



REFLECTIONS

April 7, 2019

**When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city
was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"**

Matthew 21:10

Just a Man?

Life changed for many once Jesus entered their lives. Mary of Magdala, who had reputedly lived an immoral life, was prominent among them. *"I've been changed, yes really changed. / In these past few days, when I've seen myself, / I seem like someone else..."* she sang in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical production from the early 1970's. But how, she wondered, *"He's a man. He's just a man."* She wasn't alone in her wonder.

"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him," in fear and amazement [the disciples] asked one another, after Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. (Luke 8:25)

Then when Jesus healed a lame man, the Pharisees asked, *"Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"* (John 5:12) On still another occasion, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, *"Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Luke 5:21)

Just a man? Mary Magdalen would learn differently when Jesus called her name outside the tomb. And Thomas found more than just a man when he touched the Savior's wounds.

Just a man? Peter finally got it. *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:15-16) Just a man? Apostle Paul explained Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death —
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2:6-11)

Just a man?

The tomb was empty!

Share the story.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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The musical production from the early 1970's has never held much appeal for me. The music, not my style, the hippie movement, of which I was not a part, defined the setting, and the tone of it held less respect for God and his only Son than I felt it should. Still, public appeal made for a successful presentation of the life of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus *was* different; yet he looked like other men—no different at all. Only he was different—very different she would come to learn.

I don't know how to love him.
What to do, how to move him.
I've been changed, yes really changed.
In these past few days, when I've seen myself,
I seem like someone else.
I don't know how to take this.
I don't see why he moves me.
He's a man. He's just a man.
And I've had so many men before,
In very many ways,
He's just one more.

Read more: [Jesus Christ Superstar - I Don't Know How To Love Him Lyrics | MetroLyrics](#)



REFLECTIONS

March 31, 2019

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:7

Jars of Clay

Traveling near the northwestern edge of the Dead Sea, the parched look of sandstone hillsides was enough to dry almost anyone's mouth. The only magnetisms to them were small cave openings dotting the cliffsides. The area located around the caves of Qumran was once home for an ascetic sect of Hebrews dedicated to belief in the Bible as the word of God. They are said to have had someone reading the Bible 24 hours a day.

In the late 1940's and early 50's, exploration of the caves of Qumran led to the discovery of unexpected treasures. Inside, explorers discovered numerous old jars of clay. Protected inside them they found biblical manuscripts, written on papyrus and parchments, we know today as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Consensus dates them to the last three centuries BCE. Before the discovery the oldest scripture found dated to 10 CE. The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* pushed back a thousand years the date of the oldest scripture manuscripts found.

For all those years, those old jars of clay did nothing but hold inside them their antiquity treasures, so someday they could be shared with the world.

Now this may seem like a stretch, but an adage says you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Some of us older ones might object believing we can indeed *learn* new things. The problem is in doing them within these old clay jars that house our souls. As Jesus said, "... *no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And for me, here is the best part: And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'*" (Luke 5:37-39)

Age does take its toll on performance, even in doing what once was done with ease. New things may be learned, but execution is another matter altogether. But whether a new wineskin or an old jar of clay...

Treasure is found not so much by what one does as by what is held inside.

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REFLECTIONS

March 24, 2019

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

Revelation 3:7

Disappointments

Originally published October 29, 2006, the following excerpt from *Reflections* entitled *Life's Disappointments* addresses those difficult times when things just don't work out.

Sometimes the job we wanted, the trophy we sought, the relationship we chased, or the house we dreamed of just doesn't happen the way we hoped. Some things are just not to be—at least not the way we dreamed them.

God opens doors that invite us to pursue a dream, but He also closes doors that leave our dreams short of the desire we had for them. We should not feel alone. God also closed doors for some of his most significant people. Just look at Moses.

God opened and closed doors on Moses throughout his life. He opened a door when He spared his life in a basket. God closed a door when He expelled Moses into the desert from his position of royalty. Surely it was one of life's disappointments. And God was not through. Another door opened when He called Moses called to lead his people to the promised land. Yet there was still a disappointment to come. Moses led his people to the destination but was not allowed to enter himself. One of life's disappointments.

