



SOUTHSIDE MIDWEEK NEWSLETTER 8.12.20

A Message to Our Students – Barrett

On Monday, August 17, my daughter Bailey will begin her Freshman year at Harding University. Karen, my children, and I will pile into our van along with all of Bailey's clothes and dorm room essentials to make the eight-hour drive to Searcy, Arkansas. We are both excited and hesitant to participate in this important transition in the life of our oldest child. Having served in a campus church for the last twenty-five years, I have been on the receiving end of this exchange many times, however, this will be my first time on the leaving end. I'm sure I will be a complete mess.

Because we will be gone for the first part of the week, I will not be publishing a midweek newsletter next week. Please pray for us as we travel and for Bailey as she begins this new season of her life. Below is a message that I have read to many college freshmen through the years to encourage them as followers of Christ during their college years. Before leaving Bailey in Searcy, I will begin the family tradition of reading this message to my own teenagers as they begin their freshman years in college. The entire message is taken from Paul's first letter to Timothy (The Message). I wanted to share it with you. I hope that it encourages you as it has encouraged me and many students.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, making me adequate to do his work. He went out on a limb, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. The grace of our Lord has been poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here's a word you can take to heart and depend on for the rest of your life: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. You and I are proof. I give you the following instruction so that you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.

The first thing that I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know.

Secondly, train yourself to be godly. Exercise daily in God, no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gym are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.

Thirdly, don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. The people will all see you mature right before their eyes.

Fourthly, don't be harsh or impatient with an older man. Talk to him as you would your own father. Treat younger men as brothers. Reverently honor an adult woman as you would your mother, and the younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

Fifthly, don't be embarrassed or ashamed to speak up for our Lord. We can only keep on going, after all, by the power of God, who first saved us and then called us to this holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

Sixthly, avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Don't have anything to do with foolish arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. God's servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps his cool.

Seventhly, turn your back and run from the evil desires of youth, and run towards righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with all of those who call on the Lord with a pure heart. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed.

Finally, remember always and repeat these basic essentials over and over:

If we died with him, we will also live with him;

If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we disown him, he will also disown us.

If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

The amazing grace of our Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God our Father, and the intimate relationship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

Forgiveness – Kevin

One of the most challenging commands Jesus gives us is to forgive. Meeting a person who forgives people who hurt or wronged them is hard to find. Forgiveness is an endangered quality.

Jesus was a person who was easy to be around. You don't learn how to be stressed out, critical, grumpy, moody, vengeful from Jesus. Jesus says in John 12:32, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself." Jesus doesn't attract people by being selfish, having a temper, holding grudges. We've been schooled by the "ruler of this world" to be selfish. We've been trained to view everything and everyone as a means to our personal satisfaction. The battle in this arena is real, it's daily, even moment by moment. If you want to know who's winning the battle in your heart, simply look at how you react when someone does you wrong.

Think back to a time when someone jumped your case – and it was totally uncalled for and even unfair. With that situation in mind, check out Matthew 18:15. What you don't find is Jesus advising us to go and talk to everyone we can find, telling them how we've been wronged. We don't find Jesus advising us to tell others how bad this person is and how badly they treated us. But that's what we do, isn't it? Forgiveness is an endangered choice. Jesus tells us to go have a talk with this person who hurt us and try our best to work out the hurt.

Jesus goes on in Matthew 18 to have a brief conversation with Peter about the magnitude of forgiveness he has in mind – not stopping at forgiving the same person 7 times, but 70 times 7 if necessary. Sounds like Jesus is suggesting that we forgive without limits. My guess is that if we forgive with limits, we'll be more focused on the limits than we will be on the forgiveness. Because forgiveness is so difficult, Jesus offers us a parable. Check it out in Matthew 18:23-35. Every time we hesitate to forgive, this would be a good parable to read again. The last two verses are not pleasant to hear.

We often struggle to forgive because of too much pride and too little memory. Of all the human weaknesses, pride is the loneliest. Pride will cause you to damage a relationship and then prevent you from reaching out for the very help it takes to reconcile. Pride feeds selfishness, bitterness, hatred, violence. Pride and forgiveness don't mix well and when they do forgiveness ends up as something which must be earned or deserved. Combine our pride with a short and selective memory and forgiveness becomes even nearly extinct. When the man in Jesus' parable was forgiven a debt he couldn't repay, that had zero impact on the debt someone who couldn't pay owed him. Our mistakes are seldom remembered to be as bad as what others have imposed on us. We need a longer and more accurate memory of how we have hurt others in our past.

I have one closing thought about how to be a more forgiving person, but first I need you to read 1 Peter 2:23-25. Sit with this line... "by his wounds you are healed". The supreme motivating force in forgiving others is found in the gratitude for all God has forgiven us.

A Shepherd's Prayer – Ron

"Jesus, teach us to pray"

I would like to highlight two points from Luke 11:1-13 where Jesus teaches the disciples to pray. It is in this passage that Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer, along with some explanation of how we should approach God. Jesus begins the prayer with "Father." My first point is that Jesus wants us to approach God as our Father. The Creator of all space and time doesn't want us to call him Creator, King, or All-Powerful Lord, even though He is all of them. When we talk to Him, Jesus wants us to see God as our Father. Dad. When we see Him as our Father, then we can feel secure in our relationship with Him because we view ourselves as **children** of God. We are members of his family.

My second point is about how we approach our Father. After teaching the disciples the prayer, Jesus then tells them of a man who, when an unexpected guest arrives, persistently asks his friend for a loaf of bread. The man keeps knocking on his friend's door until he finally receives the loaf of bread, not because he was a friend but because he persisted in asking and knocking until the friend relented and gave him the loaves. We are prone to ask, "If God is more caring than the best earthly father, then why would he sometimes be slow to respond to our prayer?"

Yet Jesus teaches us to persist in approaching God. "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." The Greek for the three verbs should be translated "ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking." Jesus commands this continuous action three times and repeats these three words in verse 10. I believe he is trying to capture our attention. Asking is the simplest activity and requires no movement on our part. Seeking turns asking into an activity of pursuit. Knocking on and on at the door again and again signifies utter earnestness and perhaps even desperation. Jesus clearly wants us to be like this friend who kept knocking. He wants us to persist in prayer. But then he makes a sudden turn in verse 11 and shifts from the image of a grumpy, persistent friend to the image of a caring Father.

He elaborates that a father will not give his child a snake when he asks for a fish. When we do not receive what we are asking for, we can think God is giving to us something we do not want. However, we need to keep reminding ourselves that our Father in Heaven knows how to give good gifts to his children. He is giving us what is good for us. Also, there is something in the persisting—the asking and seeking and knocking—that we need, that is good for us. And he knows best. "Everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened." God, our Father, is not unresponsive to our persistent prayer.