when I was a young preacher just starting out seeking advice, "Son, just practice what you preach."

Basically what the old preacher was saying is this type of person does not avoid his/her freedom and responsibility. This type of person most likely comes out of a family that loves, which prefers taking personal responsibility, doing what they say they will do and practices what he/she preaches.

No, you cannot go home. Things change. People change. Air conditioners break down. Internet scams are numerous these days. AND, people do disappoint us and we disappoint others. Sometimes I get peeved. I peeve others. That's the way life is. Do you want something constant? Have your faith in God who NEVER changes. Trust Him. Live for Him. Following His leading from His Word.

Character is who you are and what you do. Do it well and you will receive a great reward in heaven. Otherwise, you can never go home.

JB071017

...about on focusing forward**41**

Sometime ago a good friend, Bob Applegate [who recently been to be the Lord], sent me several pithy little sayings that prompted me to write a number of ramblings. One of those little pithy sayings was: *"So why is a car's windshield so large and the rear view mirror so small?"*

Think about it. One good reason for having a much larger windshield than a small rearview mirror is because it could be that our past is not as important as our future. A rearview mirror is where we came from. It is a time to glance back from where we've been and look ahead and move on. The windshield is where we are to focus on to where we are going. If you spend too much time looking back, you'll never get where you are going.

I learned about focusing forward and not focusing on where I've been while plowing a long-eared mule, Ole Lucy, while I was a boy. Actually, Ole Lucy taught me how to plow. Ole Lucy knew where to walk in the row so I could plow the furrow straight. My dad used to say, *"Looking back at the straight row you just plowed will result in a crooked row ahead."* What he was saying was, take a quick glance on where you've been, but keep your eyes focused forward on the row ahead.

In the English dictionary the word *"forward"* is toward, or at a place, point, or time in advance; onward, ahead; directed towards a point in advance; moving ahead; pertaining toward the future; movement in a forward direction. The word *"focus"* is the primary center from which a thing develops; to concentrate; and become focused.

I believe God has a row for us to plow; a purpose for which we have been created and called to do. We are well to look back from which God has brought us from, then turn our focus toward what God has called us to do ahead. Many people get lost in looking back on where they've been and lose their focus toward the future.

In my own life I have some crooked rows in my career because I spent too much time looking back at the things I've done when I should have focused forward and moved on to other places, other ministries, other people sets. It is good for us to be encouraged, to take a look back at some of the differences we've made in other people's lives. It helps us have the courage to do the hard things ahead; looking back at things God has brought us through to some of the rough spots in our lives, gives us new courage. Glance back, but don't stay there.

The Apostle Paul is a great example of one who focused forward in his calling. Paul had many opportunities to stay in a place of safety, a place to settle down and take it easy, but Paul was focused forward. Paul had a vision while at Troas. In that vision Paul saw a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, he got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called him to preach the gospel to Macedonia.²⁰ Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, in Berea, in Athens, in Corinth, in Ephesus, and other places. Paul had many trials, hardships, arrested and thrown in prison, but Paul kept his focus forward pressing toward the goal toward which Christ

²⁰ Acts 16:8-10

Jesus had took hold of him. Paul said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."²¹ Paul had a lot of things to look back on. I was circumcised of the people of Israel, a tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; a Pharisee. He had great heritage.

Some people run their lives only on their heritage; the old money; the old name, but never really live life on their own. Paul had a lot of past accomplishments; a great heritage, a great name. Paul is saying, I'm taking a glance at all of those things, but I must press onward. "Forgetting what is behind and straining [focusing toward] what is ahead, I press on toward the goal [the big objective] to win the prize of which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."²²

Dr. David J. Schwartz, who has helped millions of people improve their lives with his book, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, says, "*Keep your eyes focused on the big objective.*"²³ Schwartz says that many times we're like a salesman, who failing to make the sale, reports to his superior, "Yes, but I sure convinced that customer he was wrong." In selling, the big objective is winning sales, not making arguments.

Tom Peters says, "The number one managerial productivity problem in America is, quite simply, managers who are out of touch with their people and out of touch with their customers."²⁴ In working with employees, firefighters, and fire officers, the big objective is developing their full potential, not making issues out of minor errors. The big objective of leadership is getting people to do things willingly to their *full* potential. To do that, leadership must be in touch all the way down the line.

In a marriage the big objective is peace, happiness, and tranquility, not winning the little arguments that most married couples have from time to time in a marriage. Every couple have some quarrels, some spats, some big disagreements from time to time, but don't lose the war by winning some battles. Every marriage is wise to tolerate and even encourage some degree of conflict, disagreements and combat from time to time but keep your eyes focused on the big objective. Don't spend time pole vaulting over insignificant mouse droppings. Keep your marriage focused forward peace, happiness and tranquility. Be there, listen and love those in your family.

In living with neighbors, the big objective is mutual respect and friendship, not seeing if I can get the neighbor's dog impounded because once in a while he barks at night. I witnessed the potential of an entire community torn to bits when two people had a simple misunderstanding. Two men were gunning for each other until someone who had the guts to confront each of them and brought them together to talk it out instead of shooting each other. Both men had loaded

²¹ Philippians 3:12

²² *ibid*

²³ David J. Schwartz, PhD, *The Magic of Thinking Big*

²⁴ Tom Peters from Paul Malone, III book, *Love 'em and Lead em*

guns and were both willing to kill the other. With one person who had a relationship with both of those men, stood between them and allowed them to talk it out. It resulted in both men shaking hands and became good citizens, mutual friends and respect for many years after that. The big objective was mutual respect while talking out the difficulty [which turned out to be nothing of significance, but could have brought about the death of one or both, two families and an entire community brought to grief.

You have to focus forward to the big objective. Don't spend too much time looking back. If you're going to spend time day dreaming, stretch your vision forward. Dream about what can be, not just what is or what has been. Dr. Schwartz says, "Think above trivial things. Focus your attention on big objectives."²⁵ Dr. Schwartz also says, "Eliminate the word impossible from your thinking and speaking from your vocabularies."

Focus forward on the big objective. Don't get bogged down in problems; focus forward to the solution. Albert Einstein once said, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." Einstein focused forward and worked through the solutions to the big objective. Einstein was an experimental person; not the smartest person in the world, but he was a sponge.

David Schwartz tells about a friend of his who said, "I'm not the smartest man in my business, but I'm the best sponge in the industry. I make it a point to soak up all the good ideas I can."

Successful people - salespersons, managers, technicians, line-workers, floor-sweepers, chaplains – live with this question, "How can I improve the quality of my performance? How can I do my job better? Absolute perfection in all human undertakings is unattainable. No matter who you are and what you do, there is endless room for improvement.

If you want to be a trusted chaplain, make a difference in the lives of your firefighters and your community, focus forward to the big objective. Focus on bettering your best, improving the quality of your service. The "ministry of presence" is the way to get there. Be there, listen and love, and in time, you will make a real difference in your firefighters, their families and your community. And in time, your chaplaincy will begin to be fruitful, and your ministry will multiply. And, in time (I don't know what that time will take) you will probably be looked at as one of those walk-on-the-water chaplains, kind of a hero and perhaps even a legend in time.

As you are building a fruitful chaplaincy, be a trusted advisor, you will focus forward to making a difference in people's lives. Truly make a difference. The chaplain should never have an ulterior motive for serving firefighters and their families. The chaplain's goal should never be to seek a platform for evangelism, never to grow his/her congregation, never to find a preaching platform or winning others to his own religious views.

The goal of the chaplaincy – the big objective is serving others. "*Service is the lifeblood of any*

²⁵ David J. Schwartz, PhD, *The Magic of Thinking Big*

organization [chaplancy]. Everything flows from it, and is nourished by it. Customer service is not a department. It's an attitude."²⁶

As the chaplain focuses forward to the big objective can help build an attraction, build relationships with the firefighters to just simply being there, listening and loving. In other words, the chaplain is not there to religionize them, not to corner them into his/her religious group, not to coerce them, not to pin them down with a hard-hitting sermon and watch them squirm, you are to be there, listen and love them. And, ladies and gentlemen, that kind of relationships, that kind of make-a-difference chaplancy, takes time.

What you really want to do is keep focused, focus forward, keep your eyes focused on the big objective and walk out the objective, one step at a time, one day at a time. It is hard work, takes great patience, there is no EZ button for this one.

We all have times when you just want to toss up your hands in frustration and give up. We really do believe Mama was right. "Mama said there'd be days like this," but we just batten the hatches, refocus your big objective forward and keep on walking out the big objective. Keep focused on the windshield, while just glancing at the rearview mirror occasionally.

Keep God first. Stay focused. Be patient. Walk out the big objective. Take *whatever time it takes* to become that "walk-on-the-water" chaplain you would really like to be.

JB 072717

²⁶ Mac Anderson, The Essence of Leadership

...about on Character Building**45**

A few months ago, in March of 2017, I did a rambling on character. I talked about how my parents instilled in me my own core values in my life. In that rambling, I said that character is not something money can't buy. Morals, respect, common sense, patience, trust, integrity, love, honesty and all those positive character traits has to be modeled by someone who has lived out the principles in their own lives.

Character building – useful traits like self-reliance, endurance, courage, integrity, ethical and moral strength, values and sets of principles and guidelines are caught more than taught. Our personal beliefs, core values, and opinions are at the center core of our lives.

David, writing in Proverbs, encourages young people to acquire a disciplined and prudent life, get guidance, learn from the wise, accept and store up in your hearts the Word of God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; get wisdom and understanding and hold fast to them.²⁷

The center core of building character is the core principles of God's Word. Stephen R. Covey in his book, Principle – Centered Leadership, talks about that center core. He calls it the Life Center principles. Covey says that “Whatever lies at the center of our lives becomes the primary source of our life-support system. In large measure that system is represented by four fundamental dimensions: security, guidance, wisdom and power.”²⁸

Covey says if we focus on the alternative centers – work, pleasure, friends, enemies, spouse, family, self, church, possessions, money, and others we weaken our life center. For example, if we focus on the social mirror, social media, actors, athletes, politicians, and other heroes we empower the circumstances and opinions of others to guide and control us. In other words, we become slaves to those to whom we focus on. When we focus our lives on the correct principles, we become more balanced, unified, and anchored.

David says, wisdom and knowledge is important, and says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”²⁹ The center core of our character building should be on the foundation of God's Word. David says ‘listen to my instruction and be wise.’

All the things that David and Covey describes are valuable to us in building character. Security is important. Our self-worth, our identity, self-esteem, and inner strength are important in building a self. Guidance is important. Guidance is important in the direction we receive in life, our parents, our teachers, our mentors. Wisdom is important. Sage perspective on life, a sense of balance, a keen understanding of how various parts and principles apply and relate to others is

²⁷ Proverbs in the purpose and theme of the book (chapters 1 – 4)

²⁸ Stephen R. Covey, Principle-Centered Leadership, p 21

²⁹ Proverbs 9:10

important. Power is important. Power is the capacity to act, the strength and courage to accomplish anything is important.

Just a few days ago I witnessed a character building project of the Trinity United Methodist Church in Ruston.

The youth of the church spent a weekend out in the community [Weekend of the Cross] serving people who needed help. The kids did all kinds of services - painting, weeding, repairs, building decks, etc.

My sister-in-law [a quadriplegic] received a recipient of their services. They tore out an old dilapidated, rickety deck, cleaned up the area and built a brand new deck. What I saw was a group of dedicated men and women doing character building with a group of committed and dedicated youth. The kids did all the dirty work [and it was dirty work, and hot to boot]. Under the guidance and instruction of caring Christian mentors those young people built a professional-looking deck for a grateful person who desperately needed it.

I saw some of the useful traits of character being built during that weekend— self-reliance, endurance, courage, integrity under the guidance and wisdom of their youth leaders. Some of the things I witnessed during that weekend was security, self-worth, self-esteem, wisdom and power and the awesome power of sharing with another person who needed their help. Of course, not everything turned out completely as planned. Something like this never does. For example, they were two boards short and had to go get more boards. However, the mentors made sure that the kids understood the plan, each part of the plan in detail and they were there to provide guidance step by step in the process. On the other hand, the leaders allowed the kids to do every part of the task and made sure they were accountable. The leaders gave helpful praise and helpful criticism. I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to stand back and watch such a character-building project. Thank you, Trinity United Methodist Church, Ruston, Louisiana for such an insightful project which has done every year for over twenty years. Thanks to the church, the youth leaders, and the youth for allowing me to witness such a great character-building project.

I hear a lot about how kids today are going down the drain; that kids today can only do one thing, punch on cell phones and text [and I've even said it too]. In my observation of that weekend project, I witnessed something of a character-building project. I began to believe that the problem is not with the kids; the problem is that we adults are not giving them enough opportunities to build character through projects like the Weekend of the Cross and others. Kids are just little adults. Kids need to be given guidance, to be cared for, to be loved, to be modeled, be encouraged and be accountable.

David, in Proverbs, was right on!

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See below a couple of pictures of the kids working on the project and a picture of the lady who received the benefits from their labors.



Picture at the beginning of the project completed



Smiles from the crew after the project



A character-building project from a grateful smile of someone who appreciated so much what the kids did for her.

...about on my Practical Philosophy of Ministry

48

I read one time that an engineer needs only two things in his tool belt: WD-40 and Duct tape. If an engineer or a mechanic needs those two things he could do his job well. If he wants to move it and it don't move, put WD-40 on it. If he doesn't want it to move and it moves, he puts duct tape on it. The moral of the story is: Don't complicate things, just do what's needed.

In fire academy I learned an important lesson while climbing ladders. One exercise was to climb a 35 foot ground ladder carrying a roof ladder, then extending the roof ladder to the top of the house and climb it to the top, then take the roof ladder back down and then carry it to the ground while un-climbing the ground ladder and set your feet on solid ground. The moral of this story is: No matter how high you climb, you still have to un-climb the ladder and plant your feet on solid ground.

I wanted to climb the theological/ministerial ladder as far as I could climb. I climbed the basic ladder (B.B.S.); then I climbed a master of Bible ladder (M.B.S.); I then climbed another theological ladder (Th.M.); then carried the roof ministry ladder (D.Min.) and finally climbed on top of the roof ministry ladder (Ph.D.). Wow! I had climbed the ladder to the top. Only thing is I now had to un-climb the ladders and get my feet solid on the ground. In all that climbing and un-climbing I learned three basic lessons in practical pastoral ministries that have made me a fairly effective pastor and chaplain for all those fifty plus years:

1. Listen and keep your mouth shut until you have something to say;
2. Un-climb those theological / ministerial ladders and relate to people on their level; and
3. Visit Sister Bertha's sick cow.

Listen and keep your mouth shut until you have something to say. The first lesson was in a basic pastoral counseling class. At the beginning of the course the instructor asked the students a question. "What do you want to get from this course?" Of course, most were want-to-be-pastors, and he was bombarded with questions about specifics of certain problems they might encounter. Dr. Corley, very patiently, wrote every question he could get on the board (in those days an instructor used a chalk board and chalk). As soon as he was unable to get one more question on the board, he grabbed an eraser, erased all the questions, threw the eraser against a side wall of the classroom and shouted at us: "You just want me to spoon feed you all the questions, don't you?" "Well, you are going to be very disappointed with this class." He stood there for a few minutes for effect, then he quietly said, "In this class I want to teach you to listen and keep your mouth shut until you have something to say." In looking back on my academic experience, this was one of the best investments of my time and money I have ever invested in.

A lot of called people, are for the most part, have been called to preach (that means talk). As it was with this group of students, we were talkers. Most preachers I know talk, talk, talk and talk some more. I was one of those. I was a talker. I talked, talked and talked some more. I talked about a lot of stuff that I had no idea about. If someone asked me a question, I gave them an answer, often pulling it off the top of my head, with great confidence and authority as a "man 'o

God.” In hindsight, I realize that often times I should have kept my mouth shut until I had something to say, but in my inexperience I said something anyway. Ben Franklin said, “We are all born ignorant but one must work hard to remain stupid.” During those early days in my inexperienced ministry I worked real hard at being stupid, and I succeeded. Stupid I was. Don Corley helped me more than he will ever know about keeping my mouth shut until I have something to say. I wish I could have progressed more in that area. I still open my mouth when I should keep it shut. However, in retrospect, I was a lot better at it after going through Don's class.

To be an effective pastor, one has to work hard at his/her listening skills. Don taught me to listen. Listen. Really listen, not just while the person is talking I am just forming my own response. Actually listening to the other person who is speaking with my brain is in idle about what I'm going to say next. That's hard. Listening is probably the hardest thing you ever will do. To really tell if you're listening, use reflecting listening. Reflect back on what the person is saying. What I hear you saying is... As I understand what you are saying is.... Truly listen. Then make your response to what you understand the person to have said.

Think through something before saying it, or else you might bring upon yourself great regret. I'm not talking academically here, I'm talking to you about my own bought and paid for experience here. Listening well to the other person. Then keep your mouth shut until you have something profitable and positive to say.

Un-climb those theological / ministerial ladders and relate to people on their own levels. Dr. Clarence Woods (in a Systematic Theology class where we were to learn all the essence of theology systematically and learn the names of the theological terms like Eschatology, Thanatology, Christology, Angelology, Demonology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Hamartiology, Homiletics, Apologetics, Anthropology, Hermeneutics, Exegesis, etc.) at the final exam said, “Now, that you've had your exam, you ought to throw all that stuff (all those old theological terms) in the trash can right now. Don't go spouting all those old terms to your people. They don't understand it and they don't want to understand it, so don't try to cram this old stuff down their throats. Talk to the people in terms they can understand and you will relate to them. If you don't, you'll live to regret it.” In other words, un-climb those theological / ministerial ladders and get yourself on solid ground where your people are.

I only realized what Dr. Woods meant when he said, “If you don't, you'll live to regret it” when I met up with a friend at the hospital one time. My friend had recently received his Th.D. and had been called to a large blue-collar church. It was a large church when he came, but the attendance was steadily declining. He, with a very concerned look on his face, told me he couldn't believe what was happening. He asked me his advice. After some time, listening to him and with great concern, I responded to him, “I don't want to hurt your feelings but I heard you speak at a multi-church meeting the other night, and honestly, I would have to had to have a Concordance, a Bible Dictionary and a Bible Atlas to understand what you were talking about and I have a PhD in Ministry myself. My advice was to him, “You need to use terms your people can understand.” He was visibly upset by my observation. I reminded him that my observation was not to be critical of him, but wanted to be helpful to him. I reminded him that Paul says, “He gave some apostles,

some prophets, some evangelist, and some pastors and teachers.”³⁰ I'm not that my visit with my friend was not completely the result, but he finally discovered that he needed to be in another area of ministry rather than a pastorate. And, my friend was a very successful bishop /apostle for the remainder of his ministerial career. He was a great apostle. Not all of us are pastors and teachers.

And, then there is visiting Sister Bertha's sick cow. He gave some pastors and teachers, but we have to grow into our “calling.” You don't just wake up one morning and are equipped and qualified to be a pastor. Being a pastor is a holy calling. It is a high calling. It is a calling close to God's own heart. On a human level, a pastor is part of the best way you can describe God. God is a shepherd of his sheep. The pastor is an under-shepherd of his sheep.

I read a story about a cowboy turned preacher. While working on a cattle ranch in Texas, he felt the call to preach. He preached to the cattle as he rounded up and drove his herd. He knew he could preach. He wanted to be an evangelist, or be a missionary in China, but this little town asked him to be their pastor in Kansas. He had never considered being a pastor. He didn't know how to be a pastor with any stretch of imagination. However, after several others pressed him to be their pastor, he started prayed for God to help him how to be a pastor. He knew he could preach, but he had no clue how to be a pastor. He prayed earnestly for God to give him some sign that he was to be a pastor, and if he is to be one, for God's sakes show me how to be a pastor?.

During his earnest praying and crying out to God, he kept hearing these words in his head, “*Do you love me?*” The preacher out loud, said, “Lord you know I love you.” The words in his head said, “*Feed my sheep.*” He finally found the words in the Bible where Jesus reinstated Peter.³¹ That was it, the preacher thought. The church people are my sheep my lambs. I'll go ask about the health of Mr. Jones' younger child who has been sick. I'll ask about Mrs. Hudson's grandchildren. I'll ask about Mr. Cleve's new pickup truck. I'll ask about Mrs. Jackson's sister-in-law who's sick in Portland. I'll ask about Mrs. Fowler's new baby, I'll ask about Miss Lucy's latest cinnamon buns, I'll go ask about how Mr. Cornwall's new barn is coming along, and I'll go by and visit Sister Bertha's sick cow. Maybe, I'll even lay hands on the cow and pray for her. The preacher heard this same familiar voice in his head again, “*You do love me.*” Now the preacher has begun how to be a pastor. Sister Bertha had spread word all over the community that that preacher is an uncaring, sorry excuse of a pastor because he's never even come by and asked about our sick cow. He just don't even care about Ben and me and our sick cow. Some pastor he is!

You see, the pastor needed to get a new perspective. When the preacher had a cow, his cow was sick, his wife called him during his sermon preparation time and demanded that he go to the store right now and get a quart of milk since I can make some cornbread for your peas at lunch, because our ole cow is sick, the preacher gets a new perspective.

It is important for a pastor to visit Sister Bertha's sick cow. Once he is jarred into reality, the pastor, runs by the store, get the quart of milk, drops it off at his house and heads for Ben and Bertha's.

³⁰ Ephesians 4:11

³¹ John 21:15 ff

He apologizes to Sister Bertha for neglecting her sick cow. He tells Mrs. Bertha and Ben that they know they are worried sick about their cow, and that they know how many things are going on in the pastorate right now or he'd have been there sooner, but that he just had to run by and say a prayer for Bossy.

Guess what happened? After pastor goes down to the barn with Bertha and Ben and lays his hands on Bossy and prays for her, Mrs. Bertha burns up the phone lines telling everyone about how caring and fine pastor we have down at the church. "He actually came by, you know how busy he is, and he laid hands on Bossy and prayed for her. And, her neighbors responded in the same way because they had experienced the same kindness from their pastor showing concern about their children, grandchildren, new barn, new pickup truck, etc.

And, guess what? Over time, that ole cowboy pastor built one of the largest churches in the community because he did three things: He listened; kept his mouth shut until he had something to say; he un-climbed the theological / ministerial ladder and related to the people at their own levels; and he visited Sister Bertha's sick cow.

Of course, above and beyond all of that, the pastor sought God's directions. He really didn't know how to do much, he didn't even know how to ask God about how to be a pastor, but he did the main thing, he asked God, and God answered what he needed to do.

JB

12/30/16

P. S. This is applicable to fire chaplains too! Have a fruitful ministry in 2017.

...about on Whatever It Takes

52

As fire chaplains, we serve firefighters and those whom they serve. Rick Lasky says “Firefighters truly are jacks-of-all-trades, and masters them all.”³² Call a firefighter, present him a problem, and he’ll figure it out.

Whether paid, volunteer, paid-on-call, or any combination thereof, a firefighter is a servant – the cream of the crop in our society. Firefighters are there for people when they *really* need us. That’s who we are. That’s what we do. Firefighters don’t join the fire service for the money. Firefighters are to save lives and protect property. Firefighters are there to *make a difference*.

Firefighters are there to respond to the call. No matter what that call is. No matter the size of the need or the kind of the need. Firefighters are there to do whatever it takes. I just read an article in the *Louisiana Daily Dispatch* that says it all.

A Jefferson Parish credit union employee heard ducklings trapped in a pipe in Kenner’s Veterans Park and called for help. Among those he called was the Kenner Fire Department. The firefighters sized up the situation and set out to do whatever they needed to do to rescue the helpless little ducklings. The firefighters put a little cage into the pipe to catch the ducklings. Then they gently pumped water into the pipe to push the ducklings to the end of the pipe toward the cage. The little ducklings swam toward the current of the water to the cage and were taken out all in good form. All four ducklings were rescued. These firefighters saved four lives that day.

The story didn’t end there. Jefferson Feed Store was consulted about how to best care of the little ones. It was determined that because of their small size and vulnerability, the credit union worker who first heard their cries in the pipe decided he would keep them for two or three weeks and take care of them. Jefferson Feed agreed to provide feed and supplies to the new duckling dad. After the little ducklings grew enough to take care of themselves they were to be returned to the park.

A touching story. These stories can be recounted over and over again. Firefighters are protectors. Firefighters are the most highly trained, challenge tackling, problem solving, and helping people in the world today. I’ve always heard that it take a special person to be a firefighter. That is true. It takes a person who loves to help people, kittens, ducklings, puppies, children, old people, young people, homeless people, wealthy people, religious people, atheist people, and even the person next door.

Rick Lasky also says, “It is a privilege to be a firefighter.”³³ Fighting fires used to be a major part of the work of a firefighter, but is much more than that today. Firefighters are emergency medical technicians, paramedics, hazardous material technicians, dive and swift water rescue persons. Some firefighters become specialized rescue fields like high and low-angle rescues,

³² Rick Lasky, *Pride and Ownership*, p 9

³³ *Ibid* p 42

confined space rescues, trench rescues, collapse rescues, automobile extrication rescues, urban search and rescues, weapons of mass destruction rescues, terrorism rescues and small drain pipe rescue for four little ducklings.

AND, we serve those Knight in not so shining armor. What a privilege we have been called of Almighty God to be the servants of these most gallant knights. Medieval knights were conferred by a sovereign because of personal merit to serve his country. Firefighters are conferred by a fire department organization, a municipality, a parish, a state, or a nation to serve the people (and ducks) of the community they serve.

As fire chaplains we are appointed by our fire chief and endorsed by our church affiliation to be servants to those who serve (Knights in our time) - those brave men and women who live a breath away from death at any given time. They train, they study, they perform drills, practice scenarios, review previous calls to improve, to strive for perfection to save a life, to protect the property of others. They serve others, knowing that their next alarm could be their last alarm. We serve a one-of-a kind courageous, dedicated, sacrificing servant. Thank God! As fire chaplains, we are one-of-a-kind too. We are called, we have answered the call - to do whatever it takes to serve well those who serve.

Brother and sister chaplain, every day of my life I thank God for calling me into this amazing opportunity of service. We are called to serve the "cream of the crop" in our society.

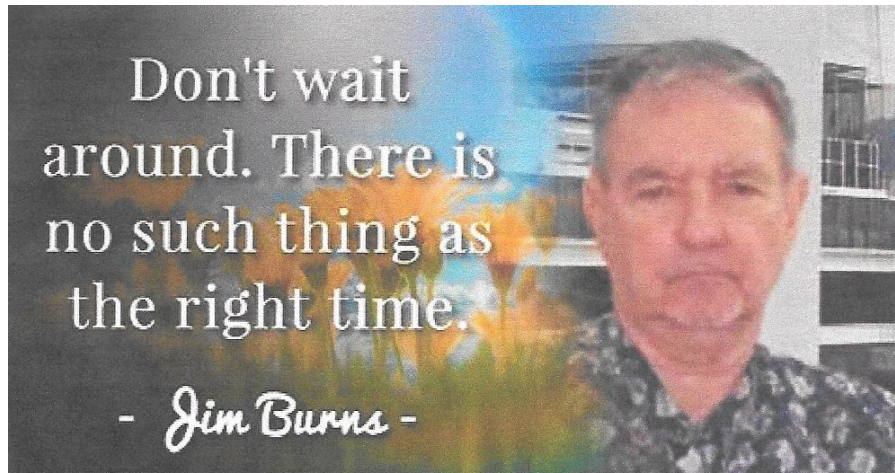
Thank you for answering the call.