Then there was King David—what a champion for God! God opened doors to make him king and what a king he was. David loved God. He talked about God, he wrote about God and he danced about God. One of David's great dreams was to recover the Ark of the Covenant from the enemy and to build a temple to God to house it. The Ark was recovered, but God closed a door when David wanted to build the temple. It was one of life's disappointments.

There was also the disappointment of Apostle Paul. Paul longed to go to Rome. It was his dream destination. He would finally make it there, but his dream did not envision a trip bound in chains. Paul suffered one of life's disappointments.

Sometimes things just don't work out. But they work out for God. The Israelites reached the promised land, the temple was built for the Lord, and Paul had an audience in Rome. None of these dreams were fulfilled in the way the dreamer had hoped, but by pursuing the dream they honored God.

Life's Disappointments, a part of living. They remind that God is not there to help us live out *our* plans. God placed us here to live out *his*.

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REFLECTIONS

March 17, 2019

**"As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."**

Genesis 8:22

Becoming Less

Budding trees and fields of blooming flowers mark the coming of spring. Better though is the promise of winter's end. Seasons are defined by their prevailing features—spring by its freshness, summer by the length and warmth of its days, fall by its vibrant colors and cooling nights. Then comes winter. For me it's defined most by its cold and darkness, sometimes restful, but most often uncomfortable. Seasons are part of God's order of life in his creation. Not only human life, but of all life.

Think about the trees. Born from seed, they live through numerous seasonal cycles to bear fruit of various kinds before giving way to trees younger and stronger to carry on. So too is human life. For most, there are more than a few seasonal cycles to live. But think about life's seasons—birth, preparation, fruit bearing, then preparing the way for those who follow before stepping into a lesser role. All within God's orderly plan. Think about this one.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. (John 1:6) His birth was unusual because of his parents' age; but God had plans for him. His early years were in the desert living on locusts and wild honey preparing for the season ahead. It too was in the desert, this one in Judea where he preached the message of repentance and baptized those who sought to be cleansed. But he knew all along that one greater than him would follow. His job was to prepare the way. When the Messiah came, his job was to become less. These were his seasons—birth, preparation, bearing fruit, becoming less.

Based on descriptions of the man we know as John the Baptist, he was an eccentric fellow, reclusive, drawn to nature, but unafraid to speak his mind. He rose to distinction because he would tell anyone to their face about the fallen world and the sinful nature of man. John's message reminded followers of God's commandments, that everyone fell short of them, and to cleanse their souls from their sins required sacrifices. But in the end, they needed the sacrificial blood of a Savior, the one for whom John the Baptist paved the way.

John the Baptist reached the pinnacle of success in his own right. Loyal followers grew in numbers every day. His message captured attention and inspired action. Only his job wasn't to remain in the lead role; and he knew it. *"He must become greater; I must become less,"* he said.

Becoming less—a season of life—perhaps even the most important.

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REFLECTIONS

March 10, 2019

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Deuteronomy 6:1-2

God's Family Values

Church Youth Days display the energy and spiritual depth of young people at the beginning of their journeys through life. They tell their stories of love for Jesus and their dreams for a better world. They share what they learned about God's hope for mankind and things they've seen that are not as they should be. The church is a setting for learning. But the best lessons they'll receive are rooted in the family values they learn at home.

The term "family values" sounds old fashioned versus those today that sound much like the time when judges ruled. *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.* (Judges 21:25) But God asks us to love him and to teach *his* values to our families. Nowhere in the Bible is it stated more clearly than sixth chapter of Deuteronomy.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

It's refreshing to find families that know to *Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.* (Proverbs 22:6) Those values teach about loving your neighbor as much as yourself, and that individual liberties and freedom don't trump the well being of those around us. They tell stories of God's unfailing love, of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide us in service to God.

