

Spiritual Reflections & Prayers



Seton College
St Vincent de Paul Group



-Compiled by Melissa Haworth-

Spiritual Reflections

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Better Change

'Being the change' is about being a better person so that you can make a difference in the world.

Changing the World

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.

Unknown Monk 1100AD



Everybody, Somebody, Nobody and Anybody

Once upon a time, there were four people named Everybody, Somebody, Nobody and Anybody.... When there was an important job to be done, Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. When Nobody did it, Everybody got angry because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Somebody would do it, but Nobody realised that Nobody would do it. So it ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done in the first place!

Chris Osgood

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which of the people featured in the story do you associate with the most?
- Which person do you feel you need to challenge in your life?
- What are some actions you can take to change this?

Taken from 'Spiritual Reflections' – Compiled by St Vincent de Paul Society, Parramatta Diocese, 2003

Leave Your Light On

My blinking buddies are back for the summer again. For several years now I have had the pure delight of watching the fireflies gather in my backyard at night and share their light. I enjoy standing there watching them blink on and off as sun sets, the stars rise, and the air cools in the evening. What I love the most is seeing a lone firefly sharing its light only to be answered by first one and then another and another. Soon dozens are flashing their lights on and off in perfect unison. It is then when my whole backyard becomes a symphony of light and Earth feels a lot closer to Heaven. It is then when I joyously remember all the light we can share too.



We all have one advantage over my blinking buddies, though. We can leave our lights on. We can shine them in the darkest night and add light to the sunniest day. We can light up the hearts around us with our love and brighten every soul we meet with our happiness. We can shine our goodness, kindness, and oneness with God so that everyone can see. And just like my firefly friends we can help others to get their lights shining as well.

Don't be afraid to shine your light. Don't be afraid to leave it on even when the world around you seems dark. Shine it brightly. Shine it joyously. Shine it lovingly. Let it glow in oneness with God's light as well. Before you know it you will no longer be a lone firefly in the darkness. Before you know it others all around you will begin to shine their own lights as well. Before you know it you will be making this world a better, brighter, and more beautiful place.

In this life you have two choices. You can sit in the darkness or you can help God to light up the universe. If a few dozen lightning bugs can make my backyard a Heavenly symphony of light then just imagine what God could do with you. Have a bright, shining, and glorious day then and always remember to leave your light on.

Joseph J. Mazzella

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is a gift that you have that you can share with others?
- Who is a person who seems to 'shine' with God's love?

No Hands but Yours

Christ has no body now on earth
but yours,
No hands but yours,
no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes
through which Christ's compassion
looks out on the world,
Yours are the feet
with which He is to go about doing good,
And yours are the hands
with which he is to bless us now.

Written by St Teresa of Avila

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Considering we are the hands, the feet, and the eyes of Christ on earth, how can we carry out our Vincentian work to our full potential?
- What do you feel called to do?
- How can you be the 'face of Jesus'?



The Starfish Story



A young man is walking along the ocean and sees a beach on which thousands and thousands of starfish have washed ashore. Further along he sees an old man, walking slowly and stooping often, picking up one starfish after another and tossing each one gently into the ocean.

“Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?” he asks.

“Because the sun is up and the tide is going out and if I don’t throw them further in they will die.”

“But, old man, don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it! You can’t possibly save them all, you can’t even save one-tenth of them. In fact, even if you work all day, your efforts won’t make any difference at all.”

The old man listened calmly and then bent down to pick up another starfish and threw it into the sea. “It made a difference to that one.”

REFLECTION

Sometimes we feel like some issues are too big for us to make a difference. But in this story we see the impact of one act of kindness. People are often quick to comment, like the man in the story, about the negative aspects of what you are doing, because they can only see the big picture. But if we are able to see both the small and bigger picture, we can see value in the small things we do such as a kind word or helping someone. This story tells us that we can’t do everything, for example the boy couldn’t stop the starfish landing on the beach but he could throw them back in, letting them live another day.

Character & Making Good choices

The person who you become - your character - is shaped by the choices that you make in your life.



Being Polite

I walked with a friend to the newsstand the other night, and he bought a paper, thanking the owner politely. The owner, however, did not even acknowledge it. "A sullen fellow, isn't he?" I commented as we walked away.

"Oh, he's that way every night," shrugged my friend.

"Then why do you continue being so polite to him?" I asked.

And my friend replied, "Why should I let him determine how I'm going to act?"

Sidney J. Harris

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Is there someone who you know that often seems impolite? How do you usually respond to them?
- How can you be kind to someone like this?

Children learn what they live

If a child lives with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, they learn to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, they learn to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If a child lives with praise, they learn to appreciate.

If a child lives with security, they learn to have faith.

If a child lives with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, They learn to find love in the world.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What impact do you want to have on the next generation?
- Choose one positive quality and practise the action this week. (e.g. try to encourage those around you.)

The Carpenter's House

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family.

He would miss the pay cheque, but he needed to retire. They could get by. The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favour. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

Author Unknown

REFLECTION

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. Sometimes we do not put in our best effort into what we are doing. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized that we would have done it differently.

Think about how you are building your life. Do you try your best, no matter what your best may be? Are there ways that you can put more effort into your school work, in serving others, in spending your time wisely?

Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.

The Next 24 Hours

The next 24 hours are guaranteed to excite us,
to lift us to new levels of understanding,
to move us into situations with others where we
can offer our unique contributions
All that is asked of us is a willingness to trust that we
will be given just what we need at each moment.



We can dare to live, fully, just for today.
We can appreciate the extraordinariness of every
breath we take, every challenge we encounter.
Within each experience is the invitation for us to grow,
to reach out to others in caring ways,
to discover more fully the people we are capable of being.



We must not let a single moment go by unnoticed.
When we withdraw from life, we stunt our growth.
We need involvement with others,
involvement that perturbs us, humours us,
even stresses us.

We tap our internal resources only when we have been pushed
to our limits, and our participation in life gifts us, daily, with that push.

How necessary the push!

None of us will pass this way again.

What we see and feel and say today are gone forever.

We have so much to regret when we let things slip away, unnoticed or
unappreciated.

A special series of events has been planned for me today.

I shall not miss it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Name one thing today that you appreciate today
- What is one thing that you want to understand more today?
- How can you be kind today? And how can you include others?
- How can you challenge yourself today to be the best person you can be?

The Power of One

You are one.
You are unique.
You are important.
You are special.

One song can spark a moment
One flower can wake the dream
One tree can start a forest
One bird can herald spring

One smile begins a friendship
One handclasp lifts a soul
One star can guide a ship at sea
One word can frame the goal

One vote can change a nation
One sunbeam lights a room
One candle wipes out darkness
One laugh will conquer gloom

One step must start each journey
One word must start each prayer
One hope will raise our spirits
One touch can show you care

One voice can speak with wisdom
One heart can know what's true
One life can make the difference
You see, it's up to you!!

(Author Unknown)

The Scorpion and the Old Man

One morning, after he had finished his meditation, the old man opened his eyes and saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the water. As the scorpion was washed closer to the tree, the old man quickly stretched himself out on one of the long roots that branched out into the river and reached out to rescue the drowning creature. As soon as he touched it, the scorpion stung him. Instinctively the man withdrew his hand. A minute later, after he had regained his balance, he stretched himself out again on the roots to save the scorpion. This time the scorpion stung him so badly with its poisonous tail that his hand became swollen and bloody and his face contorted with pain.

At that moment, a passer-by saw the old man stretched out on the roots struggling with the scorpion and shouted: “Hey, old man, what’s wrong with you? Only a fool would risk his life for the sake of an ugly, evil creature. Don’t you know you could kill yourself trying to save that ungrateful scorpion?”

The old man turned his head. Looking into the stranger’s eyes he said calmly, “My friend, just because it is the scorpion’s nature to sting, that does not change my nature to save.”



REFLECTION

In life, we are going to come across people who are unkind to us. People can say or do nasty things to us which really hurt – just like the man in this story got hurt by the scorpion. We can’t choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we respond. We don’t need to let the pain that we have received define how we act, speak and respond. Instead, we can choose to be kind, positive and loving.

This story also reminds us of the power of forgiveness. We can choose to be bitter and angry, or we can choose to let go and move on. Which will you choose?

The Two Wolves

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."

He continued, "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

REFLECTION

We have the potential to be kind, wonderful people, but we also have the potential to be angry, greedy people. Our character is formed by the choices we make. In the story, it talks about feeding the wolf that you want to win. In our lives, this means making good decisions and surrounding ourselves with positive things if we want to be a good person. Alternatively, if we feed on bad things, it will be harder to be a good person.

FEED GOODNESS WITH:

- Good friends who respect you and are loyal and positive
- Prayer to God
- Naming things that you are grateful for
- Serving others

STARVE BADNESS WITH:

- Avoiding gossip, teasing and negative humour
- Letting go of your mistakes, forgiving yourself and moving forward
- Avoid hanging out with people who are constantly complaining or who disrespect you

When You Thought I Wasn't Looking

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator,
and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you feed a stray cat,
and I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I heard you say a prayer,
and I knew there is a God I could always talk to
and I learned to trust Him.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend who was sick,
and I learned that we all have to help take care of each other.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you give your time and money to help people who had nothing,
and I learned that those who have something
should give to those who don't.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I felt you kiss me goodnight and I felt safe and loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw tears come from your eyes,
and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I learned most of life's lessons that I need to know
to be a good and productive person when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I looked at you and wanted to say,
"Thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."

REFLECTION QUESTION

Who is someone
who inspires you by
the way that they
live their life?



COMMUNITY & INCLUDING

*Every person is a child of God.
Respect the dignity of every human person.
(From the 'Sayings of Seton')*

A Sense of a Goose

Next Autumn, when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying in a "V" formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily, because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

If we have the sense of a goose, we will stay in formation with those people who are heading the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs, whether with people or with geese flying south.

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

What message do we give when we honk from behind?

Finally - and this is important - when a goose gets sick or is wounded by gunshot, and falls out of the formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies; and only then do they launch out on their own, or with another formation to catch up with their own group.

If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.



Buffalo - United We Stand

One day a lion was watching a herd of water buffalo feeding in an open field. He had attempted to attack in the past. But he was no match for the strong buffalo with their sharp horns and hoofs. The lion had lost hope... however, he couldn't keep away. Hunger kept him coming back.

One afternoon the buffalo had an ugly fight. This time when the lion came to watch them. He found them in separate corners of a field. It was now easier than ever to attack the buffalo one at a time. Which the lion did to his great delight.

REFLECTION

Regardless of our differences, we must strive to work together with those around us. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This means that we can achieve so much more as a team. Together ordinary people can achieve extraordinary results. United we stand, divided we fall. The buffalos were easy to attack when they were fighting each other, but together the lion couldn't beat them.

Value your friends and don't let little things tear you apart. Be ready to understand and forgive others. Remember that united we stand, divided we fall.



In the Same Boat

Two men were out on the ocean in a boat.

One of them began drilling in the bottom of the boat, and the other, aghast said "What are you doing? Stop drilling!"

And the first man replied: "It's all right. I'm only drilling on my side."

Chopsticks

A woman who had worked all her life to bring about good was granted one wish: "Before I die let me visit both hell and heaven." Her wish was granted.

She was whisked off to a great banqueting hall. The tables were piled high with delicious food and drink. Around the tables sat miserable, starving people as wretched as could be. "Why are they like this?" she asked the angel who accompanied her. "Look at their arms," the angel replied. She looked and saw that attached to the people's arms were long chopsticks secured above the elbow. Unable to bend their elbows, the people aimed the chopsticks at the food, missed every time and sat hungry, frustrated and miserable. "Indeed this is hell! Take me away from here!"

She was then whisked off to heaven. Again she found herself in a great banqueting hall with tables piled high. Around the tables sat people laughing, contented, joyful. "No chopsticks I suppose," she said. "Oh yes there are. Look - just as in hell they are long and attached above the elbow but look... here people have learnt to feed one another."



REFLECTION

In life often we come across difficult times. It is in these times that we have a choice. We can choose to complain and be frustrated. Or we can choose to help those around us and work together with other people who are also struggling.

As it is said "it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Dandelions

A man who took great pride in his lawn found himself with a large crop of dandelions. He tried every method he knew to get rid of them. Still they plagued him.

Finally he wrote to the Department of Agriculture. He enumerated all the things he had tried and closed his letter with the question: "What shall I do now?"

In due course, the reply came: "We suggest you learn to love them."



THE SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him

Forever in the next.

Amen.

By Reinhold Niebuhr

Everyone can play

At a fundraising dinner for an American school that serves learning disabled children, the father of one of the students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After praising the school and its dedicated staff, he told the following story:

Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they'll let me play?" Shay's father knew that most of the boys would not want someone like Shay on their team, but the father also understood that if his son were allowed to play, it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging and some confidence to be accepted by others in spite of his handicaps.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play, not expecting much. The boy looked around for guidance and said, "We're losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him in to bat in the ninth inning."

Shay struggled over to the team's bench put on a team shirt with a broad smile and his Father had a small tear in his eye and warmth in his heart. The boys saw the father's joy at his son being accepted. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the right field.

Even though no hits came his way, he was obviously thrilled just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base and Shay was scheduled to be next at bat.

At this stage, do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball.

However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher, recognizing the other team putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay



could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball right back to the pitcher.

The game would now be over, but the pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have been the end of the game.

Instead, the pitcher threw the ball right over the head of the first baseman, out of reach of all team mates. Everyone from the stands and both teams started yelling, "Shay, run to first! Run to first!" Never in his life had Shay ever run that far but made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to make it to second base. By the time Shay rounded towards second base, the right fielder had the ball, the smallest guy on their team, who had a chance to be the hero for his team for the first time. He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions and he too intentionally threw the ball high and far over the third-baseman's head. Shay ran toward third base deliriously as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home.