JB

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...about on Stepping over the Edge in Faith**54**

I have a file that I call "*Jason's Wisdom*" a journal about life and business. Jason Leister has a way of looking at life and business in a way that most people don't look at. Jason's ideas have jump-started many of my most recent articles about life and the chaplaincy. I am most grateful to Jason for generating my own thinking about my life and my ministry and sharing it with others.



Jason most recently wrote in his journal about "*the edge.*" Most things I have ever done in my life and ministry (that made a real difference) is because I've been pushed to the edge or pushed over the edge of my comfort zone. My motto is: Don't wait around. There is no such thing

as the right time.

Jason said he had spent years building walls around his comfort zone. In retrospect, I too, have done the same thing. It is comfortable in that zone. Like an old blanket, an old shoe, an old hat, an old shirt. You know what I mean. Anytime I seem to be pushed from the center of my comfort zone and pushed out near the edge I got nervous. I start looking for my security blanket, shoe, hat or shirt. My wife will tell you that I wear the same old shoes, the same old shirts, the same old hats, when I have a closet full of other clothes, shoes and a wall full of hats that I could wear. I just like the old comfortable ones.

However, looking back on my life and ministry, I have been to the edge (that boundary line between my reality and my unrealized potential) many times. The truth of the matter, is we can stay away from that line, or we can choose to live on that line or over that line and make a real difference. It is easy to stay within the lines; stay comfortably in our built-up walls of security and become an invisible person; not risking much of anything and getting not much of anything. We can just wear our old shirts, hats, shoes and be a comfortable nothing.

Please don't think I'm talking too much about myself, however, the only thing I know for sure is my own experience. I have kept close to the center of my comfort zone many times, and I've been pushed over the line to the edge a number of times that has made a difference. Again, I'm not bragging, as Paul says, "I will not boast about myself, except about my weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:5b).

Stepping over from the center of that comfort zone and stepping near or onto the edge of the line from outside the comfort zone become risky. You remember the old cliché about getting out on a limb is risky, but the fruit is out on the limb? It is a lot more secure and less risky near the trunk of the tree, but to get the fruit, you have to climb out on a limb. The closer to the fruit the smaller the limb gets and is more likely to break. That's kind of like stepping on the line of the comfort zone, the more likely it is to break and you will tumble to the ground.

On the other hand, you can stay safe near the tree trunk and have no fruit, or you can venture out on the limb, take the risk of falling and take the risk of reaching the fruit. When you go out on the limb and take a risk (you can fall, you can screw up and you can fall short) or you have a chance of getting the fruit. If you stay on the tree trunk (stay safe with no risk) you will never get the fruit.

As chaplains, God has called us to make a difference in people's lives. To do that, we must climb out on the limb, take a risk, make us accountable to ourselves and to the God who has called us, and move out to the edge.

No one ever changes the world or changes an individual's life, or makes a real difference with small and safe steps close to the center of our comfort zones. So many have great potential, but never takes the risk.

I want to share with you a real-life illustration. A few years ago, I shared a vision with a group of five pastors about a community-wide ministry that God had dealt with me about since I was a child in Sunday school.

Several of the pastors thought it was a good idea, most said *you* should do it. However, they had risked nothing. If the project failed, no one was accountable but *me*. I was the one on the spot. I was the one who would have to go out on the limb. I began to look into the costs involved – financial resources, human resources, and all the other parts involved in putting together such an endeavor. I prayed for weeks about it. I tossed and turned night after night. I toyed with shelving the idea and getting on with my comfortable life as a small church pastor. I thought how impossible such an endeavor would be. I talked with people who said how awesome the potential had, and how risky such an endeavor would be.

Finally, it came down to one thing – I had to make a decision. I had to put on new shoes, a new shirt, a new hat, and to go out on a limb or forget about the whole affair. A newspaper publisher got wind of the idea we had been talking about. (You've heard about the question about three frogs sitting on a lily pad. One, decided to jump. Who were left on the lily pad? Three, because making a decision is not jumping.) Anyway the newspaper publisher wanted an interview. Looking back on this, it was one of those "*God's winks*." I was on the spot. I had to put up or shut up. I was over the edge; once that newspaper article was printed, there was no turning back. Thanks for those "God winks" - how God speaks directly to you through the power of coincidence.³⁴ A newspaper publisher was used of God to push me over the edge. Once I was

³⁴ Rushnell describes a "God wink" is similar when a kid sitting at the dinner table and looks up and sees someone winks at him, like a Dad or Mom or Grandpa. You had a nice feeling from that small silent communication. Probably meant: "Hey kid...I'm

pushed over the edge, I had to go out on a limb. I had to buckle up and do what I needed to do, with fear in my throat every step of the way. Courage is not an absent of fear. Courage is doing what needs to be done, even with much fear.

I took the step over the edge in a free-fall with only faith in God. And, God made the impossible possible. However, nothing happened until *I* stepped over the edge in faith. After all my research, I told the other pastors and a few who had joined onboard with us (after reading the newspaper article that we proposed), that it would cost about \$100,000 to start, and we don't have any money. I then said to them, "It is impossible for us to do this, but I believe all things (even this) are possible with God." What were they going to say to that? I told them I had only about \$1,000 in my personal savings account and I was committing all I had to the project. At that, they agreed that we should move ahead. By the end of the meeting we had received cash and commitments to \$10,000 toward the project.

After that meeting, three of us went to a bank with the \$10,000 in cash and commitments and walked out of the bank with a \$40,000 loan and another \$50,000 line of credit toward the project. With the \$10,000 we had and the \$40,000 borrowed, and another \$50,000 line of credit, we started moving toward developing the project.

We sent a follow up article to the newspaper that we had actually started the project, and people began to come onboard almost immediately.

Money started coming in, people began to help at no charge - skilled labor, technicians, dirt workers with their machines, concrete finishers, electricians and office workers. In just a few short months we started a ministry that ran for fifteen years and touched thousands of lives from more than twenty-five countries around the world. One person stepped from the comfort zone over the edge by faith into the unknown and God honored faith and made a difference in thousands of lives. It took one person to step over the edge, and then many followed.

Paul is an example. Saul had one of those "God winks" on the Damascus road where he was blinded. When he met Jesus there, his life was never the same. He went up and down the highways of the Roman Empire preaching Jesus. Paul declared his calling and chose Barnabas to go with him and launched the gospel to the Gentile world. As they preached many others followed. It was not an easy task and there was some division among them; Paul and Barnabas finally parted ways. Paul chose Silas and continued on. They divided and conquered. Paul's ministry last about 35 years and in those persecuted years – beaten, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, driven from city to city, and the thorn in the flesh - he won multitudes in the Gentile world. One man on the edge who was given a "God wink" and followed his calling.

My chaplaincy has been a "stepping over the edge" process, as well. I was happy to be a fire chaplain with a local fire department. I was comfortable there. I was happy there. I enjoyed

thinking about you right this moment and I'm proud of you. Everything is going to be all right. That "God wink" can be a clear message of reassurance that no matter how uncertain your life seems at the moment, He will help move you toward certainty - that coincidence that thrust you over the edge.

being a firefighter/chaplain and a local pastor. Then, I received a call that the Regional Director of the Great Lakes Region (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI) had resigned. I was asked to fill-in for a few weeks until they could get someone. I went out on an edge and said I'd help until they could get someone. Those few weeks turned into several years. From there I was asked to become the Regions Chaplain of the Federation of Fire Chaplains (really felt over my head then, I was a way out of my comfort zone), coordinating the Regional Chaplains from the United States, Canada, South America, Germany, Australia and Namibia in Africa.

After retiring from the FFC I have been allowed to be the Executive Secretary of the Louisiana Fire Chaplains group. What a pleasure to serve those who serve. From one "God wink" to another God has allowed me to be a servant to many of some of the best servants God has ever called. As with Paul, it has had its difficulties and persecutions, but I thank God for those "God winks" and thank Him for pushing me over the edge.

If God is calling you to do something that keeps you on the edge, no matter how small or how large, take a step from the center of your comfort zone and into the edge by faith. Over the edge usually makes you nervous and uncomfortable; you think about the risks, about the possibility of failing, but don't think so much about the risks as a bad thing, start thinking about viewing the real difference that can make with a step of faith. Stepping over the line from the center of the comfort zone to the edge is what real faith feels like.

Take a look at what God is calling you to do, and begin moving closer to the edge. The edge is where life happens. Over the edge make a *real* difference. Watch for that "God wink" and act! Don't wait around. There is no such thing as the right time.

JB 100516

...about on statues

I've tried very hard to stay away for all the controversy over taking down civil war and/or southern statues. I really did try. I even prayed to God to not let me get into this controversy. However, He simply ignored me, or he didn't want to get into this Himself. Anyway, I'm into it, so here goes. Win, lose or draw.

I'm a dyed-in-the-wool southerner. I even have a license plate on my truck that says "American by birth, Southerner by the Grace of God." I love my southern heritage. I love my Rebel flag. I think we should have a right to keep our southern heritage and fly our Rebel flag. It's part of who we are. I love Robert E. Lee and Jackson too. I love all the statues in New Orleans that make New Orleans, New Orleans. I have some real deep feelings about losing my heritage to others who don't like us, but I really wish we could just shut up about statues and love each other; Yankees or rebels, blacks or whites, Catholics or Protestants, Christian or Jews, conservatives or liberals, Democrats or Republicans, or none of the above. Just love all of God's children.

According to my understanding [and I know that I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer] is that a statue is a three-dimensional work of art, as a representative of a person or animal or an abstract form of some kind. Statues just stand there in the place where they formed and placed. Statues have no power to hate or to love, they just stand there. Statues are just statues. They are neutral. Statues do not and cannot incite riots. Statues cannot disrupt peace and harmony among people. Statues cannot start wars and bring about killings. The problem is not the statues.

The problem is with people. The problems of all the unrest, riots, and killings is the people who have their minds warped with some ideology, doctrine, myth, or a social movement, institution, or a large group that is a splinter-group of a divisive segment of a society. Therein lies the problems of all the unrest today. People. We are the problems or the solution to the problems. We the people.

I wish people - politicians, governments, etc. would not bow to the pressure of these ideological groups to do their bidding. Every time you give in to one of these groups, you incite wrath to another group and unrest, riots and killing just keep going around and around like a merry-go-round.

The Bible tells us that we are to love one another [black, white, yellow, green or purple]. Some of my best friends in the world are black and I am white. It doesn't matter about the color, it matters about what's in the heart of the person. One of my black friends tells people that we are brothers from another mother. That's the way I look at it. I am a conservative politically and religiously, but I have some of the best friends [people who would go to the ends of the world when I am in need and they've proved it, and I've done the same for them] but they are liberal to the core politically and religiously, but they love me and I love them. We recognize that we are both children of God and are therefore brothers and sisters. The Lord didn't say love your neighbor who has your own color or has your own political views or believes what you believe

religiously, He says love your neighbor as yourself, period.³⁵ Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you."³⁶ And, Jesus certainly loved a bunch of off-the-wall kinds of people, warts and all. I've spend the better part of my life loving people who are unlovable, people not like me at all, but have built some of the most fruitful and lasting relationships that I now cherish as some of my best assets in life.

Let's stop using that racist chip, that liberal chip, that conservative chip, that Catholic chip, that Protestant chip, that Christian chip, that Jewish chip, that atheist chip. If America is to become great again, we've got to learn to love each other. Plain and simple. I've learned a lot about relationships from my dog, Miss Dolly. Miss Dolly is not a fighter, she is a lover. When we move to this new neighborhood there was a dog who came into our yard wanting to fight. Miss Dolly said, "Let's don't fight; let's play." Dolly refused to fight and in time those dogs became good friends. I have discovered this in human relationships many times over in my lifetime.

You can take down every statue in the world, and it's not going to change the world. The only thing that will ever change the world is people in the world accepting each other. There will never be a unified world.

It never has and never will because people are different. Hey, I want to tell you something that you probably don't want to hear. You can't change people. I can't change you, and you can't change me. We have our own views about everything form shoe laces to the space program. It's going to happen that some people will not accept your views, no matter what you do. Some people will never like you. No matter what you do, they'll never like you. You can throw away all your statues, your pictures from your walls, change your clothes from what you like to what they like, they'll never like you. It's going to happen. The only thing you can do is to accept them as a person who was created in the image of God. That's a whole other story, but you have the power to accept them as they are. That's all you can do.

So, why take down the statues? All you can do is change a view of history. History is history. You can't re-make history, history is the record of what has already happened. Erasing a view of history does nothing to change the past, present or the future.

Even though there will be people who will never like you and you may never like them, but you can *love* them.

The Bible didn't say to like them, but it says we are to *love* them. Period.

Have a nice day and don't worry about trying to change history. It's already happened. We can never change history, no matter how we try.

JB081917

³⁵ Matthew 19:19

³⁶ John15:12

...about on a Chaplain's Confidence is in God**60**

I want to share a little saying my friend Bob Applegate gave me a few days ago. "All things in life are temporary. If it's going well, enjoy it, that won't last long. If it's going badly, don't worry, that won't last long either." Being a confident emergency services chaplain comes and goes as well. If you feel confident, enjoy it right now because that won't last long. If you feel really inadequate for the job, don't worry, that won't last long either.

I'm reminded of what Jason Leister said about his confidence. Jason said, "I wasn't really a confident kid. At least not on the inside." That reminds of me for most of my life. Sure, I have done things that scared me to death (like preaching in front of a lot of people, or walking onto a multiple casualty incident scene with people crying, screaming, injured and dead all over the place, or doing a death notification), but over time I got in the habit of doing those things anyway.

Preaching in front of people was a normal part of my life for 25+ years of my life, and walking onto critical incident scenes was a normal part of my life for some 35 years of my life. I may have looked like the epitome of confidence on the outside, but on the inside, it was a different matter. After all those years of preaching from the platform, I still got nervous before I came to the pulpit. And after all those years of working with more incidents than I want to remember, I still get a pit in my stomach when I walk onto a scene with hurting, dying and deceased people. I have trusted God through all of those experiences, but I still prayed for the fear to be removed from my life and give me relief to do the job I've been called to do without fear, but He did not take away the fear, so I stopped asking him.

Jason says, "Confidence doesn't come from achievement, it doesn't come from experience, it doesn't come from knowing you are better than someone else." I can attest to that in my own life and ministry. Training is important, experience is valuable, but confidence comes from who you are and whose you are. It comes from a strong sense of "calling." Your confidence to do this ministry comes from the ability to do what you are able to do to bring some degree of comfort in a very difficult situation and leave the rest to God.

Remember, when Paul had what he called in the "thorn of the flesh," he begged God to remove it from him and God said, "No way Paul." The scripture does not tell us what that "thorn" was, but it could have been his feeling of a lack of confidence. At least, most of those of us have been called of God to serve him by serving others, sometimes feel a lack of confidence to do the job we have been called to do. Paul knew he was pretty good at what he did. He says he could have boasted about it - the visions and revelations from the Lord, even caught up in paradise, but he says he will not boast about himself because he knew it was only temporary. He knew God had given him a blessing in disguise, "a thorn in the flesh", and a messenger of Satan, to torment him. Was that blessing in disguise his confidence? I don't know, but it very well could have been. God told Paul that "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect (confidence) in weakness* (in your inadequacy) (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

It seems that Paul finally realized that it didn't mean much about his confidence in himself, but in his confidence in the One who had sent him. God reminded Paul, as He needs to remind us

over and over again, that His grace is sufficient and His power is adequate in our inadequacy and weakness.

It has taken me a lifetime to realize that all things (in this world) is temporary, so if I feel confident and adequate, I just enjoy the moment, because it won't last long. And, when I come across those horrific incidents that turns me every way but loose on the insides, I don't worry, because God's grace is sufficient for the moment, and this won't last either.

So, use all the training you have received, all the experience you have gained and simply trust in the amazing grace of God to walk you through the moment, even if you are scared to death on the inside that you are not adequate for the task. God's grace is sufficient and His power will work through your own weakness and God will get the glory for it.

Thank you for being there, listening and loving those in crisis, whether you feel confident or not. God will see you through each moment.

JB 080416

...about Distortions of the Truth

In my 76 years I have never seen so much distortion of truth as of today. When I was a young man it seemed that businesses were honest with their customers; businesses advertised their wares through a spirit of truth in advertising. Today it seems that that everyone is using bait and switch in their advertising. Nothing seems to be what it is as advertised. Distortion and deception is the name of the game. I have purchased several “wonder” items that turned out to be a false view of the real thing advertised. I have purchased items that had great a warranty, when I started reading the warranty I soon realized that the many disclaimers made the warranty practically useless. It seems that deception and distortion is the way of life today.

Even deception and distortion about God is using bait and switch. A few years ago Dr. D. James Kennedy³⁷ made a stated truth: *“When a lie goes unanswered, it becomes part of people’s thinking.”* Lying about our products, services and even about God is becoming part of people’s thinking. Lying is a way of life. Whatever we say to make the sale is the thing to do. Nothing seems to be what it is said to be. And, going unchallenged to the deception and distortions, most people seem to take it as the norm. Truth is old fashioned, truth is something of the past, and lying is something that we simply accept in our thinking.

I’m afraid that even well-meaning believers – people truly seeking others into the Kingdom – are promoting distortions of God. Not intentionally, perhaps, but because they too have been led to view God as less than God really is. Many are trying to make God more user-friendly, they are presenting a god who loves and forgives, but never judges or punishes; a god who is compassionate and patient, but not completely holy; a god who gives everything, but never expects nothing in return.

This simplistic, humanlike view of god is what Steve Lawson calls a “user-friendly god.” Calvin Miller calls this view a “bubble-wrap god”- with no sharp edges. J. B. Phillips calls this view of god as a “god-in-a-box”- like a “jack-in-the-box god”³⁸ - where he only pops up when we open to box, and when he disappears when we shove him back in the box, he stays there until we need him again. A view much like the “jack-in-the-box god” is the “genie god”- when he stays in the bottle until we rub the bottle and pull out the cork and call him to pop up and do our bidding. .

While there are some elements of truth, they are nonetheless distortions and deceptions of the truth about God as revealed in the Scriptures. In addition to those described above there are several other distorted views of God. A “Celestial Santa Clause” – a jolly Olé’ Saint Nick that comes around and makes everybody happy. Then there is the “god as divine co-pilot”; then there is the “heavenly repair man”, the “galactic grandfather”, the “clever magician” to name a few. Many people are bowing to those false altars every day and ever week in churches. These views of god are not anywhere near the God of the Bible.

³⁷ D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

³⁸ J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*

These views of God has removed all sense of fear and reverence to the Almighty God of the Bible. Stripped of his unspeakable majesty, he is reduced to the lowest possible level, where anyone can access and use him as they please – becoming a bond-slave to humanity.

These people view him as a “fire extinguisher” – something that is there hanging on the wall only to be acknowledged when you need him. This “user-friendly, god-in-a-box, bubble-wrap, fire extinguisher god is a product of man’s own sinful imagination – a god of our own making.

Voltaire once said, “*God created man in His own image, and man has returned the favor.*”

Voltaire believed that man creates the notion of a god in his own image with his own limitations and humanlike qualities. Regrettably, this kind of idolatrous thinking is far too common in our time, not only among avowed agnostics, but among professing believers who are neglecting the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

In today’s world, many have left to their own fallen imaginations, tend to perceive the Infinite God in light of our own finite limitations. The world today is filled with many false thoughts and imaginations of the Great I Am. Rather than allowing these thoughts and imaginations of God, we should develop our view of God from the Scriptures.

Anytime we minimize God’s Word, playing fast and loose with its truth, we start worshipping a god of our own imaginations instead of the true God of Scripture. Isaiah, the prophet of God, having a high understanding of God said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord; for the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways, higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”³⁹

When someone says, “Well, I think” they’ve just elevated themselves above God. We need to understand who God truly is. It is not about “What I think.” It is about who God really is. It is crucial that our view of God – the most important thing about any of us – corresponds to who He has revealed to Himself in Scripture. Any departure from the true knowledge of God will always result in idolatry, false religion, and ultimately to our ruin.

The apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They know the truth, but because knowledge about God is universal, available to all people, but they do unrighteousness because they choose to suppress the truth – refuse to see the truth about God. God’s wrath will be poured out upon those who refuse the truth. When people reject the truth about God, they construct their own thoughts about Him, and the result is a man-made idol who will ultimately bring our own destruction.

Paul says, “Professing to be wise, they become fools, and exchange the glory of the incorruptible

³⁹ Isaiah 55:8-9

God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.⁴⁰

This downward spiral hits the point of no return. If people will not receive the truth about who God is, He will give them over to a deviant lifestyle and further distortion of who He is. Paul says, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchange the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised."⁴¹

This is the deadly game of distorting the God of Scripture. Whenever one rejects the knowledge of God, it inevitably leads to creating a man-made god to worship. Once a man erects a false god, the real God will give that person over to all sorts of other lies, defiled living, and if there is no repentance, to eternal destruction. The true God gives us to a depraved mind, which sees all kinds of unlawful and evil things as alright.

Therefore we must guard the true knowledge of the God of the scripture with all our might. J. I. Packer said, "Knowing about God is critically important for the living of our lives. Packer also says, "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God."⁴²

Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the church age, throughout his life, lived a quest to know the infinite God in a deeper way. Augustine recognized that a right view of God must be the driving force behind every believer's life, behind the church in every age. Only that can bring His glorious Presence and All-sufficient power to bear upon the lives of His people.

Every morning as our eyes pop open, our prayer should be: Lord, reveal the truth of Yourself to me today. Lord God, unveil and unmask the fallacy of the user-friendly god in my life, that I may know You in your Sovereignty, in Your Holiness, in Your Righteousness, and in Your Love and Forgiveness.

We would do well to follow the example of J. I. Packer and the example of Augustine, who offered a daring prayer reflecting his passion to know the inscrutable God who dwells in unapproachable light. Augustine had a holy passion to know God. J. I. Packer believed that the most important thing about you is that you know God.

I would encourage you to read Knowing God by J. I. Packer. Knowing God has been widely reviewed by some of the most well-known people in America. Joni Erickson Tada, D. James Kennedy, Michael Card, Stuart Briscoe, John R. W. Stott, Gerry Davey, Bill Hybels, Chuck

⁴⁰ Romans 1:18-23 a paraphrase of this passage.

⁴¹ Romans 1:24-26

⁴² J. I. Packer, Knowing God, Inter Varsity Press, 1973

Swindoll, Jack Hayford, Chuck Colson, Billy Graham, John Perkins, Christianity Today, Church Times and others. In fact, having this book in your library would be a very valuable investment.

Knowing God is the most important quest of your life.

JB 110216

...about Fleecing the Flock**66**

A few years ago I wrote a piece called Religious Addiction and Abuse. In that paper I told about outstanding examples of religious abuse in the form of religious embezzlement, ministers fleecing the flock for their own enrichment. There are a lot of religious systems today that are based upon a set of man-made principles about God and God's people developed by the teacher, pastor or prophet. Their principles say you are "good" if you believe in their principles and you are "bad" if you don't follow their principles, and, you are in deep trouble with God if you do not give to their particular ministry.

Many "men of God" are betraying thousands of people for their own financial gain in the name of their religious principles. I believe in tithing and giving to the church with all my heart, but my giving and tithing is between God and me. I don't believe God will give an individual prophet, teacher, pastor or evangelist "a word" about how much I must give to that ministry or other.

I was called of God to serve in the ministry. I have spent more than fifty years serving people in the name of the Lord God. I have served as a church pastor for several churches, have been a public safety chaplain, and produced and directed a large outdoor drama based upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In all my fifty plus years in ministry, God has always provided me a good living – food, clothing, lodging, a vehicle to drive and tools for my ministry, but in all of those years I never earned more than \$65,000 a year from my salary and benefits, and mostly a lot less than that. I was called to serve, not to build an empire or become wealthy.

I'm not complaining about low pay for serving the Lord, rather I'm praising Him for all He has blessed me with in my ministry, but I am complaining about all the ministers who have become very, very wealthy while their own flocks are barely scrapping by day by day. I read about a pastor who earns \$900,000 a year (\$12,000 a month) while his congregation members earn on the average \$27,000 a year (\$2250 a month). What's wrong with this picture?

Another well-known minister is pulling down \$50 million a year; a minister we all know is estimated at a net worth of \$73 million, which earns only \$126,000 a year from his church salary. Several well-known ministers is estimated to be worth 50 million, one 25 million. There are a large number of ministers you know (house-hold names) are estimated to be worth \$5.4 million, \$4.5 million, \$4 million, and several others at \$5 million each.

Without divulging their particular worth, all of these ministers have joined the millionaire status: Joseph Prince, Al Sharpton, Kay Auther, John MacAthur, Reinhold Bonnke, Leroy Jenkins, Jan Crouch, Jimmy Swaggart, Paul Cain, Richard Rossi, Jack Van Impe, Bill Moyers, Franklin Graham, Charles Stanley, Jessie Jackson, Joel Olsten, T.D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Myers and Charles Blake.

Jesus, when he called and sent out the twelve disciples he told them not to take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff, for

the worker is worth his keep.⁴³ Those disciples (and I believe we today who have been called) are not to overburden themselves with the things of this world, extra money, food, clothing, houses and lands, etc. Jesus told them they were worthy for their meat (to be taken care of their secular needs and maintenance by those they were to serve. In my fifty plus years in ministry, God's people have been faithful to care for their pastor and other church staff. If those who do not minister to the material needs, take your leave and shake off the dust from their feet.⁴⁴ Jesus said, if the church does not care for the maintenance needs of the pastor, the pastor is to pack up and move on to another congregation.

Jesus told his disciples do not worry about what you eat; not about what you will be put on.⁴⁵ You should not seek what you should eat or drink, nor have an anxious mind, but seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you.⁴⁶ In Mark's work he said it like this: "...take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts – but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics.⁴⁷

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they were to live as they were called. "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, let him walk (in that calling). And so I ordained in all the churches. "...Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ...Let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.⁴⁸ Paul encourages ministers to live a pattern of self-denial and to serve all men.⁴⁹ Paul gives us a pattern from Christ. We are not to try to build wealth while serving the Lord. We are to serve people in His name, not to build wealth in His name.

Paul is not saying that we should become poor to serve the Lord. Yet, he is saying that we should not get rich while others are in want. It is just not the pattern of Christ when a minister earns \$27,000 a year and the average church members are receiving \$65,000 to \$95,000 a year or when a minister is earning \$900,000 a year and the average church members receives \$27,000 a year. It is not a pattern of Christ when a minister has amassed \$75 million while those in his church members are receiving from \$50,000 - \$75,000 a year. This just does not compute.

⁴³ Matthew 10:9-10

⁴⁴ Matthew 10:14

⁴⁵ Luke 12:22

⁴⁶ Luke 12:29

⁴⁷ Mark 6:7 8; Luke 9:1-6;

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 9:1-23

Paul says we should have a sense of equality there. ...“but by an equality that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance may also supply our lack.... It is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left, and he who gathered little had no lack.”⁵⁰

Most denominational organizations use a formula for selecting the salary and benefits of a pastor that equals to are just slightly over the average earning of the church members. For example, most of the denominational guidelines are that if a pastor is called to a church whose average membership earns in the neighborhood of \$50,000 – 75,000 a year, the pastor's salary and benefits would be compatible. If the church members in the church average 35 – 50,000 a year, the pastor's benefits would be not more than \$50,000 a year. That's in line with what Jesus and Paul was saying.