Experience is the best teacher some believe. But those of us who *live in a land with large, flourishing cities [we] did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things [we] did not provide, wells [we] did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves [we] did not plant — then when [we] eat and are satisfied, [we are] careful that [we] do not forget the Lord.* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

God's family values. May we teach our children. Better yet. May they see us live them.

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REFLECTIONS

March 3, 2019

"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Acts 9:15-16

Looking Back

Recent *Reflections* I've written and conversations I've had seem to have focused more than usual on life already lived. Perhaps the emphasis began with the reference to the family photo taken Christmas day. Included with us in the photo are our children and their respective growing families. "The fruits of our lives," we described them to be. So, began the lookback at those fruits and others for their similarities and differences with the vision and dreams we had when we set out on our journey oh those many years ago.

The journey led to places we didn't know existed, to challenges we never imagined confronting, to people's lives that influenced ours and lives we touched that could never have been in those initial dreams. Mostly though, the hand of God is clearly seen leading us all the way, teaching us and preparing us through all the many trials we faced and errors we made, to serve his purpose for our lives. And with it, I think we find a bit of our own purpose fulfilled too.

Fifteen years ago, the central theme of these *Reflections* focused attention to the road ahead—God's purpose for your life and mine. Discover it. Pursue it in service to him, ending with his final blessing, "Well done good and faithful servant." While I still see the pursuit of God's purpose for our lives as our calling, looking back, it is clearer to me that God uses our lives for his purposes even when we venture from the prescribed path.

As already said, this is not the first of my lookbacks in life. But this one feels a bit different because of its attention to God's work more than discernment of where He is leading me. Past lookbacks have recognized and acknowledged God's hand at work in the world, the miracles of nature and his clear presence manifested in other people's lives. This time, though, the view is more on yesterday's results than preparation for tomorrow. And here are my findings.

God has blessed me in this life in more ways than I could ever have imagined. Like most young people setting out on their journeys, I wanted my life to make a difference in the world. Looking back, the world *is* different, and whether I had a role in it or not, the difference has little to do with me and the purposes I aspired to serve. For everything I set out to do or be, God held the key. *What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.* (Revelation 3:7)

It's a blessing if God ever used me as an instrument for *his* purposes. And now, looking back, *There is nothing in us that allows us to claim that we are capable of doing this work. The capacity we have comes from God* (2 Corinthians 3:5 TEV).

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REFLECTIONS

February 24, 2019

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Romans 7:15

Stand for Something

As the saying goes *if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything*. The saying is easy to understand and seemingly not so hard to do. But just take a look at the failures.

Eve fell first to that sneaky snake's persuasive pitch that a bite of the apple would give her the power of God, not the promise of death. Then after 400 years in slavery, the Israelites fell to shortened memories brought by their difficult journey to the land God promised to Abraham. When the going became tough on their journey, the Israelites forgot what slavery was like, and wished to return to it rather than face the struggles to gain a better life.

Elijah once stood strong to protect God's prophets from the swords of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel; then ran cowardly when fear overcame his faith from Jezebel's threat to kill him. And don't forget that Peter once walked out to meet Jesus on the Sea of Galilee until he realized he was walking on water and began to sink. And of course, we remember Peter's promise to stand up for Jesus no matter what only to later deny him three times.

Apostle Paul understood the problem when he expressed, *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* Perhaps, like me, you relate to those failures arising from distracting temptations, fears of loss or pain, and discouragement from hardships. When you stand for something, it can bring about more trouble than yielding to the pressures to abandon the cause. And maybe sometimes it does. But look at some success stories.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into years of bondage by his jealous brothers but then rose to become a powerful leader in Egypt. Later when his brothers came in need of help from hardships of their own, Joseph helped them and forgave them saying, *"....do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."* (Genesis 45:5)

As a young man, King David stood on his faith to bring down a menacing giant with only a slingshot and five smooth stones in his pouch. The prophet Daniel risked death by refusing to deny God, but then walked away unharmed from within both a lions' den and a fiery furnace. Then there is the best example of all to follow.