All were screaming, "Shay, Shay, Shay, all the Way Shay" Shay reached third base, the opposing shortstop ran to help him and turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third! Shay, run to third." As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams and those watching were on their feet were screaming, "Shay, run home! Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit the "grand slam" and won the game for his team.



That day, said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world. Shay didn't make it to another summer and died that winter, having never forgotten being the hero and making his father so happy and coming home and seeing his mother tearfully embrace her little hero of the day!

Source: Rabbi Paysach Krohn, a popular lecturer and best-selling author of the ArtScroll Maggid series of short stories

Growing Good Corn

There once was a farmer who grew award-winning corn. Each year he entered his corn in the state fair where it won a blue ribbon.

One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew it. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbours.

"How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbours when they are entering corn in competition with yours each year?" the reporter asked.

"Why sir," said the farmer, "didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbours grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbours grow good corn."



He is very much aware of the connectedness of life. His corn cannot improve unless his neighbour's corn also improves.

So it is with our lives. Those who choose to live in peace must help their neighbours to live in peace. Those who choose to live well must help others to live well, for the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches. And those who choose to be happy must help others to find happiness, for the welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all.

Author Unknown

REFLECTION

The farmer in this story was successful because he helped those around him to also succeed. He realised that what people do around him would also affect him. If we want people to be kind to us, we should be kind to them. If we want to have friends, then we need to learn to be a friend.

The People Sitting Next To You

Look around you...

Who are the people sitting next to you?

The people next to you...

are the greatest miracles you will ever meet at this moment... and the greatest mysteries.

The people next to you...

are a unique universe of experience seething with necessity and possibility, dread and desire, smile and frowns, laughter and tears, fears, and hopes... all struggling to find expression.

The people next to you...

believe in something
stand for something
count for something
work for something
wait for something
run from something
run toward something.

The people next to you...

...are more than any description
...are more than any explanation

The people next to you...

are searching...
for meaning
for inner peace
for self-esteem
for something
they already have...

they just have to realize that.

The people next to you...

...have problems and fears just like you
...are often undecided
...but are strengthened with great toughness in the face of challenges and are able to survive the most unbelievable difficulties and challenges.

The people next to you...

are combinations of people met during all of their lifetimes.

The people next to you...

...have something they can do better than anyone else in the world
...have strengths they do not even recognize
...need to talk about their abilities
...need you to listen.

The people next to you...

need a friend
want to understand you
care for you.

The people next to you...

are special human beings
and so are you.
You will want to get to know these people.



CONNECTING WITH GOD

*Prayer is an open line to God. No network problem,
no low battery; always good signals and messages to
send.*

A Conversation with God

Find a place where you can be still.

Use whatever will help you to prepare for your prayer time.

If you like, play some music or if you prefer sit in silence.

In the presence of your loving Creator, look honestly at your feelings over the last day, the highs, the lows and the level ground.

Can you see where the Lord has been present?

What are the reasons you have to give thanks?

Which situations are you aware of that need

God's care and protection?

Offer all these to God who accepts our thanksgiving and hears our prayers.

Talk to God ... about what is in your heart right now.



Quiet Prayer & Meditation

Be Still and Know

INSTRUCTIONS:

As a group read the following phrase. Repeat the phrase, but each time you read it out leave out the last line (i.e. read all 5 lines, then the first 4, then the first 3, then the first 2 and then only the first line).

BE
STILL
AND KNOW
THAT I AM
GOD

Wasting Time

Sheila Cassidy talks about the value of time. Sheila Cassidy worked as a doctor in Chile during the Pinochet regime. Sheila experienced and observed violence and human rights violations during the reign of the regime however during these testing times she also knew the power of prayer. Sheila drew her courage and strength from her prayers, she writes of the hope this gave her in her book, *Prayer for Pilgrims*.

As a doctor Sheila gave medical care to political opponents of the regime. She was arrested by the Chilean Police and was kept in custody without trial where she was tortured for information about her patients. When she was released she brought attention to the human rights abuses that were occurring at the time in Chile. Sheila explains the value of time. "One of the break-throughs that I have experienced in the understanding of prayer is the significance of 'wasting' time. One day I was working at a boring job and a friend came to join me. He loitered about for nearly an hour, perched on the edge of the table and talked occasionally of nothing in particular.

When he had gone I was filled with a special joy because I realised that he had deliberately wasted an hour with me; it was not that we were discussing something of importance or that I needed consoling: it was a pure and unsolicited gift of time. If we think about it, for busy people time is often the most precious thing they have to give. Doctors, priests, those who counsel, will always 'spend' time with those in need. They may sit up all night with someone who is distressed; they may pass long hours in listening to problems, or in giving advice; but this is all time deliberately spent.

We only deliberately waste time with those we love - it is the purest sign that we love someone if we choose to spend time idly in their presence when we could be doing something more 'constructive'. And so it is with prayer; there is a very real sense in which prayer is a waste of time ... it is the purest sign of our love for God that we are prepared to 'waste' our time with him".

From *Prayer for Pilgrims* by Sheila Cassidy

A Love Letter from Jesus

Dear friend,

How are you? I just had to send you this letter to tell you how much I love and care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were walking with your friends. I waited all day, hoping you would talk to me also. As evening grew near, I gave you a sunset to close your day and a cool breeze to rest you, and I waited. You never came. Oh yes, it hurt me, but I still love you because I am your friend.

I saw you fall asleep last night, and I longed to touch your brow, so I spilled moonlight upon your pillow and face. Again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you.

You awakened late and rushed off for the day... my tears were in the rain. Today you looked so sad, so alone. It makes my heart ache because I understand. My friends let me down and hurt me many times too, but I love you. I try to tell you in the quiet green grass; I whisper it in the leaves and trees; breathe it in the colours of the flowers I shout it to you in the mountain stream, and give the birds love songs to sing. I clothe you with warm sunshine and perfume the air. My love for you is deeper than oceans and bigger than the biggest want or need you have.

We will spend eternity together in heaven. I know how hard it is on this earth. I really know (because I was there) and I want to help you. My father wants to help you too. He's that way you know. Just call me, ask me, talk to me. It is your decision. I have chosen you and because of this, I will wait... because I love you.

Your friend,

Jesus

Source: Maury Web Pages Directory, author unknown

The Father's Love Letter

My Child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. (Psalm 139:1). I know when you sit down and when you rise up. (Psalm 139:2). I am familiar with all your ways. (Psalm 139:3). Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. (Matt10:29-31). For you were made in my image. (Gen 1:27). In me you live and move and have your being. (Acts 17:28). For you are my offspring. (Acts 17:28)

I knew you even before you were conceived. (Jer 1:4-5). I chose you when I planned creation. (Eph 1:11-12). You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. (Psalm 139:15-16). I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. (Acts 17:26). You are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14). I knit you together in your mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13). And brought you forth on the day you were born. (Psalm 71:6)

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. (John 8:41-44). I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love. (1 John 4:16). And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. (1 John 3:1). Simply because you are my child and I am your Father. (1 John 3:1).

I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. (Matt 7:11). For I am the perfect father. (Matt 5:48). Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand. (James 1:17). For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. (Matt 6:31-33). My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. (Jer 29:11). Because I love you with an everlasting love. (Jer 31:3)

My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. (Psalm 139:17-18). And I rejoice over you with singing. (Zep 3:17). I will never stop doing good to you. (Jer 32:40). For you are my treasured possession. (Ex 19:5) I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. (Jer 32:41). And I want to show you great and marvellous things. (Jer 33:3)



If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. (Deut 4:29). Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4). For it is I who gave you those desires. (Phil 2:13). I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. (Eph 3:20). For I am your greatest encourager. (2 Thess 2:16-17)

I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles.(2 Cor 1:3-4). When you are broken-hearted, I am close to you. (Psalm 34:18). As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. (Isaiah 40:11). One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. (Rev 21:3-4). And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. (Rev 21:3-4).

I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. (John 17:23). For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. (John 17:26). He is the exact representation of my being. (Heb 1:3). He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you. (Rom 8:31). And to tell you that I am not counting your sins. (2 Cor 5:18-19). Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. (2 Cor 5:18-19). His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. (1 John 4:10)

I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love. (Rom 8:31-32). If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. (1 John 2:23). And nothing will ever separate you from my love again. (Rom 8:38-39). Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. (Lk 15:7). I have always been Father, and will always be Father. (Eph 3:14-15)

My question is... Will you be my child? (John 1:12-13)
I am waiting for you. (Luke 15:11-32)

Love, Your Dad

Almighty God



A Very Special Meal

Once there was a very poor and devoted woman who always prayed to the Glory of God, asking very little, if anything for herself. But one thought, one desire continued to recur and finally she asked: petitioning the Lord, that if it were possible she would love to prepare a special meal and have God share at her table. And God, in His Love for this goodly woman, said He would indeed come the next day and share a meal.

Filled with ecstasy, the woman went out the following morning with her meagre purse and purchased such delicacies that she felt would please the Lord.

Returning home, she prepared a banquet and waited patiently for her most honoured guest. Soon there was a knock on the door, and when she opened it, there stood an old beggar asking for something to eat. Being a woman of God, she could not turn the beggar away, so she invited him in to partake of her table. The beggar felt as if he was in a dream - such a feast set before him. He finished all the food, thanked his hostess and left.

The woman was only slightly disheartened, she gathered up her purse, her coat, and hurried back to town to get more food for her special guest. Her funds were less now and so the food was not quite so elaborate. Nonetheless, she lovingly prepared another meal and sat to await the arrival of the Almighty.



A few hours went by and there was a loud knock on the door. This time it was an old gypsy woman with no teeth, who was deaf, who spoke quite loudly and was, rather rudely, insisting that any true believer in the Lord would not deny her something to eat.

Though the woman had no more money with which to buy more supplies, she invited the woman in and offered her a seat at the table. The gypsy ate everything, did not even thank the woman and left without closing the door.

By now it was beginning to get dark both inside and out. The woman's faith was strong, so that, though somewhat distraught, she did not give up, but rather, looked around her humble house to see if there was anything she could sell in order to buy more food to set before the Lord.



She hurried to town with a little silver cup that had been in her family for several generations, but she was willing to part with it for the great honor that God was going to bestow on her - the sharing of a meal.

Late in the night she rushed home to prepare yet a third meal. She waited and waited until, once more, there was a knock on the door. Holding her breath, she slowly opened the door to find yet another poor man in the guise of a wandering monk, in search of a meal.



Again, she offered hospitality, with as much grace as she could muster in her disappointment. This man also ate all that was set on the table and left after blessing the woman for her kindness. So discouraged and dismayed was she that all she could do was nod slightly, in acknowledgment of the thanks.

Now it was too late, with no way to buy any more food and no more money with which to buy it. She got down on her knees, weeping such heart-broken tears. She asked God what she had done wrong. Why had God not come to share at the table as He had promised?

And God, in all His Divine Compassion and Mercy, lifted the woman off her knees, and holding her close to His Heart, said, "My child, I enjoyed your hospitality so much that I came three times!"

Mirabai Chrin

REFLECTION

This story is like the parable that Jesus tells in Matthew 25:35-40:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

"Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

"And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

Christmas Presents of Presence?

Since the beginning of October, a Sydney bicycle shop has had a big countdown sign in the window: “Only ... sleeps till Santa time” and in the weeks before December 25, every newspaper, magazine and television channel will remind us to “purchase, purchase, purchase” before the big day.

Receiving gifts is really not as important as giving them. The gift itself, no matter what its monetary value, is just an object without the presence or connection with the thoughts of the giver. Isn't that what the gifts are all about, to indicate the importance of other people in our lives and our wish to be in their presence?

Christmas celebrates the presence of God with us in the form of a child. It is a time when the love of God and of fellow men becomes more urgent than hatred and bitterness. It is a time when our thoughts, our deeds and our spirits make real the presence of God among us.

Christmas Gifts for...

- Your enemy - forgiveness
- Friends - your heart
- Customers - service
- Children - nurturing
- Parents & teachers - gratitude
- Yourself – respect



Prayer

Lord Jesus, Wise men travelled for miles to bring you the first Christmas presents. So may we, too, remember with thankful hearts the love that comes with each present we open. We also thank you for the amazing love you have for each of us, and we thank you for the many gifts that you give us. We ask your particular care for those who do not experience the love and presence of dear ones.

Amen.

Cupcakes & Rootbeer

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with cupcakes, several cans of root beer and started on his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he saw an elderly woman. She was sitting on a park bench watching the pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed the lady looked hungry so he offered her a cupcake. She gratefully accepted and smiled at him.

Her smile was so wonderful that he wanted to see it again, so he offered a root beer as well. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling without saying a word.

As it began to grow dark, the boy realized how tired he was and wanted to go home. He got up to leave but before he had gone no more than a few steps, he turned around and ran back to the old woman, giving her a big hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy arrived home his Mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked, "What has made you so happy today?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." Before his mother could respond he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile in the whole world!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face. He asked, "Mother, what has made you so happy today?" She replied, "I ate cupcakes in the park with God." And before her son could reply, she added, "You know, he is much younger than I expected."

By Julie A. Manhan

REFLECTION

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring; all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

People come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. Take no one for granted and embrace all equally with joy! This story is like the parable that Jesus tells in Matthew 25:35-40



God Speak to Me

The man whispered, "God, speak to me."
And a meadowlark sang. But the man did not hear.

So the man yelled, "God, speak to me!"
Thunder rolled across the sky. But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you."
A star shone brightly. But he noticed it not.

And the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle."
And a life was born. But the man was unaware.

So, the man cried out in despair, "Touch me, God, and let me know that
you are here!"

Whereupon God reached down and touched the man. But the man
brushed the butterfly away and walked on.



