

"Timing is Everything"

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Theme: The needs of others are opportunities to demonstrate loyalty.

Text: Proverbs 17:17

Here's a thought: Someone has observed, "Prosperity begets friends, adversity proves them."

One of the all-time greats in baseball was Babe Ruth (1895-1948). His bat had the power of a cannon, and his record of 714 home runs remained unbroken until Hank Aaron came along. The Babe was the idol of sports fans, but in time age took its toll, and his popularity began to wane. Finally, the Yankees traded him to the Braves.

In one of his last games in Cincinnati, Babe Ruth began to falter. He struck out and made several misplays that allowed the Reds to score five runs in one inning. As the Babe walked toward the dugout, chin down and dejected, there rose from the stands an enormous storm of boos and catcalls. Some fans actually shook their fists.

Then a wonderful thing happened. A little boy jumped over the railing, and with tears streaming down his cheeks he ran out to the great athlete. Unashamedly, he flung his arms around the Babe's legs and held on tightly. Babe Ruth scooped him up, hugged him, and set him down again. Patting him gently on the head, he took his hand and the two of them walked off the field together.

People young and old have learned when we strike out, commit errors and fall behind we need the support of others. King Solomon drank deeply of life and I am sure he spoke from experience and observation when he wrote Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." NIV

Proverbs 17:17 comes out this way in The New Living Translation: A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need. NLT

Relationships are defined in:

Opportunity Adversity

Relationships are defined in:

Opportunity



There are defining moments in relationships – times when you can show someone you are there for them or times when you let them down.

I can still remember my brother Laurence helping us move from Calgary to Edmonton in 1986. We loaded up a farm truck and he took a day out of his busy life as a farmer to haul our stuff 300 kilometres. We lugged a steel hide-a-bed that weighed a ton up the stairwell to our third floor apartment in a humble neighbourhood just east of Commonwealth Stadium. He seized the opportunity to show us that he cared.

On the other hand, I can remember when a fellow living a few kilometres down the road who knows my family and me refused to let my father-in-law drop off an appliance for us at his house while we were away a few years ago. He demonstrated at that moment that he did not want to get involved.

Someone has concluded, "Loyalty means nothing, unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of sacrifice."

The Lord is continually setting up divine appointments for us. I have noticed that divine appointments rarely come at times and in places that are convenient for us. Following Jesus is not a part-time job or hobby where we volunteer when the time fits for us. Being yoked with Him means that *He* sets the agenda. However, when we begin to realize the partnership we have with Him the pressure lessens and we recognize our role is to simply obey and respond to these openings.

The Apostle Paul talks about these appointments in Ephesians 5:15-18:

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. NIV

In a world that is so consumed with self-gratification we are called to be watching and listening for what the Holy Spirit is doing and saying. He is prompting us and setting us up for moments when the kingdom of God is manifested. While He can and does show up in dramatic ways, more often He shows up in subtle ways as we quietly speak His words and do His works.

The problem is often, however, our drunkenness. This intoxication certainly includes beer, wine, liquor, marijuana and cocaine but it does not end with these obvious impairments. No, we can be intoxicated with wealth, a career, family, travelling, a new boyfriend or girlfriend, busyness, television, camping, gaming, sports or with buying new things. The list could go on and on. In fact, any pursuit that distracts us from growing our relationship with the Lord can so impede our judgment that we lose sight of what really matters in light of eternity. Such drunkenness causes us to focus on self-gratification and keeps us from seeing and seizing the opportunities that the Holy Spirit provides for us.

Think of it this way - what fills a person controls a person. If I am filled with anger, envy, hatred, etc., those emotions will control my actions and interactions with others. The person drunk with wine loses self-control, but the one "drunk" with the Spirit gives the believer self-control! Compare Galatians 5:23

(www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=33924). Rather than being drunk, Paul says, we should be clear-headed, clear-sighted and filled with the Holy Spirit. As we walk in the Spirit we are empowered *by* Him and responsive *to* Him. Following Jesus is not about self-effort but about communion and obedience.

When I was a kid we would try to nullify what we said by pointing out that our fingers were crossed when we said it. When we were serious we would call for the pinky swear, or pinky promise, which is the entwining of the little fingers ("pinkies") of two people to signify that a promise has been made (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinky_swear). Perhaps you have heard someone say, "Promises are made to be broken." I wince when I hear this because 2,000 years ago religious people were going to great lengths to wriggle out of their commitments.

People swore by all sorts of things other than God to confirm that their word was true. They reasoned that if they broke their oath based on any of these lesser things, at least they were not bringing God's name into disrepute. It eventually became necessary for rabbis to decide which oaths were completely

binding. (from IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)

Jesus addresses this foolishness directly in Matthew 5:33-37:

33 Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.” 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No”; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. NIV

We *tell* others we care when we commit to helping them when an opportunity arises. We *show* others we care when we follow through on our commitments.