As servants of God are not to be under-valued for our services, but we are not to be over-valued for our services either. We are to serve all men according to the calling to which we have been called. We are not to fleece the flock in order to become wealthy. Hey, God has the final judgment and we will be judged according to what we have done with our calling.

JB 051917

P. S. To grow your own spiritual health, start reading the Bible for yourself. Don't be abused by those who are seeking only their own good. Jesus and many other writers of the Bible tell us over and over again that there are false teachers, blind guides, snakes, brood of vipers, trying to lead you astray, hypocrites, and deceiving you. Peter talks about false prophets who introduce destructive heresies, in their greed will exploit you with stories made up. Read the Bible for yourself.

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

...about Two Powerfully Simple Words – Thank You**69**

“Thank You” can be an incredibly powerful two words. Thank you is to express gratitude, appreciation, acknowledgment. Thank you is a way of sharing grateful feelings toward another who has given a favor, a service or a courtesy. It is a sense of heart-felt appreciation.

Sharing those two words can be incredibly powerful to the one who needs them, or isn't expecting them. Being appreciated is one of those things that really motivates us. When you have had a very difficult time or when someone doesn't seem to appreciate what you do, saying a “Thank You” can bring about a whole new attitude and helps move our mood forward; gives us more energy to do what we do; to feel that we are meaningful, after all. Often times when a person is not appreciated for the deed they do for us, they start to worry that their deed is meaningless. By demeaning the deed (not meaning to, but just not recognizing the deed), in a sense, we are demeaning the person.

It is important to say “Thank You” because when we do, we recognize that the person had a choice – they didn't have to do what they did for us, or they didn't have to do it in a certain way. For example, my daughter just called me and asked me if I wanted to join her at McDonalds. She thought of me. I said “Thank You” anyway, but I'm in the middle of writing an article and I'll get some left-overs here. So many things like that come along in our path every day. It is an opportunity to say “Thank You.”

Another way to say thank you is for our own benefit. Saying thank you is a way of acknowledging our dependence on others. That we are alone on this earth. That we need others along the way. In fact, saying thank you is a way that we must rely on others in so many ways. I am sitting here today writing this article very dependent upon many other people – the people who manufactured this computer, the people who developed the software, the people who generate the electricity to power this computer, the people who built the light bulb I see right now, the people who built the house I'm sitting in right now and on and on it goes. It is important for us to recognize the time it took to provide the tools that we use in our everyday lives, the skills they learned to be able to make those tools. Hey, I'm dependent on an awful lot of people every day of my life. I'm thankful for all those who make my life easier and in some case for my life at all.

We should be thankful in all circumstances. Paul says give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.⁵¹ Even when the lights go out, when the computer crashes, it is an opportunity to be thankful that we need a rest. Paul also says give thanks to God in everything⁵² even when the power goes out, or the computer crashes. Give thanks to God for everything. And Paul says we are to be thankful for everyone, kings, those in

⁵¹ 1 Thes. 5:18

⁵² Phil. 4:6

authority,⁵³ those who build houses, those who manufacture computers, those who build highways, those who refine gasoline, those who manufacture automobiles, those who plant crops and harvest food, those who process the food, those who transport the food, the grocery store workers to stock the food. We are so dependent on others. Jesus took loaves and gave thanks before feeding thousands of people⁵⁴ Jesus gives thanks to God for hearing him when he raised Lazarus from the dead.⁵⁵ Jesus recognized his dependence upon his Father God in everything, and he thanked him for it.

People need to feel appreciated. Humans are created in the image of God⁵⁶ and are sensitive creatures, more than any other creatures, that have consciousness (feelings, thoughts, and need to be appreciated). God created humans to acknowledge relationships. God enjoyed his relationship with His creatures. We, His creatures, are programmed to seek freedom and relationships. God wants his creatures to relate to Him. One of the best ways to relate to Him is to “Thank” Him for what He does for us.

People who need relationships and who need to be loved, need to be appreciated. Making people feel good brings good in others in other unpredictable ways. By making someone else feel important and appreciated, you've just brightened up someone's day in the smallest of ways and that person is more than likely to pass on that good feeling to someone else. Saying “Thank You” is a powerful way that can make a domino effect. People can make more willing to do something for others when they are appreciated. And when you says “Thank You” to others, others are more likely for them to do something for you again in the future.

These two powerful words can create a cycle of goodwill that is essential for humans to live in this world. By saying “thank you” you're also saying, “I appreciate you,” “I value your relationship,” you are meaningful to me.” It's contagious. If you do something nice for someone, they will do something nice for someone else. And, I imagine that God is smiling from face to face. “Thank You” for reading this.

JB 020817

⁵³ 1 Tim. 2:1

⁵⁴ John 6:11

⁵⁵ John 11:41

⁵⁶ Gen. 1:26

...about a Powerfully Simple Act – a Smile

71

I recently talked about the power of two little words: “Thank You.” An incredibly powerful two words can change a person's attitude and mood. A powerfully simple act can do the same thing – A smile can evoke good feelings.

Have you ever felt like you just seemed to be down? Have you ever had no motivation to do anything, not even the things you usually love to do? Have you had one of those days that all you want to do is sleep; feel that you are unloved, unlovable, worthless and nothing but a burden to others? These feelings are normally called depression. Even when I am a normal caring person, sometimes I simply care little about anyone or anything. I'm just out of sorts, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Have you ever been there?

The truth of the matter is that many people go through bouts of depression like that. Some people have bouts of change in sleep patterns, feelings of despair, hopelessness, sadness and worthlessness; having trouble concentrating or remembering, and many other unexplained symptoms. Some of those uneasy feelings can result from a change in location, loss of a job, separation or divorce of a parent, death of a family member or close friend, loss of precious memories in a house fire, serious accident, a sudden disability and many other things.

As fire service chaplains we encounter people down, people who are sad, feeling of despair, hopeless, and simply don't want to do next, We encounter people who are simply out of sorts, depressed, can't concentrate, all they can do is cry or in a trance.

Although we can't take the hurt away, can't remove those feelings, but we can make a difference, even but for a moment. A smile can express acknowledgment of the person and his/her sad circumstances. When someone gives you a beaming smile, how do you respond? Most likely, you smile back. And you probably feel better too. So, by giving a smile (not a beaming smile, of course), but a sincere smile, even but for a few short seconds, you can change the person's feelings of sadness to some degree of hope. Someone cares.

A sincere smile can be incredibly powerful to the one who is hurting and needs a smile, or isn't expecting a smile in such dire circumstances. Receiving a smile is one of those things that really moves us. When one has had a very difficult time, when it seems like the whole world is upside down, sharing a genuine smile you can bring about a whole new attitude and helps move their mood forward; gives them more energy to do what they need to do; to feel that someone really does care and wants to help.

In response to a critical incident where people are hurting, depressed and do not know what to do next, is a time when there is not much else to do but smile at them, touch them, hug them (appropriately) and listen to them. Our motto is: *be there, listen and love*. That is the most important thing we can do. We acknowledge the person who is hurting, we recognize the depth of their hurt, and we can smile at them.

In a Harvard research study group of caregivers and patients, the study indicated that the facial expressions of care providers made a difference in the response of their patients. As

the caregivers *smiled*, the patients perceived them as more *warm, caring, concerned, empathetic* and the patients felt more satisfied and their physical and mental health improved. You may not be a therapist, but you can make a positive difference in people who are going through a critical incident. And, by smiling at your patients, you may be doing yourself a favor, as well.

That study also indicated that the caregivers increased more confidence, happiness and reduced their own feelings of stress in their jobs. Writer of Proverbs says that "All the days of the oppressed are wretched (a critical incident), but the cheerful heart (a smile) has a continual feast."⁵⁷ He also says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."⁵⁸ He says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."⁵⁹ A sincere smile from another person (sharpens) indicates positive smile (sharpens) of another.

When we smile at another person we receive a benefit for ourselves. Smiling at another person in distress and despair is a way of acknowledging our dependence on others as we said about saying thank you. It reminds us that we are not alone on this earth. That we need others along the way. We are dependent on an awful lot of people every day of our lives.

This powerfully simple act – a smile - can create a cycle of goodwill that is essential for humans to live in this world. By smiling at someone who is going through a traumatic event you're saying, "I recognize you," "I value you," you are meaningful to me," "I'm here for you," "I'm here to listen to you."

"Every time you smile at someone it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing."⁶⁰ This powerfully simple act can make a difference in someone's life. Your smile can be an enriching gift to someone whose life has just been disrupted and seems all downhill.

Smile!

JB 020917

⁵⁷ Proverbs 15:15

⁵⁸ Proverbs 17:22

⁵⁹ Proverbs 27:17

⁶⁰ Mother Teresa of Calcutta

...about an Old Man Reflects

73

After looking at the cartoon on the left of this page, and the little old preacher-man (with more degrees than a thermometer) standing with his hat in his hand on the right, the old man (me) began to reflect back upon his life. After spending a life-time of working for a living and doing ministry he begins to think about how well he had done.



The old man started out in life working at a day-job with the federal government. The old man had climbed the ladder in his field and was feeling good at where he was at the time. He was above average in pay by most of those in his community and it seemed evident that he would climb to the top of his pay grade, have a fruitful career and have a fat retirement fund at the end of his career.

However, something happened! The young man felt "called" to ministry. He continued to work while doing bi-vocational ministry and spending a lot of time and money going to get a bunch of degrees in ministry. And, in time, he left his job and went "into the ministry." For the better part of his working years, he spent doing "full-time" ministry. Now, he looks at his retirement fund with a sad look on his face and wonders if he should have kept his lucrative job and kept on being a bi-vocational minister while building up his retirement fund.

Most of the people the old man served over those almost fifty years always made more money than he. Most of them made twice or three time as much. Most of those people paid in more social security and retirement annuities during their working years. Now, the old man is trying to survive on his measly social insecurity in a time when he is not physically able to work to supplement enough income to even keep the old income he used to as a minister.

As the old man thought about his finances and the lack thereof, he became very depressed; feeling like he was a miserable failure. He felt he had sorely let his family down because he could not provide the *things* most other people in his community had. He was reminded that he had to drive an old half worn-out used car most of those years; he was reminded that he and his wife shopped at the thrift store for most of their clothes. He realizes that now he has only one shirt that did not come from a hand-me-down store.

The old man started thinking about the consequences of his choices. Was his life decision a mistake? Should he have listened to an advisor in college and declared a major in an area other than theological studies and ministry? Should he have taken a few biblical courses and stayed with his government job and served as a bi-vocational minister? The old man realized he had made a small choice that made a big impact upon his entire life.

The old man began to reflect on his choice to serve in ministry as his life vocation. A lot of bad choices had been made. He could have made some better choices to secure a better retirement fund for sure. He could have done more, better, wise choices in his financial life. He could have built a better retirement fund; he could have saved more and spent less.

But the old man's reflection was turned toward the *real focus* on his life and ministry. He thought about how his parents had taught him about life, about the core values in life – commitment, honesty, respect, integrity, service, trust and humility. And in all of those values, money never came into focus as one of the core values in life. The old man had great respect for his parents. They had done pretty well in teaching the old man about life when he was a child.

The old man began to think about his commitment to serve the Lord. Did he fulfill that commitment? He spent his entire adult life fulfilling that commitment, trusting God every step of the way to provide the necessities of life; serving people, serving with honesty and integrity and mostly in humility. The old man never tried to be something he was not, he was not heady, high minded, and proud. He was a servant of the Most High God, through thick and thin.

The old man was there for those he had been called to serve, through bad times and good times; through joyous occasions and profound sadness. He was there to rejoice in the birth of a child, he was there to hold the hands of parents who were disappointed in their child. He was there during the long nights when a spouse was critically ill and dying. He was there to marry their children, and he was there to bury their parents.

He was there when they were in the hospitals, praying for them, holding their hands; he was there when they or their children or cousins were in jail, comforting them. He was there to referee the sheep when they had lost their self-control and almost did some things they would regret for the rest of their lives. Actually, the old man had had to stand in between good men to keep them from killing each other. He had to make decisions that most others in the congregation thought was wrong, because he had to stand with integrity, respect and the commitment he had made to God many years before.

As the old man reflected, he realized there had been some very difficult decisions he had had to make; there were many actions he had to take that he didn't want to take, but all in all God used

those decisions and actions for the betterment of the larger good. He had stood by his convictions – his own core values in life, trusting God through it all and God turned it into amazing grace.

The old man, upon reflecting on his life, realized that he is not perfect, that he made a lot of mistakes, that he messed up a lot along the way, but God's grace is bigger than all of his imperfections, all of his mistakes, all of his mess-ups and all his sins; that God's grace is sufficient in all of his weaknesses.⁶¹

The old man reflected on some the men in the Bible who did some great things, people just like him, imperfect, full of mistakes, really messed up and sinned. Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul and many others were screw-ups at times. They all made mistakes. They all sinned. The old man, with a long time of reflection, thought to himself, I must be in pretty good company, after all.

The old man was reminded of an article he read a few days ago that inspired him greatly. It was an article written by a daughter about her dad at his retirement. The article was about a Captain Steve Campbell at the Rancho Cucamonga Fire Department in California after his retirement of 35 years with the department. The daughter said, "My dad was a firefighter, a fire officer, a husband, a father, an immovable force, the department's artist, a prankster, and a storyteller. Among all those things he has done, he was and is my hero, and now he can become a legend."

Upon further reflection, the old man thought, by the grace of God, I might have done a pretty good job of following my heart under the leading of the Holy Spirit, even with all the mistakes, unwise choices, and weaknesses, I might be someone's hero, after all.

No matter what you do in your life, how much or how little money you make, how little or more education you have, how much or little acclaim you receive along the way, if you are true to God and yourself – follow your own deeply held core values you are a hero to someone, you may never know it, but God knows it and that's the One who counts.⁶² And, you'll have a happy life. A friend of mine posted this picture on his Facebook a few days ago that says it all.⁶³ And, in someone's eyes you could become a legend.

⁶¹ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

⁶² Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41; Proverbs 19:17

⁶³ Posted by Randy Ray on his Facebook



JB 010317

...about fences from An Old Farmer

77

I recently read a post from a friend about an old farmer's advice. I reposted it on my Facebook page describing one of the BEST posts I've seen in a long time. The old farmer advises that *"your fences need to be horse high, pig-tight and bull strong."* Having grown up on a farm myself, I believe that seems to be pretty good advice.



Another of his advice was *"You cannot unsay a cruel word."* Having spent many a time swallowing my own words and wishing I could withdraw what I had said but can't, I can surely attest to that old farmer's advice as well.

It is so easy to say what's on your mind at the time, but knowing that you can never take them back is one of the hardest things to live with in life. I have hurt people I truly love and respect (that would never in a million years try to hurt them) with my unthinking words by spouting out what's on my mind without thinking about how it will impact others. I am not basically a "bad person" in many respects – lie, steal, mistreat people and cheat on my income taxes-, but I have one Achilles' heel that haunts me – things I say without thinking it through and what it will impact others. One of my greatest regrets in life are the things I've said that hurt others without realizing it at the time.

Another advice of the old farmer is *"If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'"* When I realize I'm in a hole deep down in that Achilles' heel, the first thing I do is stop diggin' and seek God's guidance to keep my mouth shut. I was in a counseling class where the instructor told the class at the beginning that his goal for the course was to teach us to keep our mouths shut until we had something to say. I still have my Achilles' heel, but I'm reminded of that bit of advice over and over and over again. That was probably one of the best psychological counseling classes I ever had. That one piece of advice was worth all the money and time I spent taking that course.

In regards to *"unsaying a cruel word,"* the old farmer also said, *"Lettin' the cat outa the bag is a whole lot easier than puttin' it back in."* Saying a un-thought-

out-word is a lot easier than taking it back. Kind of like my old professor was saying, "*Keep your mouth shut, 'til you got something to say.*" The old farmer is saying, think it through before you say it, 'cause you can't take it back.

The old farmer's advice also includes, "*Good judgement comes from experience, and a lotta that comes from bad judgment.*" My Dad used to say that *bought* experience is the best experience. Good judgment has its price. The price of good judgment is the price you pay for bad judgment. If you learn from the bad judgment, then it is worth the cost. Often the higher the price you pay, the more valuable the commodity. I've paid some terrible prices of bad judgement in my life, I hope I've learned a little from the advice of the old farmer.

In his conclusion, the old farmer says, "*All of this is mostly just common sense*"— keep your mouth shut, until you have something to say. I hope you get a little something of value from my own bought experience.

Have a profitable year as you pay your own price to become a wise fire chaplain. Yep, it takes time. I hadn't got there yet, but still working on it.

JB 112616

...about Plowing and Puddles from an Old Farmer

79

This is my second installment of the sage wisdom of an old farmer. I recently read a post from a friend about an old farmer's advice. I reposted it on my Facebook page describing one of the BEST posts I've seen in a long time. One



of his pieces of advice I can also attest to, having grown up on a farm myself, is: *"Life is simpler when you plow around the stumps."*

Having been a pastor and public safety chaplain for a number of years, I have run into this sage wisdom of the old farmer *"Every path as a few puddles."*

My son-in-law has recently been called to a new pulpit. In asking about some things he needs to know at the beginning of his new pastorate, my first sage advice to him (with tongue in cheek) is to get everything you can get from the church as soon as you can, because once the honeymoon is over, it's over. How do I know when the honeymoon is over? You'll know. When the path starts getting full of puddles, you know the honeymoon is over. The same thing is true with a fire chaplain. Mostly, you'll have a great path, but be aware that there are some puddles. You'll find some people who resist you up front. There will be some who will want to become dependent upon you. There will be some who think you can't do anything right. There will be some times when you just want to take your marbles and go home. However, God gives you an opportunity to do something meaningful that keeps you going on your path, even with the puddles.

These two sage advices that the old farmer gives go together: *"Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer."* *"The best sermons are lived, not preached."* In my first installment of this article I talked about my big Achilles' heel, hurting people with my thoughtless words. Being a preacher, it is one of those problems I have had to deal with all my life. I always want to say something. One of my hardest things is to keep my mouth shut until I have something to say that is of worthwhile, something that is helpful to another.

I have learned in my many years in ministry that the old farmer is right. People may never remember the sermons you preached, but they will never forget the sermon you lived. Being there in a time of difficulty, listening to them and loving them, warts and all, in times of need will help you get over some of the puddles in your path.

I remember my first funeral of a still-born child. I didn't know what to say. I was totally clueless. I just hugged the parents tightly and allowed them cry and told me how bad they were hurting. About all I could say was, "I'm sorry" and kept listening. That funeral sermon was 99% scripture and one 1% my words. After 35 years later, I received a phone call from a name I did not immediately remember. It was the parents of that little child who had spent several years trying to find me to say "Thank You" for what you did for us when we lost our child. The father had to prompt me to remember the incident, but those parents remembered that event vividly. I've preached a lot of sermons in my years, but I can't tell you one that stands out head and shoulders above another, but I can tell you about many of the results of living those sermons.

The old farmer's sage advice is my final installment of this piece: "*Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.*" That is profound wisdom.

Not complicated, not great and high sounding words, just simple profound wisdom.

Have a profitable year as you pay your own price to become a wise fire chaplain. Yep, it takes time. Perhaps a life time. I hadn't got there yet, but still working on it until God calls me home.

JB 112716

...about Small Choices that make Big Impacts**81**

I want to share a devotional I received from Chaplain Rodney Berry, Emergency Services Chaplain in Southern Africa that he received from Chaplain Charles Dick. The title of the chaplain's devotional is: *Choice*. Chaplain Dick's scripture verse for the day was: Deuteronomy 30:19. *"I call the heavens and the earth to witness about you today, that I have set before your life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live."*

Chaplain Dick says, only a daily basis we are all faced with choices. Sometimes these are small choices and sometimes they are large choices. Small choices could be what we eat, where we go, who we talk to and how we treat others on a daily basis. Large choices could be where we work, who we marry, how many children we have, what we study and so forth.

However it is important to note that small choices can also have a significant impact on our lives. Often our very happiness and success is actually dependent on the "small choices" we make on a daily basis. For example small unwise choices at work or at home can cause dissention and bring unhappiness. Especially if these choices are not made with care or taking other people into consideration.

The Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:15 that we should walk circumspectly and not as the unwise but with wisdom. So where can we get the wisdom we need to enable us to avoid these unhappy situations in our lives? James 1:5 teaches that if we need wisdom we should ask the Lord who gives in abundance, without reproof and that He will give it to us.

I pray that we will ask the Lord to give us wisdom and that the Lord will work in our hearts enabling us to walk in wisdom and respect toward others. Amen.
Chaplain Charles Dick.

Chaplain Dick's devotional packs a real punch. What he is saying to us is that we need to deal with the choices in our lives, small and large, that could impact our lives and the lives of others greatly. For example, if one person can chooses to drink and drive resulting in an accident where another can be killed or

crippled for life, that single choice can impact the lives of many other people for the rest of their lives. That small unwise choice can carry, horrible and long-term consequences for a number of other people.

Small choices are never small results. Small unwise choices can impact our lives for the rest of our lives and the lives of those we love and respect. We really need to think before we act. What we eat. Where we go. Who we talk to. How we treat other people. Where we choose to live. Where we choose to work. What we choose as our occupation. Who we marry. Choices are important. Our choices will direct our paths. Our choices will impact our success or failure. Our choices will bring us happiness or sadness. Our choices will result our final destiny. Every choice we make is a BIG choice in some respect. Heaven and earth witness to our choices. Our life or death, blessings or curses is in the choices we make on a daily basis.

I've seen many people in their old age become very lonely and bitter. Many have chosen to build an empire, to amass great wealth, climb the corporate ladder while walking on others in their climb while having no consideration for others. Those unwise life choices are the result of those lonely and unhappy benefits in their old age.

On the other hand, I've seen many people in their old age very happy and enjoying themselves. These people seemed to make choices to be helpful and considerate of other people, regardless of their wealth, their station in life, and even with many hardships. These people seem to enjoy the rich benefits of old age resulting with the small life choices they made in their earlier lives.

I recently read an allegory written by Donald E. Wildmon which tells about a King of a large kingdom who was growing old and decided that it was time to select an heir from among his four sons. The King called the four son in, one by one, to discuss the inheritance of his kingdom.

When the first son, sat down. The king said, "My son, I am very old and will not live much longer. I wish to entrust my kingdom to the son who gives me the best answer to this question. "Tell me, if I leave my kingdom to you *what will you give to the kingdom?*" Now this son was very rich. "I will give all my great wealth to the kingdom and it will be the richest kingdom in all the world."

The second son was very intelligent. To the same question, the second son responded, "I am a man of vast intelligence and I will give my intelligence to the kingdom so the kingdom will be the most intelligent kingdom in the world."

The third son was a man of great strength. The third son answered the same question, "I am a man of great strength, I will give my strength to the kingdom so the kingdom will be the strongest kingdom in the world."

The fourth son came into the king. This son was not especially rich, smart, or strong like the third other sons. In response to the father's question the son replied, "Father, you know that my brothers are much richer, smarter and stronger than I. While they have spent their days gaining their attributes, I have spent time among the people of your kingdom. I have shared with them in their sickness and sorrow. And I have learned to love them. I'm afraid that the only things I have to give to your kingdom is my love of the people. I know that my brothers have much more to offer than I do, therefore I will not be disappointed in not being named your heir. I will simply go on doing what I have always done."

When the king died the people anxiously awaited the news of the choice of their new king. What was the old King's choice? At the news, the greatest rejoicing the kingdom ever knew took place when the fourth son was named by the King as his successor. The old King rewarded the life choice of his four sons. The old King rewarded the choice of the fourth son to love the people of the kingdom.

Life is a choice. Whatever you leave behind is your choice. Your choices will make a BIG impact.

JB121916

...about How to Change Your World

84

Have you ever wanted to make some changes in your life, in your world? Most of us think we could make some of those changes in our world if we only had someone to help us. That's not a bad idea because most of us are not able to do everything we want to do alone, in fact, most of us probably can't do anything without some help from others.

We usually need to recruit others to help us in some of the most elementary things in life. I've been in many situations where I've tried to repair some simple jobs without some help. I was working on a simple lawn mower repair job the other day, and as much as I tried, I simply could not do the job without some help. It was such a simple thing – I simply had to hold two pieces together, place a both through the two pieces, and screw a nut onto the bolt to hold the pieces together. I tried it numerous times, but I simply could not hold the two pieces together, put the bolt through the hole while reaching the nut, holding the nut and screw it onto the bolt. I had to have someone hand me the nut or to hold the pieces in place to complete the job. It was a simple job, but it was one of those jobs that required help.

In most cases in life, we need some help to make changes in our world – fixing lawn mowers, building a house or building a life. We are simply *needy* people in making changes in our life. Who are you going to help you change your life or your world? This is a crucial question.

We learn early in life that we need someone to help us. As a child we normally look to our parents. As a child, my daddy was my helper, actually in reality, I was the helper and he was the one who did the job. I asked him to help me, and he did most of the work while I assisted him. As a child I needed teachers to help me learn basic skills. I needed skilled persons to walk me through the most simple steps and tasks as I grew up.

As Christians, we often want to change things in our lives. We want to be more financially secure, we want to be healed from our sicknesses, we want be more faithful in our Christian service - to change our world. We are soon to realize that we need help. We need to have a plan to go by; we need to have a pattern to follow. We believe as Christians we think we can change our world if only we have someone or something to help us along the way.

As Christians, a lot of us can think we can change our world if only we had “the power,” “the money,” “the anointing,” “a group who will stand with us,” “someone who will pray for us,” “if we could get on so-and-so's prayer line,” “had more prayer partners,” “was in a big church,” “had some powerful elders,” and on and on it goes. “If I could only...”

Many people often look to the wrong sources. I'm not down on prayer lines, prayer partners, deacons and elders, churches, anointing, laying on of hands, churches, having someone to stand with us. I fully rely on my prayer partners, I have a long list of people in my prayer line, I constantly stand with my brothers and sisters in times of prayer needs, I lay my hands on people in prayer, but I always call upon the Source of power, strength, and healing as I pray. I trust in the One who answers my prayers. I think we need to look to the Source of our power, our strength, and our healing that changes our world. Our sufficiency is in God. Our strength, our healing and the changes in our world comes from God.

God is the One who can really help us? Who's our Daddy? Who do we believe in? Who do we trust? Do we trust in prayer lines? Do we trust in prayer partners? Do we trust in the power? Do we trust in money? Do we trust in a big (or small) church? Who do we really trust? Paul said, "Our sufficiency is from God (our Daddy)."⁶⁴ Our competence comes from God.

No matter how many prayer partners, how many prayer lines, how many people lay hands on us, nothing is going to happen until we have a personal relationship with God. We need a real, genuine, dynamic relationship with God, committed and dedicated to God, surrendered everything we are to Him, then He infuses us with power, strength, grace and competence.

When we walk with God and trust in Him, we will begin to start seeing battles won, regardless of how weak we are or how few prayer lines we are on, or how few prayer partners we have or what church we belong to. I've said this many times and people look at me very oddly – I don't believe in religion. I'm not a religious person. I like certain religious traditions, I love many religious ceremonies, but I don't trust in religious traditions. I believe in Christ Jesus the Son of God. I have a relationship with Him. I don't pray like most people pray. I talk to God as a close friend, my Daddy, the One who helps me out when I can't do the job alone.