Jesus stood up to Satan's temptations for food after 40 days of fasting, for power after looking down on the world, and to avoid his fate on the cross. He had a stand to take. Even as the cross loomed ahead, Jesus chose to have his flesh torn by scourging lashes, nails driven into his hands and a spear stabbed into his side. He took a stand for something—your salvation and mine.

God has a purpose for you and me to stand for too.

I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. (Exodus 9:16)

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Jesus stood up to Satan's temptations and endured the cross—he could have vanished in the crowd or come down from the cross. But he stood for something—your salvation and mine.

Seems to me, we should be willing to stand for that banner too

Rom 7:15

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

NIV

Peter—denial, walking on water,

Elijah running in fear of the wrath of Jezebel.

Israelites forgot the suffering from bondage

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. Dan 10:12



REFLECTIONS

February 10, 2019

**There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven**

Ecclesiastes 3:1

New Seasons

Intent on our own meal and daily matters confronting our lives, we scarcely noticed the stranger at an adjacent table. But he aroused our attention as he prepared to leave. My eyes met his with more than a glance, and the length of the gaze prompted me to break the silence. That modest acknowledgement was all he needed.

“I try to go to a different place every night,” he explained. “I lost my wife two months ago, so I try to get out and go places.” After a few more words about himself, his face twisted, his voice quivered, and he struggled to his feet. But then he sank back into his chair. “I try to laugh through these moments,” he sobbed. “But I can’t. I’ll be all right in a few seconds.”

We came to learn his name was Jay, but that was not important at first. What was important was allowing this man to talk. He did; then as his emotions quieted a bit, he moved from his table to ours. “Maybe you are just what I need.” So for a while we listened intently as he relived some of his past and struggled to envision his future.

Advancing technology, growing intellect, and improving skills sometimes seamlessly erode past practices into new seasons of life. Other events, though, shock us into new realities with no warning at all. With the loss of a loved one, a dear friend, or physical abilities, our lives fall into a state of darkness.

Darkness leaves next steps unsure, and direction unguided. The course of life changes in mid-step with no place to land it; but neither can the step remain suspended. Darkness is the state Jay seemed to be the day we met him. Our time with him fell short of the amount needed for him to adequately share his grief. His hope rested in yesterday’s grave. His purpose completed. Any reason for tomorrow uncertain.

We all go through such times when our lives face a change of seasons. New seasons are masked with uncertainty, unsatisfied by looking back. But until our final breath, one thing never changes. God has purpose for our lives even as seasons end and new ones come along.

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.

God does it so that men will revere him. (Ecclesiastes 3:9-14)

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REFLECTIONS

February 3, 2019

**Show me your ways, O Lord,
teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.**

Psalm 25:4-5

Decision Time

Disturbed by the prophecy God had revealed to him, young Samuel wondered what to do next. Should he reveal the troubling message to Eli, his mentor; or protect Eli from hearing God's ill-fated plan for his family? But Samuel didn't have much time to consider the quandary before Eli asked him what the Lord had revealed to him. Decision time.

Samuel knew God's plan, but what God didn't reveal to him was how to use the information. Decision time is a familiar place to find ourselves during day-to-day activities; but those decisions reach a heavier state when they concern following God's plan for our own lives. *"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths."*

Sometimes we hear God tell us his plan for our lives; but he seldom includes specific direction for the steps to take in doing it. It's like He gives us a beautiful picture of what He want us to do but offers it in the form of a jigsaw puzzle with no instructions for how to put the pieces together. Those steps we must decide for ourselves, and sometimes the choices we make are not very well thought out.