Are you willing to step out and commit to helping others? Can you be counted on to fulfill your commitments?

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The Apostle Paul reveals a secret to relationships in Romans 12:15 when he exhorts, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” NIV

People are touched when we match their emotions. Whether others are rejoicing or mourning we can miss out when we focus on our own problems or our own insecurity. How many times have I chosen not to get involved because I wasn't sure of what to do or say? I can't count the number of times.

An expert in the law was testing Jesus on how we can secure eternal life and on who our neighbour is. In response to this conversation Jesus shares the parable of the Good Samaritan who went out of his way to help a man who had been beaten and robbed (Luke 10:25-37). Here we have an age-old example of someone who loved another person facing adversity.

There seems to be two different “Als” living inside me. One Al wants to draw close to people and the other wants to pull away. One wants to talk with someone who just lost a loved one and the other wants to avoid them because it is awkward and I don’t know what to say. One wants to pray and talk with someone who is struggling and the other doesn’t want to get involved because it is too hard. One wants to help someone while the other says I already have too much to do. One wants to give while the other says I can’t afford it.

Solomon ponders in Proverbs 20:6:

Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is really faithful? NLT

When you think of loyal and faithful friends, who comes to mind? *Why* do you consider them to be loyal and faithful? Are these people that you met within the last week, the last month or even the last year? Chances are, you have known these people for quite a while and over time they have been there for you when times were tough. Loyalty like this cannot be demonstrated on Facebook or Instagram. Faithful friends and family show up when life smacks you in the head. Such relationships are not cooked in the microwave oven but in the crock pot. Such relationships are the most satisfying and fulfilling.

Two men were out hunting. Suddenly one yelled and the other looked up to see a grizzly charging them. The first started to frantically put on his tennis shoes and his friend anxiously asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly bear?"

His friend replied, “I don't have to outrun a grizzly. I just have to outrun you!”

I would surmise it was more painful for Jesus to be let down by His close friend Peter than to be betrayed by His disciple Judas Iscariot – whom he knew was a devil (John 6:70). Imagine the pain and the shame that Peter felt when he denied knowing Jesus for the third time in one night as Jesus had prophesied. As the rooster crowed to mark the third denial, Jesus looked at Peter with a penetrating gaze. With such regret and self-loathing that we can all identify with to one degree or another, Peter went outside and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). The forgiveness that Jesus shows toward Peter in John 21 after Peter denied knowing Him three times is profound! Can you imagine the relief and love that Peter felt knowing Jesus remained loyal to him even though he had let the Lord down so dramatically?

Someone has observed, “Prosperity begets friends, adversity proves them.”

I was recently at a conference where the message penetrated my heart and I went up for prayer. Brenda and the speaker did no more than pray for me, embrace me and let me cry. I can’t tell you how meaningful their empathy was

to me. I can't measure how healing it was just to have them stand and cry with me as I let the hurt out and let the Holy Spirit touch me.

It's amazing how we remember the people who helped us when we moved, visited us in the hospital, comforted us when we mourned, congratulated us when we achieved and celebrated with us when we were glad.

On one side of this coin, the less we expect of others the more we will be delighted and surprised when they come through for us. On the other side of this coin, the more we show ourselves faithful and loyal to others the more we will delight and surprise others.

Is there space in your calendar & cash in your wallet to help others when they are in need? If you are too busy and you have no financial margin to help others, what changes do you need to make?

In September of 2003 Brenda and I had hit rock bottom. I had been voted out of the church I was pastoring so we and our two young children were evicted from the house that belonged to the church. Not knowing what to do or where to go, I asked my dad if we could live with him until we determined our next step. He agreed and the next three years turned out to be the best opportunity Brenda, Allison, Braden and I ever had to get to know my aging father. I contacted a couple who are New Covenant Ministries International (NCMI) apostolic team members, Jim and Margaret Lamont, whom I had met almost three years earlier and told them about our situation. They are not wealthy people but they surprised us by sending a cheque to help us get to a training time in the Toronto area, where we met people that reached out to us without asking how many people were in our church. Then Jim flew from California to Calgary at his own expense and spent three days just being with us, listening to us and praying for us. There was no New Beginnings Church yet and we were broken and discouraged. It took about 11 months before we started to meet on Sunday mornings in our living room. Out of such a deep, dark valley have arisen friendships and partnerships with the NCMI apostolic team. I wish Jim and Margaret could come to visit us and see what the Lord has done since 2003. Unfortunately, their health does not permit them to travel very far. Nevertheless, Brenda and I will remain grateful to them for how they reached out when we needed someone to reach out.

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