Paul said, "He could do all things *through* Christ who strengthened him⁶⁵, not through 67 different prayer lines; not through 27 different deacons and elders; not through 685 believers laying hands on him, not through chanting mantras. Paul said, he could do all things *through Christ who strengthened him*. We can change our world *through* Christ.

As we begin to build that relationship with God, our praying will begin to be more than just religious prayers, more than just spiritual pleadings; our praying will be more than just words we have heard others say, more than just religious conversations; we will begin to actually talk to God like a close friend. We start asking God to help us do exactly what we need.

Actually, I can never remember anyone asking Jesus to pray for them. Can you ever remember anyone in the Bible saying to Jesus, please pray for me? I don't! They asked Him to "heal me," "Give back my sight," "Make me clean," "My little girl is dying, please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." "I want to see."

⁶⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:5

⁶⁵ Philippians 4:13

People always asked what they wanted from Him? I've prayed many a time for the Lord to help me get that nut on that bolt. Lord please take that pain away in the left side of my neck. In fact, I just asked Him to do that while I was typing this article. The pain was gone in a split second. Hey, was that a miracle? You decide. Was it just a simple request that God answered? I decide to think so.

When asking for help with a lawn mower repair job, you would normally ask your friend, "Would you please hand me that nut;" "would you please hold this little arm for me while I put this bolt and nut on it." I ask for specific help in my requests. If I asked for help, and never said please hand me that nut, I'd probably still be sitting there holding that mower arm until I finally sat there until I pass out, or until my friend finally said, "So you want me help you, what exactly do you want me to do?"

Vague religious prayers are about as useless as non-specific needs for help in repairing a lawn mower. Such vague prayers will only help people ease their own consciences, help them do their religious obligations, but brings no real results. Religious stuff has no power within itself. Jesus says of the Pharisees, "They do what they do to be seen of men, use high sounding words, and tedious matters of religious ceremonies, but have of no avail."⁶⁶

If you want God's help, you need to ask Him specifically what you want from him. With a true relationship with God, you will pray for something in particular and believe God hears and answers your prayer. In Mark 10, a man cries out to Jesus. Jesus responds to him, "What do you want?" The man told Jesus what he wanted, "I want to see." Jesus told the man to go your way, your faith has made you well.⁶⁷ This is not rocket science, this is simple, elementary common sense. You can change your world by trusting in the One who can help you.

One example comes to mind. As I was directing a large project that required a number of skilled craftsmen. I didn't have those skills. I asked God to help me find the right skill sets to do the job. My prayers were specific. I needed electricians. I needed concrete finishers. I needed carpenters. I even needed a donkey. One day a donkey just walked right up to the construction site. I don't want to say that I did all the praying. Several people stood with me in prayer for those needs, but God provided the money, the people, the materials, even the donkey who was needed to complete the project.⁶⁸

To change your world, you need: (1) to *trust* in the *One* who can help you; (2) to *ask for* help from the One who can help you; (3) to ask for the help you *need* from the One who can help you; (4) stop praying for things you already have.

Stop praying for strength. You already have strength in Christ Jesus. You don't need to pray for grace, you already have grace in Christ. You don't have to pray for the Holy Spirit, you already

⁶⁶ Matthew 23:5

⁶⁷ Mark 10:52

⁶⁸ Jim Burns, A Dream Comes to Life

have the Holy Spirit in Christ. You don't have to pray for power, you already have power through Christ Jesus.

Just start talking with your Daddy. Focus on Jesus. It is too easy to get our focus on the wrong things. Let's focus on Jesus. Do you want to change your world for the better, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.⁶⁹

Most of the things we want changed in our lives are only temporary. Most of those things are subject to change. Sickness and disease are subject to change. Our financial situation is subject to change. Our rebellious children are subject to change. Our deteriorating relationships are subject to change. Negative persons in our lives and work place are subject to change. That dead-end job that is dragging us down is subject to change. Cancer and heart trouble is subject to change. Do not allow your focus to be on your bills, your job conditions, your injury or sickness, your bad relationships, and all those other things that are subject to change.

All of these conditions are but for a time; all these challenges are working for you. God will keep challenging you, pushing you, and moving you to become that special destiny for you. Whatever comes against you is working for you so long as you keep your eyes focused on Jesus.

God has given you a vision for change and He wants to birth some new thing in your life. Birth involves pain. Birthing is not comfortable. Keep your focus on Jesus! Keep on keeping on.

God bless you as you change your world!

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⁶⁹ Hebrews 12:2

...about my Perspective on God, Man and Sin**88**

I grew up in the church. I remember sleeping (and sometimes stealing bottles from others who were sleeping on the same quilt) on a quilt in the middle of an aisle of a drafty old church building as the preacher went on and on about how sinful the congregation members were, how they must come forward, fall on their knees before God and confess their sins or they would end up in the fires of hell where the worm dieth not and burn in the convulsive fire forever and ever and ever.

I grew from the quilt in the aisle to the pew (where my legs went numb), where I heard that same “hell-fire and brimstone” preaching week after week. The preacher used different “texts” from the Bible from week to week, but he did the same old sermon: you are sinners and you are going to hell if you don't come down here and repent of your sins. Sometimes the preacher would talk about drinking whiskey, smoking cigars, dancing, cursing, fornicating, adultery, divorcing their spouses, working or fishing on Sunday, playing cards, going to movies, dating girls that are not Baptist, and on and on and on.

I was scared to death to go to sleep on Sunday nights because I was afraid that while I was asleep I might die, and I would go to hell because I couldn't remember all the sins I had committed and didn't repent of. What a childhood! I lived enough hell in my childhood and teen years to have enough hell in those years for an entire lifetime.

After a while, I committed my life to the Lord, but I still felt I was such a sorry, rotten sinner, so I thought I'd like to find out for myself what sin is all about and how I could remedy it once and for all.

I looked up some words about *sin*. I discovered a great big Greek word called *Hamartia* (*hä' mär tē' e*) and another word called Hamartiology. Hamartia is the word for sin. Hamartiology is a theological term for the study of Hamartia (sin).

Hamartia (Greek) in theological terms means: “miss the mark” “flaw” “failing” “defect in character” “flaw in behavior” “abnormality” “judgment in error”.

Hamartia in theological terms most often applies to flaws in omission and commission in thoughts and in actions which is in atypical manners of Christian characters.

Hamartia in medical terms refers to disorganized arrangement of tissue types in an atypical manner. I recently had a cardiovascular accident and I received a coronary angiogram to test the blood vessels of my heart. The cardiologist said he found a 50% blockage in an artery and a hamartia – an atypical manner of how the artery was arranged in a normal heart. I've always known I was not normal, now I guess I don't have a normal heart either.

Sin is hard to define. Sin is missing a mark. Missing the center of the target. Missing the bull's eye, somewhere outside the center target. It is a flaw in your aim. It is in failing to aim at your bull's eye. Most who are shooting enthusiasts know that you are going to miss your mark sometimes; you are going to fail from time to time. You know that to become a better marksmen you need to work on your flaws in shooting. You also know that many times you are going to miss while you are working on your flaws, your defective shooting skills. And, you keep on practicing. As you continue to practice, you will begin to be better at your shooting.

The same is with life. The writer of Romans says that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.⁷⁰ We have all missed the mark of what God wants us to be and do. One thing about humans is that we are all unique. Each one of us has some disorganized arrangement types. We are all different. Many of us have flaws in our lives. We all have defects in our character, we have flaws or abnormal behaviors. That's the way God created us, unique and different. So, we cannot be totally normal. I have a plaque that someone gave me a few years ago that says, "Everyone seems normal until you get to know them." The longer I look at that plaque, the more I believe that is to be true.

To understand about hamartia, the sin that lies within us, we need to take a look at who we are as a human being – man.

⁷⁰ Romans 3:23

Man comes from the Hebrew (Adam). We humans were created in the image⁷¹ of God. Created in the image of God,⁷² unique from the rest of creation. Humans are a paradox, possessing God-like authority over all of God's other creation; yet we are all flawed beings. We, you and I, have flaws. We have defects. We have failings. We are abnormal in some way. We are going to miss the mark, that's who we are.

God wants to work through individuals to bring about blessings to every other human life. Humans were created in God's image – with capacity to make choices and bring about God's glory by bringing blessings to others.

However, to understand who we are, we need to take a little look at the one who created us in His image.

We said it is hard to define sin, hard to define life, hard to define man, we have an even more difficult task of defining God. In fact, we cannot define God adequately in human terms.

God Who is God? We can talk about God for days on end, but who is God? We can know that God exists. We can know that God is first essential cause and order. We can know that God is mysterious. We can know that God is plural, yet He is singular. We can know that God is the Sovereign Lord and Creator of all things. We can know that God is Creator of everything from nothing. We can know that God is Creator, but not a craftsman of everything. We know that God is called "He who is." "I AM that I AM." We know that God is self-existence. We know that God is described as divine goodness.

In Christian doctrine God is described as Infinite, eternal, purely spiritual, the Supreme Personal Intelligence, Creator and Preserver of all things; Moral ruler of the universe. Christian doctrine uses attributes to describe God: Spirituality, Infinity, Eternity, Immutability, Self-sufficiency, Perfection, Absolute Freedom, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Justice, Truth, Love, Mercy, and Grace. All of these terms and descriptions tell us something about God, but still terms and descriptions don't say everything about who God is.

⁷¹ A figurative description, a representation of person or thing, appearance of, to reflect in the likeness of

⁷² Image of God – Wikipedia (articles multiple issues and multiple sources. (See footnote at bottom of article)

At the end of all the terms and descriptions we have created, theologically and philosophically, we have a real problem of understanding and knowing God.

Can God actually be known? We believe God is incomprehensible.⁷³ Total and complete knowledge of God is not attainable by man on this earth. We cannot comprehend God, and yet we can know God through *some* of His attributes.

There are a lot of false gods. Under the heading of idolatry there are about as many false gods as there are religions. On the other hand, we who confess to believe in the True God, we have as many false ideas about God as do those who follow idol gods.

We cannot know God in all of His attributes because God is above and beyond our understanding, but we can know God in *some* of His attributes, mainly His love, mercy and grace. John says "God is love."⁷⁴ Love is the highest characteristic of God, the one attribute that we can emulate to some degree. The love of God underlies all that He has done and is doing, although many facts exist which we cannot reconcile with his love on account of our limited understanding. In one sense of the word, we can show love, mercy and grace to others around us which is one of those God images we can share with others. God created man and He said it was "good," of high quality and of high moral integrity.

In creating man with high quality and of high moral integrity, he created man with an ability of choice. In order for man to exercise his choice, God created a limitation on man, a restriction. God gave man everything he would ever need, but he made this one restriction – "You are free to eat from every tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the knowledge or good and evil, for on the day you will eat from it, you will surely die."⁷⁵ Eating of the forbidden fruit represented Adam's (man) rejection of God as the source of divine wisdom and his choice to pursue wisdom apart from God. That act of rejection brought Adam and the entire human race on death, a harmonious relationship that had been existed between God and Adam (man). From that first rejection and stretching of God's word, life on earth, the experience of hamartia and death in our lives became the consequences.

⁷³ Job 11:7; 21:14; 36;26; Psalm 77:19; Romans 11:33

⁷⁴ 1 John 4:8; 16

⁷⁵ Genesis 2:17

Remember, Eve added only three words to the command of God, “or touch it”⁷⁶ and those seemingly innocent three words complicated a lot of problems for the church today. There is a horrible religious spirit that has befallen upon the church today because of people doing just what Eve did; they are adding to or taking away from what God has said. Most religions are built upon a belief system developed by a teacher, prophet, bishop, elder or pastor. Religious systems are usually built upon a rigid system that brings guilt, shame, fear and elitism.

All the rigid, obsessive adherences to strict rules, codes, guidelines, shame based beliefs, uncompromising judgmental attitudes, totally denying bodily desires, manipulating scripture and all of those things become abusive to people who really would like to bring glory to God, but are felt to be more dirty than the lower parts of a snake's belly.

The religious belief system I grew up in had some rigid rules, a lot like the Amish rules - no music, no computers, no photographs, no electricity, no jewelry, no automobiles (but you can hire someone else to take you somewhere in an automobile). You can't have electricity (but you can have a gas stove and refrigerator in your house; you can have a generator to run an air compressor and electrical tools for your work, but you can't have electricity in your business). Most of all the religious rules just doesn't make sense to me. I agree with what Eric Fromm once said, “...religion is not necessarily having to do with a concept of God; religion is more like a group-shared system about an orientation or object of devotion.”

Almost every religious denomination has their own religious rules that have nothing to do with what God wants us to do as His children – to love others, give mercy to others and forgive others their trespasses, but their religious messages have been twisted, misinterpreted or misunderstood so as to bring people under control of the leaders of the denomination. I just can't understand religious systems for the life of me.

I am a hamartia (sinner). I have a lot of flaws; I have a wagon-load of defects in my life; I have failed miserably in my financial dealings, in my decision in taking

⁷⁶ Genesis 3:3

steps that have brought me a lot of distress and heartaches in my life. I, like old Paul, I think I'm one of the worst sinners of all, a chief of sinners.⁷⁷

However, I walk by faith in the grace of God.⁷⁸ I ask God to help me not to magnifying my flaws, defects, failures and bad decisions as I walk this earthly existence and I hope that I will make it through each day while trying to love others with mercy and grace.

That's all I can hope to do because of who I am and whose I am.

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To better clarify footnote 3 above, Image of God from Wikipedia. The best interpretation, after millennia of study from various sources, a human created in the image of God means to recognize some special qualities of human nature which allows humans to have self-awareness, the capacity for moral reflection, for intellectual growth, and for a unique relationship with the Creator and to be estranged from that relationship through his own choice.

⁷⁷ 1 Timothy 15

⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:10

...about Running to Win – Following Paul's Example

97

Do good things always happen to good people? Sometimes we think that if we are good, go to church, read our Bible and tithe most of the time, our life will be a "bed of roses." If we think we are doing what God wants us to do, we are going to be blessed, prosperous and we'll have no illnesses, no accidents, have no enemies and all we have are great friends, but that's just not true. In another article I said life is NOT fair. We can be in God's will, fulfilling, and finishing His will – and yet bad things come into our lives.

When you're believing in God for good things and something really bad happens instead, what do you do? How do you respond to a disease, a disaster that blows into your life, without warning and without your permission? Where do you turn? What do you do?

When you begin to live in God's will and purpose for our life, we soon become a target. The enemy will try to keep you from your vision of serving God. God is not always in control, not everything in your life is not caused by God. Many things in life are the result of human will, or nature. God is not behind every event that happens in this world. The world brings about bad things in people's lives.

The world hated Jesus even though he did everything good to people. Religious people stoned Stephen for being full of the Holy Spirit and doing good things. You may try to follow God's will, giving up your addictions, resisting temptations, but your old friends and even your family will persecute you, and even hate you.

An example of Paul. No one ever worked more effectively to spread the good news of Jesus than the apostle Paul. If anyone ever knew and fulfilled the call of God on his life, was Paul. He received revelations that boggled his mind, and yet Paul knew pain and difficulties more than almost any thing you can imagine.

A little history of Paul. He was a native of Tarsus. His name was Saul. We learn that he was probably an aristocrat, a Roman citizen, was a tent-maker by trade and was a student of Gamaliel, a distinguished teacher of the Law. He was a Hebrew and a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was evidently committed to the Law and taught the Law to others. He was committed to stamp out the teaching of false teaching about a Jesus as the Christ. We first see Saul at the martyrdom of Stephen. It was one of the turning points of history. Saul had never witnessed like a death of that like Stephen.⁷⁹ The immediate effect of witnessing Stephen's death, Saul went on a rampage to persecute the followers of Christ. However, Stephen's dying words went straight to the mind of Saul and lodged deeply into his heart. It seems that Stephen's death was the price paid for Saul's soul. And, what a soul! Next to Jesus, the greatest man of all the ages, was one man who of no other established Christianity in the main centers of the then known world of the time.

He was evidently determined to destroy the church. Having crushed and scattered the Jerusalem church and set out to Damascus to destroy the church there. On his way, something happened to him that would change his life and Christianity forever. Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, get up and go to the city and you will be told to do."⁸⁰ Saul was blinded. He was restored to his sight, was baptized and "straightway" immediately began to preach Christ Jesus as the Son of God and he never wavered from that day to the day of his death, a 100% commitment to Christ.

Paul, which he became known after his conversion, shared a central message – the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, the one body in Christ, and the unfolding of the doctrine of grace which were taught by Jesus Christ himself.

⁷⁹ Acts 7:54- 8:1

⁸⁰ Acts 9:4-5

From the moment on the Damascus road he was a changed man. With zeal and unparalleled commitment in history, he went up and down the highways of the Roman world crying out Jesus is the Christ of the Living God. They tried to kill him, but he kept preaching Jesus. He made three journeys into Galatia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Debre, back to Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Cesserea, and to Rome, preaching and winning people to Christ.

Paul had some of the most difficult circumstance in his journeys. In almost every city they mobbed him, they tried to kill him, they beat him, scourged him, imprisoned him, stoned him, ran him out of town form city to city. On top of all of that, he suffered a "thorn in the flesh" that he had to deal with. Paul's suffering was almost unbelievable. His friends forsook him and left him to suffer alone. Paul never quit, never gave up, always hindered, always hassled, beaten, and almost killed, but he kept on going.

He was executed for a crime which he did not commit. Yet, his final words for Timothy was to stay the course, avoid business entanglements, endure suffering, fight the good fight of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of falsely knowledge.⁸¹

Paul reminds Timothy not to worry about him, saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award me."⁸² Paul knew his execution was fast approaching, so he needed to give these final words to his son in the ministry, Timothy.

These are some of the grandest words from one of the greatest mortal man who ever lived. The battle scared old warrior of the cross said, in the shadow of his own death, "I have won." In just a few days the executioner's ax released Paul's soul from his worn and broken body to flights of angels and took him to the bosom of his beloved Savior and Lord to be with him for all eternity.

⁸¹ I Timothy 6:11-20

⁸² II Timothy 4:7-8

Paul must have been made of steel. Undoubtedly he had supernatural power to keep him alive and going through the difficulties he had endured. His ministry lasted only about 35 years, but in those 35 years he won vast multitudes to Christ.

Paul is a good example for us to follow. In our hard times, in our losses, in our difficulties, in our pressures, in our distresses, we are to keep going, to change more, and become a better person. Paul tells us that in our greatest weakness, we'll find our greatest strengths.⁸³ When we are at our darkest, we can see the brightness; when we face our worst battles, we can find our greatest victories.

In life, we're going to fall flat on our face. We will have to face some challenges. We will encounter some unsurmountable circumstances. As Paul's example, commit our ways to the Lord, trust in Him. Paul's final words were: "I won."

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...about how to *Know Thyself* 101 -

100

I recently read an article about knowing one's self. At first glance, we probably think we really know ourselves pretty well. However, it is probably more of a challenge than we know of who we *really* are.

Several years ago in a seminary class I was required to do a personality analysis of myself from a personality profile instrument. I was required to read and study the results of my personality analysis, and describe my overall reaction to the profile and write a paper on the experience. I was to look at my primary personality traits, to look at my own Achilles heels, my behavioral traits, primary and secondary motivators, primary and secondary stress areas in my life, dealing with conflict, my orientation to leadership/follow-ship, and make some steps for self-improvements of myself. In this exercise I learned a lot about what I didn't know about myself, as well as what I knew about myself. I called this class "Know Thyself 101." From this experience I also learned more about myself and my fellowman. The better we know and apply the great truth God has revealed to us the better we can live life the way it should be.

I learned how important it was to know myself if I was to make good decisions in my ministry and in my life. Whatever you do, you need to have a good idea of who you really are.

Most of us (like I was prior to the "Know Thyself 101" experience) have a good idea about who we're supposed to be. Who are parents want us to be. Who our friends might like us to be. Who our fire chief and firefighters might like us to be. Who the spiritual and religious leaders in our lives say we should be. Who our mentors think we could be. Who the world pressures us to be. The fact, is we can spend our entire life chasing the visions of all those want us to be and

⁸³ 2 Corinthians 12:10

pressures us to be. We can spend a lot of time, do a lot of work, and be pulled in hundreds of different directions and the end result is we just get tired to the core.

However, there is in the middle of all of this there is a **real** you somewhere in there, a being that many of us don't really know yet. How do you get to know yourself? Job of the Bible says it is important to let us be weighed in the honest scales of God so that we may know ourselves as God knows us. ***“Let me be weighed in an even balance (an honest scale), that God may KNOW mine integrity.”***⁸⁴

The best way to get to know yourself is doing in the same way you get to know others. You talk to others so you can get to know them. You do things with them. The price to get to know them is to spend time with them. The price is time. That means you need to spend some time with yourself. Talk to yourself. Now, I know there are some who say, talking to yourself means you are nuts. The crazy world says talking to yourself is crazy. I'll let you decide who the insane one is here. You make the decision. Only you can choose to make this relationship building with yourself or not. You can pay the price of getting to know yourself or you can simply take the road of least resistance and become one of the multitudes of brainwashed, scared, and servitude minded selves. When you know who you are, you get clarity. You get clarity about how to make decisions, how to take more effective actions, and how to pursue a path that is in alignment with how you are wired. How God has created you to do and be. Once you get to know yourself, you begin to realize that the most important thing is that the only person qualified to make decisions about your ministry and your life is YOU.

So how do you know how to get to know the real you? Spend time with yourself. Not staying on Facebook, not listening to podcasts, not reading books. Walking outside. Sitting on your solitary swing. Walking through the woods. Talking to yourself. Talk back to the talking to yourself.

The Psalmist was asking God to run a personality analysis on his life and to give him knowledge to follow the right path. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”⁸⁵

Looking back into the Old Testament, I believe Job is a good example of a man who did an in depth analysis of his own life while undergoing trials almost beyond imagination. Job learned some valuable lessons about life, about himself, about man in general, religious men in particular, about suffering, and about God.

Take some time to get to know yourself. That time pays off in the long run!

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⁸⁴ Job 31:6

⁸⁵ Psalm 139:23-24



...about My Proud American Heritage

102

The United States of America is one of the greatest places on earth. I grew up in the greatest generation in America. My grandparents immigrated to a land which had religious freedom and a land of unparalleled opportunity for them to make for themselves a life of their own choosing, and those great Americans taught American pride to their offspring.

James M. Burnes (later became Burns) migrated from Ulster, a descendant of Scott-Irish parents to Washington County, Florida in western Florida. Jim Burns migrated westward where he met a young girl in Alabama of Choctaw descent, Mary Hunt, where he fell in love with and married

Mary and moved to "No Man's Land," a five parish area in west Louisiana where they settled and raised a family.

"No Man's Land" is where our ancestors settled (the Burns and Smith clan) in now Vernon Parish, Louisiana. This land had a boundary dispute between Spain and the United States. It was not in Texas nor in Louisiana. A group of hardy pioneers, some of the most rugged individuals, with a strong sense of independence and self-reliance, carved themselves into a life for their families in this neutral ground between Texas and Louisiana. No Man's Land was a place where outlaws took refuge. There was no military and no law in this land during this time. I don't know if our ancestors were outlaws or just a bunch of tough people, but we have a great heritage from some of the most rugged, independent, self-reliant people in the world. You can Google "No Man's Land" or check out the article on "Neutral Ground" (Louisiana) in Wikipedia on line. You can get an idea of what these people went through to be where we are today.

William Smith and Catherine Jane Sellers also settled in No Man's Land where they settled and raised a family. John Archer Smith, a son of William and Catherine Jane, met a young woman, Mary E. Peavy, daughter of John W. and Caroline Peavy, John and Mary married and settled in No Man's Land, now Vernon Parish, Louisiana. The Smith, Sellers and Peavy clan were of English and Dutch descent primarily.

John E. Burns, son of Jim and Mary Hunt Burns, (a mixed breed as they were called back then) took a liking to and fell in love with a short little girl, Ida Kathrin Smith, daughter of John Archer and Mary (Peavy) Smith, and married. John E. (J.E.) and Ida Kathrin (Kate) Burns lived out all of their lives in "No Man's Land," between Hicks and LaCamp, in the Parish of Vernon.

John and Kate Burns lived through some most difficult times in American history. They saw the end of the Great Depression, weathered through World War II and the Korean conflict. I came on the scene just as World War II was winding down. Camp Polk (now Fort Polk) was just a few miles from our home. Maneuvers brought soldiers all around our place. We had an old country store where a lot of soldiers came and bought soft drinks and snacks mostly.



I learned about *free enterprise* as a young child of 8 to 10 years old. An army officer told me if I'd take that little red wagon full of drinks and snacks out there where the soldiers are camped, I'd make a killing. Seeing an opportunity, I bargained with momma to buy Coke, Dr. Pepper, Grape, Orange and RC Cola for a nickel, gingerbread cookies for a nickel and cinnamon rolls for ten cents. At the suggestion of the officer, I took my little red wagon full of drinks and snacks and sold them to the soldiers at whatever the market would bear. I didn't know about "free enterprise" nor "what the market would bear" back then, I just bought drinks for a nickel and sold them for a dime (100% profit); I would sell the gingerbread cookies for a dime (another 100% profit), and sold the cinnamon rolls for a quarter (2.5 times what I paid).

Being an astute businessman, I by-passed my momma and went directly to the bread man when he came to the store. I purchased my gingerbread cookie at 4¢ instead of 5¢ and still sold them at 10¢. My Profits increased just a little more. I purchased my cinnamon rolls now at 8¢ instead

of 10¢ and kept selling them at 25¢. My parents encouraged my enterprises. I sold Grit papers and socks, mowed yards, cut and split wood and did almost anything I could find to do to make a little money. With my cousin, Richard Poe, and I started a military surplus business across the road from Lee Roy Monk's store and did a great business there for a while. Had I stayed the course, I could have been another Donald Trump.

As a young child and teenager I always had money in my pocket when many others had none. Some of the other students at my school thought I was a rich kid, had a silver spoon in my mouth. To the contrary, our family scratched out a meager existence with the opportunities afforded in this great country, the United States of America. We had a forty acre farm with row crops, had a grist mill, hammer mill, syrup mill and saw mill, country store and pastured cattle and hogs to make ends meet. Looking back on those times, those were the best of times in America.

On the hearth with a roaring fire in a drafty old house in the winter, my parents told me stories of the difficult times their parents and grandparents had in building this new life. They told me how hard their parents worked, and I saw with my own eyes how hard they worked to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads; they told me how important it is to respect others; to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. They taught me to give credit where credit is due; to help those who cannot help themselves (don't do it for them, they said, but to help them). By their words and actions, my parents taught me to make your word your bond, if you tell someone you will do something, do it. Don't make promises you can't keep. If you make a promise do it or die trying. (These are words I heard as a child and teen from the mouths of my parents in the 1940s and 1950s). And in my community I know many other children heard these same words from their parents. *

In the greatest generation in America we didn't have nursing homes. Children took care of the parents when they got too old to take care of themselves. That generation didn't have government welfare, we took care of those in the community who had needs. People would get together and work out a person's crop if he is sick or injured. If a person's house was burned, the community would have an old time house raising. The churches in the community were the welfare system in that generation, and people were appreciative for what you did for them.