REFLECTION

Sometimes God speaks to us through different things: a flower to show his love, a good friend to give us compassion, a word of wisdom to inspire and guide us.

Don't miss out on a blessing because it isn't packaged the way you expect.

The Messiah in Disguise

High in the mountains was a monastery that had once been known throughout the world. Its monks were pious, its students were enthusiastic. The chants from the monastery's chapel deeply touched the hearts of people who came there to pray and meditate.

But, something had changed. Fewer and fewer young men came to study there; fewer and fewer people came for spiritual nourishment. The monks who remained became disheartened and sad.

Deeply worried, the abbot of the monastery went off in search of an answer. Why had his monastery fallen on such hard times?

The abbot came to a guru, and he asked the master, "Is it because of some sin of ours that the monastery is no longer full of vitality?"

"Yes," replied the master, "it is the sin of ignorance."

"The sin of ignorance?" questioned the abbot. "Of what are we ignorant?"

The guru looked at the abbot for a long, long time, and then he said, "One of you is the messiah in disguise. But, you are all ignorant of this." Then, the guru closed his eyes, and he was silent.

"The messiah?" thought the abbot. "The messiah is one of us? Who could it be? Could it be Brother Cook? Could it be Brother Treasurer? Could it be Brother Bell-Ringer? Could it be Brother Vegetable Grower?"

"Which one? Which one? Every one of us has faults, failings, human defects. Isn't the messiah supposed to be perfect? But, then, perhaps these faults and failings are part of his disguise. Which one? Which one?"

When the abbot returned to the monastery, he gathered all the monks together and told them what the guru had said.

"One of us? The messiah? Impossible!"

But, the master had spoken, and the master was never wrong.

"One of us? The messiah? Incredible! But, it must be so. Which one? Which one? That brother over there? That one? That one?"

Whichever one of the monks was the messiah, he was, surely, in disguise.

Not knowing who amongst them was the messiah, all the monks began treating each other with new respect. "You never know," they thought, "he might be the one, so I had better deal with him kindly."

It was not long before the monastery was filled with new found joy. Soon, new students came to learn, and people came from far and wide to be inspired by the chants of the kind, smiling monks. For once again, the monastery was filled with the spirit of love.



Author Unknown

DEALING

WITH

ADVERSITY

*Don't tell God how big your problems are Tell your
problems how big your God is!*

Is Your Hut Burning?

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried. Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

REFLECTION

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Remember, next time your little hut is burning to the ground -- -- it just may be a smoke signal that summons grace of God.

The Law of the Garbage Truck

One day I hopped in a taxi and we took off for the airport. We were driving in the right lane when suddenly a black car jumped out of a parking space right in front of us. My taxi driver slammed on his brakes, skidded, and missed the other car by just inches!

The driver of the other car whipped his head around and started yelling at us. My taxi driver just smiled and waved at the guy. And I mean, he was really friendly. So I asked, 'Why did you just do that? This guy almost ruined your car and sent us to the hospital!' This is when my taxi driver taught me what I now call, 'The Law of the Garbage Truck'.

He explained that many people are like garbage trucks. They run around full of garbage, full of frustration, full of anger, and full of disappointment. As their garbage piles up, they need a place to dump it and sometimes they'll dump it on you. Don't take it personally, just smile, wave, wish them well, and move on. Don't take their garbage and spread it to other people at work, at home, or on the streets.

The Carrot, the Egg and the Coffee Bean

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling.



It seemed that, as one problem was solved, a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In the first, she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans.

She let them sit and boil, without saying a word. In about twenty minutes, she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me, what do you see?"

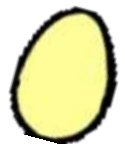
"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," the young woman replied. The mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, "What does it mean, mother?"

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity - boiling water - but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.



The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened! The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

"Which are you?" the mother asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?" Think of this: Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong but, with pain and adversity, do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit but, after a death, a breakup, or a financial hardship, does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart? Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavour.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you. When the hours are the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate to another level?
- How do you handle adversity?
- Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

The Obstacle in our Path

In ancient times, a King had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the King for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the King indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many of us never understand!

Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Think about some of the obstacles that are currently in your path.
- Have you ever seen something as a setback and then realised that it worked out for the best?
- Can we relate this learning to how we sometimes judge other people?

ENCOURAGEMENT & HOPE

H.O.P.E - Hold On Pain Ends

Keep Your Dream

I have a friend named Monty Roberts who owns a horse ranch in San Ysidro. He has let me use his house to put on fund-raising events to raise money for youth at risk programs.

The last time I was there he told me the story about a young man who was the son of an travelling horse trainer who would go from stable to stable, race track to race track and farm to farm, training horses. As a result, the boy's high school career was continually interrupted. When he was a senior, he was asked to write a paper about what he wanted to be and do when he grew up.

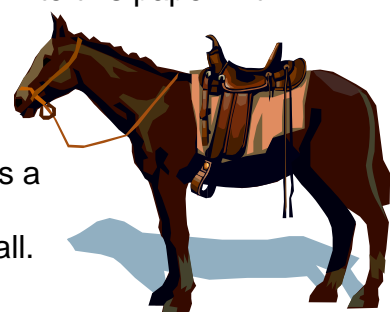
"That night he wrote a seven-page paper describing his goal of someday owning a horse ranch. He wrote about his dream in great detail and he even drew a diagram of a 200-acre ranch, showing the location of all the buildings, the stables and the track. Then he drew a detailed floor plan for a 4,000-square-foot house that would sit on a 200-acre dream ranch.

"He put a great deal of his heart into the project and the next day he handed it in to his teacher. Two days later he received his paper back. On the front page was a large red F with a note that read, 'See me after class.'

"The boy with the dream went to see the teacher after class and asked, 'Why did I receive an F?'

"The teacher said, 'This is an unrealistic dream for a young boy like you. You have no money. You come from an itinerant family. You have no resources. Owning a horse ranch requires a lot of money. You have to buy the land. You have to pay for the original breeding stock and later you'll have to pay large stud fees. There's no way you could ever do it.' Then the teacher added, 'If you will rewrite this paper with a more realistic goal, I will reconsider your grade.'

"The boy went home and thought about it long and hard. He asked his father what he should do. His father said, 'Look, son, you have to make up your own mind on this. However, I think it is a very important decision for you.' "Finally, after sitting with it for a week, the boy turned in the same paper, making no changes at all.



He stated, "You can keep the F and I'll keep my dream."

Monty then turned to the assembled group and said, "I tell you this story because you are sitting in my 4,000-square-foot house in the middle of my 200-acre horse ranch. I still have that school paper framed over the fireplace." He added, "The best part of the story is that two summers ago that same schoolteacher brought 30 kids to camp out on my ranch for a week." When the teacher was leaving, he said, "Look, Monty, I can tell you this now. When I was your teacher, I was something of a dream stealer. During those years I stole a lot of kids' dreams. Fortunately you had enough determination not to give up on yours."

Keeping the Dream

The American hip-hop composer and singer Tupac Shakur had a short and difficult life that led him to prison and eventual death in a drive-by shooting at the age of 25. Here are the lyrics of one of his songs:

*Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack
in the concrete?*

*Proving nature's law is wrong it learned to walk
without feet.*

*Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it
learned to breathe fresh air.*

*Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no
one else ever cared.*

According to this urban poet, roses may grow in the midst of violence, injustice, loneliness, loss or desperation.

PRAYER

God of peace and justice,
You give us the capacity to
change,
to bring about a world that
mirrors your wisdom.
Create in us a desire to act in
solidarity,
so that the pillars of injustice
crumble
and those now crushed are
set free.
Amen



The Four Candles

Four candles slowly burned.

The ambiance was so soft one could almost hear them talking.....

The first candle said: "I am Peace!"

"The world is full of anger and fighting. Nobody can keep me lit"

Then the flame of peace went out.

Then the second candle said: "I am Faith."

"I am no longer indispensable. It doesn't make sense that I stay lit another moment."

Just then a breeze softly blew out Faith's flame.

Sadly the third candle began to speak: "I am Love!"

"People don't understand my importance so they simply put me aside. They even forget to love those

nearest them. I haven't the strength to stay lit."

And waiting no longer, love's flame went out.

Suddenly a child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles.

"Why aren't you burning? You are supposed to stay lit to the end!"

Saying this, the child began to cry. Then the fourth candle answered:

"Don't be afraid! I am Hope!"

"While I am still burning we can light the other candles."

With shining eyes the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles.



Adapted from the John Mark Ministries by Rowland Croucher and Others, 2006. Original author unknown.



F A I T H &

F A I T H I N

A C T I O N

Faith without works is dead (James 2:17)

Faith Must Be Lived

A rabbi and a soap maker went for a walk together. The soap maker said, “What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world after thousands of years of teaching about goodness, truth and peace – after all the prayers, sermons and teachings. If religion is good and true, why should this be?”

The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Then the rabbi said, “Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is after all.”

The soap maker protested and said, “But rabbi, soap can’t do any good unless it is used.”

“Exactly,” replied the rabbi. “So it is with Judaism or any other religion. It is ineffective unless it is applied and used.”



Taken from 'Stories' Vinnies Reflection Resource 2008

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you regularly keep your faith in “use”?
- How can you better “use” your faith and values in your life?
- Do you know someone who doesn’t just believe in God, but also acts like it? How is that person different to other people?

God Exists

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation. They talked about so many things and various subjects. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: "I don't believe that God exists."

"Why do you say that?" asked the customer. "Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children?"

If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving a God who would allow all of these things."

The customer thought for a moment, but didn't respond because he didn't want to start an argument. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt.

The customer turned back and entered the barber shop again and he said to the barber: "You know what? Barbers do not exist." "How can you say that?" asked the surprised barber. "I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!"

"No!" the customer exclaimed. "Barbers don't exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside." "Ah, but barbers DO exist! What happens, is, people do not come to me. "

"Exactly!"- affirmed the customer. "That's the point! God, too, DOES exist! What happens, is, people don't go to Him and do not look for Him. That's why there's so much pain and suffering in the world."

Author Unknown



The Living Bible

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a t-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry for the students but are not sure how to go about it.

One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his t-shirt and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet.

By now the people are really uptight and the tension in the air is thick. About this time the minister realizes that from the back of the church a deacon is making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-grey hair and a three piece suit. A godly man, elegant, dignified and very polite. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is thinking that he is about to politely tell Bill to leave.

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.



And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, he says "What I am about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible people will ever read!"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a time or a significant moment when you have witnessed someone act in a way that reflects the teachings in the bible?
- How did you feel? Did it have an impact on your life?
- How important do you think it is to act in a way that reflects the things you say?
- Reflect on your own life in relation to this story. Is this how you live your life?
- What things could you change to be more like the old man in this story?

REFLECTION

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Remember, next time your little hut is burning to the ground ---- it just may be a smoke signal that summons grace of God.

The Lord's Prayer Script

Characters

- Person (seen)
- God (unseen)



Stage Setting

- No particular setting is necessary, but it is good if the person could sit on a chair and lean on a table that has a Bible on it.

Script

Person: Our Father, who...

God: Yes?

Person: Don't interrupt me! I'm praying.

God: But you called me.

Person: Called you? I didn't call you. I was praying. Our Father who art in heaven...

God: There, you did it again.

Person: Did what?

God: Called me. You said, "Our Father who art in heaven." Here I am. What's on your mind?

Person: But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, sort of like getting a job done.

God: All right. Go on.

Person: Hallowed be thy name...

God: Hold it! What do you mean by that?

Person: By what?

God: By "hallowed be thy name"?

Person: It means...it means.... Good grief! How should I know what it means? It's just part of the prayer. *(pause)* By the way, what does it mean?

God: It means honoured, holy, wonderful.

Person: Ah, that makes sense. I never thought about what hallowed meant before. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God: Do you really mean that?

Person: Of course! Why not?

God: What are you going to do about it?

Person: Do? Nothing, I suppose. I just think it would be rather good if you got control of things down here the way you have up there.

God: Have I got control of you?

Person: Well, I go to church.

God: That isn't what I asked you. What about that bad temper? You've really got a problem there you know!

Person: Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of those hypocrites down at the church!

God: Excuse me, but I thought you were praying for my will to be done? If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Person: Oh, all right! I guess I do have a few hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I probably could name some others.

God: So could I.

Person: I haven't thought about it much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I really would like to know how to be free.

God: Good! Now we're getting somewhere! We'll work together, you and I. Some real victories can be won. I'm proud of you!

Person: Look, Lord, I need to finish this up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does! Give us this day our daily bread .

God: You need to cut out the bread you're a little overweight as it is!

Person: Hey! Wait a minute! What is this? Here I am doing my religious duty and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my faults!

God: Praying is a dangerous thing. You could end up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to bring across to you. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep on praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer. *(Pause)* Well. go on!

Person: I'm scared to...

God: Scared of what?

Person: I know what you'll say!

God: Try me and see.

Person: Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

God: What about Peter Brown?

Person: See! I knew you would bring him up! Why, Lord he told lies about me, and he cheated me out of some money. I swear that I'll get even with him.

God: But your prayer. What about your prayer?

Person: I didn't mean it.

God: Well, at least you're honest! But it's not much fun carrying around that load of bitterness inside, is it?

Person: No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even! Have I got some plans for old Peter!

God: You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you really are. But I'll change all that.

Person: You will? How?

God: Forgive Peter. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Peter's problem and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will have settled your heart.

Person: It doesn't sound easy, but deep down, I know it would be worth the effort. Thank you, Lord, for helping me work through this. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. AMEN.

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Last changed: Saturday 12 August 1995

GOD'S

NATURE

Whoever does not love does not know God,
because *God is love.* (1 John 4:8)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

He proposed another parable to them. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.”

