



September 1998

Another month, Torch People. Here we are, getting ready for fall again, getting used to belonging to City Bible Church, getting blessed in the Holy Spirit, and just generally getting on with life. Isn't that what how it's supposed to work? God created us with purpose and destiny, and our mission in life (should you choose to accept it!) is to find and fulfill that purpose and destiny. What I want to talk about this month is the things that tend to keep us from that.

To begin with, while our callings, abilities and talents are all unique and different, we each have a mix to work with. In many ways life resembles a card game and some hands will be better than others. Some we cash in on, with others we minimize our losses. But I notice something playing cards- the same person usually wins. Does that person get better hands, or do they consistently make the most of what they get?

How we view that question has big implications for our life. If it's all luck and chance, then it's just too bad, isn't it? A Moslem would say *Inshallah- as Allah wills*, an expression of ultimate and irrevocable fatalism.

But we're not Moslems, we are Christians. We have a God who planned our life for good down to the most minute detail. We have a God who hears and answers every prayer. We have a God who calls for us to seek Him, for He has much to say to us. We serve a *living* God.

Proverbs 6:23 speaks of *reproofs of instruction* being the way of life. Life does give us little reproofs we need to take heed to, for they teach us things.

For instance, one can be alone without feeling lonely. If we feel loneliness, it tells us something very important. It tells us God is feeling rejected at that moment because we've taken his place and pre-eminence in our hearts and tried to fit another person into it. But they didn't fit and couldn't handle the expectation and maybe that's why they're not around right now either.

Some of us are alone in life for very obvious reasons. Selfishness, bad manners, offensive habits, bad decisions ... there's a list that could be made. A good steward of his own resources will be constantly on the lookout for social violations he or she may have been committing.

Moodiness and depression are not innocent personal choices. They're often either sin or the result of sin, meaning that we're not responding to something properly. Now we're all going to go through hard times, and God will walk with us especially close when that happens. Other people will give us help too provided we treat them properly.

We shouldn't expect unreasonable things of our friends or make them the dumping ground for whatever garbage gets dredged up out of our heart. That doesn't mean we should never talk about what's hurting, but enough's enough. No matter what we may be going through, we're still accountable for every thought, every word, and every deed.

It's easy to tell whether we're being an edifier or a social parasite. Do people seek us out and want to talk to us, or do we have to corner them in order to afflict them with the story of our life? What do we really know about that person who *doesn't have the time* to talk to us? What is their life like, what do they want and hope for, what is God speaking to them?

Lest I make this sound too easy, let me tell you they will not tell you the first time you ask. They probably won't tell you the first day you talk to them. They probably won't tell you at any time if you ask those questions directly. But if they sense you're interested in them, the inner person, they'll begin to open up. If you can keep your little story on the shelf and be honestly interested in another, they'll begin to find you interesting. Pray for them too, an honest blessing, no strings attached.

How about our life and decisions in general? Do we live in the middle of some big crisis that never gets resolved? This can be the legacy of a life of dependency and co-dependency. The alcoholic creates and orchestrates conflict on a regular basis, for at such a time, who could deny them you-know-what? Sometimes the addiction is for self pity, and again orderly prosperity is their enemy.

It's hard to properly respect and value a person who cannot or will not meet the basic standards of life, to be punctual and careful about other people's time, who cannot keep up the affairs of his or her own life, cannot or will not make and keep basic commitments. Relationships must be based on respect even more so than on love. Are we worthy of respect?

Some of the basic responsibilities can be demonstrated in areas such as church membership and attendance. Are we really committed, or just along for the ride? Can others count on us? Are we being a blessing to anyone? A man or woman is not complete in the Christian walk until there is a pattern of giving and serving, for this is the example that Jesus left for us to follow.

How about our manners? Do our actions in public or private embarrass others? Do we make messes others are forced to clean up? Do we behave in such a manner the testimony of the whole group is damaged? Do we hurt the feelings of those around us by being callous in our ceaseless flow of chatter?

Part of the commitment the TORCH leadership has made is to 'speak the truth in love.' We are not just marking time here, we're seekers of the Living God who are desperate for change. The change occurs at all levels. There's a spiritual side, and now is the day to seek God. The heavens are open and the rain is falling. Pray! We need our portion.

But some things are meant to come through the interaction of one person with another. We're all pretty near perfect in our own humble opinion. That's why we desperately need to see ourselves through the eyes of another from time to time. When we do- that's when we need all the love and courage we can beg, borrow or steal.¹

I experienced a bit of that honesty during my Bible college years. It took over four years, and what I discovered when I got down to the level of truth was rather painful-but it was positive. That was because I had some real answers to relational questions. I discovered that some of my expectations for friendship were neither

justified nor realistic. Also, much of what I'd called friendship was not really that at all.

Although what I found seemed negative at the time, what it really did was to dispose of an unworkable foundation and allow me to build in truth and God's grace. But, it took several years and some deep pain before I could cut through all the social platitudes that we surround ourselves with and really come to understand what was going on.

What price change? For my heart, it's cheap at any price. We only have one shot at life. Today we have less time than we did yesterday. Can tomorrow be better? Can today be better? Inshallah? Or do we want to be Christians? As for me and my house, we will seek The Lord!

Events

This month is scheduled a little on the low-key side. Summer is delivering its last blessings and the church is winding up for a good fall season. Next month we're trying to plan a mini-retreat at Sun River so try to leave a little time and budget available around the middle of the month. We're shooting for the 17th but that's unconfirmed. Look for more info to come...

For Labor Day weekend we decided to try a picnic on Mt Tabor for our Sunday afternoon SNAC. Take Yamhill to 69th for the entrance to the park, and we'll figure it out from there. Bring all your own stuff, and look for some simple fellowship.

Promise Keepers is still a blessing for the men. One word of etiquette is in order- if for some reason you have to be late it would show consideration to M- to call and let her know that you are on the way. That's because the wonderful dinners she cooks for us are scaled according to who shows up and if people don't show until things are well underway it creates problems.

On the 18th we are going to try for another activity night. The activity will probably be a movie at McMenamins, Kennedy School, but we cannot schedule this more than a few days ahead of time because they don't schedule their movies very far ahead. So if you're interested, give E- a

¹ (But of course, it's stealing for a good cause).

call that week and she'll let you know what the plan is.

SNAC on the 20th will be at G's. A main dish will be provided, bring either a salad or dessert dish. The main dish is still under discussion, but the three strongest possibilities are fried chicken, pot roast, or corned beef, so it should be a good afternoon.

See ya 'round...

GAH

© 1998 Gary A. Hughes