In looking back, government administered welfare was probably one of the worst things we ever did in America. Government welfare created a welfare mentality. Give it to me. I'm entitled to it. Let me sit and watch TV and let some other sucker work and take care of me. I think this "give me" mentality is badly hurting the America we once were and loved.

Our hyphenated descendants – Mexican-American, African-American, Asian-American and all those other hyphenated American words are adding to the "give me" mentality. African-American or Mexican-Americans are thinking today that "they" are entitled for everything that our forefathers worked so hard for. And they think that we (the police, white people, law-abiding citizens, etc.) are profiling them and discriminating against them. Let me tell you the honest to goodness truth, those hyphenated Americans are profiling themselves. Police officers are trained to look at the deviants, those who are standing out, looking stupid, acting stupid, and

acting out like criminals. Police use a standard measure of profiling. It has nothing to do with the color of one's skin or nationality. It has to do with how you look and act. If you don't look stupid, act stupid, and look like a criminal you will not be profiled by the police.

My parents were proud Americans. They didn't have more than enough, but they had enough. They worked hard for what they had and they shared it with others who had less fortunate than they. I had the opportunity to be another Donald Trump, I had the opportunities, but my "calling" moved in another direction.

I am convinced that God "called" me to be a servant to serve others. At that time, all I knew to do with that calling was to preach, so I preached. I did the very best I knew how to do to answer that calling, to preach and pastor people. In time, God allowed me to serve him in other ways. He led me into a 15 year ministry which reached an audience from 25 countries of the world and touched a lot of lives; he then allowed me to be in a pastorate for ten years in which I did as my parents had taught me to do, to give everything I had to those to whom I served; from that springboard, God opened a door to the public safety chaplaincy, which became a passion for serving those who serve – police officers, firefighters, jail ministry and county coroner's office. From that service, God opened another opportunity to be in chaplaincy administration –first as Regional Director of Great Lakes Region (IL, IN, MI, OH and WI), and then to Director of Regions for the Federation of Fire Chaplains coordinating all eight regions in the US, all of Canada, South America, Germany, Australia and Namibia.

All of these opportunities were orchestrated by God, step by step, by being an American citizen. I count as friends on a first name basis of people from all over this world because of God's calling, by my following of that calling, by doing what my parents taught me to do and because I was born in the United State of America. I can never imagine the opportunities I have had in any other country of the world other than in America.

Please don't think I'm bragging on myself. I'm just so thankful to God that He allowed me to be born in these United States of America in the greatest generation in America and being taught by parents who taught me right from wrong, who put the board on my back side when I needed it, loved me even when I was wrong, and encouraged me to seize the opportunities afforded in this great country of ours.

I don't have much in the way of worldly goods, by my choice, because I followed the leading of God's call on my life. I'm pleased that He has used me to touch the lives of many people and has put me in places where I was needed, at the right place and at the right time. I'm proud to be a Christian. I'm proud to be a servant of God by serving others. I'm proud to be an American
God bless America.

JB072016

P. S. * I didn't steal these words from Michele Obama. She stole these words from thousands of other Americans who taught their children who lived in that greatest generation.

...about America's Happy Birthday Problem

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Happy Birthday America! Will it be the last?

In the United States today we celebrate our independence as a nation being considered the “land of the free” on paper. If you look around you, it's easy to see that people in this country are not “free.” Dependence is everywhere. We are trained by the media and the government to be dependent. We're told what to do and what to believe. We need a “good” job, we need an education and we need a “degree.” We're told to follow the rules, we're taught we need permission and we need approval. We need to tolerate everyone. We're told that the old ways that has built America great is outdated. We're told that guns are a detriment. We're told that fundamental Christians are not to be tolerated. We're told to embrace all emigrants in our country (legal or illegal). Instead of living under a Declaration of Independence our forefathers intended, we are living under a Declaration of Dependence.

The United State of America was shaped with sacrifice, hard work, and independent thinking. Many believed (even other countries of the world) that previously America was the greatest nation on earth. However, on this 240th year of our Declaration of Independence, many people have a growing concern that America as we know it is eroding away; that we have some serious problems.

What are these eroding problems? What is destroying our former way of life in our country? Our mainline media, our federal government, our President, many in Congress and liberal thinkers are telling us that we have a huge gun problem, that the National Rifle Association and Christian radicals are destroying our country and killing our people. That is the root of our

problem in America. I totally disagree with the media, with the President, with Congress, the liberal thinkers in our country. I believe there is a far more fundamental problem in our country.

I recently read a piece about the majority of those who are killing our people - who they are and what they have done. In that piece from the Shoe Bomber, the Beltway Snipers, the Fort Hood Shooter, the USS Cole Bombers, the Madrid Train Bombers, Barfi Nightclub Bombers, the Boston Marathon Bombers, Pan-Am Flight #83 Bombers, Beirut U. S. Embassy Attackers, the Beirut Marine Barracks Bombers, the World Trade Center Bombers, September 11th Attackers to the Orlando Gay Bar Attackers and many other terrorist attacks has *one common denominator*. These terrorists were not politically motivated, they were theologically motivated.

Why did those terrorist kill so many people? Their misguided beliefs assured them that they, in fact, were rendering a service to their God by helping to destroy infidels, especially destroying 'the great Satan,' the United States of America. These terrorists believed if they would sacrifice their lives in killing the infidels, they would be richly rewarded. These terrorists were religiously motivated.

A lot of people think that terrorists are simply lunatics. Not so. Many of those terrorists were highly intelligent, well behaved and normal (on the surface) people just like you and me. They were not lunatics. On the contrary, the terrorists listed above were acting on a belief that was fully logical to them. They believed that if they sacrificed their lives to kill infidels they would immediately be ushered into an eternal harem with endless food and sexual pleasures.

Most Americans reject acts of terrorism done in the name of God as unspeakable and perverse, Christians and Jewish people in particular. Christians and Jews believe that terrorism is the opposite of everything they believe in. Christians and Jews follow the teachings of the Bible, and there is no such thing in their belief of killing infidels; on the other hand, the Bible is about a God of forgiveness, love, mercy and grace.

So where do these terrorist get the motivation for destroying so many people. Why did a group of terrorists brake through the barricades of the U. S. Marine compound in Beirut loaded with explosives and kill 241 American soldiers on October 23, 1983? Why did the terrorists highjack airplanes and fly into the twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 taking 2,602 mostly American lives?

In all of the terrorist attacks listed in this article were evidently religiously motivated. These people were internally directed and impelled by a faulty understanding of a God of wrath.

They believe that if they destroy the infidel they will be greatly rewarded. What was their motivation? Were they motivated by a political ideology? Maybe to some degree, but at the heart of it, their motivation was a religious motivation. These terrorist were of the Muslim faith.

We hear from the mainline news media, our federal government, and other liberal thinkers in our country that the Muslim religion is "a religion of peace." That just simply does not add up. It is evident that the Muslims are out to get us, to kill us, to destroy us because in their thinking we are the infidels, and infidels are to be destroyed.

A few years ago while in a Weapons of Mass Destruction Preparedness and Anti-Terrorism class, an FBI special agent told the class that the Muslims are in our country (United States) for one reason and one reason only, to kill us. The agent gave a lot of good evidence for his conclusion. However, two weeks later the agent was relieved of his duties from the Bureau. The agent told us the truth for our benefit, but it was not politically correct to say such a thing, and he paid the price with his job for sharing the truth to law enforcement personnel who are out there on the streets day after day to serve and protect the citizens of this country.

Watching television on the evening news it seems that the problem in this country is guns, the NRA and radical Christians. Let's be honest, are those the problems? I've never seen a gun jump off a table and shoot someone. Guns don't shoot people, people shoot people. The gun is not the problem; the problem is the people with the gun. There have been only a few mentally deranged NRA members go off the deep end and kill a few people. There are a few radical Christians who make a lot of noise and even kill a few people in abortion clinics, but the majority of mass shootings in this country and abroad are Muslim radicals who want to get their harem with all the food they can eat and all the sex they can get for their reward.

The mainstream media, the federal government, and big-named Democrats are feeding us a line. We are being told that the trouble in this country is guns, the NRA and radical Christians. They are fabricating outright lies and people are falling for it, hook line and sinker. Whatever the media tells us, whatever the President tells us, whatever the Congress tells us, we just blindly take it at face value because we don't want to seem stupid or incompetent or don't want to go against those who are supposed to be intelligent and powerful.

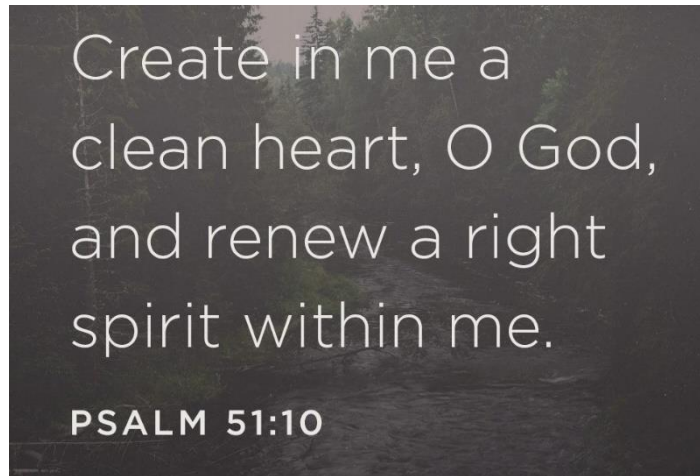
I want to share a little story that Hans Christian Andersen tells about the Emperor and his new suite. Some swindlers came to town (knowing how much he paid for his clothes) and promised the Emperor that they would make him a suit that would be invisible to those who are not fit for their positions - those who are stupid or incompetent.

Even though people saw nothing happening while the swindlers were sewing the Emperor's new suit, but they dared not say so lest they be thought to be stupid or incompetent. As it was time for the Emperor to model his new suit he decided to hold a parade and show off his new suit. As the parade proceeded, proudly wearing his new suit, people said things like: Beautiful patterns, great colors, how magnificent the suit, how great it looks on the Emperor, how well it fits him, on and on (because they didn't want to know them to be stupid or incompetent). As the Emperor strutted around with his new suit, a small child finally blurted out, "*But he has nothing on at all.*" Finally, others began to listen to the innocent child and realized they were all swindled.

Sounds like we have some swindlers in our midst. Telling us falsehoods to the point that most people in the country think we have a gun problem, an NRA problem, a Christian radical problem when the truth of the matter is we have a Muslim sympathizing problem.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where the problem is. A small child who can barely read or listen to television (without a commentator telling them what is going on) can see the problem. We don't have a gun problem. We don't have a National Rifle Association problem. We don't have a Christian radical problem. We have a "*blindness on our eyes to the truth*"

problem. We need to rip off our blinders to the truth problem that we have accepted for years, rip up the Declaration of Dependence we've been living under, and draft our own Declaration of Independence, say what you believe, say what you see going on around you. We've been too afraid to tell the truth. We don't have any backbone that our forefathers had. If America stands,



“we the people” has to stand up for the truth, come what may.

We have a Muslim problem, plain and simple in this country. We are catering to them. We are afraid to offend them. If we don't stand up to the truth, this could be the last Declaration of Independence celebration on this July 4, 2016.

That's the honest-to-goodness, politically incorrect truth.

JB 070416

...about how we can we make a real difference

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We have been stressed over the hurt and death of the last several days. We have seen marchers with banners of “BLACK MATTERS,” “WHITE MATTERS.” We've heard a lot of strong rhetoric, and strong hate on both side of the fence. Blacks marching while hating whites demanding that whites treat them right. Whites are hating blacks while demanding their rights. What is happening is a strong division between the races in this country. Has all the marching, all the hate, all the killing on both sides made any difference? No!

I had a seminary class that required me to do a *personality profile* of myself. I did a personality profile instrument; I read and studied my personality; then I analyzed what I had studied. I looked at the major points in my analysis (good and bad); I learned some things about my personality; was required to take some steps in self-improvement and then wrote a paper to be turned into my faculty mentor.

What I learned about myself was my primary personality traits; how those primary personality traits caused my behavior; what motivates and what de-motivates me as a person. This was one of the very best exercises I've done in my life. My faculty mentor told me that to improve

myself and make a difference in the world around me, I must take a good honest look at *me* and do something about it.

I have used that exercise over and over again. I have, liked the Psalmist, allowed God to do some house cleaning in my life. You know, you can clean your house this week and next week you need to clean it again. Dust gets in the house and you need to clean it again and again to keep it clean. I believe we need a house cleaning in these United States of America. The only way to keep America's house clean, is to clean "we the people" in this house.

We hear clichés about "Make America Great Again," "God bless the USA Again" and all of those clichés, but nothing is going to happen until "we the people" change. Period. Plain and simple. Nothing is going to happen until *we* change.

If we can improve our country, we MUST take a look at ourselves, honestly look at who we are and what we do, and why we do it. The Psalmist cried out to God to do a personality profile of himself; to create a clean heart in him and renew a right spirit within him. It's not a movement, it's not a protest group, it's not an anti-protest group, it's not guns or no-guns and it is not about black or white. It's about humans one at a time bearing their souls to God and following His directions.

If we are to see an improvement in our country, we - you and me, MUST look deep within us and cry out to God to root out of the stuff in us that is bad, and renew a right spirit with us. Many in this country think we are be Christian – we don't cuss, steal, drink, smoke, chew, dip, don't run around on our spouse, don't lie or cheat on the IRS; that we go to church most weeks, give our tithe when we go to church, sing in the choir, teach a Bible class, go out and try to get others to come to our church.

Going to church is no more a Christian than being housed in a garage is a BMW. It's not a housing thing, it's a heart thing that make the difference, and it's a heart thing that will make a difference in our country. We are a divisive nation. We spend a lot of time trying to voice our opinions (including myself) and making points to our positions. We work hard at it, but are we making any difference. I don't think so!

The Apostle Paul to the Philippians Christians spoke to them about how we are to behave as Christians. In Philippians 2:1-5 Paul says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Our black brothers spend a lot of time complaining about how their ancestors were slaves; how they have been discriminated against; how they live in slums and been mistreated with the police. Our black brothers should heed Paul's words, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. Press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Look at yourself. Do we look respectable? Do you look like thugs? Do you behave as upright citizens, or do you rob, steal and fight? Police officers are trained to look at *people*, black or white; they are trained to profile people who look like miss-fits

of the norm. Many blacks profile themselves by the way they look and act. Clean up your act and you will not be profiled.

To our white brothers we should heed Paul's words, "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Phil. 3:17) [following the attitude of Christ Jesus]. Our white brothers need to try to get to know the *person* rather than the *color* of the skin. Some of my best friends in this world are black. They are honorable men, men who take care of their families, men who are profitable citizens of our community, people look and like act like other citizens. These friends are friends. It doesn't matter the color of their skin, it matters about what's in their heart and about their behavior.

I'll admit it is difficult to make a difference in these times. We are living in terrible times. The Bible tells us that there will be terrible times in the last days. People (black, white, yellow or red) will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying it power (2 Timothy 3:1-5). We need to take a look at ourselves. What kind of personality traits are we exhibiting? How are we behaving? Are we exhibiting the behaviors described in Philippians 2:1-5 or are we exhibiting 2 Timothy 3:1-5? We need to take a personal look at ourselves, before we put the blame on someone else. I'm talking to myself here as much as anyone else who is reading this right now. I'm not perfect in the least. I have to work on my attitude and behavior every day. Some of my friends and family can tell you how imperfect I am, and they are not being critical of me, they're just simply telling you the truth. I need this message as much as you need it. I've hurt some good friends with my hurtful positions and views and I regret that very much. What's done is done, all I can do is fall on my knees to God and ask him to clean my heart and renew a right spirit within me.

We all need to get alone with God and do a personality profile of our selves. Take an honest look at who we really are, and then fall on our face to God and recite the words of the Psalmist in an honest and sincere heart: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*" (Psalm 51:10).

AND, when we do, God promises us He will forgive our sin and heal our land: "**If my people, who are called by my name, will *humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land***"(2 Chronicles 7:14).

That's the ONLY way YOU and I can make a real difference in our country.

JB

...about Selling 101

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Just read an article from *The Client Letter* that I've advocated for years. The author says that somewhere a few decades ago he swallowed a pill he had spent a lot of time and money on in trying how to sell things. The author found out that his clients didn't have any interest in his marketing and selling systems – all they wanted was the results *I promised them and delivered it on time.*

Basically, I learned this when I was a kid selling soda pop and gingerbread cookies from a little red wagon. I learned this from soldiers in the field. I lived near a large military base, and one day soldiers were camped near our store. It was hotter than hades. An officer came to our store and said, "Hey kid, why don't you load up that little red wagon with drinks and cookies and go to the camp, and you'll make a killing."

I took all the money I had, *bought as much as I could pay for* and loaded my little red wagon and *took the products* out to the field *where they were.* I sold out in short order and then had to restock and go out again. The officer told me another great idea that I learned later in marketing class, *charge what the market will bear.* I was purchasing sodas for a nickel and sell for a dime, pretty good margin, for a snotty nosed kid. But I learned a lot from that project.

What I learned back then, still works today: If you have something that works (something that the client needs), you won't have to convince them to buy it.

These guys were hot and thirsty and I had cold soda pop and gingerbread cookies, I brought the product to them and they bought. And the officer was right, "I made a killing" because I had something they wanted and needed at the time. Other soldiers told all their buddies, "Hey this kid has cold drinks."

I think one should not spend a lot of time working on a marketing and selling system to the right client; spend your time on committing to do what you do better than you already do.

When things work (what the client needs and make it easy for them) selling become a lot easier.

When things work, people talk;

When people talk, people find you,

When people find you, they buy your product or service.

People are finding our Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy training (works) in every region of the state (where they are); they tell others and we train them.

...about who you think you are

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Who do you think you are? Who made you what you are today? The truth of the matter is that you are a compilation of a lot of other people who has influenced you in your life. The only man who thinks he is a self-made man in this world is simply a fool. You are who you are because of who you have allowed others to influence you, guide you or mentor you. You've probably been told by your parents as a child that you need to be careful who your friends are because they will influence who you are. That's probably one of the best advice you had as a child.

Over the years I've run into a number of people who thought they were God's gift to the world. They were so stuck on themselves that they thought they could do anything without working at it and that they could succeed without any effort, all by themselves. They spent hours in front of the mirror admiring themselves. These people spent most of their waking hours talking about how great they were to everyone who would listen to them. However, soon people tired with their greatness and stopped listening to them. These people often became lonely people.

I knew a man who lived to be "up on everyone else." This man lived to put you down by bringing himself up. No matter what you told him you did, he told you how much better he did than you. If you had a new car, he told you he had a better new car. He was "it" and no one else could ever come near him. He had a very lovely wife and very likable child. However, his wife finally left him and took their son with her because she "just couldn't put up with his arrogance anymore." This man was a highly intelligent man, who could have been a very successful individual, if he could just see himself as he was, instead of who he thought he was.

I heard about a business consultant who was fond of saying, “*The fish is always the last one to discover water.*”⁸⁶ What he means by this is ‘fish has a major blind spot around water.’ The fish can’t see water because that’s all he knows. He is in the water, so he cannot see water.

In my observation over those years I’ve noticed that people who are so stuck on themselves they developed a natural ceiling; these people deceived themselves and eventually turned their lives into mediocracy. These people were their own mentors, giving their own advice and following that advice. Those who are their own advisers are just plain fools. “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.”⁸⁷ A fool is wise in his own eyes.⁸⁸ Those of a haughty spirit, heady and high-minded, overly full of ambition, never willing to receive counsel or advice, and who thinks first of him/herself have a natural ceiling that can never become what they could become and truly be valuable to the world and to their fellow man.

To break out of the natural ceiling, one must become disciplined. A wise old man once said to me that knowledge is useless without some skills⁸⁹. Disciplined learning makes *useful* knowledge. In proverbs the wise man says, “A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.”⁹⁰

In the ancient world, gymnasiums were not about sporting events, they were training centers to teach students by mentoring. The word “disciple” means “learner, student.” The word “mentor” is one entrusted with the care and education with another; a wise and trusted counselor. Discipleship involves an apprenticeship in which the apprentice or student is brought toward a particular goal under the tutorship of a wise and trusted master counselor.

To be a master at anything is not just to accumulate knowledge. I’ve known a lot of people with great knowledge, with advanced degrees and highly acclaimed positions, but can’t even get in out of the rain. I’ve known people who can talk a blue streak about a subject, but cannot even tie their own shoes. I know a lot of people who have a lot of “book sense” but no common horse sense. I read somewhere that “common horse sense is stable thinking.” I kind of like that. To me it is *real* wisdom.

I’ve sat in the private study of my mind many times and wondered just how these brilliant people got so brain smart and yet are not able to function in simple tasks in daily life. I knew a man who had three doctor’s degrees yet his parents had to lead him around like a child. He never even learned to drive a car. His mother purchased all his clothes for him and I always wondered if his mother dressed him. I don’t know that for sure, but I’m sure his mother put out his clothes

⁸⁶ Jason, Editor, The Client Letter, Incomparable Expert

⁸⁷ Proverbs 18:2

⁸⁸ Proverbs 26:5

⁸⁹ John E. Burns (a man with a 9th grade formal education, but one of the most educated men I ever knew.)

⁹⁰ Proverbs 15:5

for him every day. This man was one of the most brilliant men I've ever known, but he was also one of the most helpless and useless people I've ever known. To my knowledge he never sought advice from anyone. He lived in his own make-believe world of academics and never did much of anything else. What a shame for such a potential life, yet misspent on the self.

My mentor in the fire chaplaincy, Edward M. "Ed" Stauffer, shared with me a very valuable passage of scripture from the Proverbs, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."⁹¹ I was called by an elderly former pastor one day for an appointment. At our meeting, he told me that early in his ministry he vowed to God that he would keep himself current in his ministry, and he wanted some advice from me. Here he was in his mid-nineties at the time (serving as a youth pastor), and there I was still wet behind my ministerial ears, and he was asking advice from me. I learned one of the greatest lessons in my life that day. Not so much by what he said, but what he did. And, by the way, he built one of the most thriving youth ministries in his area by choosing his disciples wisely, mentoring them and letting them do the job of youth ministry. This was one of the most humble ministers I knew at the time, but others like myself, held him in high esteem as one of the most successful ministers in our part of the country. He built a great church in his town and then became a youth minister to one of the mentors he had trained in the ministry many years before.⁹²

A New Testament passage of scripture also tells us that we should "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering others."⁹³ This minister followed Paul's advice and it served him well into his nineties chasing giants and climbing mountains.

I believe we all need a mentor, one who will bring us along-side him and impart the right information while modeling the right skills to us. You can't just learn from a book about doing a skill, you need to have someone walking beside you and show you how to do it by example.

In the fire chaplaincy we are put through a basic training with the Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy, a 16 hour fundamental training class for would-be fire chaplains. Some only go through the Essentials class and stop. However those who become a real value to others continue to train, learn and develop their skills under an experienced mentor.

Jesus gives a word picture of a disciple. He told his disciples to "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me"⁹⁴ His disciples understood the importance of the yoke. I learned as a child the importance of the yoke. We used a collar (yoke) with a mule or horse to use a wagon or a plow. The yoke was for three basic reasons. First, the yoke was to bring the animal under submission,

⁹¹ Proverbs 15:22 share from Edward M. Stauffer

⁹² Rev. Tom Mitchell (deceased)

⁹³ Philippians 2:3 from New Testament in Bible

⁹⁴ Matthew 11:29

under the control of the person sitting on the wagon or the man behind the plow plowing the field. A yoke makes the power of the animal beneficial to the job to be done (under control of the master). The second reason of the yoke speaks of the work to be done. The yoke make it possible to do the work to be done. Without an unbroken (undisciplined) mule, no matter how powerful he/she may be, is useless to the work to be done. The third reason for the yoke is to bring about companionship. After the animal (under the yoke) becomes disciplined, he becomes a part of the family. The farmer take care of his animal. The farmer becomes proud of his disciplined animal. The yoked animal becomes a very valuable asset to the farm. The farmer and the animal develops a real companionship, a real friendship, a real relationship.

In the ancient world and even in some countries today, a young ox or mule is yoked to an older and experienced animal to train the young animal. When I was a young man we had an old mule, Lucy, who was yoked to a young mule, Jack, in order to train ole Jack to plow, first, and then to pull the wagon. It was a tedious job to break a young mule to plow and then to work with a wagon. Yet, with young Jack coming alongside the experienced Lucy, the task was much easier. Jack learned where to walk when plowing a furrow. Jack learned how to hold back or pull ahead to make the team become *one* by working along-side Old Lucy. Old Lucy was Jack's mentor. Jack learned how to do his job well by working alongside Old Lucy. And, by the way, Old Jack became a very good plow mule by himself. He had the power, he had the energy, he had the skills to be a great plow mule because he was mentored by Old Lucy.

Getting a professional license for many today are required to follow a mentorship. A medical doctor, for example today does an internship and residency under a skilled doctor; a carpenter does an apprenticeship under a skilled carpenter, a teacher does a student-teacher or internship under a skilled teacher, and on and on it goes. An apprentice learns accountability to his mentor. A student is accountable to his teacher (that's why we have tests). Accountability is important to building a knowledge base and mastering a skill in almost every profession.

We talk a lot about accountability in the fire chaplaincy. We are not to go out on our own to do our own thing. We are accountable to the agency we have been appointed to. We are accountable to follow the standard guidelines and standard of care we are to provide. We are accountable not only to our department, we are accountable to our community, we are accountable to our umbrella organization, we are accountable to our religious organization who has endorsed us, we are accountable to the God who has called us to this ministry.

Again, I learned from the example of Jesus in the New Testament about training his disciples. First, Jesus considered the importance of choosing and training those who would follow him. Jesus spent time in choosing the right people for the right job, and he took another couple of years mentoring them before he sent them out. His disciples walked alongside him. He taught them and showed them how to minister by his example. Just like Tom Mitchell had learned from the discipleship principles of Jesus.

Young people today tend to think they just want to go to the top of the ladder without taking one step to the next one and next one until they get to the top. They tend to want to go from the bottom in one leap to the top. It just doesn't happen. The truth of the matter is if you somehow

get to the top without taking one step at a time to the top, you can be sure you will fall just as fast to the bottom as you have jumped up there. Proverbs again says, "He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe."⁹⁵

There is a process from immaturity to maturity. There is a process in acquiring a knowledge base. There is a process in learning a master skill. There is a process in building a strong relationship. There is a process in building a life.

Going back to the saying about "*The Fish is always the last one to discover water*" we all have our blind spots. We've talked about our *bad* blind spots, now let's talk about the other blind spots in our lives – the good blind spots.

Just like a fish having a major blind spot around water because he can't see it because it's all around him, you are usually the very last person to know about just how much value you can bring to the world. This seems like a widespread universal joke.

Most of us look toward those brainy, intelligent, highly skilled people with all those degrees and positions to show us what we can do. In my own experience I have stumbled on to many solutions to my own problems. You are a lot more important than you think. You have innate skills you may have that you never expected. We are often blinded to our own freedom of choice, the freedom to choose for ourselves.