Luke 17:5-6

And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” The Lord replied, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

REFLECTION

We don't need a lot of faith - just as much as a mustard seed - to provoke great results, because our God is an awesome God! We must believe in Him and not worry about what we can or can't do. God will not ask us to do more than we can. He wants us to be willing to do His work. He'll provide the rest. His Word is “planted” in our hearts and minds and grows when you think and understand and learn about Him. You can “plant” more seeds when you share His Love with others. The parable of the mustard seed and yeast parables have a similar message. The kingdom of heaven ultimately produces consequences that are much more significant than what appears at first – the mustard seed produces extensive growth and the yeast provides intensive transformation. Jesus wants to teach us that seemingly small beginnings should not be scoffed at.

If the realm of God is like a mustard seed, we can have faith that whatever small things we do on God's behalf will spread farther than we can ever tell. And I think to myself, “Well I do have that much faith, I guess.” Not much, but surely at least as much as there is in a little mustard seed. And here God gives me the promise that if I can muster even that much faith, my prayers will be answered.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the primary point of the parable?
- What can we learn from this parable?
- Consider how God might be working around us in ways that seem small but will have a great impact.
- What can we do with the faith that we have?



Day in the Life of a Bird

One September morning, the quietness of the house was disturbed by a familiar thud. Another bird hit the window. Having been used to these occurrences, I usually ignore whenever that happens.

But that particular morning, it was different. I was prompted to check. Outside, there laid this bird seemingly lifeless. I could have easily thrown it to the garbage container nearby, but instead picked it up and gently held it on my palm. At the same time, I was talking and praying in between my breaths. " Please don't go, and God please save this little bird."

Slowly, the bird began to stir. I continued holding it until I felt it was strong enough. Towards the end, I was able to release the bird.

As I went back inside the house, racing thoughts of how similar can our life be with what just happened to that little bird... Sometimes life's troubles can seem paralysing, making us feel weakened and lifeless. But, we need to take heart, for we have a God that is greater than all our troubles. If we remain faithful, He promised in Isaiah 46:4 He will watch over us and rescue us from troubles. He is a restoring God. His mercies are new every morning.

REFLECTION

Sometimes it seems like God is so big and distant. Sometimes it feels like God couldn't possibly have the time to help me while he is busy running the universe. But even though we can feel this way, it's not true. God loves each of us and cares about us individually. He cares about our pain, our joys, our doubts and our passions. He wants to be involved in your life and let you know that he cares.

Next time you are feeling like that injured bird instead of giving up, send a prayer up to God asking for his help. He is always there for us.



An Interview with God

I dreamed I had an INTERVIEW WITH GOD.

"So, you would like to interview me?" GOD asked.

"If you have time," I said.

GOD smiled. "My time is eternity... what questions do you have in mind for me?"

"What surprises you the most about humankind?"

GOD answered... "That they get bored with childhood, that they rush to grow up, and then long to be children again. That they lose their health to make money... and then lose their money to restore their health."

"That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present, such that they live in neither the present nor the future."

"That they live as if they would never die, and die as though they had never lived."

GOD's hand took mine... and we were silent for a while.

And then I asked, "As a parent, what are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?"

GOD replied, "To learn they cannot make anyone love them. All they can do is let themselves be loved."

"To learn that it is not good to compare themselves to others."

"To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness."

"To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open profound wounds in those they love, and it can take many years to heal them."

"To learn that a rich person is not one who has the most, but is one who needs the least."

"To learn that there are people who love them dearly, but simply do not yet know how to express or show their feelings."

"To learn that two people can look at the same thing, and see it differently."

"To learn that it is not enough that they forgive one another, but they must also forgive themselves."

"Thank you for your time," I said humbly. "Is there anything else you would like your children to know?"

GOD smiled, and said... "Just know that I am here. **Always.**"



Footprints in the Sand



One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

God's Positive Answers

For all the negative things we have to say to ourselves, God has a positive answer for it:

You say: "It's impossible"

God says: All things are possible (Luke 18:27)

You say: "I'm too tired"

God says: I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30)

You say: "Nobody really loves me"

God says: I love you (John 3:16 & John 13:34)

You say: "I can't go on"

God says: My grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)

You say: "I can't figure things out"

God says: I will direct your steps (Proverbs 3:5-6)

You say: "I can't do it"

God says: You can do all things (Philippians 4:13)

You say: "I'm not able"

God says: I am able (II Corinthians 9:8)

You say: "It's not worth it"

God says: It will be worth it (Roman 8:28)

You say: "I can't forgive myself"

God says: I FORGIVE YOU (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

You say: "I can't manage"

God says: I will supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19)

You say: "I'm afraid"

God says: I have not given you a spirit of fear (II Timothy 1:7)

You say: "I'm always worried and frustrated"

God says: Cast all your cares on ME (I Peter 5:7)

You say: "I don't have enough faith"

God says: I've given everyone a measure of faith (Romans 12:3)

You say: "I'm not smart enough"

God says: I give you wisdom (I Corinthians 1:30)

You say: "I feel all alone"

God says: I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)

Author Unknown

I Asked For

I asked for Strength.....
And God gave me Difficulties.

I asked for Wisdom.....
And God gave me Problems to solve.

I asked for Prosperity.....
And God gave me Brain and Brawn.

I asked for Courage.....
And God gave me Danger to overcome.

I asked for Love.....
And God gave me Troubled people to help.

I asked for Favours.....
And God gave me Opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted
I received everything I needed!



Source: Over this violence thing...Peace-'The Still Small Voice', 2003, National Council of Churches in Australia Youth Network.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In this reflection, the author prayed for good qualities, but instead, God gave the person opportunities to develop those qualities. What was the value of this?
- There is a saying that goes 'be careful what you pray for', what do you think about this saying?
- What is one quality that you wish to grow in? How might God prepare you to develop this quality?

GOD'S PLAN

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD.

"They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Cracked Pots

A water bearer in India had two large pots, hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made for.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the pot spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream.

"I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologise to you.

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologised to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."



REFLECTION

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots. In this world, nothing goes to waste. You may think like the cracked pot that you are inefficient or useless in certain areas of your life, but somehow these flaws can turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Kind of makes you proud of being a cracked pot. Look around and you will see all the lives that you have touched/watered.

Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

The following prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden in 1979 at a celebration of departed priests. The words of the prayer are often attributed to Oscar Romero, perhaps because they beautifully summarise his philosophy, but they were never spoken by him.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes
everything.

This is what we are about:
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

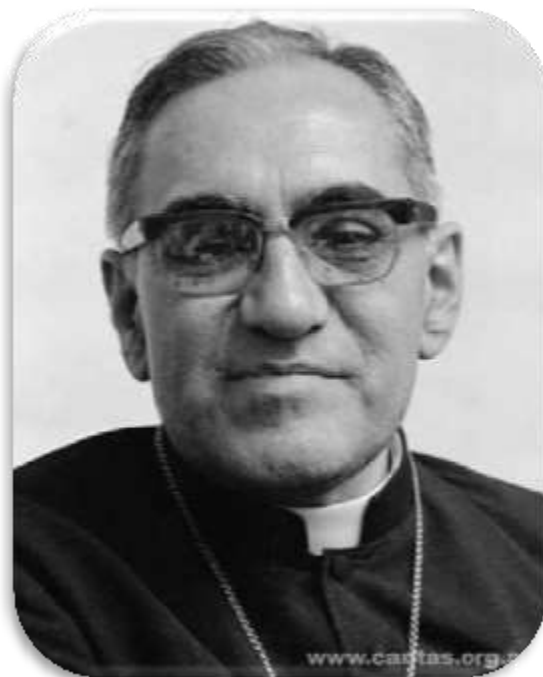
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

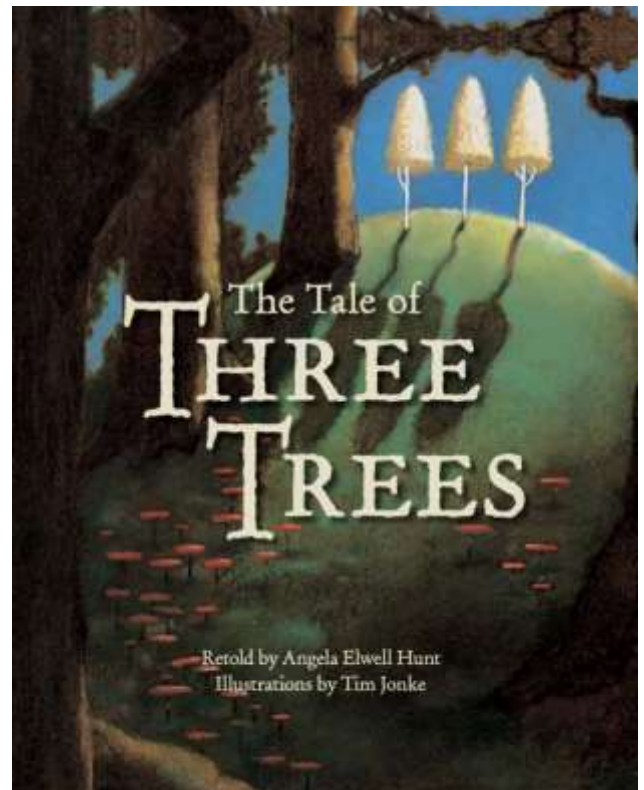
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen



The Three Trees

Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up. The first little tree looked up at the stars and said: "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!" The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. "I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world!" The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town. "I don't want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world."



Years passed. The rain came, the sun shone and the little trees grew tall. One day three wood cutters climbed the mountain. The first wood cutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining axe, the first tree fell. "Now I shall make a beautiful chest, I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree said.

The second wood cutter looked at the second tree and said, "This tree is strong. It's perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining axe, the second tree fell. "Now I shall sail mighty waters!" thought the second tree. "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last wood cutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the wood cutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me." He muttered. With a swoop of his shining axe, the third tree fell.

The first tree rejoiced when the wood cutter brought her to a carpenter's shop. But the carpenter fashioned the tree into a feed box for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, or treasure. She was coated with saw dust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals. The second tree smiled when the wood cutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead the once strong tree was hammered and

awed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail to an ocean, or even a river, instead she was taken to a little lake. The third tree was confused when the wood cutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" The once tall tree wondered. " All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God..."

Many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feed box. "I wish I could make a cradle for him." Her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. " This manger is beautiful." She said. And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

One evening a tired traveller and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveller fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake. Soon a thundering and a thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through the wind and the rain. The tired man awoke. He stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.

One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten wood pile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hand to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel. But on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. It had made the third tree strong. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

REFLECTION

The next time you feel down because you didn't get what you wanted, sit tight and be happy because God is thinking of something better to give you.



The Two Horses

Just up the road from my home is a field, with two horses in it. From a distance, each horse looks like any other horse.

But if you get a closer look you will notice something quite interesting...

One of the horses is blind.

His owner has chosen not to have him put down, but has made him a safe and comfortable barn to live in.

This alone is pretty amazing.



But if you stand nearby and listen, you will hear the sound of a bell. It is coming from a smaller horse in the field.



Attached to the horse's halter is a small, copper-coloured bell. It lets the blind friend know where the other horse is, so he can follow.

As you stand and watch these two friends you'll see that the horse with the bell is always checking on the blind horse, and that the blind horse will listen for the bell and then slowly walk to where the other horse is, trusting he will not be led astray.

When the horse with the bell returns to the shelter of the barn each evening, he will stop occasionally to look back, making sure that the blind friend isn't too far behind to hear the bell.

Author Unknown

REFLECTION

Like the owners of these two horses, God does not throw us away just because we are not perfect. Or because we have problems or challenges.

He watches over us and even brings others into our lives to help us when we are in need.

Sometimes we are the blind horse, being guided by the little ringing bell of those who God places in our lives. And at other times we are the guide horse, helping others to find their way.

GRATITUDE

Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Giving and Receiving

This prayer is based on the scriptural message that we should give of what we have received. We remember our gifts so that we can realise our blessings and thank God. We then respond with our willingness to share this abundance with others.

Before this prayer, read these passages:

Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.” Luke 6:37-38

...You have received without paying, so give without being paid.
Matthew 10:8.

Taken from Out of the Ordinary © 2000 by Joyce Rupp. Paul Coutinho, SJ, How Big is Your God? The Freedom to Experience the Divine. Loyola Press 2007. Chapter 32 Page 109 – 110

REFLECTION QUESTION:

- Name 5 talents that you have.
- Which gift in your life are you most grateful?
- Why is it important to use your gifts?
- How can you use this gift to help others?

PRAYER

To each sentence, respond as a group: **The gift I have received, I will give as a gift.**

You have received mercy, kindness, and unconditional love from our God...

You have many physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual abilities that can be used to better the lives of others...

You have people in your life who have believed in you when you did not believe in yourself, people who stood by you in your difficult times...

You have a heart capable of great compassion, empathy, and tenderness...

You have inner strength, the grace of conversion, the gift of hope, and the desire for good...

You have food on your table, clothes in your closet, and a roof over your head...

You have access to medical care, good education, music and the arts, and numerous sources of communication...

You have religious freedom, the power of free speech, advocacy groups, and structures for promoting justice and protecting citizens...

You have a marvelous planet on which to live, with beautiful forests, rich soil for growing food, priceless minerals, precious creatures of all kinds...

You have the opportunity for spiritual renewal, growth, and maturity in your relationship with the divine, continual access to opportunities for faith development...

Gracious Giver, so much has been bestowed upon me. I lack for little and yet yearn for so much.

Continue to teach me to appreciate what has come to me as blessing and gift. Keep on urging and challenging me to share what I have. Help me to give generously and freely of my bounty. I offer you my thanks for all that has been granted to me. Amen.

Letter to My Grandchildren

To my beautiful grandchildren...