The biblical account of Samuel's life finds most of his decisions were God directed. Most of us, however, aren't so privileged. Abraham and Sarah impatiently decided not to wait for the Lord to provide their promised heir. Moses killed a man and ran away to a far country. King David took another man's wife and then had that man killed to conceal it. And from his training to protect God's Law, Paul zealously persecuted Christians. So, we pray, —*guide me in your truth and teach me, / for you are God my Savior, / and my hope is in you all day long.*

And through the Holy Spirit, He does. *Good and upright is the Lord; / therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. / He guides the humble in what is right / and teaches them his way. / All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful / for those who keep the demands of his covenant.* (v. 8-10)

Now, if God instructs sinners in his ways, there is hope for me.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV)

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With faith in the Lord, our prayers for guidance are answered without our even knowing it happened. So, maybe God does direct our paths. We know how difficult it is to discern between acts of the Holy Spirit through us from the actions of our own will.



REFLECTIONS

January 27, 2019

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Romans 14:7-8

Choosing Life

Surgery, the major kind, is nothing foreign to Charlie. A few years ago, a kidney transplant extended his life and returned him to his station as a beloved server at a well-known country club. More than fifty years on the job there has now taken a toll on Charlie's octogenarian body. Surgery is the only relief for his incessant back pain. But his surgeon postponed the scheduled procedure pending further tests on the strength of his heart.

What might have been met with disappointment Charlie received with great appreciation. "I'm glad," he said with a bounce in his voice. "I don't want my doc to have no trouble when he gets in there," he explained. "Let's check everything out first."

So, Charlie suffers with a tingling leg and painfilled nights for at least one more week before the doctor might be willing to operate. Now one more week for the doctors to ensure the surgical risk is low enough sounds okay to Charlie. He's choosing life.

Now isn't it an amazing gift from God to have wired us with a strong will to live? Our earthly being is our most cherished possession. "*Love your neighbor as yourself,*" Jesus reminded. (Mark 12:31) And, "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13) These teachings are measured by the high value we place on our own lives.

Still, one might recall that Jesus also cautioned, "*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,*" (Matthew 6:25) But these words were in the context of worry and the provisions for life, i.e. food, clothing, shelter, etc., not for life itself.

For life itself, Jesus comforted Martha at Lazarus' tomb, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26)

Well I believe this; and I think Charlie does too. He chose life with his kidney transplant. And he is choosing life now. Either way, I think he knows this: *For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:9)

Charlie is choosing life. And of this I am sure, his life is in good hands.

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REFLECTIONS

January 20, 2019

**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"**

Isaiah 6:8

God's Call

What is the next new thing God is asking you to make? And who are the people you are called to make things with? These are questions posed to the audience of the recent Men's Retreat at Laity Lodge gave me a fresh perspective of God's call to us, his children.

Mostly I associate God's call with who He wants me to be and to perform the duties He gifted me to do. Now those considerations are not necessarily dismissed in these fresh questions, but further discussions helped me see how God uses people in my life in ways that have nothing to do with either positions in life or unique giftedness. And if that concept holds true for those impacting my life, then reason explains that it also holds true for me impacting theirs.

Our life stories describe the lasting impact we leave in this world. The speaker, Kurt Thompson MD, explained how we help each other tell our stories. What kind of story would Abraham's life have told without Isaac's role in it? Or what influence would Paul's life have had if Barnabas had not come alongside him at the beginning of their evangelistic journey?

All this makes me wonder how my life would have been without James as a childhood friend, or Tom as a golf buddy, or Walter as a business partner? All of them have in their own way illumined my life story. Of course, these people are among an endless list of others whose lives intersected with mine to cast light on my story. And frighteningly, I have become an indelible part of theirs. Our stories, mine and theirs, would be different without each other. Through them part of my story is told not because of what we may have *done* together, but because they were there. That's the way God works.

The prophet Isaiah once found himself standing before the throne of God when he heard God ask, "*Who shall I send? And who will go for us?*" Now I imagine God looking out among his committed servants for someone willing to go someplace for him. Then, without knowing where that someplace would be, Isaiah raised his hand and answered, "*Here am I. Send me!*"

Bottom line, it seems to me, is that God wants to use our lives for *his* good purpose. So, when we hear God's call, what we hear him asking may not be to make something big or about a heavy responsibility to take on. He may simply be looking for someone to represent his presence and to illumine the story of someone else's life.