We have a mind-set that has become prevalent in our day and time – I can't. Somebody won't let me. Somebody else need to take care of me. The government should take care of me. It a "welfare mentality" that is crippling our society and so many individuals. This mind-set is destroying our freedom of choice. This mind-set is robbing us of some of the most promising scientific minds, the most musical minds, the most sociological minds, the most theological minds, the most real difference-makers in our world.

Stephen R. Covey says, "Within the freedom to choose are those endowments that make us uniquely human."⁹⁶ Covey also says that highly effective people in any environment has the habit of proactivity. We have talked about the importance of accountability and responsibility. Responsibility (the opposite of the welfare mentality) is the ability to choose our own responses. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. Effective people do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior; grew up too poor, of the wrong ethnic group, they didn't they're not..... did this to me.... grew up in wrong side of town. Proactive people take their own responsibility; they are accountable to their own success or failure. They realize that their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Proverbs 28:26

⁹⁶ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

⁹⁷ *ibid*

Our basic nature is to act, and not to be acted upon. It is our nature to choose our response to a particular set of circumstances to empower us to create circumstances. God created within us an ability to take the initiative, to make things happen. When a child has a toy and another child tries to take it away from him, he take the initiative to take it back. No one told the child to do that. He didn't learn that; God created that initiative in him.

Take a look at the fish again. The fish can't see the water because that's all he knows. Let us listen to our language: There's nothing I can do. That's just the way I am. She makes me so mad. They won't allow me to do this. I have to do that. I can't. I must. If only. These are reactive language. That is language that reminds me that I am acted upon, rather than acting.

A proactive language might be something like this: What's my alternative? I am taking a different approach. I can choose to do this. I can create an effective presentation. I will choose an appropriate response. I choose to I prefer to.... I will do...

A reactive person with reactive language can usually become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People become reinforced with their own reactive language. They feel increasingly victimized and out of control, not in charge of their lives and destiny as the result of their own reactive language. A reactive language person tends to blame outside forces – other people, circumstances, the police, politicians, God and even the stars – for their own situation.

There are circumstances that hold people back. There are inability to learn as others do, there are physical handicaps, there are many who do not have opportunities that others have, but some of the most handicapped and oppressed people in the world have become some of the most successful people of all time.

No matter what your natural abilities and disabilities, you have some choices. You may choose to build a proactive circle of influence. Proactive people, no matter their difficult circumstances, focus their efforts (regardless of the limits) in building a positive, proactive circle of influence, building a positive proactive mentor and expanding that circle of positive influence, and they start acting upon this positive influence. These proactive people start making a difference in other people's lives, and they add value to others. That's another nature of humans, to add value to the lives of others. That's the way God made us to be. In 1 John in the New Testament says, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."⁹⁸

No matter where you think you are, you can't add value to too many lives until you make some good choices and then act upon them. And, in fact, you can't add value to too many other lives, before the reflection of that impact shows up right in front of your eyes. One moment you can't see water, the next moment you can. AND, once you internalize that feeling of being truly valuable, you begin to like yourself a lot better, and others begin to like you better too.

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⁹⁸ 1 John 4:11



...about The “FSH” principle in fire chaplaincy...

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A few years ago I read a book by Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul and John Christensen called simply, “FISH.” It was about the exceptional customer service, of all places, a fish market. The place is Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, Washington. Susan and I visited the Pike Place Fish Market while we were in Seattle for a chaplain conference to see for ourselves. I had only one afternoon off during the conference and there was one place I wanted to see (we actually went across the street and saw the original Starbucks Coffee Shop but it was non-eventful). Visiting Pike Place was *something* to experience.

It is true. This is one fish story that doesn't exaggerate. The day we visited Pike Place was much like the opening setting of the book...it was a wet, cold, dark, dreary, dismal day in Seattle, inside and out. Once we entered the space of Pike Place something was different. Pike Place, a place in the middle of a wet, cold, dark, dreary, dismal day, brought light and life. People were enjoying themselves.

What was that? A fish flying through the air? Then we heard the workers shouting in unison, “One salmon flying away to Tennessee.” The whole crew were having fun! “Six crabs flying away to North Carolina.”

I've been in other fish markets, mostly pretty dreary places, but nothing like this one. Noise, action, energy and it seemed like the employees and customers were having just plain old fun, even in one of the most boring, uneventful and smelly places on earth.

Being a fire chaplain is sometimes like working in a fish market. Some time it is boring and uneventful; sometimes we're up to our eyeballs in tragedy, heartache, injury and death. Our jobs can be very depressing and could even bring on burn-out, if we don't keep our heads on right. Keeping our heads on right is vital to keeping our sanity and tolerating the ride while doing the most important ministry opportunity in the world.

At the Pike Place Fish Market, management decided to get their heads on right. They decided to choose their own attitude in a stinky and boring job. They decided that "*there is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself.*" As fire chaplains we're going to have some very difficult days, we'll see all kinds of horrible accidents, people burn out of their homes losing everything, we'll experience a lot of heartache and sadness in our work, we have no choice in the work we do, but we can choose to do the way we do the work we do.

According to the book and what management says, "There are four ingredients involved in the success of Pike Place Fish Market. 1) **Choose your attitude**; 2) **Play**; 3) **Make their day**; and 4) **Be present**.

Choose your attitude. The fish guys are aware that they choose their attitude each day. One of the fish guys said, "When you are doing what you are doing, who are you being? Are you being impatient and bored, or are you being world famous (in our job, being making a difference)." You are going to act differently if you are making a difference in a person's life.

Play. It is kind of hard for us to play as we work (someone said, if you love your job you'll never have to work a day in your life). If we start playing, someone will put a strait jacket on us and take us off to the funny farm, but we can make our work energizing. Put all the energy, skill, and caring into our work and it will energize us and it will not be work at all. That's the idea.

Make their Day. The fish guys include the customers in their jobs. They engage their customers in ways in which creates energy and goodwill. Those we minister to are our customers. What we do with them can make their day, even when they are going through the worst day of their life right now.

Be Present. The fish guys are fully present at work. What can they teach us about being present for each of our customers (those we minister to)? Being present is our primary mission. Being present is to be there to listen, really listen to each and every person we minister to. We are there to love them regardless of who they are, what they look like (race, color, creed, religious faith, sex), what conditions they are in, what kind of prognosis they have, or what kind of attitude they are exhibiting toward us.

When we are fully engaged to be present with them, we can actually make their day in some way and make a real difference in their life for that one day, one hour, one minute. I will never forget one response (that was actually responsible for me to finally answer the call to be a public safety chaplain). That response was an accident. A horrible accident. The man was thrown from the automobile and his head was pretty much cut off but was still alive. He was unable to talk but was still responsive and I could see the fear in his eyes. He held my hand with a death grip as I softly prayed for Almighty God to commend him into His loving and merciful arms and take care of him, now and forever. In those few short 3 seconds I saw something in his eyes change and he released the death grip and gave me a couple of squeezes that told me I had made a difference in his life. It was not a time to play, it was a time to pray and a time to be present and make his day, the last day he ever had on this earth.

Back to the basics of a fire chaplain: Be there (really there), to listen (be present, 100% attention to what they are saying), and to love them through the transition from this present life to the next, if need be. We can't always change the circumstances, we can't bring about a physical outcome, but we can be there, listen and love. Sometimes that makes the difference. The benefits of Making Their Day will focus our attention, away from our problems onto how we can make a positive difference to others. This is healthy, will make us feel good, and will unleash even more energy to do our jobs. Keep in the present. The past is history, the future is a mystery, and today is a gift. That is why we call it the present.

God bless you as you serve those who serve and hold on to God's unchanging hand. His grace is sufficient.

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...about the Chaplain's role in disaster response

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Disasters are of two main types:

1. Man-made
2. Natural

Disasters, whether man-made or by nature, can strain the resources of the department beyond its normal limits. Except for hurricanes, most disasters come without warning and unexpectedly.

The natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes usually involve large numbers of emergency response people – police, fire, ambulance, medical examiners, coroner, hospital emergency people, newspaper reporters, and television crews. In addition, you are likely to have victims of both physically injured and non-injured, those killed, witnesses, relatives of loved ones, nearby residents and onlookers.

The same can be said for many man-made disasters such as airplane crashes, buildings which collapse, structure fires, mass shootings, train or bus accidents. Regardless of the type of disaster, there is mass confusion, shock, disbelief and more confusion of most of those on the scene.

What is the chaplain's role in all of this? Many departments have a written disaster plan and pre-disaster training events. If your department has a written disaster plan, the chaplain should study the plan to become familiar with where he/she fits into the plan.

If your department does not have a written disaster plan, you may want to tactfully suggest adding a disaster response plan to the department's SOGs.

A disaster plan can be a valuable asset to the department and to the chaplain in several ways:

- (1) Disaster Plan can help bring order quickly to the chaotic disaster site;
- (2) it can be the guide to help coordinate efforts so that everything that needs to be done is done with a minimum of duplicated effort;
- (3) it can serve as an information clearing house, determining who is involved, who is missing, and who is doing what;
- (4) it can provide liaison with the media people and
- (5) help to control rumors.
- (6) it can determine when, where and how the chaplain can be involved when requested (is chaplain permitted to respond as a mutual aid call out [locally, state-wide, national disaster], is chaplain covered of the workman's comp and to what degree, how the chaplain is away from his/her post with a disaster, etc.)

Disasters usually have two distinct phases: (1) the immediate, confused, traumatic, shocking event and then (2) the aftermath. As in Hurricane Katrina that hit the Gulf Coast in September 2005, phase 1 was, and always is caring for the injured, accounting for all who lived in those houses, identifying the bodies of those killed, securing the area from the curious and looters, and arranging shelter, food and clothing for the survivors.

Phase 2 includes the debriefing of emergency workers, victims, survivors and witnesses; arranging semi-permanent housing for those displaced, cleaning up the debris, filing insurance claims, working with bereavement, grief and loss.

The chaplain will normally be involved in both phases. In phase 1, the chaplain usually works directly with victims and survivors. In most disaster many chaplains are needed. In this case there will be a "Chaplain's Command Post" set up with a command chaplain. Chaplains will be recruited as needed from the command post from other departments in the area or other areas. Local clergy may be asked to help, usually under the guidance of a chaplain who is trained in disaster response. The command chaplain has the responsibility of certifying the credentials of all chaplain workers and will provide a uniform means of identification for all chaplains working the disaster.

The Command Chaplain will assign chaplains and other clergy to tasks that need to be done. A chaplain should never free-lance or self-deploy to a disaster scene without clearing it through the command chaplain. And for obvious reasons, no chaplain or clergy will be allowed to work a disaster site or survivors' shelter/gathering place without prior certification of the command chaplain. You can be escorted out of the disaster area if you do not have proper authorization from the command chaplain. Unfortunately, bogus priests and ministers do show up at disasters. Sometime they are casing the place for future looting or taking advantage of people in a time of crisis. At times unscrupulous lawyers have used bogus clergy to get clients directed toward them. There are many people out there that are just waiting for a disaster to make their killing. Then, there are good intentioned but untrained clergy who show up who have a pure heart to help, but because of a lack of training in disaster relief, only make matters worse. Therefore, some form of credential checking and identification is a must. That is

why we encourage all our chaplains to take advantage of state, regional and national training seminars for chaplains.

When Disaster Strikes

At the time of the disaster, the chaplain may be:

- (1) A crisis intervener. He helps people begin to cope with what has happened.
- (2) An information gatherer. Chaplains can help compile the list of those who are involved in order to help rescue workers know if they have accounted for everyone. For example, he chaplain may find out how many people lived in a certain house, their names, etc. from neighbors so the rescue workers can do their job. A chaplain may gather all survivors and relatives in one place and get them to point out if someone is missing, and where that person was last seen.
- (3) A grief counselor. All disasters bring loss. Loss, whether loss of life or loss of property, brings grief that should be dealt with.
- (4) If not assigned elsewhere, the chaplain can serve as a liaison with relief agencies, such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.

Aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, debriefing of all involved is very important in lessening the serious traumatic emotional effects a disaster can have on people touched by the disaster. Rescue workers, support personnel, victims, survivors, witnesses and even whole communities need to be brought into the mix. All those involved are likely to need debriefing. The chaplain can be the facilitator to make sure this gets done for all who need debriefing. The chaplain can make a list of the groups involved and get it to the command chaplain who gets it to the Incident Command who can request debriefing teams be assigned to debrief these groups.

More Long-Range Aftermath

Some disasters create long-term problems. Take the hurricanes along the Gulf Coast, for example. Thousands of homes were destroyed by the hurricane winds or the flooding, leaving a need for long-term aftercare. FEMA brought in trailer homes and set up trailer camps for families who had been displaced by the

storms. Many jobs were lost because places of employment were destroyed, as well. A large population was left homeless and jobless. Such a disaster has long-lasting consequences. Entire communities are wiped out and thousands are left feeling numb and confused.

In the immediate aftermath of a large disaster such as the hurricanes, community moral is high, and many people will respond in an active and helpful manner. However, after all the cameras have left the scene and the media goes on to other stories, assistance in the long-term aftermath diminishes sharply.

After the chaplain returns home, he can be instrumental in setting up a coordinated long-term response effort. That does not mean that the chaplain will do all the work, but that he can keep the need before departments, churches and other helping agencies in his area and maybe be a clearing house for groups who want to volunteer to help. He can be the point man for putting people in contact with relief agencies and others who are organizing relief or rebuilding efforts.

Disasters can happen in large cities or in the smallest of communities. Disasters come in all sizes and shapes and can strike at any time. When disaster strikes, you can count on chaplains wanting to be in the thick of it. This is when careful pre-planning and continuing training will pay off.

You can't just walk in and say, "I'm a chaplain." There are certain credentials required to enter a disaster area. At a very minimum you will need to have completed the Basic Level 100 Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy course, the Group Intervention and Individual Intervention CISM courses, a Disaster Basics course and be certified in the Incident Command System (IS-100, 200), NIMS IS-700) and the National Response Plan (IS-800).

There are a number of organizations that offer additional disaster training. *The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Homeland Security*, and a number of religious denominations have disaster relief ministries which offer disaster response training. Check with the individual agency for their requirements and training opportunities. Look in your local telephone directory for local numbers of these agencies or check your

denomination web site. You can access FEMA's training opportunities on-line at www.fema.gov Check with your state Homeland Security office, your state fire marshal, or your local emergency manager for additional information about disaster response training.

When we've all received an acceptable standard of training when we respond to a disaster, we will be able to render a service of value to those who so desperately need us.

We at the Indiana Fire Chaplain Corps and the Great Lakes Fire Chaplain Training Institute are constantly working to upgrade our level of training and to bring advanced courses to our area. The Federation of Fire Chaplains and the International Conference of Police Chaplains also offer some great training opportunities at their annual conferences. You can access the FFC

Website at www.firechaplains.org and the ICPC website. You will find links on these two sites to many other helpful sites.

The bottom line is that we as chaplains must train, train, train in order to do the absolute best job we can do. That's our calling. We are there to represent God, our department, other firefighters, other fire chaplains and the public to which we are called to serve.

James (Jim) Burns served as senior chaplain for the Sugar Creek Twp Fire Department, New Palestine, Indiana; past-president of the Indiana Fire Chaplain Corps; Regional Director of the Great Lakes Region of the Federation of Fire Chaplains; director of the Great Lakes Regional Fire Chaplain Training Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana; pastor of His Place- New Palestine United Church, New Palestine, IN; Regions Director of the FFC and currently serves as Executive Secretary for the Louisiana Fire Chaplain Network. Check www.LouisianaFireChaplains.com for additional information..

JB 051615

...about how God can use you in strange and mysterious ways **128**

When I was a young preacher wet behind the ears, itching to preach and had no place to preach, I simply got in my car on a Sunday afternoon and started to drive. I asked God to give me an opportunity to preach. I was traveling west toward a church I had planned to go to, hoping the pastor might ask me to preach. As I traveled down the highway, suddenly I was *urged* to turn into the parking lot of a church I had not intended to go to. The church was affiliated with a denomination other than my own affiliation. Why had I been urged to turn into that church's parking lot? I had no clue of how God seemed to direct me to that church, but I turned in.

I simply felt that I needed to go to that church. I parked my care and went into the church house and sat on the back pew. Many people were gathered around the altar praying. It seemed that they were praying intently, seeking God to urgently do something. I then heard a man praying to God asking Him to send a preacher for the service. After a few minutes of prayer, a gentleman stood at the pulpit and stared directly at *me*. He then asked, "Are you a preacher?" In which I responded, "Yes."

The man said to me, "Come on up here, you are the answers to our prayers. Our pastor just fell sick and we had no time to find another preacher so we simple went on our knees seeking God for a preacher, and here you are." I had been praying while driving down the road for God to give me an opportunity to preach, a congregation was praying for a preacher to preach, and the

twain we met. God had answered my prayer to preach, and congregation's prayer for a preacher. After a few minutes of praise to God for a preacher, and some singing in worship, I was asked to come preach the Word as the Lord had led me, and I preached. Those people liked to have preached me to death that evening. "Amen," "Preach it, preacher," "Praise God," and on and on it went until I was finally, too tired to preach anymore, I shut her down. After the service people shook my hand, hugged me, thanked me, and told me how much God had used me in that service.

It actually took a few days, weeks, and even years for me to realize what God had done there that day. God (with one little inexperienced preacher and a few dedicated, believing and praying people) turned a desperate need into a *real* revival that people talked about for years. An elderly lady (some 30 years after that encounter) told me that was one of the greatest services she had ever witnessed in that church in all those years.

I saw firsthand how God works in strange and mysterious ways. I had asked him for an opportunity to preach. That congregation asked God to provide a preacher, and those two unrelated prayers were answered. I learned that when one opens his/her heart to God and seeks his face, He'll do some strange things with you. I've had a lot of strange and mysterious things in my life and ministry over the years that I can't explain, except God had a plan.

Just yesterday, I heard a preacher preached a message on "God has a plan." I've read about many others who became instruments in His service in unexplainable ways, and in a backward glance, we see God had a plan.

I read about a man and his wife who were planning to visit with another couple. The house was closed up; no lights were on; the family car was gone from the house. They knocked on the door and no one answered. As the couple were ready to leave when suddenly the man seemed to be *impelled* to call the wife's cell phone, still standing outside the door. After a couple of rings, the woman came to the door and invited them in. She was crying. The woman explained that she had planned to kill herself and was writing a note to her husband when the phone called stopped her. The couple sat down and listened to her sad and depressing story, prayed with her and gave her some comforting scriptures, and the suicide was averted. The couple believed that God intervened through them in that visit and actually saved a life. They just felt a need to visit that couple, not knowing anything about what was happening or the state of mind of the lady. Being there, at the right place and at the right time, opened to God's availability we can become ministering servants in strange and mysterious ways.

Another time, while I was driving down a road and ventured by the home of a couple I knew; I was *drawn* to stop and have a cup of coffee with the couple. As I knocked on the door, I heard something that seemed to be a real knock-down, drag-out going on. I turned around, easing back from the door thinking this is not a good time to visit, when the man opened the door. He seemed to be very put out, angry, and was going to send me on my way in no uncertain terms. He told me later that he was going to say, "We don't want any, hit the road buddy" but, as he saw me, instead, he said, "Come on in, we need you to referee this fight."

The couple was in a heated argument about how they were going to divide their junk, because they were getting a divorce. They couldn't stand each other and they were calling it quits. I certainly had no intention of getting into the middle of a family fight. I just wanted to get a cup of coffee and visit for a few minutes. Well, I got my cup of coffee, then the next, and next, and after five or six visits to the bathroom, I continued to listen to both sides of the story several times. I just listened and loved both of them, interjecting in a few words now and then, mostly asking questions about what happened to your love for each other, how you had gotten from a loving couple to the two people who were going to throw it all away. I asked about what's going to happen to your children? I just let them answer their own questions, thought about what they had had, what they were throwing away, about what they were *doing to* their children. In a chance meeting [or was God intervening through me again] a family was saved, four lovely children grew up with their dad and mom, together in one house.

The result of that chance meeting, several cups of coffee, and one ole chaplain being there, listening and loving them, these two people seemed to love each other more than they ever had, and now twenty-five years later, they are two proud grandparents who are able to share those grandkids together. Don't ever underestimate God's strange and mysterious ways.

One of the exercises I like to do frequently, just listen to God and follow His leading (which seems to be some of the most outlandish, unlikely, and strange ways) to see what He is going to do next. God's always up to something, you have to stop long enough to listen to what He's up to and then follow the urging, being impelled to, being drawn to, leading to, prompts, and sometimes even pushed into situations that we didn't want to go into. You never know what He's up to, and *you* can be the instrument He wants to do something strange and mysterious with you for His glory.

Chance meeting while at a restaurant, at Wal-Mart, at the doctor's office, getting your oil changed, getting new ties on your car, waiting in line to check out at the grocery store, walking your dog, sitting around the fire house can bring about some of the most strange and mysterious ways of sharing God's love to people and make a REAL difference in people's lives.

These Ramblings is one such example. I've had many people tell me that they look forward to hearing from my ramblings; that the ramblings minister to them; that they got a rambling just when they needed it; how the rambling came just at the right time while they were wrestling with a ministry opportunity. I never know when a rambling is going to hit me or what the subject is going to be until God *prompts* me to start writing.

Kind of a postscript to this is that God must be preparing me for a new dimension to my ministry because I'm getting older and my body is not like it used to be, my vigor and vitality is not there anymore when I could respond day in a day out and minister to people without stopping for days on end. Now, my mind and spirit says "Go," and my body says, "Are you crazy, I have to rest." So maybe God is using me in a different way through these ramblings. If my body is too tired, I sit and write about what God is giving me to write about.

So, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God; in normal avenues or with strange and mysterious way. Give it with all you've got, and all to the glory of God.

JB091817

...about an Amazing Act of Courage and kindness

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Just a few days ago I did a rambling about how God can use you in strange and mysterious ways. In that rambling I shared some pretty strange and mysterious ways and how God used people to make a real difference in the out-of-the-ordinary. In those strange and mysterious ways were actually amazing events by ordinary people. And they all made a difference. Some saving a soul. Some saving a life. Some saving a home.

I just read in a local newspaper today of a strange and amazing act of courage and kindness. A local volunteer firefighter saved a person's life while traveling down the road in another fire district outside his own.

The volunteer firefighter saw smoke coming from a mobile home and went into action. The firefighter, immediately called 911. He saw smoke and fire coming from the bedroom portion of the mobile home and entered the residence where he found a handicapped individual pinned inside the home and having difficulty breathing due to the heavy smoke. The firefighter assessed the immediate situation and went into action, he removed the occupant from the residence where the individual was brought to safety outside the house. Shortly, the local volunteer fire department arrived on the scene and administered first aid and oxygen to the occupant and was quickly transported to a local hospital where the occupant received further treatment for smoke inhalation.

According to a statement from the local fire department, the firefighter was in the right place at the right time, and undoubtedly saved the person's life. The heroic action and selfless service of a volunteer firefighter from a fire district outside his own, and a person he did not know, went into action and made a difference in a life or death situation for the occupant. He saved a life.

The firefighter handed the victim off to the local firefighters to do assessment, and administer oxygen until the ambulance arrived and the patient was transported to a local hospital. It has been reported that the victim was still in the hospital at this writing, but was expected to recover.

The occupant had recently undergone a foot amputation and had a lower leg amputated about a year before that. The victim had already had a lot of bad things happen to her. Evidently, it would be the worst day of her already horrible life, but on that day, this victim had a big streak of good fortune by way of a Good Samaritan, in the person of a volunteer firefighter from another fire district.

This firefighter dodged an interview from the new media, but his state fire service chaplain organization has presented him a commendation for distinguished and dedicated service for his distinguished and selfless act by saving a life and dedicated service to his fire district, his neighboring district, the fire service, God and humanity.

Just driving down the road, minding his own business, thinking about everything in the world but this, and the firefighter was at the right time and in the right place to save a life. An amazing feat of heroism took place on what might have seemed to be a normal, uneventful day. He saw smoke, simply acted, and made a life-saving act. An amazing act of kindness.

As I said in my last rambling, I like to just listen to God and follow His leading (which seems to be some of the most-outlandish, unlikely, and strange ways) to see what He is going to do next.

God's always up to something; we have to stop long enough to listen to what He's up to and then follow the urging, impelled to, being drawn to, leadings, prompted, and sometimes even pushed into situations that we didn't want to go into, He can use us to do some amazing things to make a positive difference in others.

You never know what He's up to. *You* can be the instrument He wants to use something strange, mysterious, and amazing with you for His glory, like the volunteer firefighter did. He wanted no glory, no limelight, no attention from others, he simply wanted to help a person who needed him. God saved a life through him.

A chance meeting while at a restaurant, at Wal-Mart, at the doctor's office, getting your oil changed, getting new tires on your car, waiting in line to check out at the grocery store, walking your dog, sitting around the fire house can bring about some of the most strange and mysterious ways of sharing God's love to people and make a REAL difference in people's lives.

So, whatever your vocation, your educational level, your measured IQ, your ability or disability God can use you in normal, ordinary ways or with extraordinary, strange, mysterious and amazing ways. I saw something the other day that said, "*There is no one so rich that they don't need help or so poor that they cannot help.*" I fully believe that is true. I like Fr. Mychal

Judge's prayer, "Lord, take me where you want me to go; let me meet who you want me to meet; tell me what you want me to say, and keep me out of your way. Amen."

Give it with all you've got, give it all to the glory of God, and He'll use you in ways you'll never expect.

JB092117

P. S. Have you thought about volunteering with your local volunteer fire department? They will train you to be extraordinary, to do amazing things and most of all, to make a REAL difference with your life.

...About Assisting Children in Disasters with a Pet Therapy Team 133

Following a disaster (a major storm, a house fire, a serious accident involving a child and/or a child's parents), a child can be strongly impacted psychologically. Adults living in the impacted area must balance their roles as survivors, responders, and caregivers during this time of turmoil. The parents of children are often overwhelmed with their responsibility and not have adequate time and psychological balance to care for their children. Consequently, children may be left in the care of unfamiliar persons to provide care for them. Children in the care of unfamiliar people can bring great stress to the child. The response of a chaplain with a therapy dog can do wonders for a stressed child.

The Pet Therapy Team (a chaplain and his therapy dog) can be of tremendous value in the initial stages of the aftermath of such a disaster. During this time of turmoil, children are one of the most vulnerable groups during a disaster. A disaster is a strange event that is not easily understood for adults, must less for children. Such an event is emotionally confusing and frightening to children and needs significant emotional support from an adult or a non-threatening animal.

Some of the basic principles that might be helpful to children are:⁹⁹

- Be a supportive caring, compassionate listener
- Be sensitive to the child's cultural, ethnic, and racial experiences
- Respond in ways that is consistent with the child's level of development
- Be aware of the child's emotional status, is the child actively afraid or withdrawn?
- Determine the child's comfortable/secure current surroundings and those of his parents, and other significant persons/pets.
- Assist the child in normalizing his/her experience.
- Seek assistance from a child specialist or mental health professional, if necessary. Assistance is needed when the helper does not know what to do or think if he or she is making things worse.

Some of the first basic principles to be helpful with children in disasters can be to utilize a therapy dog team. One of the first stresses in a child during a disaster is breaking attachment relationships. Their parents may be injured or is not currently with them or able to see them. Upon separation and loss of proximity to the caregiver or parent, the child will express fear and anxiety. The child needs to be secure in the knowledge of the availability of the caregiver. A four-legged friend can make a huge impact on the frightened, fearful and anxious child. A Therapy dog can reduce the impact of stress and the separation and loss by providing unconditional love during this tough time.