Our world is changing so fast and there are many things I wish for you...

I'd really like for you to know about hand-me-down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover meat loaf sandwiches. I really would. I hope you learn humility by being humiliated, and that you learn honesty by being cheated.

I hope you learn to make your own bed and mow the lawn and wash the car. And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen.

I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother or sister. And it's all right if you have to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when they want to crawl under the covers with you because they're scared, I hope you let them. When you want to see a movie and your little brother or sister wants to tag along, I hope you'll let them.

I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely. On rainy days when you have to catch a ride, I hope you don't ask your driver to drop you two blocks away so you won't be seen riding with someone as uncool as your Mom.

I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books. When you learn to use computers, I hope you also learn to add and subtract in your head.

I hope that when you talk back to your mother that you learn what ivory soap tastes like. May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your hand on a stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. And if a friend offers you drugs, I hope you realize he is not your friend.

I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your grandparents and go fishing with your uncle.

These are just some of the things that I wish for you - tough times and disappointment, hard work and happiness. To me, it's the only way to appreciate life.



Life is a Gift

Today before you think of saying an unkind word—
think of someone who can't speak.

Before you complain about the taste of your food—
think of someone who has nothing to eat.

Before you complain about your friends —
think of someone who is crying out to God for a companion.

Today before you complain about life—
think of someone who went too early to heaven.

Before you complain about your parents—
think of someone who doesn't get to see their parents often or
at all.

Before you argue about your dirty house, someone didn't
clean or sweep—
think of the people who are living in the streets.

Before whining about the distance you drive in the bus—
think of someone who walks the same distance with their feet.

Before complaining about the homework you have to complete—
Think of children who don't have the opportunity to get educated.

And when you are tired and complain about your job—
think of the unemployed, the disabled and those who wished they had your job.

But before you think of pointing the finger or condemning
another—
remember that none of us are blameless and God will forgive
you for your mistakes.

And when depressing thoughts seem to get you down—
put a smile on your face and thank God you're alive and still
around.

Life is a gift — Live it, Enjoy it, Celebrate it, and Fulfil it.



REFLECTION QUESTION:

- Name 5 things that you are grateful for.
- How often do you thank the people around you like your parents or carers, friends, teachers and coaches?
- What is one thing that you want to stop complaining about?
- What would you like to thank God for today?

HUMAN

DIGNITY &

SELF WORTH

You are made in the image and likeness of God.
If you only knew how God sees you, you would
never doubt your worth.

Embracing Imperfection

Being Human isn't about being perfect
My name is Sophie, I am 18 and I have a facial paralysis called Moebius Syndrome. I was born with this syndrome and have had many years of people staring at me and making cruel and nasty comments because of the way I look. Over the years, I have had to overcome many barriers because so many people think that because you look different to the way society says you should look, they treat you differently and unfairly.



Society has become really stereotypical in making us feel like that we have to look a certain way, feel a certain way when in actual fact we are all imperfect. None of us are physically perfect; none of us are emotionally perfect. We all have flaws, we all have set backs and I think that for me, being physically imperfect having Moebius has helped me realise that I have to accept my flaws, both physically and emotionally and I have to embrace them and accept these flaws. I have had to learn to love and work with my flaws everyday and I accept who I am. If I am able to accept who I am, then it may go towards others also being accepting of those who are different in the way they look, act or speak. I believe that we should focus on the things that we can change, instead of focusing on what we can't and we should try and make ourselves better people because we have to accept that we are not all perfect and sometimes we cannot change the physical things about a person but we should just accept each other for who we are. If we are able to do that, then it will make for a better and just society.

I have been fortunate that I have a loving family and group of friends who accept me for who I am, not what I look like. They look beyond my physical appearance and can see the young adult that I am. I have always been a shy person but now that I am doing a Bachelor in Arts at University, and have become part of a different community, I have grown so much in myself to further accept myself and will hopefully change the view of others to do the same.

By Sophie Rose, 18 years

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are your imperfections?
- How have you judged people in your Vinnies work?
- How can you build acceptance of difference in your community?

Our Deepest Fear

Our deepest fear is
not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that
we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness,
that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I
to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so
that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We are born to make manifest
the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us,
it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other
people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others."

Authored by Marianne Williamson

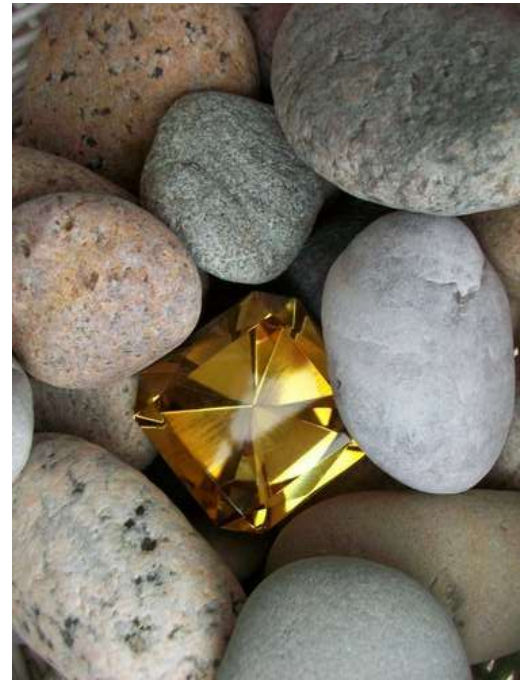
Precious Balls of Clay

A man was exploring caves by the seashore. In one of the caves he found a canvas bag with a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was like someone had rolled clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man, so he took the bag out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the clay balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could.

He thought little about it, until he dropped one of the clay balls and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful, precious stone!

Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found thousands of dollars worth of jewels in the 20 or so clay balls he had left.

Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he had just thrown it away!



REFLECTION

It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the external clay vessel. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling, so we discount it.

We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish or well known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure hidden inside that person.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us. If we take the time to get to know that person, and if we ask God to show us that person the way He sees them, then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine forth.

May we not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away a fortune in friendships because the gems were hidden in bits of clay. May we see the people in our world as God sees them.

Things to Remember - You are Special

Your presence, is a present to the world.
You're unique and one of a kind.
Your life can be what you want it to be.

Take the days, just one at a time.
Count your blessings, not your troubles.
You'll make it through, whatever comes along.
Within you, are so many answers
Understand, have courage, be strong.

Don't put limits on yourself.
So many dreams, are waiting to be realized.
Decisions are too important, to leave to chance.
Reach for your peak, your goal and your prize.

Nothing wastes more energy, than worrying.
The longer one carries a problem, the heavier it gets.
Don't take things too seriously.
Live a life of serenity, not a life of regrets.

Remember, that a little love goes a long way.
Remember, that a lot . . . goes forever.
Remember, that friendship is a wise investment.
Life's treasures are people . . . together.

Realise that it's never too late.
Do ordinary things, in an extraordinary way.
Have health, hope and happiness.
Take the time, to wish upon a star.

And don't ever forget . . .
For even a day . . .
How very special you are.

The Cleaning Lady

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions until I read the last one:

"What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?" Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would I know her name?

I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

"Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say 'hello.'"

I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.



The Twelve Gifts of Birth

By Charlene Costanzo © 2001, Harper-Collins Publishers. Charlene's Website. Charlene's Books. The Story Behind the Story

Once upon a time, a long time ago, when princes and princesses lived in faraway kingdoms, royal children were given twelve special gifts when they were born. You may have heard the stories. Twelve wise women of the kingdom, or fairy godmothers as they were often called, travelled swiftly to the castle whenever a new prince or princess came into the world. Each fairy godmother pronounced a noble gift upon the royal baby.

As time went on, the wise women came to understand that the twelve royal gifts of birth belong to every child, born anywhere at any time. They yearned to proclaim the gifts to all children, but the customs of the land did not allow that. One day when the wise women gathered together they made this prophecy:

Some day, all the children of the world will learn the truth about their noble inheritance. When that happens a miracle will unfold on the kingdom of Earth.



Some day is near. Here is the secret they want you to know. At the wondrous moment you were born, as you took your first breath, a great celebration was held in the heavens and twelve magnificent gifts were granted to you.

1. **STRENGTH** - May you remember to call upon it whenever you need it.
2. **BEAUTY** - May your deeds reflect its depth.
3. **COURAGE** - May you speak and act with confidence and use courage to follow your own path.
4. **COMPASSION** - May you be gentle with yourself and others. May you forgive those who hurt you and yourself when you make mistakes.
5. **HOPE** - Through each passage and season, may you trust the goodness of life.
6. **JOY** - May it keep your heart open and filled with light.
7. **TALENT** - May you discover your own special abilities and contribute them toward a better world.
8. **IMAGINATION** - May it nourish your visions and dreams.
9. **REVERENCE** - May you appreciate the wonder that you are and the miracle of all creation.
10. **WISDOM** - Guiding your way, wisdom will lead you through knowledge to understanding. May you hear its soft voice.
11. **LOVE** - It will grow each time you give it away.
12. **FAITH** - May you believe.

Now you know about your twelve gifts of birth. But there is more to the secret that the wise women knew. Use your gifts well and you will discover others, among them a gift that is uniquely you. See these noble gifts in other people. Share the truth and be ready for the miracle to unfold as the prophecy of the wise women comes true.

You are Still Priceless

A well known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 300, he asked, Who would like this \$20 bill?



Hands started going up. He said, I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this. He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up.

He then asked, Who still wants it? Still the hands were up in the air.

Well, he replied, what if I do this?

And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with is shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty.

Now who still wants it?

Still the hands went into the air.

My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.

REFLECTION

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless.

But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, You are still priceless

You are Unique

Think what a remarkable, unduplicatable, and miraculous thing it is to be you! Of all the people who have come and gone on the earth, since the beginning of time, not ONE of them is like YOU!

No one who has ever lived or is to come has had your combination of abilities, talents, appearance, friends, acquaintances, burdens, sorrows and opportunities.

No one's hair grows exactly the way yours does. No one's finger prints are like yours. No one has the same combination of secret inside jokes and family expressions that you know.

The few people who laugh at all the same things you do, don't sneeze the way you do. No one prays about exactly the same concerns as you do. No one is loved by the same combination of people that love you – NO ONE!

No one before, no one to come. YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY UNIQUE!

Enjoy that uniqueness. You do not have to pretend in order to seem more like someone else. You weren't meant to be like someone else. You do not have to lie to conceal the parts of you that are not like what you see in anyone else.

You were meant to be different. Nowhere ever in all of history will the same things be going on in anyone's mind, soul and spirit as are going on in yours right now.

If you did not exist, there would be a hole in creation, a gap in history, something missing from the plan for humankind.

Treasure your uniqueness. It is a gift given only to you. Enjoy it and share it!

No one can reach out to others in the same way that you can. No one can speak your words. No one can convey your meanings. No one can comfort with your kind of comfort. No one can bring your kind of understanding to another person.

No one can be cheerful and lighthearted and joyous in your way. No one can smile your smile. No one else can bring the whole unique impact of you to another human being.

Share your uniqueness. Let it be free to flow out among your family and friends and people you meet in the rush and clutter of living wherever you are. That gift of yourself was given you to enjoy and share.

See it! Receive it! Let it tickle you! Let it inform you and nudge you and inspire you!
YOU ARE UNIQUE!

Author Unknown

JOURNEY &

LIFE'S

LESSONS

Life is not about the destination, but the journey

I Have Learnt

I've learned - that you cannot make someone love you. All you can do is be someone who can be loved. The rest is up to them.

I've learned - that no matter how much I care, some people just don't care back.

I've learned - that it takes years to build up trust, and only seconds to destroy it.

I've learned - that it's not what you have in your life but who you have in your life that counts.

I've learned - that you can get by on charm for about fifteen minutes. After that, you'd better know something.

I've learned - that you shouldn't compare yourself to the best others can do. But to the best you can do.

I've learned - that it's not what happens to people that's important. It's what they do about it.

I've learned - that you can do something in an instant that will give you heartache for life.

I've learned - that no matter how thin you slice it, there are always two sides.

I've learned - that it's taking me a long time to become the person I want to be.

I've learned - that it's a lot easier to react than it is to think.

I've learned - that you should always leave loved ones with loving words. It may be the last time you see them.

I've learned - that you can keep going long after you think you can't.

I've learned - that we are responsible for what we do, no matter how we feel.

I've learned - that either you control your attitude or it controls you.

I've learned - that heroes are the people who do what has to be done when it needs to be done, regardless of the consequences.

I've learned - that learning to forgive takes practice.

I've learned - that there are people who love you dearly, but just don't know how to show it.

I've learned - that money is a lousy way of keeping score.

I've learned - that my best friend and I can do anything or nothing and have the best time.

I've learned - that sometimes the people you expect to kick you when you're down will be the ones to help you get back up.

I've learned - that sometimes when I'm angry I have the right to be angry, but that doesn't give me the right to be cruel.

I've learned - that true friendship continues to grow, even over the longest distance. Same goes for true love.

I've learned - that just because someone doesn't love you the way you want them to doesn't mean they don't love you with all they have.



I've learned - that maturity has more to do with what types of experiences you've had and what you've learned from them and less to do with how many birthdays you've celebrated.

I've learned - that you should never tell a child their dreams are unlikely or outlandish. Few things are more humiliating, and what a tragedy it would be if they believed it.

I've learned - that no matter how good a friend is, they're going to hurt you every once in a while and you must forgive them for that.

I've learned - that it isn't always enough to be forgiven by others. Sometimes you have to learn to forgive yourself.

I've learned - that no matter how bad your heart is broken the world doesn't stop for your grief.

I've learned - that our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become.

I've learned - that just because two people argue, it doesn't mean they don't love each other. And just because they don't argue, it doesn't mean they do.

