



Blankets!

by Mark Brunner

Safe Beneath The Blankets! (Proverbs 30:7-9)

Here's a story: "It is gratitude that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket. Many years before, in October 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea. But somewhere over the South Pacific the Flying Fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the ocean. For nearly a month he and his companions would fight the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable: starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone. It would take a miracle to sustain them. And a miracle occurred. In Captain Eddie's own words, 'Cherry,' that was the B-17 pilot, Captain William Cherry, 'read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off. Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a sea gull. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but

peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull. The gull meant food, if I could catch it.' And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull, uncharacteristically hundreds of miles from land, offered itself as a sacrifice.”
(Paul Harvey's, The Rest of the Story)

Is it wrong to pray for blessings more than we need? While it may not be wrong, it often isn't necessary. We should confine our prayers to the things which we need to sustain us, our “daily bread.” God will do the rest without our prompting. Praying for more might make us proud. Praying for less might make us prone to sin. Whatever the Lord provides us as that “bread,” will do us just nicely. If we need a “gull” He will send it. If we need a whole flock of gulls, most assuredly, they will be on their way. Like the Apostle Paul often wrote: “We can learn to live whether in plenty or poverty.” When we nestle our thankfulness in need, resting secure in the hope of deliverance, God will grant that need. As we rest in the warmth of His grace, the blessings we did not ask for will surely become the blanket that covers our lives. Give thanks!

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Neither Poverty Nor Riches! (Proverbs 30:8-9)

The other day I ran into a guy in the hallway of my office building who recognized me but couldn't quite place me. He stopped me and scratched his chin, with a thin line of recognition in his eyes. “Oh, you're the guy with the Corvair!” he said. I shook my head yes, shook his hand and smiled and then made my way to the elevator. It's always nice to be recognized, as this gives us a momentary stroke of our ego that feels pretty good from time to time. It struck me, though; wouldn't it have been better to be recognized for something more important than my car? As I took the elevator to the next floor my thoughts began to convict me. Have I led a life that has had little effect on anyone other than someone knowing what kind of car I am driving?

How sad it is when we are recognized by our things and not by the things we've done. Unfortunately, the more and more we get, the more these tend to become who we are. Even sadder, our sinful nature likes it that way.

In his book *Jesus, Lord of Your Personality*, pastor Bob Russell points out that having things doesn't tend to produce a grateful spirit. "Have you had a taste of the best this world has to offer? You went to Hawaii once on vacation, so now it's harder for you to enjoy the state park. You've eaten a steak at a fine restaurant, so it's harder to be thankful for a meal at Ponderosa. You've driven a Jaguar, so now you can't be as content with your used Chevrolet. Generally speaking, the more we have, the less grateful we are. It should be the opposite; the more we have, the more thankful we should be. But it usually doesn't work that way, does it? A wise man prayed, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God'" (Proverbs 30:8-9). It's a rare person who, when his cup frequently runs over, can give thanks to God instead of complaining about the limited size of his mug!" (Jesus, *Lord of Your Personality* by Bob Russell, Howard Publishing Co., 2002, pp. 14-16. Preaching Now Newsletter, June 25, 2002)

Is it wrong to own things? Can a Christian live with things? Even worse, should a Christian want things? Certainly it isn't wrong to own things or enjoy them, as long we understand that they are merely on loan from above. When we desire only that which God wants for us, we honor Him. When we honor God, he casts a light around us for all to see. "Sure, I drive a Corvair." I thought to myself as the elevator reached my floor. "But, now that you know I'm the guy who smiled and shook your hand; that's what I hope comes to mind the next time I see you."

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Burned Blankies Are Better Fixed! (Proverbs 31:20)

Several years ago Holly got an early morning phone call from our oldest Grandson, James. He dialed Nana's number to tell her that something bad had

happened. His favorite blankie had a big burn hole in it. James, being the curious, little 6 year-old that he is, was sitting near the living room wood stove. Suddenly thoughts ran through his head. "I wonder what would happen if I touched my blankie to the glass panels on the front of the stove?" He reached over the barricade Rachel and Andy had around the fireplace to keep little boys away. Instantly he burned a hole into his beloved blankie. I think he was looking for some sympathy from Nana. Instead she told him that she would fix it for him. She did and went one step further. Where once there was a hole there was now a Green Bay Packer, logo patch.

Compassion is a good beginning; but touching those we feel love and compassion for with works of service is better.

Here's a story: Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the Great Depression. He was known for his good humor and compassion. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, he turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. After dismissing the judge for the evening, he took over the bench himself. A tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She explained that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper refused to drop the charges. LaGuardia turned to the woman and said, "Ten dollars or ten days in jail." He then reached into his pocket, extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the fine which I now remit; and I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat." The following day, newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman. (Sermon.com)

Someone beautifully said, "Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.'" When we learn the difference, we can make a difference. In a way when we open our eyes, hearts and ears to those who are suffering, a small seed of compassion is planted. As Holly listened to little James on the phone tell her his sad story or as LaGuardia studied the tearful countenance of that desperate woman, that seed pushed hard to be watered and nurtured. Fixing that blankie and paying that fine was the watering that was needed. A seed of compassion swelled and burst into a healthy, growing plant of compassionate service. God is calling you and I to, yes, open our

eyes to the plight of others. But He doesn't stop there. He's calling us to action. Blankies need to be fixed not mourned.