Sometimes the therapy dog just sits and quietly listens while the child pets and handles him while the child tells him the story about what is happening. One of the most basic principles of the chaplain in helping a child in disaster is to be a supportive listener. The therapy dog certainly fills the bill with listening. He also fills the second bill by allowing the child to respond in a way that is comfortable for the child. The therapy dog has no cultural bias, no ethnicity, and no racial prejudice. The therapy dog has no language barriers; he/she just loves unconditionally to the child during his difficult time.

The therapy dog responds to the child's level of development. The therapy dog helps the child to rebuild his/her comfort and security by simply loving on the child, and of course allowing the child to love on him/her. The therapy dog's encounter with the child helps to normalize his/her own psychological balance. The chaplain/handler (the other part of the Pet Therapy Team) can observe the interaction between the therapy dog and the child and make suggestions if there is a need for a child specialist or mental health professional to be called in.

The Pet Therapy Team is certainly not the all-in-all or the care-all for children in disasters, but they can be very valuable in the psychological first aid of a child in disaster. Medical science shows that interaction with a therapy dog can reduce anxiety and provide strong emotional support. Therapy dogs love human contact and have no language barriers. People in crisis settings can be observed to be more active and responsive both and after a visit from a therapy dog. Medical studies and clinical research shows that a therapy dog can not only have medical

⁹⁹ Anthony H. Speier, PhD, Psychological Issues for Children and Adolescents in Disaster, p 1

benefits – such as stress relief, or lower blood pressure – but provide a sense of comfort, confidence and companionship after a visit from a therapy dog.

Pet Therapy Team visits are becoming more increasingly with large corporations, with children's hospitals, with cancer patients, with domestic violence victims, with people having stress in travels, with children in courts, libraries, pediatric wards, inmates in jails and correction centers and others. Therapy dog teams are sweeping the country. And, we have only begun to utilize this awesome avenue for helping the chaplaincy in disasters and public safety environments.

Therapy dogs are dogs that are used to bring comfort and reduce stress to those who are ill or under poor conditions, such as who have been affected by a natural disaster. Many people, especially children, are able to connect with dogs and feel the love that they provide, and this has a therapeutic effect on them.

Therapy dogs are not service dogs. The primary purpose of the therapy dog is to provide affection and comfort to people in a stressful situation. Therapy animals are normally privately owned and tend to visit with an owner/handler who has been registered as a therapy animal. Therapy dogs visit many different places – hospitals, nursing homes, foster homes, homeless shelters, schools and places struck by natural disasters, homes of structure fires, automobile accidents where children are involved, and other stressful situations.

A benefit of taking your therapy dog to the scene of a critical incident might be to:
-bring joy and reduced stress to a child for a short time, to take the child's mind off his/her problems and worries after a disaster; to get the child to open up and share their emotions, to give the child an opportunity to communicate with another, and to lower the child's stress level for a short time.

The therapy dog is only half the equation. The therapy dog does his/her thing without prompting, or coaching. The therapy dog just loves and allows to be loved. However, it is the handler that bring the therapy dog to the scene. The handler needs to understand the basic principles of psychological first aid as well as handling his/her dog well. Being there, listen and love is of major importance in a disaster. PFA is to provide basic care, comfort, and support those individuals who are going through disaster-related stress. The human member of the therapy dog team makes the connection, helps the children to be safe by being calm, kind and compassionate. The handler is there to meet basic needs (a bottle of water or getting to the bathroom, etc.), listening to the child and give realistic assurance, encouraging good coping skills, and helping the child to connect to parents, etc.

The chaplain/handler should greet the child with his/her name and the name of the therapy dog and ask the child/children's name(s), then help the child/children to a safe place, call for medical assistance if needed. Be very compassionate, speak in a calm, low voice and be courteous and respectful to the child.¹⁰⁰ Many times you will want to respond by comforting someone with a

¹⁰⁰ My words adapted from American Red Cross, Psychological First Aid, Helping Others in Times of Stress, Feb. 2012

touch, however, consider if your response will be viewed as intrusive or culturally inappropriate. Take the lead from the child. Listen. When some people (even children) are stressed, they like to talk about it. Others prefer to keep to themselves or only to talk to people whom they know. Don't pry. If the child doesn't want to talk, don't push him/her to do so. You might ask the child if they would like to talk to your therapy dog. In some cases, the child will tell the dog what you or no other person will tell. Encourage them realistically, let them know that the child is doing fine under the circumstances.

Never tell the child that everything is going to be fine. You can say things like, it is ok for you to cry, scream, stomp, or in other way to release your stress. Encourage some coping strategies, like take a deep breath, let's take a little walk, tell me more about what you're feeling, stand up or sit down as the need arises. Give permission for the child to love on your therapy dog. With permission from the Incident Command, you may want to connect to their family and friends to help them get through this stressful time.

It is usually important to get a child connected to his/her usual support system (parent, family member, neighbor, friend, clergy, etc.) as soon as possible. You may allow them access to a phone so they can contact their loved ones. Whatever you can do to make the child feel better in this stressful time, you will be of great service to the child and his/her family. However, be sure that you have permission from Command to call others or to take a child from a scene.

If you are interested in developing a Pet Therapy Team (a therapy dog – chaplain team) and/or checking out how you might be able to get your dog into a therapy dog program, please contact me or check out www.therapydogs.com to see what Alliance of Therapy Dogs can do to help you get you and your dog in service as a Pet Therapy Team.

JB061217

...about EZ-Poop 413

136

My calling and mission as a chaplain is to help people; not only to provide emotional and spiritual support, but in any other way I can. So I wanted to share some not-so-interesting-subject with you that could improve your health and even save your life.

I recently came across some important information as I was researching for some of my own health problems. This is not one of the most interesting topics most people want to talk about, but *it is important*, never the less – bowel movement. Let's talk about a better bowel movement for a few minutes. Your poop is important to your health and your life.

My personal primary care physician sat me down and talked to me about this important subject. So, I started to do some research on my own and realized how important this subject really is to my health and longevity. Health professionals know the importance of elimination. Medical doctors, naturopaths, and assorted holistic professionals have pointed out the modern hazards of the American toilet. However, most of us never even thing about such a thing.

Non-Western societies have much less intestinal problems than we Westerners have. For example, we have a lot of bowel and pelvic problems; constipation, hemorrhoids, accumulation of toxins, intestinal festers, colon cancer, and a variety of other discomforts resulting from the way we eliminate in the western world.

God designed the body to eliminate feces by squatting. For thousands of years, most humans eliminated by squatting. Only in modern times have we changed our position for eliminating ourselves. The modern Western toilet makes us sit. Sitting actually hinders elimination by pinching off your anal canal and increases the risk of constipation, hemorrhoids, and other problems (Figure 1). Sitting on the modern western toilet places your knees at a 90 degree angle to your abdomen, which actually hinders the process of elimination. Squatting on the other hand, places your knees closer to your torso and relaxes and straightens your rectum. Want better bowel movements for better health, squat, don't sit.

Your position can affect the ease with which you eliminate, and can decrease the risk of many bowel and pelvic problems. Modern day western toilets can cause a temporary disruption in cardiac flow. Have you ever noticed that many people die on the toilet? Why? The disruption of the cardiac flow. Your body is designed to eliminate by squatting; it was never intended to sit on a modern toilet while eliminating.

The modern day western toilet is convenient, but has one major fault; it requires you to sit. While sitting to do your business may be considered the "civilized" thing to do, but medical studies show that the natural squat position improves our ability to eliminate, and better elimination may reduce a lot of modern day ailments including bloating, straining, hemorrhoids, constipation and other intestinal problems.

Devices that enable you to squat easier while eliminating can be of great value to your health. Several versions of squat to poop toilet stools are on the market today. One, *Squatty Potty.com*, has a number of toilet stool models pricing from around \$25.00 to \$60.00 plus shipping and handling.

EZ-Poop 413 (Figure 2), my own version of the toilet stool, positions your body for easier, more comfortable bowel movement, raising your knees above your hips into a squatting position for easier elimination. You can build your own EZ-Poop 413 with little wood-working skills, a ruler, a saw, a hammer and some nails. It could improve your health and live longer, if you use the natural way to eliminate, squat, don't sit.

Using the modern day Western toilet requiring you to sit, rather than squat, to eliminate. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

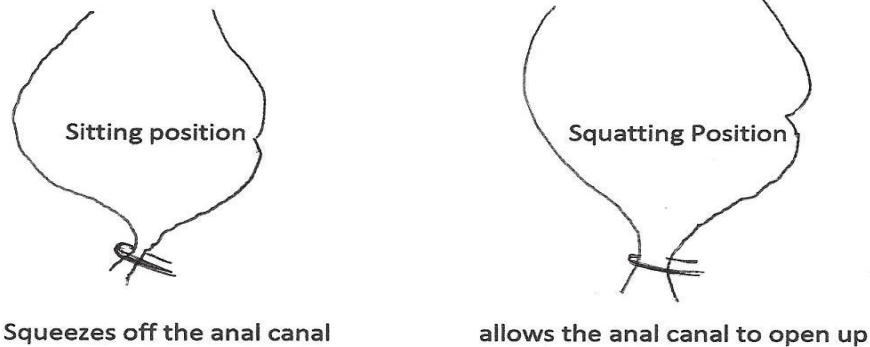
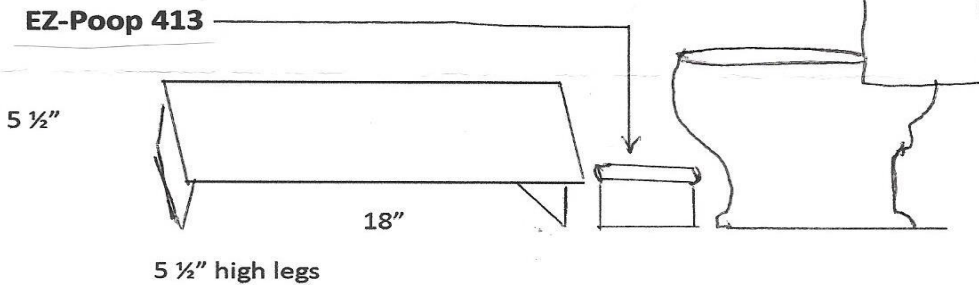


Figure 2



JB101017

...about just a bunch of ramblings

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As I said few ramblings ago, I don't do a whole lot of original thinking; most of my thoughts are generated from the thoughts of others. This one is no different.

One of my Facebook friends, Nanette Diel¹⁰¹, shares a lot of good antidotes, laughs, and good scriptural advice on her Facebook posts. She shares stuff from men and women of wisdom; people who have and are making a real difference in life. Just a few days ago, Nanette shared one that is one of my favorites by Thomas Alva Edison, aka Thomas A. Edison of well know fame and prolific inventor. Edison said, "Most people don't recognize opportunity when it comes, because it's usually dressed in overalls and looks like work."

¹⁰¹ Nanette Brooks Diel, long-time friend

That is probably one of the most truthful sayings of all times. We look for opportunities all around us as long as it's not dressed in overalls and doesn't look like work. In other words, we want a great opportunity that will make us rich and famous, look like we were 20 years younger, and become well-known like an Edison, or a Ford, or a Bell.

Well, Thomas Edison worked hard and long before he eventually found the right elements on which to build a light bulb. Henry Ford had more failures than you could shake a stick at before he became the motor car guru of American. The Wright Brothers had a lot of failures before they finally got an airplane to stay up in the air for more than a few seconds. Airplanes are now flying all over the world at tremendous speeds. Marconi, an engineer, worked on a lot of devices before he perfected the telegraph. Alexandra Graham Bell didn't just woke up one morning and low and behold he invented a telephone. Marconi and Bell saw an opportunity dressed with overalls and looked a lot like work, but they took full advantage of life's opportunities wherever and whenever they presented themselves, and as they say, it's history.

CenturyLink is one of the most well-known companies in our part of the country. Clark Williams, returning from World War II was given a 75 paid subscriber telephone company from his parents as a wedding gift. Clark borrowed \$150 from a friend to pay the freight to move into his home the company's first dial switcher. He offered a community telephone service, most of which the work he did himself. Clark's company was called Century Telephone Company. Clark continued to acquire other small telephone companies and expanded his reach, added new services, and innovations. His company was changed to CenteryTell, and eventually became CentryLink, the 3rd largest telecommunications enterprises in the United States. Clark saw an opportunity dressed with overall, looking like hard work, but he seized the opportunity.

Henry Ford grew up on a farm where he worked with his father. Young Henry got an apprentice mechanist, he ran a saw-mill, went back and worked on his father's farm. Then he got a job as an engineer for the Edison Illuminating Company and two years later was promoted to chief engineer for Edison. While he was working trying to make ends meet, he worked on and built his first gasoline-powered engine. After some more work on the engine, he began to build a gasoline-powered horseless carriage in a shed behind his house. Shortly, Ford established the Ford Motor Company and five years later rolled out his first Model T. Ford seized the moment, an opportunity dressed in overalls that looked like a lot of hard work. AND, Ford is still on the roads today.

There are many opportunities. However, they are all dressed with overalls and look like work. Achievement is the result of potential dressed in overall and looks like work, which was seized by an opportunity.

Changing gears a little. Be careful what you do and what you say. Sometimes our words often turn out to bite us back like a bad tempered dog. I saw this little illustration a few days ago on Facebook that speaks to this.

The caption said something about a fire chief's ex-wife putting a restraining order on him and his family. Well, I think it would be some good advice to think twice before you decide to slap a restraining order on a firefighter. Everyone knows that firefighters have two families; the family at home they live with, and the family they live with on the job at the firehouse. I just don't think it would be a good idea to bad mouth a firefighter.

If you just can't resist yourself to talk bad about someone, don't let it be a firefighter. Talk bad about your neighbor (and I wouldn't do that either because you might need him to help you), talk about your hairdresser (and I wouldn't do that either because he'll scalp you next time to go into his shop). Talk bad about your pastor (cause he's supposed to forgive you, but I wouldn't do that



either because he could pray some bad stuff on you), Well, I'm about to run out of people you could say bad about. I guess, it's best to just keep your mouth shut about firefighters, hairdressers, pastors, neighbors, and all the rest of those folk. Just pray for them and love them like God love them.

A great conclusion for this rambling is a prayer from a chaplain friend, Becky Walden Ploughe¹⁰², who recently shared

on her Facebook page: *"I pray for people who use their voices to hurt others... I pray with people who use voices to encourage others. I pray for people who use their hands and arms to do harm to those who are less physically powerful... I pray with those who use their hands and arms to lift other out of harm's way. I pray for those who use their status and power to step over others, putting them down, to gain more power and status. I pray with those who have "less than" because of those who take advantage of their position of having more than they. I pray for the "in-crowd" who may take advantage. I pray with the "outsiders" who may be ignored. Lord, help me pray according to YOUR will."*

JB100717

P. S. And it's just good common sense not to ever, ever slap a restraining order on a firefighter because you don't know when you might need a firefighter to save your home, to save your family or to save yourself.

¹⁰² Becky Walden Ploughe gave her permission for me to use this prayer. Thanks, Becky.

...about Victory in the Midst of Troubles -Trust God

141

My dear friend, life is NOT fair. Life comes at us from all sides when we least expect it. Trouble comes in all kinds of ways – relationship troubles, financial troubles, unforeseen accident troubles, unexpected sickness troubles, loss of a job that comes out of the clear, life-long disabilities that change our lives forever.

Troubles come upon us and compound themselves. There are times that life hits us square in the face and we simply don't know where to turn or what to do.

Let's take a look at someone who has been there; one who spent a life of ups and downs that we can hardly even imagine. David was such a man in the Old Testament and he gives us a glimpse of hope through trusting God.

Seventy-three of the Psalms are ascribed to David. David was a warrior of unprecedented bravery, a Military Genius, a brilliant statesman who led his Nation to its pinnacle of power; he was a poet, a musician, a shepherd and with all his heart a lover of God.

In the psalms we have the real character of David and his people; a people of God in their struggles, their sins, their sorrows, their aspirations, their joys, their failures, illnesses, and in their victories, we see in all the troubles they experienced we see a ray of hope.

Psalms were written to be sung. Israel sang along their way from journey to journey, as did David. They had musical instruments; the stringed instruments – harp and Psaltery; wind instruments – flute, pipe, horn, trumpet, and instruments to be beaten – timbrels, and cymbals.

“Trust” is the foremost idea in all the Psalms. David's boyhood was spent as a shepherd. He was a very gifted musician. He proved his valor by defending his father's sheep by killing a lion and a bear as a boy. As the humble shepherd lad, David was anointed as Saul's successor by Samuel. Saul's disobedience of the divine command, he rejected David as King and David became a fugitive and an outlaw. For the next several years David's life was spent fleeing from Saul's rage. During David's trying years, he emerged in the Philistine frontier and gained a sizable force of men. From the Philistines, David learned much military knowledge and skill, yet he had a bundle of troubles over and over again in his life.

After Saul's death, Israel resulted in a crisis and a civil war. After a long difficult civil war, Israel, under David's leadership, became a united Israel. David's reign was not everything but easy. He had a number of adversaries, he had experienced revolt from his own son, he suffered from his own sins, weathered famine and pestilence, and the most difficult defeat of his life when God did not allow him to build a house for God because he was a man of war and his son was to build the Temple.

Though forbidden to actually build the Temple, David laid the plans for it, and devoted a large part of his reign to collecting vast stores of gold and silver and all

kinds of building supplies, between our own money somewhere between three and six billion dollars.

David at the age of 70 and was buried in the city of David in about 960 B. C. David was not a perfect man in any sense of the word. He had a lot of flaws in his character, but the most general features, in the whole picture of David which results from all the historical testimonies, is the foundation of the character of David is that he had an unshaken trust in God.

One writer said, All in all, David was a grand character. He did some that was very wrong, but, for an oriental king, he was a most remarkable man. He was, heart and soul, devoted to God and the ways of God. In a world of idolatry, and in the nation that was continually falling away into idolatry, David stood like a rock for God. In every circumstances of life, he went directly to God, in prayer, in Thanks or in praise. His two great accomplishments were: the Kingdom and the Psalms.¹⁰³

In one of his Psalms he gives us hope in our own times of trouble. A Psalm of hope. "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in time of trouble. The Lord will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness."¹⁰⁴ Although he had been utterly crushed in troubles and sickness, he still holds on fast to the hand of God's deliverance.

In the writer of Hebrews, in the New Testament, holds fast to the word of God, believing that God is true to His word: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."¹⁰⁵ If God did it then, He will do it now. The writer of Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."¹⁰⁶ There is hope in the Word of God. He will took care of us in the past, He will take care of us today, and He will take care of us tomorrow, next week, next month, next year and for the rest our lives. One of the most important thing we can do today, in the midst of all

¹⁰³ H. H. Halley, Halley's Handbook, Twenty-Fourth Edition, page 188

¹⁰⁴ Psalm 41:1-3

¹⁰⁵ Hebrews 13:5b

¹⁰⁶ Hebrews 13:8

of our troubles, is to TRUST GOD as David trusted God in all of his ups and downs of life.

Trust God totally and completely no matter what!

JB021217

...about writer's block and why

144

It has been several days since I put together a Rambling. I guess I seem to have had writer's block for the last several days. I've had no inspiration to write about anything. My mind seems to be deadened from the normal inspirational juices. I just seem to have no desire to write. It seems I simply have nothing to say about anything to anyone. I think I have been going through the grieving process for the 26 people who went to church on a Sunday morning to worship God, fellowship together with their friends and receive new inspiration for another week; instead they were killed in a senseless spree of shooting in the small community of Sutherland Springs, Texas by a mentally unstable and deranged person.

I have gone to church for most of my life and have been a minister sharing the Word of God to people for a number of years. I have told people about the goodness of God; the love of God; the protectiveness of God, and the sufficient grace of God. I have stood in the pulpit encouraging and inspiring people to follow God's leading and God will take care of them. I believed what I spoke to them, but I was wrong. I did not always tell them the whole truth. I often neglected that we are living in a cruel world with a lot of deranged and unstable people. I did not always tell them that we live in a fallen world with people who are sinful and uncaring to the core. We are living in a world who has a majority of people who are separated from God with no conscious and are as soon as kill you as to look at you regardless of who you are or what you do.

The truth of the matter is that loving God, worshipping God, and following God's leading does not guarantee your safety in this fallen and sinful world. In this world there is a lot of tragedy, heartache, and uncalled for deaths of God's people and always has been. From Cain killed his brother Able, all through history it has happened that we have killed each other, but I still have problems wrapping around my mind and heart when we kill each other, especially when what seems to be senseless killing of innocent people.

I can't quite wrap around my mind of the horrible atrocities of God's chosen people, the Jews, in Germany during World War II. I just can't believe how many men, women and children were lined up before firing squads and put through the gas chambers by the thousands. I just can't wrap around my mind the inhumanities of humanity by other humans. I just can't fathom it.

As I saw the horrors of September 11, 2001 when inhuman humans flew airplanes into the twin towers in New York City killing so many other humans, my heart broke. I was stunned for days after that tragedy. When so many school shooting which killed innocent children without a cause, I just had a lot of difficulty realizing what and why this happened. When so many people went to an outdoor music festival in Los Vegas and were killed in a random shooting. I just could not wrap that around my mind. My heart was broken all over again. I have all but stopped looking at the public media because there are so many stories of inhumanity towards humanity. I am such a broken man after seeing so many of all of those happenings.

Now, when the safest place in the country, a place of sanctuary, a place of which to get some encouragement and inspiration, a gathering place for God's people to fellowship in safety, a church, becomes a killing field is just almost more than I can handle. I'm hurting to the core of my being in a way I've experienced in few times I have ever experienced in my life.

Even having witnessed many horrible atrocities in my own chaplaincy as a public safety chaplain, seeing people killing their own parents, killing people over one dose of drugs, killing people in a rage of jealousy, in road rage, seeing so many mental unstable people doing terrible things to their own families and friends, yet I'm still having trouble wrapping around my mind and understanding what happened in Sutherland Springs.

The only way I think I can get some sense of understanding is what Paul told the Ephesians about how the Gentiles lived. "... the Gentiles do [live], in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given

themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."¹⁰⁷ There are so many people in the world today that are living in *the futility of their thinking*. So many are darkened in their understanding, lost their reasoning mental powers, lost their sensitivity, have more and more lust for power, for a warped sense of justice, and wanting to take it out on someone or some others. There are so many in our day and time have separated themselves from God because of their ignorance, hardness of their sinful hearts.

In our Annual Conference of the Federation of Fire Chaplains a few weeks ago we spent many hours about the problems of mental and behavioral health in the country. We heard about the increased alcohol and drug abuse problem even in our communities and with our firefighters; about individuals who are living with extreme irritability; increased numbers who are living in deep depression; the number living in acute anxiety; about how more and more are living in isolation; how many people who are living with troubles with everyday activities; the increasing numbers who are living with suicidal thoughts, and more and more people who going off the deep-end and killing people without a reason. We were told about the need for providing high quality clinical care; treatment for addictions and core problems of mental health. We were told about First Responder Healing Retreats, comprehensive treatment plans, and a Christ-centered program in healing the mind, body and spirit. In the fire and police service we are beginning to work toward finding ways to help those many people who are so torn and broken.

And, I believe some in the general public is beginning to see the problems of mental and behavioral health to some degree. However, the evidence is that the problem is far greater than the average person realizes or wants to deal with.

I am so broken in my heart over the inhumanity of humanity today. The only sanity I can pull from all of this is that God is hurting much, much more than I as He sees all the inhumanity of His children. I cannot even imagine how God's heart is broken over the things we are seeing and experiencing today. As He sees all the world's inhumanity toward His human creatures [His created children] His heart must be broken so much more than my own broken heart. As my pastor said in his most anointed and powerful message this morning, "We have a sin problem, and the only solution to this problem is that people turn to God and repent."

I can only come back to the words of one my favorite Bible writers, Paul, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness....'"¹⁰⁸ I certainly don't understand all things that are happening in this world, but I can only stand fast to the sufficiency of His amazing grace. And, I pray for my Father as He is so broken by the actions of me and my brothers and sisters, and daily I thank Him for His amazing grace to keep me going one heart beat after another.

JB111217

¹⁰⁷ Ephesians 4:17

¹⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:9

...about what your mother used to say to you

147

Hey, can you remember when you were a child? I can remember when I was a towheaded boy. I had a vivid imagination back then. I went to all kinds of places and did all kinds of things. I used tin foiled plates for a steering wheel and used my feet for wheels and ran around doing all kinds of things. I became a 1942 Ford car, I became an old Chevrolet log truck, I became an old Army duce and a half truck, a Jeep, and a Sherman tank. I would put a little water on spot of dirt and spin my wheels. I had roads all around under the house. I used of Milk of Magnesia bottles and Listerine bottles for cars and trucks, I used corn cobs with a hand-hewn yoke and make a logging team using a string and made cross hauls to load sticks (logs) onto a Listerine bottle.

I didn't have a lot of store-bought toys. I made my own toys using my imagination. And, you know what, they worked. In retrospect, I believe one of the best of times were when children had few toys. They developed imagination. Those hard-times developed creativity. Those hard-time made thinking minds which have brought most of the modern technologies of our own time. Wow, and I just thought I was a poor kid, when in reality I was one of the richest kids around.

Anyway, I lived in a make-believed world most of the time, an exciting time, I did things I ever wanted to do and be, except when my mother called me, "James, come here." Usually when she called me like that it wasn't usually good, except during the times she wanted to call me to eat. Usually, when she called me, she'd say "James come, eat," not "James, come here." When she said "James, come here," she usually wanted me to do something, or she wanted to chastise me for something I had or hadn't done. Things like, "Did you make that mess over there? Clean it up, and right now young man." And, even when it was something good, like "James, come eat," she usually had one of those backhanded comments like, "Young man, clean your plate." After she had walked a few feet away, for effect, she'd say, "Children in China are hungry, don't waste that food."

Some of the things I remember my mother told me that stuck was (and I'm thankful for that down-home wisdom) "If you don't have something to say, then don't say nothing at all." Then there was the one she would say (while looking directly at me over her glasses) "James, if you can't say something nice about someone, say nothing at all." She really used that "nothing at all" phrase a lot. "If you don't do something right, don't do nothing at all." "You should finish a job, or you'd don't start it at all." Then there was the one where she told me to "Go, clean up for dinner, and make sure you wash behind your ears and wash your elbows." What the heck did I need to clean behind my ears and elbows when I was using my hands to eat with? And, besides she was not looking at me, so why did she know I needed to wash behind my ears and elbows. I just guess that was a mother thing.

Then there was the one I never did use very much because there *were always* consequences. "Don't you sass me back, young man, you know that a smart mouth carries a sore behind." Hey, that little woman, could carry a *big* wallop with a *small* Peach tree switch, and she'd make me bring her the switch. I learned real quickly not to get a flimsy switch (a thin and easily broken one). She'd make me go get another one and because I had given her a flimsy switch, I would get a few extra lickings. One thing I realized, I might not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I learned quickly. Hey, I have never forgotten those down-home wisdom tips – A smart mouth carries a sore behind. I wish kids today would realize that. I've just always had a hard time with smart mouth kids. I was one of them a few times, but it didn't take long for me to stop that smart mouth before that behind was torn up with a good hardy Peach tree switch.