I've learned - that sometimes you have to put the individual ahead of their actions.

I've learned - that we don't have to change friends if we understand that friends change.

I've learned - that you shouldn't be so eager to find out a secret. It could change your life forever.

I've learned - that two people can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different.

I've learned - that no matter the consequences, those who are honest with themselves get farther in life.

I've learned - that no matter how many friends you have, if you are their pillar you will feel lonely and lost at the times you need them most.

I've learned - that your life can be changed in a matter of hours by people who don't even know you.

I've learned - that even when you think you have no more to give, when a friend cries out to you, you will find the strength to help.

I've learned - that writing, as well as talking, can ease emotional pains.

I've learned - that the paradigm we live in is not all that is offered to us.

I've learned - that credentials on the wall do not make you a decent human being.

I've learned - that the people you care most about in life are taken from you too soon.

I've learned - that although the word "love" can have many different meanings, it loses value when overly used.

I've learned - that it's hard to determine where to draw the line between being nice and not hurting people's feelings and standing up for what you believe.



By Kathy Kane Hansen Copyright © 1971 Kathy Kane Hansen.

Steps to Happiness

Everybody Knows:

You can't be all things to all people.

You can't do all things at once.

You can't do all things equally well.

You can't do all things better than everyone else.

Your humanity is showing just like everyone else's.

So:

You have to find out who you are, and be that.

You have to decide what comes first, and do that.

You have to discover your strengths, and use them.

You have to learn not to compete with others,

Because no one else is in the contest of *being you*.

Then:

You will have learned to accept your own uniqueness.

You will have learned to set priorities and make decisions.

You will have learned to live with your limitations.

You will have learned to give yourself the respect that is due.

And you'll be a most vital mortal.

Dare To Believe:

That you are a wonderful, unique person.

That you are a once-in-all-history event.

That it's more than a right, it's your duty, to be who you are.

That life is not a problem to solve, but a gift to cherish.

And you'll be able to stay one up on what used to get you down



Author Unknown

The Story of the Woodcutter

Once upon a time, a very strong woodcutter asked for a job in a timber merchant and he got it. The pay was really good and so was the work condition. For those reasons, the woodcutter was determined to do his best.

His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he supposed to work.

The first day, the woodcutter brought 18 trees.

“Congratulations,” the boss said. “Go on that way!”

Very motivated by the boss words, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he could only bring 15 trees. The third day he tried even harder, but he could only bring 10 trees. Day after day he was bringing less and less trees.

“I must be losing my strength”, the woodcutter thought. He went to the boss and apologized, saying that he could not understand what was going on.



“When was the last time you sharpened your axe?” the boss asked.

“Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees...”

Author: Stephen Covey

From: 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

REFLECTION

Our lives are like that. We sometimes get so busy that we don't take time to sharpen the “axe”. In today's world, it seems that everyone is busier than ever, but less happy than ever.

Why is that? Could it be that we have forgotten how to stay “sharp”? There's nothing wrong with activity and hard work. But we should not get so busy that we neglect the truly important things in life, like our personal life, taking time to get close to our Creator, giving more time for our family, taking time to read etc.

We all need time to relax, to think and meditate, to learn and grow. If we don't take the time to sharpen the “axe”, we will become dull and lose our effectiveness.

The Story of the Pencil

A boy was watching his grandmother write a letter.

At one point he asked, "Are you writing a story about what I've done? Is it a story about me?"

His grandmother stopped writing her letter and said to her grandson.

"I am writing about you actually! But more important than the words is the pencil I'm using. I hope you will be like this pencil when you grow up."

Intrigued the boy looked at the pencil. It didn't seem very special.

"But it's just like any other pencil I've ever seen!"

It depends on how you look at things. It has 5 qualities, which if you manage to hang onto them, will make you a person who is always at peace with the world.

- You are capable of great things but you must never forget that there is a hand guiding your steps. We call that hand God, and he always guides us according to his will.
- Now and then I have to stop writing and use a sharpener. That makes the pencil suffer a little, but afterwards he's much sharper. So you too, must learn to bear certain pains and sorrows because they will make you a better person.
- The pencil always allows us to use an eraser to rub out any mistakes. This means that correcting something we did is not necessarily a bad thing. It helps to keep us on the road to justice.
- What really matters in a pencil is not the wooden exterior, but the graphite inside. So pay attention to what is happening inside you.
- Lastly, it always leaves a mark. In just the same way, you should know that everything that you do in life will leave a mark. So try to be conscious of that of that in your every action.

By Paulo Coelho, 2009



KINDNESS

Kindness is the language in which the deaf can hear
and the blind can see

A Glass of Milk Paid in Full



One day, a poor boy who was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school, found he had only one thin dime left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door.

Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water. She thought he looked hungry so brought him a large glass of milk.

He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness."

He said, "Then I thank you from my heart."

As Howard Kelly left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and man was strong also. He had been ready to give up and quit.

Year's later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease.

Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room.

Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case.

After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room.

She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She began to read the following words:

"Paid in full with one glass of milk"

Signed, Dr. Howard Kelly.

A Pebble

Drop a pebble in the water: just a splash, and it is gone;
But there's half-a-hundred ripples circling on and on and on,
Spreading, spreading from the centre, flowing on out to the sea.
And there is no way of telling where the end is going to be.

Drop a pebble in the water: in a minute you forget,
But there's little waves a-flowing, and there's ripples circling yet,
And those little waves a-flowing to a great big wave have grown;
You've disturbed a mighty river just by dropping in a stone.

Drop an unkind word, or careless: in a minute it is gone;
But there's half-a-hundred ripples circling on and on and on.
They keep spreading, spreading, spreading from the centre as they go,
And there is no way to stop them, once you've started them to flow.

Drop an unkind word, or careless: in a minute you forget;
But there's little waves a-flowing, and there's ripples circling
yet,
And perhaps in some sad heart a mighty wave of tears you've
stirred,
And disturbed a life was happy ere you dropped that unkind
word.

Drop a word of cheer and kindness: just a flash and it is gone;
But there's half-a-hundred ripples circling on and on and on,
Bearing hope and joy and comfort on each splashing, dashing wave
Till you wouldn't believe the volume of the one kind word you gave.

Drop a word of cheer and kindness: in a minute you forget;
But there's gladness still a-swelling, and there's joy circling yet,
And you've rolled a wave of comfort whose sweet music can be heard
Over miles and miles of water just by dropping one kind word



By James W. Foley

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How often do you stop and think about the consequences or positive outcomes of your actions?
- What effect do you think your work with Vinnies has had on those you assist?

A Smile

A smile costs nothing, but gives much.

It enriches those who receive, without making poorer those who give.

It takes a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.

None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is so poor, but that he can be made rich by it.

A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in business, and is the countersign of friendship.

It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and it is nature's best antidote for trouble.

Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone, until it is given away.

Some people are too tired to give you a smile;

Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.



The Little Things

Little stones can make big mountains, Little steps can cover miles,
Little acts of loving kindness, Give the world its biggest smiles!

Little words can soothe big troubles, Little hugs can dry big tears,
Little candles light the darkness, Little memories last for years.

Little dreams can lead to greatness, Little victories to success,
It's the little things in life that bring the greatest happiness!

Helping Hands

A mother, wishing to encourage her son's progress at the piano, bought tickets to a performance by the great Polish pianist Ignace Paderewski. When the evening arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway waiting on the stage. Soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away.

At eight o'clock, the lights in the auditorium began to dim, the spotlights came on, and only then did they notice the boy - up on the piano bench, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." His mother gasped in shock and embarrassment but, before she could retrieve her son, the master himself appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard.

He whispered gently to the boy, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in the bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side and improvised a delightful obligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized with their blended and beautiful music.

REFLECTION

In all our lives, we receive helping hands - some we notice, some we don't. Equally we ourselves have countless opportunities to provide helping hands - sometimes we would like our assistance to be noticed, sometimes we don't. Little of what we all achieve is without learning from others and without support from others and what we receive we should hand out.



The Most Beautiful Flower

The park bench was deserted as I sat down to read,
Beneath the long, straggly branches of an old willow tree,
Disillusioned by life with good reason to frown,
For the world was intent on dragging me down,

And if that weren't to ruin my day,
A young boy out of breath approached me, all tired from play,
He stood right before me with his head tilted down,
And said with great excitement, 'Look what I found! '

In his hand was a flower, and what a pitiful sight,
With its petal worn-not enough rain, or too little light,
Wanting him to take his dead flower and go off to play,
I faked a smile and then shifted away,

But instead of retreating he sat next to my side,
And placed the flower to his nose and declared with overacted surprise,
'It sure smells pretty and it's beautiful too,
That's why I picked it; here, it's for you, '

The weed before me was dying or dead,
Not vibrant of colours, orange yellow or red,
But I knew I must take it, or he might never leave,
So I reached for the flower, and replied, 'Just what I need, '

But instead of him placing the flower in my hand,
He held it mid-air without reason or plan,
It was then that I noticed for the very first time,
That weed-toting boy could not see: he was blind,

I heard my voice quaver, tears shone like the sun,
As I thanked him for picking the very best one,
'You're welcome, ' he smiled, and then ran off to play,
Unaware of the impact he'd had on my day,

I sat there and wondered how he managed to see,
A self-pitying girl teenager beneath an old willow tree,
How did he know of my self-indulged plight?
Perhaps from his heart, he'd been blessed with true sight,

Through the eyes of a blind child, at last I could see,
The problem wasn't the world; the problem was me,
And for all of those times I myself had been blind,
I vowed to see the beauty in life, and appreciate every second that's mine,

And then I held that wilted flower up to my nose,
And breathed in the fragrance of a beautiful rose,
And smiled as I watched that young boy, another weed in his hand,
About to change the lives of and unsuspecting young couples!



Fathmath Sana

NEVER GIVE

UP

“Courage doesn't always roar, sometimes it's the quiet voice at the end of the day whispering 'I will try again tomorrow'”

— Mary Anne Radmacher

Climb Until Your Dreams Come True

Often your tasks will be many, and more than you think you can do
Often the road will be rugged and the hills insurmountable, too

Always remember, the hills ahead are never as steep as they seem,
And with faith in your heart start upward and climb 'till you reach your dream,

Nothing in life that is worthy is ever too hard to achieve
If you have the courage to try it and you have the faith to believe...

Faith is a force that is greater than knowledge or power or skill
And many defeats turn to triumph if you trust in God's wisdom and will

Faith is a mover of mountains, there's nothing that God cannot do,
So start out today with faith in your heart and Climb Until Your Dream Comes True

by Helen Steiner Rice



The Story of the Three Frogs

Question: Three frogs are sitting on a log. One decides to jump.
How many are left? **Three.**

If you do the maths, the correct answer is 'two'.
But in life, the answer is often 'three'.

Just because the frog decided to jump off the log does not necessarily mean that it actually did it.

Is there a gap between what you decide to do and what you actually do?
What is in your deepest desire to do?
What does God want you to do?

If you are not doing it right now, don't give up...
Start taking a small step... TODAY

The Elephant Rope

As a man was passing the elephants, he suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at anytime, break away from their bonds but for some reason, they did not.

He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," trainer said, "when they are very young and much smaller we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free."

The man was amazed. These animals could at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were.

REFLECTION

Like the elephants, how many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed at it once before?

Failure is part of learning; we should never give up the struggle in life.



The Frogs and the Tower

There once was a bunch of tiny frogs...

... who arranged a running competition. The goal was to reach the top of a very high tower. A big crowd had gathered around the tower to see the race and cheer on the contestants...

The race began...

Honestly, no-one in crowd really believed that the tiny frogs would reach the top of the tower. You heard statements such as:

"Oh, WAY too difficult!!"

"They will NEVER make it to the top".

"Not a chance that they will succeed. The tower is too high!"

The tiny frogs began collapsing. One by one...

... Except for those who in a fresh tempo were climbing higher and higher...

The crowd continued to yell

"It is too difficult!!! No one will make it!"

More tiny frogs got tired and gave up...

...But ONE continued higher and higher and higher...

This one wouldn't give up!

At the end, everyone else had given up climbing the tower. Except for the one tiny frog who, after a big effort, was the only one who reached the top!

THEN all of the other tiny frogs naturally wanted to know how this one frog managed to do it?

A contestant asked the tiny frog how the one who succeeded had found the strength to reach the goal?

It turned out...

That the winner was deaf.



REFLECTION

Listening to negative comments can really bring us down and even stop us from wanting to try in the first place. Even Jesus had people muttering that 'nothing good can come from Nazareth!' To achieve our goals we need to ignore the voices that say we will fail.

Just like that frog who couldn't hear the negativity, just imagine what we could achieve if we block out those negative voices

The Heart of Success: Commitment

A young woman lost in the desert made her way to an old weather-beaten, abandoned, home in the distance. Searching for water, she came upon a pump outside the house and began pumping furiously for water. After several attempts and seeing nothing flowing, her eye saw a small jug topped with a cork and a hastily scribbled note underneath. “You have to prime the pump with water first. When you’re finished, refill the jug for someone else.”

The young woman sat and pondered her options. If she drank the water, her thirst would be gone, but if she followed the note’s instructions, all the water could be lost on a pump that might not work. Sweating profusely, she listened to her frightened pounding heart and chose to...

Inside each of us is a person who wants something. Like the woman we can drink from the jug ensuring primary satisfaction or we can choose to prime the pump, helping ourselves and those likely to follow. Similar to the young woman, we have to decide and then commit to a plan of action. Then you will see your life shift and begin to move as magic unfolds. If you’re in sync with your greatest purpose, it’s your destiny to succeed.

...and chose to pour the entire jug of water down the rusty pump and furiously pumped! After some time water gushed forth. She was so grateful, she corked that jug after filling it full again. Then added these words to the note: “Just do it. It really, really works!”