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UFOs! (Proverbs 31:28)

Life is full of those little moments I like to call “UFO’s,” “U(you) Failed Oops.” You know, those little moments when it suddenly dawns on you that some deep character flaw, hidden for years, unexpectedly surfaces in your life. That’s when the: “I guess I do say that a lot!” Or, “You know, you’re right. I do tend to do that!” comes to mind; those little character flaws that lay hidden for years; failings that surface, especially at those moments when you’re lecturing someone else on just the same thing you do all the time. Usually it’s a moment when you ought to be encouraging but criticism is easier, more satisfying. I had a U.F.O. moment the other day. My son Dan had shared his frustration with me on finding the right path in life. He listed the things he did well—his special spiritual gifts. Instead of praising him, however, I criticized him for not applying those gifts. That’s when a U.F.O. suddenly popped up; and it had my “career path” written all over it. I was reminded of how often I had done exactly what I had admonished Dan for. It occurred to me, perhaps, because someone hadn’t encouraged me, I stayed the course at a time I should have sought a better path.

Here’s a story: “Keith Hernandez was one of baseball’s top players. He was a lifetime .300-hitter; who had won numerous Gold Glove awards for excellence in fielding. He’s won a batting championship for having the highest average, the Most Valuable Player award in his league, and even the World Series. Yet with all his accomplishments, he had missed out on something crucially important to him – his father’s acceptance and recognition that what he had accomplished was valuable. In a very candid interview about his relationship with his father Keith related: “One day I asked my father, ‘Dad, I have a lifetime 300 batting average. What more do

you want?’ His father replied, ‘But someday you’re going to look back and say, “I could have done more.”’ (Speakers Sourcebook II.)

How easy it is to find fault even when it’s with someone who is excelling. The problem is: often those with a knack for pointing out the weaknesses and fallibleness of others, only have this talent because of a deep sense of familiarity with the same failing themselves. It’s by their own shortcomings that they know others in the same boat so well. It might be wise for those who are quick to criticize to consider these wise words: “Many faults we think we see in others are simply the ones we expect to find there because we own them ourselves.” So, the next time a U.F.O., “U Failed Oops”, pops up on your radar screen, step back and pull-up on the criticism. Who knows? Your encouragement might mean the difference between success or failure for someone on the edge of excellence, just waiting for you to nudge them forward.

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One At A Time! (Proverbs 31:28)

How do you stay focused—on anything, for that matter? If you’re like me distractions play a very big part in your decision-making process. This is especially true when I’m confronted by multiple priorities. Although I don’t mind having more than one challenge on my plate at a time, I do find that I am more easily distracted when I have to focus on multiples than singles. The key I’m told is not to be afraid of taking on more than one task at a time while always being sure to prioritize tasks and then clicking them off one at a time.

Keeping your life spiritually focused, always with an eye on Christ, even as you’re dealing with the day-to-day stuff that happens, can be a challenge.

Here's a story: She was the Vice President of Household Affairs for her entire adult life. She had a husband, four daughters, and one son whom she managed. Her calling was not to the marketplace; it was to the home. She often went beyond her job description to fulfill menial tasks like sewing clothes, playing dolls, and even playing catch with her son. Things were going along well until midway in life she lost the love of her life in an airplane crash. She was in her early 40's, still beautiful, with five kids to raise on her own in spite of the fact that she hadn't worked in the business place for nearly 20 years. The death of her husband removed their steady upper middle-class income, and she was now faced with the greatest test of her life. At her lowest moment, wondering how she was going to make it, she cried out to God. God answered, "Trust Me." Those audible words became the strength that she needed to care for her family for the next 40 years. From that moment on, she came to know her Savior personally and shared Him with her family. Her children came to know Him as well. Grandchildren became the recipient of her prayers, and they came to know Him too. She was building an inheritance in Heaven, one prayer at a time, one soul at a time. She never remarried; Christ became her Husband. (Author unknown. If anyone has a proprietary interest in this story please authenticate and I will be happy to credit, or remove, as the circumstances dictate.)

When this Mom was faced with focusing despite the multiple tasking suddenly thrust upon her, she did the one thing that set her apart from lesser women, she lifted up her eyes to heaven and made God her number one priority. She made her heart's attention things spiritual. Christ became her substitute, the one whom she was sure would step in when things got tough. With the friendly eyes of Christ gazing down on her, the multiple tasks were clicked off one at a time. We look up and He looks down. Isn't it just like God to make what seems so hard the easiest thing in the world to do?

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