Another one of those down-home pieces of wisdom I learned from my mother was "Just because someone else jumps off a cliff, would you want to jump off too?" Well, I tried to test that wisdom. Most of the time, during my teenage years. I watched some of my classmates doing things that seemed to be "cool." Well, I kind of pushed that wisdom to the back side of my brain for a time and I did some of those (in hind sight stupid things) things my friends did. However, in time, thankfully a short time, I began to realize the truth of that down-home wisdom. I was

never arrested, never spent a night in jail and have no criminal record, unlike some of those I was wanting to follow after.

I finally found out how my mother read to me and encouraged me to read from Proverbs. After seeing the consequences of some of those “cool” things my friends received, I started reading Proverbs for myself. I discovered that the book of Proverbs was filled with moral benefits of wisdom. “My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding... you will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; do not forget my teachings; trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. He who listens to a life-giving rebuke (even Peach tree switches from your mother), will be at home among the wise”¹⁰⁹

Hey, experienced wisdom, even if it is called down-home wisdom, even if it came from your mother or Proverbs, it's pretty good stuff. One who has lived for a long time, I can testify that wisdom is pretty solid, and if you follow it, you'll have a better life. At least you never have to keep looking back over your shoulder, or trying to skirt from the law, or get a whipping with a Peach tree switch.

Get all the wisdom you can get and apply it.

JB120917

¹⁰⁹ Proverbs chapters two, three, and sixteen

...about understanding God**149**

Many people today have not discovered a God big enough for the needs of the modern day and age, and many religious people are strenuously trying to defend an outgrown conception of God who exist between the pages of the Bible or outside the four walls of the church. Many have seen enough to know that God is immeasurably “bigger” than our forefathers imagined. Modern science is discovering that there is an incredibly complex Being who is behind we call the universe and life itself. The purpose of this article is to expose the many inadequate conceptions of God and to help us find ways to catch a glimpse of the true and living God.

There are hundreds of thousands of words in many different languages that attempt to describe God. I have spent my entire adult life learning about many of those descriptions, but I am still bewildered with many of the attempts to describe God. The best thing I have learned that is truly credible is: God is indescribable. We need not try to keep God within the pages of the Bible or outside the four walls of the church. God is much bigger than these. We have for thousands of years tried to keep God in word form. It just can't contain Him. He is too big to harness and control. One of the best descriptions of God is “the fullness of divine power.” Beyond control. Power without limits.

The two essential and personal names of God in Hebrew Scriptures are *Elohim* and *Jehovah* (more correctly *Yahweh*), who “He who is.” He is not qualified. He has no beginning and no end. He just is. God has no past, no future, He is always in the present. In the English word for God is identical with the Anglo-Saxon word for “good” and therefore is “divine goodness.” Many words trying to describe God are things like Personal Intelligence, Creator and Preserver of all things, the perfect Moral Ruler of the universe, and on and on it goes to somehow make sense of God.

One of the best description of God in the Scriptures declares that God is incomprehensible¹¹⁰ In other words, perfect or complete knowledge of God is not attainable by man upon the earth. We just simply can't find enough words to describe God.

If you woke up one morning and everyone in the world was speaking your own language, you'd probably think you would be able communicate with everyone in the world. You might be able to describe yourself to your friends in your community, in the state you live in, in the country you live in, and your friends in other countries of the world. You could describe with your friends that you are male or female, you are tall or short, slim or a little plump, dark or light, you hair is black or blond, your age, the community you live in, the school you went to, the job you have, if you are single or married, your race, and on and on, but have you described yourself completely? No, it is not possible to describe in words who you really are. You are a creature of the Creator, and you are unique. The Creator is unique. God is indescribable

Jason Leister, writer of the Incomparable Expert Daily Journal, tells about a consultant of his who is an amazing international designer. His designer friend, even though one of the best in

¹¹⁰ Job 11:7; 21:14; 36:26; Psalm 77:19; Romans 11:33

the world, is having a challenge communicating what he does to the world in a way that makes sense to others.¹¹¹

Jason, after thinking about it, says, "It soon became clear that there's really no way (yet) for him to talk about what he does so that all of his prospective clients *get it*. If he tries to describe himself with words that other people understand, by picking a title for himself that is well accepted, then his way of working, his extreme attention to detail, his over-abundance of patience, and his premium fees are just a few of the things that don't fit. It is completely impossible to describe Jason's designer friend.

There is no language (yet) that can communicate the proper feelings and ideas about his work. That is also true about God. We try as we may, reading from the Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, English or any other language of the world, and we still can't conceive of the *real* essence of God.

We can't understand God through putting together words in any language. We can't understand God in scientific terms. I spent years with time and effort studying the science of God and of the relation between God and the universe.

I studied Systematic Theology. The text book in that class was A. H. Strong's Systematic Theology. We studied Theology (about God); anthropology (man); Soteriology (salvation); Ecclesiology (church); Eschatology (final things) and all those other "ologies" (a big book of 1166 pages). During that class I was exposed to a small little book (124 pages about ¼ inch thick) called *Your God Is Too Small*¹¹² by J. B Phillips that expanded my inadequate view of God more than I could have ever imagined. I was so impressed with the book I purchased a carton of books and gave them to my minister friends across the country. One of my friends mailed me a check with a note, "I'm sending money for the book you sent me and I burned that thing." After talking with him he told me he never read the back of the book. Most of us have developed a concept of God that is simply too small. Our conception of God usually cannot stand up to the winds of the storms of *real* life.

Preachers are a lot like car salesmen. Car salesmen have a goal. To sell cars. Car salesmen talk about the *features* of the particular model (whatever the model is). The salesperson works the *features* until he/she gets the customer to sign on the dotted line. As the purchaser starts driving the car, they often become disappointed in their purchase. They are not disappointed in the car as it was designed to perform, they are disappointed in the *features* they have been sold by the salesperson.

Preachers often preach about the *features*; misapplying doctrine to their listeners with sunglasses on, but without telling the whole story. When we hear from preachers about God from a doctrinal standpoint, we are often actually hindered by our understanding of the true God. Misapplying doctrine thinks us that following God is a perfect bed of roses, a state of affairs in which

¹¹¹ Jason Leister, Incomparable Expert Daily Journal, Nov. 24, 2017

¹¹² J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1961

everything in the garden is lovely all the time and problems no longer exist – or if they come, they have only to be taken to the throne of grace, and they will melt away at once.

As we begin to live life, we start to realize that life is *not* fair. Life in the real world is hard, and it sometimes doesn't make any sense at all. Sometimes we can't wrap around our minds and hearts the way things are because we have an inadequate concept of God; we have been sold a bill of goods. We just don't know why things happen. We don't understand why bad things happen to good people. We don't know how bad people kill good people. We become totally frustrated and deeply saddened. We question God as we have been told to be by the preacher.

Phillips talks about many of the unreal concepts of God: Resident Policeman. Parental Hangover. Grand Old Man. Meek and Mild. Absolute Perfection. Heavenly Bosom. God-in-a-Box. Managing Director. Second Hand God. Perennial Grievance. Pale Galilean. Projected Image. God in a Hurry. God for the Elite. God of Bethel. God without Godhead. God by any other name. God must not be limited to religious matters or even to the "religious" interpretation of life. These are *features* that preachers use to sell their bill of goods, and are inadequate or sometime totally deceptive about God. When one tells us about an absolute God, we better run for the hills. God must not be confined to one particular section of time nor must we imagine Him as the local god of this planet or even the universe that has thus far discovered. God cannot be described in scientific terms, religious terms, or any other terms.

In understanding God to some small degree is an art. Most people can do art to some degree. Art takes time. Art requires focus. Sometimes it requires an unfocused view. Art is experienced. By the way, to do art, you must be willing to do it poorly at first. Art is creativeness; making or doing of things that have form and beauty. Art is by doing. To become an accomplished artist, one must start at the beginning and work through skill, focus and practice. Actually starting with where you are is really the only requirement for doing art. Kind of the same way of knowing about God, starting where you are is the only requirement for knowing God.

Most children are creative. You probably knew to do art as a child. And then the system did its best to beat it out of your creativity. Most children are creative. Most children have great imaginations. Most children create art with ease. Most children (who have been taught about God in their childhood) probably have a better understanding of God in their childhood than we now have of God. Some children can come to understand God in the surge and thunder of the sea, for some in the dazzling splendor of a mountain peak, for some the song birds of spring, for some the smell of wood-smoke or of the frosty of autumn evenings, for some – the list is ending.

I believe that one of the best ways of learning to understand God is to experience what you know of God and practice experiencing God in your daily life, talking to Him, listening to Him and following Him as you know Him and keep on practicing, like learning to do art.

We have become totally frustrated and deeply saddened by our inadequate concepts of God as He has been told to be by religious car salesmen. I fully believe that J. B. Phillips is correct, that we have been sold a bill of goods – that our God is too small, that our concepts are faulty and inadequate at best.

I recently read a book called *The Shack* by William P. Young.¹¹³ *The Shack* was on the #1 New York Times Bestseller and has over one million copies in print. Eugene Peterson says *The Shack* has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good. I couldn't put it down. It was so absorbing. A fictional story that shares about Mackenzie Allen Philips's youngest daughter, Missy, who was abducted during a family vacation and had been brutally murdered in a shack in a wilderness. The Shack, in a world where religion seems to grow increasingly irrelevant, wrestles with the timeless question, "Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?" Mack finds God in a way he had never imagined in a hundred thousand ways. I don't want to ruin the book for you because I want you to read it if you haven't already. I believe *The Shack* will astound you and perhaps transform you as much as it did Mack and me.

Often, with good intentions, people might say that if you have troubles it is a call to consider your ways. But trouble is not necessarily a sign of being off track at all; for as the Bible declares in general that "many are afflicted of the righteous."¹¹⁴ We live in a troubled world. Many people are troubled mentally and do some horrible things to each other, non-religious people and very religious people. Many people are filled with troubles. Often, in the midst of those heartaches and troubles, we may have an opportunity to get to know God better. Through many of those trying times we can actually begin to understand God better than we have ever understood Him before.

When it seems that your whole world has turned upside down and you feel nowhere else you can turn to, you might spend some time with whatever degree you know of God and let Him help you to better understand Him. You don't have to know anything about God, just tell Him what you are feeling right now and trust whatever you know about God, (you have to trust someone or something). What do you have to lose? You might experience what Mack in *The Shack* experienced. You might be astounded and even transformed. You might know a lot more about God than you think you do. Take the plunge. Step over the edge. Take a step of trust in the dark.

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Just some of the reviews from *The Shack*. ...one of a kind invitations to journey to the very heart of God. ...cuts through the clichés of both religion and bad writing to reveal something compelling and beautiful about life's integral dance with the divine. ...it ushers you directly into the heart of the nature of God in the midst of agonizing human suffering. ...a beautiful story of how God comes to find us in the midst of sorrow, trapped by disappointments, betrayed by our own presumptions. ...the most absorbing work of fiction I've read in many years. ...will leave you craving the presence of God. ...captures the shift from being highly responsible people in a religious system to walking in intimacy as we respond to the fragrance of Christ in daily life. ... during a difficult transition in my life, this story has blown the door wide open to my soul

¹¹³ William Paul Young, *The Shack*, Windblown Media, CA, 2007

¹¹⁴ Psalm 34:19

...about the ; tattoo - an important message

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Have you noticed that high school and college age student campuses all over are sporting a new tattoo called the *semicolon tattoo*? Is this just another fad for the college set? No, it is about something more. It is about an important message.

As fire chaplains we deal with a lot of issues that most people don't think about until it hits them in the face. We deal with people who have lost their homes, their dreams and their futures. We deal with people who suddenly wake up with life-changing issues; people who are walking, jumping, skipping one day and are bed-ridden for life the next. We live in a world who has a growing problem that most everyone passes over every day.

We talk about the multitudes of issues: political issues; economic issues; race issues; and (probably one of the most past times and gossip subjects in America today) about our illnesses – our headaches, our backaches, our Arthritis pains, sinus infections, our knee replacements, hip replacements, our heart valve replacements, our liver transplants and the like, but we just seem to skip over and avoid talking about one of the most common illnesses, probably the greatest problems we deal with every day – mental health; depression and suicide issues.

I have a plaque in my office that reminds me every day that says: “Everyone seems normal until you get to know them.” That is so true. We all have our own personal issues that could be in some major or minor degree called mental illnesses. We seem pretty normal until we really get to know ourselves. People (including me) need to deal with their mental health in the same way they deal with their physical health.

According to those who measure such issues, say that an American takes his or her own life every 13 minutes every day. In a single year, 40,000 people in America take their own lives. Suicide is the 10th most common cause of death in this country. That's staggering. More and more it comes home to our communities, our families and even to our own doors.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention indicates that *most* victims of suicide suffer from diagnosable disorders. We need to be aware of the symptoms instead of ignoring them until it's too late. There are risk factors that can be observed: the loss of interest in life, loss of pleasure, insomnia, recurrent major depression, substance abuse, giving away possessions, impulsive or aggressive tendencies, severe agitation, panic attacks, diminished concentration, a blast of anxiety, drastic changes in a terminal illness, complicated traumatic grief, unremitting hopelessness, awareness of family history of suicide, sudden change in the loss of a spouse or child who has died, loss of a job, loss of a home, moved away from long-time home. I've witnessed a number of suicides where the family saw NO clue of the event until we sat down with them to do the investigation of the suicide, then they saw multiple symptoms. Changes in lifestyle habits, giving stuff away, spending time alone making lists, calling relatives in a different way and time. If only they had seen the clues. If only they had intervened in a timely fashion.

So what's the semicolon have to do with all of this? The semicolon tattoos have behind the ear; they are tattooed on the leg, on the foot; on the wrist. Most of the tattoos are SMALL, but the meaning is HUGE... Why? What does the semicolon mean? A semicolon in writing separates two thoughts but indicates they share something in common. For those of us who do not write very often we might never use the semicolon or think about them at all.

However, it is becoming one of the most popular tattoos in the country. What does the semicolon tattoo symbolize? The semicolon symbolizes *Hope; inspiration; my life matters*. The semicolon tattoo means that the optional semicolon continues a sentence rather than ending one like an abrupt period of my life – *my life is not over. Help you keep me going*.

A semicolon means my life isn't over. The semicolon is a *mark of survival*, resilience and triumph against inner struggles. It means someone saw the clue and intervened. It means I'm alive instead of dead. It means someone cared about me in a very difficult place.

The semicolon tattoo symbolizes that you're not alone; that 350 million people have lived through depression and mental illness and relates to you. It could also mean that they are susceptible. It can be a call for help. It is a way of saying, "Hey, look at me, I'm struggling, I've survived and want to continue to live. It could say, "I really don't want to die."

You can help! You can encourage, love and inspire people who are struggling with depression, and end-of-life tendencies. A young lady who herself fought against mental illness and depression throughout her life created the Semicolon Project in 2013¹¹⁵. In fact, Amy lost her father to suicide which spurred her to create the Semicolon Project as a way of honoring her father and bring hope to others who are struggling with depression and mental illness.

Amy Bleuel developed a website which makes a simple statement with this punctuation mark. On the website she states: Your life matters. It's all about Hope. Inspiration. The Semicolon Project attempts to tell each person that the story isn't over. The project is a faith-based



nonprofit that encourages each person to keep battling depression, self-harm and other issues.

Many times, the only thing we can do for hurting souls is to stand with them as they hurt. Sit quietly with them; hold a hand; give a gentle hug; and encourage them to share their story with you. Give them a semicolon instead of a period.

Remember this is a prevention article, not a suicidal intervention article about where a person is immediately ready to end his or her life. Keep a copy of the website on the back of your business

cards and share with people who are struggling with depression, self-harm and other end of life

¹¹⁵ www.projectsemicolon.com

ailments who need a semicolon, and encourage them to check out the website. Then ask them what they thought about the website (that is to encourage them to get in touch) so I can see what's going on with them and hopefully build a dialogue for further care.

Although this is not an article about a suicide intervention, if you are facing an actual intervention dealing with a suicidal individual I would encourage you to simply stay calm and listen (really listen); let him or her talk about his or her feelings; be accepting and non-judgmental; ask a few gentle questions to keep them talking: What I understand you are saying to me, you are feeling sad or unhappy? So, what I hear you say is, you feel that your situation seems hopeless? What I understand is you've been there before, you have a semicolon tattoo? Tell me about your tattoo? Can you tell me about your religious experience? We do know that an emotional disturbance is a treatable life struggle, and that God can be glorified through this, once it's overcome, right?

Either way, your goal is not to be a therapist (unless you are a licensed therapist) whether you are doing preventive care or suicide intervention, your goal is to give psychological first aid and bring the person to agree to see a competent counselor and bring them to a comprehensive counseling service for treatment.

There are too many mental health issues that we are not able to qualify to deal with as a fire chaplain, things like Schizophrenia, Anxiety Disorders, Bipolar Disorder (manic-depressive illness) and others. We are primarily to be there, to listen and love. We decide if we can help; determine what we can do; do what we are qualified to do (make the connection, help them be safe, be kind, calm and compassionate, make basic needs, listen, give realistic assurance, and make a referral to a qualified mental health professional).

If we are in an actual critical intervention, we do what we can. Do not leave the person alone. Call for help to make a connection to a mental health professional, to incident command, or other supervisor. If there are no other person available, call 911 to obtain police assistance. Never leave the person alone.

By the way, the website is: www.projectsemicolon.com

Hope you have a semicolon too. Your life matters!

JB121217



Warr;or = fighting to overcome

We have heard a lot about unity in the news lately. We hear about how the Republicans can bring unity and healing to America and make her great again. We hear about how the Democrats can build unity and make America great again. What I hear is a lot of rhetoric, with not much substance.

I have a theory that comes from the Bible, that I believe, can bring unity and healing to America. *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

To begin with I must set the stage for the context of this scripture, lest someone jump all over me that I don't understand the scriptures. The promise God makes here is presupposed to a very specific context. This promise is given to God's **people who are called** by God's **name**. The promise was given to *a specific covenant people* [and should not be applied to other nations or even to the church]. God say if Israel (which had become faithless to God and had experienced a lot of consequences as a result – famine, invasion, deportation to another country) would humble themselves, pray, seeks God and turn from their sins, He will forgive their sins and heal their land [the promised land of Israel].

Having said this, however, these verses reflect to God's gracious nature, and on that basis we may conclude a fundamental principle – that any person or people regardless of race or geography can come to the Lord in humility, praying to Him, seeking His face, and turning from their sins, will find forgiveness and healing for their land (life).

The first statement is: *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves.”* His promise presupposes a very specific condition of *His People*. I am a Christian, so I'm directing this article toward Christians. However, it also applies to our Jewish brothers as well. When we as children of God humble ourselves, earnestly pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wickedness [our pride], there is no telling what changes in America can take place - even becoming great again in a short time.

We today are a lot like Israel was back then (around B.C 1004). We are leaving God out of everything – out of our lives, out of our schools, out of our government and wickedness is running rampant in our streets, our houses, our mouths, our hearts and we are NOT unified.

Our nation was founded upon Judeo-Christian principles. The Declaration of Independence was signed by a very diverse group of people – lawyers, a physician, farmers, merchants, a scientist, businessmen, an ironworker, a clergyman, an educator, surveyor, and a political writer, but they had a united front to build a *United States* in America.

The First Amendment of the Constitution gave us freedom of religion in our country; that government shall not be a favorable religion nor prohibit the free exercise thereof. Our country was born in religion. The first order of business in Congress was a call to prayer to Almighty God. Our country was a unified group of Judeo-Christians who were unified in serving Almighty God.

However, as time went on, unity was lost in separateness. Specifically, Christians are not unified today. The church is fragmented with man-made divisions. We have many denominations that separate us. Just before he was crucified, Jesus made an earnest prayer for his disciples, “*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name –the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one*” (John 17:11). He knew he was leaving this world, and the church was to do his work on earth. He knew they must be as one to do that job.

Paul in his missionary travels told the church how important it was to be unified in the body of Christ. Paul used an illustration from the human body [with many parts]; when the body is broken, divided, and separated we simply can't do what God has called us to do. At best, we can only limp along in our separateness.

As I hear of all the churches closing their doors, I am sad on the surface, but as I take a long look beneath the surface, I believe God is rebuilding “His Church” from the ashes of all separated churches. Jesus promised that I will build “my church” and the gates of hell will not overcome it (Matt. 16:18). I don't believe Jesus wants churches; He wants “His church,” unified. In fact, Jesus told Peter he did not get his revelation from man, but from the Father.

Denominations have, for the most part, been built upon the interpretations of men. Denominations have created more distinctive doctrines from every other doctrines of other denominations than you can imagine. Christian denominations are more divisive than unified. Even though a lot of believers call ourselves Christian, yet we are more rule keepers of men than we are followers of Jesus Christ. And, I am persuaded that other religions are doing the same.

As a professed Christian, I have a passion for seeing us called by His name “His church” (not the names of men – Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, etc.); to move toward seeking His face, humbling ourselves, pray, and turning from our wicked ways. When we do this, the Lord promises He will hear from heaven, and He will forgive our sin and heal our land.

If you are a Christian, I would like to share a link: www.hisplaceajesuschurch.com which has a series of articles that describes a no-frills, *focused on Jesus* kind of church that I believe God wants in this day and age. Articles include from “sharing the vision” to what one can do to take “the next step” toward helping to bring about such a church, no matter what church you are affiliated with right now – no matter the name of your church help it become “His church.” *If my people will seek His face, stop our wicked [selfish] divisions, God promises He will forgive our sins and heal our land.* My theory is that such a church can make a real difference in America and any other country of the world.

God bless the Church, and God bless America.

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...about what I can leave behind

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As I write this article I'm five days into a good case of flu which has turned me every way but loose, chills and fever, mind-fog and just simply bad all over feeling. I discovered joint pains in joints that I didn't even know I had in my body. I coughed so much that I didn't even want to breathe. Sometimes during those miserable days I just wanted to go home. As I thought about going home (to my eternal destiny), I kept thinking about my dash (what I had done between my birth and my death that has made any real difference that I had ever been here).

A few months ago I did a Rambling about the dash – between your birth date and your death date that is placed on your tomb stone. The dash on that tomb stone represents one's life after you're gone. If you live 30 days or a hundred years, when people walk by your tomb stone all they'll see is a dash between your birth date and your death date, unless you have left something behind that prompts people to talk about. That dash represents all you have done and all you've been in your life. Sobering thought isn't it! Especially, when you are sick as a dog and feeling your demise could be very near. Even in a mind-fog and in pain, you think about who you are and what you've done that has mattered.

In another Rambling a few months ago, I talked about an old man reflects. The old man started out in his life working to climb the ladder of success as far as he could climb and looking forward to having a fat retirement nest egg somewhere around retirement age. Most of us head down that same path with great ideas and great ideals.

We want to be somebody. We want to have a great position. We want to be wealthy and/or powerful. We want people to look at us and say, "He's important" or "He's rich" or "He's powerful" or "He's so and so – high government official, Senator, doctor, lawyer or Indian Chief. And, we spend a lot of time and money working to get there, but in looking toward the end of your life or a good case of the flu, all of those things fall away as of importance. What did you do with your dash that really mattered?

After experiencing life and living, the old man has found out some real practical wisdom. The old man has learned that it was not worth the time and expense of trying to figure out how to get his piece of the pie. The old man learned that he should have spent more time, energy and money in trying to find out how he could give back to something to the world – the people around him, his family, his friends, his neighbors, his community – a specific group of people with real everyday problems who needed to be solved.

No matter what worth-while project, career, business, relationships, chaplaincy, pastorate or whatever, Jason Leisure says, "It always revolves around people who need something you can give." The old man spent too much time to try to make things easier on himself; wanted to have a great, trouble-free life. However, it didn't turn out that way. It is simply a waste of time trying to live a trouble-free life. No matter where the journey takes you, there will always be a fair amount of turbulence along the way. Troubles come upon us and compound themselves. Hey, life is not fair. The guy who told you that life is fair was a liar. Life comes at us from all sides and when we least expect it. Turbulence comes at us in all kinds of ways – relationship troubles,

financial troubles, health problems, disabilities that change our lives forever. These things come in the outset of life and in the middle ages of life and in old age. Life IS life; ups and downs; good days and bad days and all kinds of days in between. Every journey in life has some risks; there will always be a fair amount of turbulence along the way.

I was traveling from the far northeast to the far south by air several years ago. At first, my flight was cancelled from a major airline to tree-top airways flying into a small airfield, then moved by bus to a larger airport. After boarding and awaiting for takeoff, we were disembarked because of mechanical problems with the airplane. Waiting for three hours for another airplane that would take us on toward Atlanta to make another connection, we finally boarded and waited for them to anti-freeze the wing controls. We finally got in the air and headed for home. Things were beginning to go my way, we deplaned from Buffalo to Pittsburg and on toward Atlanta and immediately boarded the next connection. After getting on the airplane in Atlanta and headed to Jackson I felt all was right with the world now, I'm on my way to last leg of this journey, when we suddenly experienced a terrible storm. The pilot tried to climb over the storm, then around the storm and final had to go through the storm with some of the most terrible turbulence I've ever witnessed. During that time of turbulence I think my sincere, honest, and real God-to-me and me-to-God prayer relationship grew more than in my entire life. During that turbulence I actually put my life into God's hands more than I ever had. I actually knew my life was over at that time, and totally surrendered to God's will completely. I actually prayed for God to take care of my family now that I would not be there to take care of them. How stupid was that? Did I think I was taking care of my family? How egotistical was that? God had been taking care of them all along. That was actually a rational moment for me. I realized that I and my family were taken care of by God, not by me. My second reasonable thought was, I had put someone else first. I had put my family first. My prayer was not for my life to be spared, my prayer was for my family to be safe and taken care of.

Now, I need to remind you that several years earlier I had said I had surrendered my life to God; that I was surrendered to serve in the ministry. During the turbulence of that storm I actually surrendered me to God period. I surrendered my will to others, not myself. I kind of learned during that experience that surrendering to God is not to be a big-shot preacher going around preaching and witnessing how great I am in God's economy. I learned that day that being surrendered to God period. I kind of realized that day that surrendered to God is no bed of roses, that being in the ministry is not a pleasure cruise. I was learning that it was not about me. It was about those I had been called to serve. It was about not what I would get. It was about what I could give.

In that turbulence, there was a defining moment in my life. I was no longer to live for me, I was to live for others. I actually learned about a Christ thing that day – Christian is a Christ thing. Putting others before self.

So, what should I leave behind? The notable accomplishments in my life? I have had some notable accomplishments. I have received a lot of awards; I have climbed a lot of ladders in my careers; (I have saved some newspaper clippings of some of those accomplishments, but in

hindsight I realize that it was not my accomplishments, it was God using me as his instrument in doing the accomplishments).

It is not about the good experiences in my life that defines my life. It is not in some of those bad experiences that made me grow as a person does not define my life, but I know that the only people who will ever know about my *dash* when God has taken me into His Majestic Presence are those lives who have been touched by my life in times when they needed help and I was there – listened, and loved them without judgment.

The old man has learned that there *is* a God; that he isn't him; that God is love and the old man is not love, but is just trying to be like Him in some small degree.

To have touched the lives of others is what the ole man wants to leave behind.

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