National Storytelling Network newsletter
By Angela Davis



The Story of the Eagle

The eagle has the longest life-span of all the species. It can live up to 70 years.

But to reach this age... The eagle must make a hard decision
In its 40s its long and flexible talons can no longer grab prey which serves as food
Its long and sharp beak becomes bent

Its old aged and heavy wings due to their thick feathers become stuck to its chest. And make it difficult to fly.

The eagle is left with only two options: die or go through a painful process of change which lasts 150 days. The process requires that the eagle fly to a mountain and sit on its nest. There the eagle knocks its beak against a rock until he plucks it out. After plucking it out the eagle will wait for a new beak to grow back and then it will pluck out its talons.

When its new talons grow back the eagle starts plucking its old-aged feathers
And after five months the eagle takes its famous flight of rebirth and lives for 30 more years.

REFLECTION

Why is change needed? Many times in order to survive we have to start a change process. We sometimes need to get rid of old memories, habits and other past traditions. Only free from past burdens can we take advantage of the present.



PROSPECTIVE



UNDERSTANDING

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” (C.G. Jung)

How the Poor Live

One day, a father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the firm purpose of showing his son how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return from their trip, the father asked his son, "How was the trip?"

"It was great, Dad."

"Did you see how poor people live?" the father asked.

"Oh yeah," said the son.

"So, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?" asked the father.

The son answered, "I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden, and they have a creek that has no end. We have

imported lanterns in our garden, and they have the stars at night.

Our patio reaches to the front yard, and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on, and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us; they have friends to protect them."

The boy's father was speechless. Then his son added, "Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are."



Image source: <http://i1.trekearth.com/photos/61346/bibury-trout-farm.jpg>

REFLECTION

It is easy to forget just how blessed we are in this consumer driven age. Close your eyes and think of the wonderful blessings you have. Write them down if you'd like. Make a note to appreciate these more regularly.

PRAYER

Lord, help me count my blessings.
When I get a glass of clean water from the tap,
When I curl up under my doona
Or spend time with friends.
There are many in the world
Who must continue without these.
It is for them I appreciate these-
The blessings that I have.
Amen.

Seasons of Life

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall. When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.



The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said, "no - it was covered with green buds and full of promise".

The third son disagreed; he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfilment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but only one season in the tree's life.

He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, fulfilment of your fall.

REFLECTION

Just because you are going through a tough time, don't lose hope. Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest. Don't judge life by one difficult season.

Persevere through the difficult patches and better times are sure to come sooner or later.

The Widow's Offering

Mark 12: 41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their abundance; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."



Image source: http://www.lidswomenofgod.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/christensen_-_widows_mite_the.jpg

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why did Jesus say the widow had put in more when the value of her contribution was not as large as the others? What is important about the distinction?
- Have there been times when you have provided more (time, money, etc) than you 'had spare'?
- Have there been times when someone else has offered you something more that they 'had spare'? How did that feel?

The Value of Time

To realize the value of a sister/brother:
Ask someone who doesn't have one.

To realize the value of ten years:
Ask a newly divorced couple.

To realize the value of four years:
Ask a graduate.

To realize the value of one year:
Ask a student who has failed a final exam.

To realize the value of one month:
Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby....

To realize the value of one week:
Ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of one minute:
Ask a person who has missed the train, bus or plane.

To realize the value of one-second:
Ask a person who has survived an accident.

Time waits for no one. Treasure every moment you have.

From John Mark Ministries – www.jmm.org.au

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How will you spend the rest of this day?
- What would you like to thank God for?
- If you have a friend who is stressed, what could you do to help them?
- What do you do to calm down when things are stressful or too busy?

PRIORITIES

“The life you have left is a gift. Cherish it. Enjoy it now, to the fullest. Do what matters, now.”

— Leo Babauta

Materialism

From the Bible:

“Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.”

Luke 12:15

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

The Philosophers have their say:

“Acquisition means life to miserable mortals.” Hesiod, 7th Century BC

“Oh, what a void there is in things.”
Persius, 1st Century

“... the single minded pursuit of a trivial object can destroy a man...”

Geoffrey Chaucer, 14th Century



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How would you define materialism?
- Do you think that we are more materialistic than the generations before us?
- Remember a time when you desired a new possession and couldn't get it. How did that make you feel? Why did you want the item so much? Did you obtain the item in the end? If so, what factors contributed to your enjoyment of the item?
- Is materialism truly a modern problem?
- It seems from the quotes above that this is a dilemma faced by humans over the ages. Certainly many of the teachings of Christ centre on the issue of money and material gain.
- How then are we as modern Christians to address the issue of materialism?

Mind Sweeping

Mark 6:31-32 “And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.”

Quite often life asks and requires us to be busy and always on the move. The tasks of our daily lives can include studying, traveling from place to place, class to class, meeting friends, rushing to make deadlines and running errands for ourselves and others. As necessary and purposeful these tasks may be, we can in the process neglect simple tasks needed to survive such as eating, sufficient sleep, relaxation, and self-renewal.

Find a piece of paper, divide this in half and find a quiet ‘deserted place’ to rest a while, just as Jesus had asked the Apostles to do. If you are short on room, create enough space around you to think, have privacy and be comfortable.

Once you have rested the body it is time to find rest, peace and ‘food’ for the mind. Open your mind to each and every thought that makes itself known, begin to write all these thoughts either in short hand, keywords or small drawings/symbols on blank piece of paper that you have divided in two.

On one section of the paper write all your worries, concerns, random and passing thoughts of not much significance. Concerns you may not be able to control such as rainy weather tomorrow, traffic on the way home, something that happened today or your bus arriving on time.

In the other section write those thoughts that arise that are important to you. You will know when you hear them that they are

important to your health, your journey in life, peace of mind and overall wellbeing.

They could be concerns for a loved one, making a deadline for a bill or an important assignment, calling an old friend, finding time to eat, play sports and exercise. By taking the time to acknowledge, separate and organise our free thoughts we are sweeping our mind preparing a space for calm relaxation.

Cut down the middle of the two sections so as to separate them into two pieces of paper. With the important points; gently fold these and place into your pocket to be concerned at and addressed at another time.

With the lesser of important mind chatter thoughts left over; squeeze the paper into a ball or tear into pieces and recycle it to be reused into something useful and renewable. Do not hold onto that which clouds your mind or is beyond your control.

You are now in your deserted place. You have travelled the journey necessary to take the time to feed the body with rest, clear the mind of noise and have created a clear goal to revisit the important issues after stopping for a period of rest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- **Do you ever feel you need a boat to be free and travel to a deserted place?**
- **Can you see in those around you when they may need to make this trip?**
- **The disciples then, after reflection, went on to feed thousands of hungry men with what small resources they had. How can we make sure that we find the time to rest so that we too can give adequately to those around us who ask for our help?**

Rocks In the Jar

A philosophy professor stood before his class with some items on the table in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, about 2 inches in diameter.

He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks.

He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up the remaining open areas of the jar.

He then asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous “Yes.”

“Now,” said the professor, “I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your partner, your health, your children – things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter – like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff.”

“If you put the sand into the jar first,” he continued, “there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party, or fix the disposal.”

“Take care of the rocks first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.”



Source: <http://academictips.org/blogs/moral-tale-the-important-things-in-life/>

The Fisherman and the Businessman

A businessman was standing at the pier of a small coastal village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The businessman complimented the fisherman on the quality of his fish.

"How long did it take you to catch them?" the businessman asked.

"Only a little while" the fisherman replied.

"Why don't you stay out longer and catch more fish?" the businessman then asked.

"I have enough to support my family's immediate needs" the fisherman said.

"But" the businessman then asked, "What do you do with the rest of your time?"

The fisherman said: "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, spend time with my wife, stroll into the village each evening where I play guitar with my friends."

The businessman scoffed: "Well, you should get bigger nets and catch more fish!" the businessman answered.

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman, smiling.

The businessman replied, "You will make money and you'll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish!"

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman's questions. "You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you!" he said.

"And then what will my reward be?" repeated the fisherman.

He business man was getting angry. "Don't you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let all your employees catch fish for you."

Once again the fisherman asked "And then what will my reward be?"

The American said slowly: "Then you would retire and you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, spend time with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings and play your guitar with your friends..."



The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said "And what do you think I'm doing right now?"

RELATIONSHIPS

A true friend is someone who accepts your past,
supports your present & encourages your future.

Friends in the Desert

Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand:

"Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone:

"Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The friend replied, when someone hurts us we should write it down in sand, where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Source: <http://www.spiritual-short-stories.com/spiritual-short-story-428-Friends+in+the+Desert.html#sthash.82mWATPH.dpuf>



LOL, TTYL & FYI

As technology advances further and further it has begun to dictate not only how we communicate with each other (method) but also the way we communicate. Text messaging provides the instant gratification of feedback and praise from a friend with an emoticon 😊;??? or we all know the usual **LOL**, **TTYL** and **FYI**.

When Frederic Ozanam said “embrace the world in a network of love” he had no idea we’d be sending virtual hugs and liking, pinning, tweeting and trending our joys and sadness across the world. He had no idea that in the 21st century the term “network” would have a whole different meaning that potentially means each and every person in the world is only a few cables and an internet connection away.

While there are many positives of such ease of access to communication such as organising social events, remembering birthdays and tweeting celebrities there are also the downfalls which can have drastic consequences.

The impact of your words can either be positive and build people up or negative and tear people down. Sometimes we don’t realise the impact our words on social networks can have. Social media has its own set of social rules and language. However the instant nature of social media can result in less respectful interactions than face to face communication. Before we send an email, write something on someone’s wall or tag someone in a tweet we must stop and THINK.

T – Is it the TRUTH?
H- Is it HELPFUL?
I – Is it INSPIRING?
N – Is it NECESSARY?
K – Is it KIND?

If you are experiencing cyber bullying; don’t think it will just go away or need to talk to someone. Reach out to friends, have some laugh with those around you and most importantly talk to someone. You can talk to the school counsellor about these issues.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What impact either negative or positive might this comment, post or tweet have on the individual or others who view these?
- Could my comments etc. be seen by someone as cyber bullying?
- Could this post be offensive?
- A comment or post that we believe is funny or a personal joke by one person could offend someone else.

In the Corinthians God speaks to His people reassuring them that when they are experiencing hard times and others are unkind to them His power of comfort, strength and guidance is at its strongest and most perfect.

It's almost like God powers up when people are being unjust to others. He stands by the person suffering and believes in them and that they deserve better. God becomes a positive light within us and we are the ones who need to harness that light and take action. Following the example of God Blessed Frederic Ozanam, cofounder of the St Vincent de Paul Society said; "Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attack."

Corinthians 12:9-10

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

PRAYER

Dear God, Be the strength in other's words that they may be kind and honest with no intent to steal the spirit of others. Be the strength in my words that they do not willing hurt others just as I have wished them not to hurt me. It comforts me to know that You have such far-reaching, kind-hearted, Fatherly love for us. Even in this networked world we live in Your love knows no limit. Help me keep logged into Your powerful love and signed out from harshness to others. Amen.

Switching off technology activity:

Sometimes we get so caught up in online life that we forget to enjoy and experience things around us and connect with our friends and family. Give yourself some time to enjoy life through taking the switch off technology challenge.

1. Make one day a week your "switched off" day. That means phones are on silent, no facebook or instant messaging (you can check it occasionally in case it's something important but no unnecessary replies); close your laptop and sit with a family and friends.

Talk to your parents about the ways they communicated with friends and organised social events when they were young. You'd be surprised how much more you can get done in just one 'switched off' day.

2. Around or on your computer and phone wallpapers place words and quotes to keep you positive and mindful of how you talk to others online. Maybe write your own THINK formula and keep it near your computer
3. Think about a time you may have felt persecuted or insulted by other's actions and words. How did you feel? Keep this in mind and remember that not only is God's power felt in all its perfections during these persecutions but it can also be felt more as a nudge to be kind and to THINK before we speak.

Thirty Second Quiz

Don't bother getting a pen and paper... just read... if you can't answer them, just keep going.

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer prize.
5. Name the last five Academy Award winners for Best Actor and Actress.

How did you do?

The point is, none of us remembers the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They're the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Now here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. Name three teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Easier?

The lesson? The people who make a difference in your life aren't the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They're the ones who care.



SERVICE &

SOCIAL

JUSTICE

“At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.”

— Mother Teresa

Apology to My Brothers & Sisters

To my brothers and sisters in developing countries:

While I was deciding which oat bran cereal to eat this morning, you were searching the ground for leftover grains from the passing wheat truck.

While I was jogging at the health centre, you were working in the wealthy landowner's field under a scorching sun.



While I was choosing between diet and regular soda, your parched lips were yearning for a sip of clean water.

While I complained about the poor service in the gourmet restaurant, you were gratefully eating a bowl of rice.

While I poured my "fresh and better" detergent into the washing machine, you stood in the river with your bundle of clothes.

While I watched the evening news on my widescreen television set, you were being terrorized and taunted by a dictatorial government.

While I read the newspaper and drank my cup of steaming coffee, you walked a long, dusty miles to a crowded schoolroom to learn how to read.

While I scanned the ads for a bargain on an extra piece of clothing, you woke up and put on the same shirt and pants that you have worn for many months.

While I built a fourteen-room house for the three of us, your family of ten found shelter in a one-room hut.

While I went to church last Sunday and felt more than slightly bored, you stood on the land with those around you and felt gratitude to God for being alive for one more day.