Maybe that's what Jesus was telling us when He said,

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REFLECTIONS

January 13, 2019

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Deuteronomy 4:9

God's Calling

A recent *Reflections* looked back 15 years to the very first one recalling the subject of traditions. About them we said, "These annual reenactments are expressions that reach back and connect us with memories we hold dear. Traditions vary from family to family and from household to household; but they are all founded in one common theme—love." Perhaps the key element in the most meaningful of traditions went unnoticed. That element is family.

Traditions are usually most meaningful and passion-filled when they represent family legacy. The image of God mentioned in the creation of mankind, I suggest, is a family unit—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:26 references the plurality of God's image, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...*" reemphasized in Genesis 9:6 "*...for in the image of God / has God made man.*" But whether or not the concept of God's image is shared, for me the importance of family has never been more strongly felt than on Christmas Day just past.

All our family descendants gathered at our home that day—what God joined together, Janice and me, with the fruit of our life together. Two children, their spouses, our children's children plus four from the fourth generation assembled in our backyard for a family photo before the onset of the other Christmas traditions. Joy filled our hearts. If my life had ended that day, all would have been well with my soul.

Warm smiles beamed across all the family faces, but the loving hearts beneath those smiles made them special. From the oldest to the youngest, (scarcely one month old), love radiated from their hearts. Now that would be a blessing to anyone, but they are a special blessing to me—all of them, the loving wife God chose for me to share my life, my two sons and the wives chosen for them, my children's children, and now four in the fourth generation. There in that family photo is my life; and for Janice and me together, our lives. And God's blessing is showered all over it.

The photo of two people nestled among the fruits of their lives captures only a moment in time. And we pause now to look back with gratitude to our loving Lord; but we also fix our eyes on the road still to travel. Troubles surely await us along the way, but amidst them, there are stories yet to tell and lessons still to teach before reaching the joy promised at journey's end.

It's God's calling to us in this world until He calls us Home.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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Your comments are welcomed and encouraged. Richard may be reached at richard@reflectingthesavior.org.



REFLECTIONS

January 6, 2019 Looking Back to January 2, 2005

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Deuteronomy 4:9

About Traditions...

(Note: For this first edition of the 15th year of *Reflections* we look back to the initial edition published January 2, 2005. Our family has grown since then; but with only a few minor variations, the account then accurately describes the traditions still practiced this past season and those expected to continue in the months to come.)

At our house this year we repeated our usual Christmas celebration patterns by purchasing a freshly cut Christmas tree and decorating it ornately; putting up the electric train as a complement to the increasingly elaborate setting for the lighted miniature Coca-Cola village; and the Christmas morning “package fest,” was followed by a bountiful meal featuring Janice’s prime rib (preceded of course by reciting in unison Mema’s mealtime prayer.) The next day we gathered to compete in an annual family golf tournament, and we will finish off the seasonal festivities this week when my sons join me at a men’s retreat at Laity Lodge.

These annual reenactments are expressions that reach back and connect us with memories we hold dear. Traditions vary from family to family and from household to household; but they are all founded in one common theme—love.

This Christmas we relived our memories and made some new ones by remaining true to our traditions, and we’ll repeat them again next year after we have celebrated each other’s birthdays, hunted Easter eggs, gathered for Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, watched fireworks on July 4th, and enjoyed several servings of Thanksgiving turkey and dressing prepared from Daddy’s spicy recipe. And at least one of those times steeped in family tradition, we will all worship together as our way to thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed on us.

We keep our traditions not only as a way of keeping our “I love you’s” current with each other, but also to instill the legacy of our values into the generations to come. When we fail to tell our stories over and over not only are the beautiful stories lost, but of much greater concern, the underlying values perish with them.

The Deuteronomy message of Moses’ sermon is that when we teach our children, we teach our children’s children. So, in this New Year may we instill our values by remaining true to our traditions remembering that,

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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