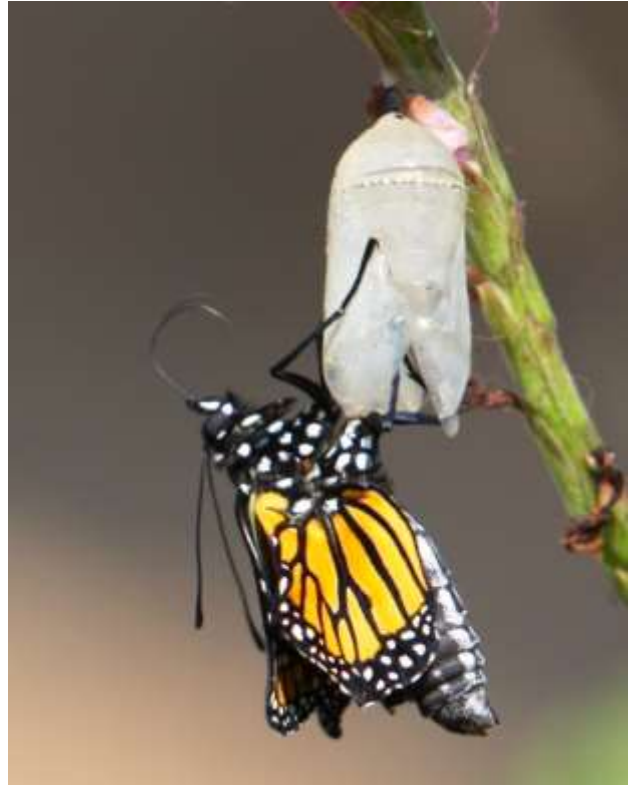
My brothers and sisters, forgive me for my arrogance and my indifference. forgive me for my greed of always wanting newer, bigger, and better things. Forgive me for not doing my part to change the unjust systems that keep you suffering and impoverished. I offer you my promise to become more aware of your situation and to change my lifestyle as I work for the transformation of our world.

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Butterfly Reflection

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further. So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon.

The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shrivelled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.



Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieve its freedom from the cocoon.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In our Vinnies work, what is the difference between “Being a voice for the voiceless” and “Strengthening the voices of the voiceless”?
- When is a time you’ve been tempted to jump in and try and fix someone’s problems for them? Has this helped them? Why/why not?
- Read over our Vinnies Mission Statement. How does this relate to the passage above?

REFLECTION

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. If God allowed us to go through our lives without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as what we could have been. We could never fly!

Invisible Charity

Quite often we may wonder where our donations of charity go; how do the people receiving our gifts feel? Were our blankets warm enough and our food plenty? We may not always have the opportunity to see our good works in action and making a difference in the lives of people in need. However, this does not mean our actions go unappreciated. Or that we will not be rewarded by God.

Matthew 6: 1-4

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. That your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Read Matthew 6:1-4 and consider a time when you did a charitable deed that the receiver did not know about or you were not fully recognized for. It may just be saying “hi” to someone who needs a friend or donating clothes you have outgrown to your local Vinnies Centre.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did this make you feel? Did you wonder what it would be like to see another young person receiving that warm jacket in the middle of winter?
- Can you think of ways that you may feel rewarded in your own life by God for doing these good deeds?
- Make your own list of some “invisible charity” that you have done in your life. Then make another list of all the things and people in your life that you are grateful for and that God has rewarded you with. Reflect on how “rewarded” you feel by God for having this.
- Now take time to think of someone you know or do not know who may be in need of a charitable deed such as friendship, clothing, guidance or helping hand in a difficult time. How can you reach out to this person in your own time quietly, as the Bible calls us to? What steps are needed to achieve this charitable deed?

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.”

He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.



He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’

Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbour to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.”

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Blessed Frederic Ozanam once said, “Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice’s role to prevent the attack”.

- How would you describe the difference between charity and justice?
- Which is more important, charity or justice?
- Is your work with Vinnies more related to charity or justice or both evenly?
- How might Vinnies be both the oil that soothes the wounds and also the prevention of the attack, for those who are disadvantaged and marginalised?

Those We Serve

When you hear the words 'serve', 'serving' and 'service' what do they bring to mind? What do you think they mean in relation to our work in Vinnies? It can be a humbling experience to bring a smile to a young child's face, teach someone a new skill that they will have with them for the rest of their lives or witness a mother's overwhelming sense of gratitude for the positive changes she can see in her child.

But to say we are "serving" children, parents, schools, neighbours, those in need of compassion, assistance and friendship and people we have not met before; how does this make us feel?

We hope that we are able to say to our participants on our Vinnies Programs, people that we visit; whomever they may be; "how can I serve you?" Just as Jesus asked the blind man in Mark:10! Although Jesus had a big crowd of followers already; He didn't feel too proud to stop, talk to the beggar and ask him what he would like. He didn't assume He knew what the blind man wanted, He didn't ignore his cries. It is important that we know, live and understand our own conviction just like we do with prayers.

Take a look around you today; think of all the places we are served in our lives: the post office, cafes, restaurants, waiting at the doctors, calling a customer service helpline, maybe even getting a facial! Think about how you ask for what you want and what you might think of the person at the time you are asking.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you even think about them at all?
- Do you make the effort to always ask kindly, politely with patience and 'please' and 'thank you'?
- Do you sometimes get agitated when your needs are not met or you don't receive exactly what you asked for?
- How is their role in the transaction different to yours?

Then put yourself in that person's shoes. Think of times you may have worked in a hospitality/customer service role. How did you perceive the person you were "serving"? Did you feel equal, appreciated and rewarded?

Those who benefit from our time; talents and gifts that we donate in our Vincentian works are special, as are we. Spend time today being mindful in how you ask others for a service; goods or just a listening ear. Also be mindful of how you interact with others. Always take time to stop and think of ways your words or responses can better reflect your values and this idea of service.

By **St Vincent de Paul Society, State Youth Team, 2012**

What is Service?

Service is...

1. An act of a helpful activity.
2. The performance of duties as a servant.
3. The serving of God by obedience, piety, etc.

Romans 12

Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another.

Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teaching; if it is encouraging, to encouraging.

When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them.

Some thoughts on service by Mother Teresa:

It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing.

It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving.

You and I, we are the Church, no? We have to share with our people.

Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing.

Jesus made it very clear. Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me.

Give a glass of water, you give it to me. Receive a little child, you receive me...

Love cannot remain by itself -- it has no meaning.

Love has to be put into action, and that action is service



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do you define service?
- Who are the people who serve you in your life?
- What are your gifts?
- How might you use those gifts in service to others?
- Can you remember a time when you were deeply affected by an act of service?

Would You Mind If I Washed Your Feet?

If Christ should suddenly stand before me with a towel thrown over his shoulder and a pan of water in his hands, would I have the humility to take off my shoes and really let him wash my feet? Or like Peter, would I say : “Wash my feet, Lord? Never!” Christ has stood in front of me on many a day. It hasn’t always been a pan of water that he’s held in front of me, for water is only one symbol of a way to be cleansed and healed. Sometimes he holds a Bible, or sends a letter, or calls me on the telephone. Sometimes she holds a loaf of bread, or a cup of tea, or gives me her shoulder to cry on. Christ comes in so many ways, in so many people, always holding out that basin of water and asking that same embarrassing question: “Would you mind if I wash your feet?”

The beautiful thing about that burning, persistent, foot washing question is that eventually it calls forth that same question from your heart. Then you discover that your basin is full of water and your heart is full of a call: a call to wash feet.

John 13:2-15

Jesus ... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.



REFLECTION

Think about how each person’s feet are unique. Each have their own story. We talk about walking in another’s shoes, respecting where they are coming from and trying to see things from their point of view. I want you to look at your feet. Think about where your feet have been lately and about how they have walked (quickly or slowly, eagerly or trudging). What would your feet say if they could talk? How am I called to wash others’ feet – to serve them in my Vinnies work?

ST VINCENTS

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a **caring** Catholic charity offering a 'hand up' to people in need. We do this by **respecting** their dignity, sharing **hope** and **encouraging** them to take control of their own destiny.

-The vision of SVDP-

The Vinnies Logo

Think about the Vinnies logo

The three hands in the logo represent three hands.

The top hand is the hand of Christ that blesses the cup. We can recognise it as the hand of Christ because there is a wound in the hand.

The cup that is being held by the middle hand can also be thought of as a gift – this could include the gift of time, of love, of yourself, of presence or whatever it is that you give in your vinnies work. The middle hand offer the cup (or gift)

The bottom hand is the hand of someone who is suffering that receives the cup or whatever gift is given to them by Vinnies.

Think about how your Vinnies work today has been blessed by God.



St Vincent de Paul Society



THE HAND OF CHRIST BLESSES THE CUP



THE HAND OF LOVE OFFERS THE CUP



THE HAND OF THE SUFFERING RECEIVES THE CUP



*The hand of Christ
blesses the cup*



*The hand of love
offers the cup*



*The hand of suffering
receives the cup*

Inspiration From Our Founders

Read the following quotes and reflect on them using the questions provided.

“If we are really called to carry the love of God far and wide, if we are to inflame the nations with this fire, if we have the vocation of setting the whole world on fire, if it is so, then how much I must myself burn with this fire”

St Vincent de Paul



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What makes you want to set the whole world on fire?
- What issues are you really passionate about?
- Where do you get your energy to try and change the world?
- Do you know anyone who is ‘on fire’ with the love of God? What make them different?



“Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor”

BI Rosalie Rendu

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Is love and compassion more important than physical assistance? Why / Why not?
- Can we help those who need assistance if we don’t respect and love them?
- What difference does it make?

“Christianity is not about ideas but about deeds inspired by love”

BI Frederic Ozanam



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are the ‘deeds’ or works that you do to live out your Christian faith?
- How does your faith provide a foundation for the work you do?
- Are ‘deeds’ equally valuable when they are not inspired by love?
- Are ‘deeds’ still Christian if they are not inspired by love?

St Vincent de Paul's Spiritual Way

By Fr Kevin Canty

Saint Vincent de Paul did not develop 'spirituality' in the ordinary sense of the term. Rather, he followed the spirituality of the Church, and in order to make this spirituality available to all he developed what is now referred to as his "Way."

Vincent doesn't offer us spirituality, a teaching on prayer or the spiritual life. He offers us a Spiritual Way. He shows us how we can meet God in our everyday experiences; in the events, the persons, the circumstances of our life. His Way is the way of the Church, a way of experience, of faith, and of practical wisdom....all embraced in a spirit of love.

A Way of Charity

Vincent experienced true Charity- the Love that led God to send his Son among us... 'to bring the good news to the poor.' (Luke 4:18)

A Way of Mission

Vincent responded to God's love and call, and saw himself and his followers as being sent also 'to bring good news to the poor'.

A Way of Prayer in Action

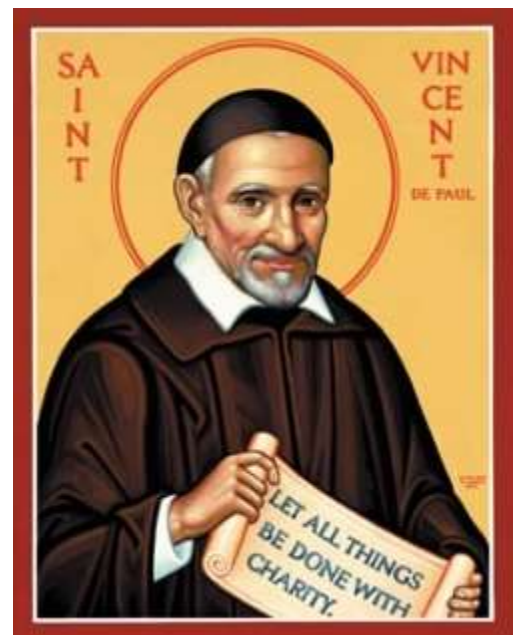
For Vincent, Prayer was a way of developing and deepening a personal relationship with God, with Jesus Christ. Vincent experienced God in his life. He had a deep faith and trust in God's providential care for him and for all people, especially the poor. He encouraged his followers to share their faith, their experience of God in prayer and in their life experience. A tradition he left his priests and brothers, and his sisters the Daughters of Charity, was called 'Repetition of Prayer'. This was a simple sharing of the fruits, the insights, the experiences of God in one's own time of personal reflective prayer.

A Way of Practical Love

Vincent encouraged his followers to be contemplative in action, to respond to God and one's neighbours with a practical love, especially for the poor. Vincent de Paul models the fullness of a Christian life that is prayerful active and actively prayerful.

He found God in everyone.

Vincent shows us balance between action and contemplation, organising good works and relying on divine providence, between intelligent activity and trusting surrender.



The Inestimable Worth of Each Human

A man convinced of the inestimable worth of each human being, Frederic Ozanam served the poor of Paris drawing others into his work. Through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, his legacy continues to the present day.

In Paris he studied law at the University of Sorbonne. When certain professors there mocked Catholic teachings in their lectures, Frederic defended the Church.

A discussion club which Frederic organised sparked the turning point in his life. In this club Catholics, atheists and agnostics debated the issues of the day. Once, after Frederic spoke on Christianity's role in civilization, a club member said: "Let us be frank, Mr Ozanam; let us also be very particular. What do you do besides talk to prove the faith you claim is in you?"

Frederic was stung by the question. He soon decided that his words needed grounding in action. He and a friend began visiting Paris dwellings and offering assistance as best they could. Soon a group dedicated to helping individuals in need under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul formed around Frédéric.

Frederic is an outstanding model of putting faith into action, especially in service of the poor. He proves that to be Vincentian is not about the clothes you wear or the title before your name. It is about serving those who are marginalised and experiencing disadvantage.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do you think that the worth of each individual human being is "inestimable"? Why?
- Why do we [Australians] continue to place certain groups above others, in terms of their worth in our society? (think of marginalised groups across our nation, why do they remain outcast?)
- What do you, your community, your peers do "besides talk"? How are you serving our poor and disadvantaged?
- Can you think of positive examples of "faith in action"? Why are they outstanding? Are they Vincentian by nature?