

## Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, October 29, 2016

The first motion picture I saw after accepting Christ as my Savior and Lord in 1984 was *Tender Mercies* starring Robert Duvall in his Academy Award winning role portraying Mac Sledge, a down-and-out recovering alcoholic country music songwriter/singer. This was a vulnerable time in my life having just surrendered my will to Jesus a few weeks earlier. The storyline of the film brought me affirmation that I could truly change as Robert Duvall's character had successfully done in the movie.

The idea of a merciful God was something I had never considered before the Spring of 1984. Up to this point in my life, I had always considered God to be a Heavenly Being who occasionally watched over my actions and chastened me on occasion as was certainly warranted. I had no concept of His wonderful mercy in those first forty years of my life.

Universal Pictures made little effort to promote this film – possibly due to the strong Christian message presented in the script. Even without their promotion, the film amazingly garnered five Academy Award nominations and also captured Best Original Screenplay honors for writer Horton Foote. What I remember most about Duvall's character was the peace that he portrayed throughout the film. That was something I had only recently come to feel for the first time in my life.

This paradigm shift caused me to realize that I no longer had to perform for recognition and acclamation. All of a sudden it wasn't about what I did, but only about what Christ did for all mankind on the cross. In Psalm 103, King David proclaims that God does not treat us as we deserve. As long as we revere Him, He bestows His compassion on us no matter what our disobedience might have been in the past. He only looks at who we are this day forward.

In Luke 1: 76-79, Zechariah prophesies the role of his only son John the Baptist and declares "the tender mercy of God" which "will come to us from Heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." You see, we are all born into a life of natural sin, which means we must face the darkness of this world and cannot fathom the wonderful mercy that God has made available to all mankind.

As the forerunner of the Messiah, John's message of repentance prepared the world for Jesus' ensuing three-year ministry. In Luke 3, we're informed that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy restated from Isaiah 40:3-5. John's God-assigned task was to "Prepare the way for the Lord" so "all mankind will see God's salvation." Have you come to experience God's tender mercy?

It's quite possible to be a regular church attendee and not know Him as He truly is. As a teenager and young adult, I regularly attended a name brand church in Texas and knew the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and the whole liturgy of the church. In fact, I didn't even have to open the hymnal at all! You see, the problem was that I had "I Disease" and had no loving relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was all about me and not about Him and others.

I'm so thankful He finally enlightened me and showed me The Way to His tender mercy. Consider doing the same if He has touched your heart through these words offered humbly for your thoughtful consideration. He loves you so much that He sent His only Son to die for all mankind!

Here to serve,

Jim Langley, CLU

Passages to Ponder: Isaiah 40:3-5; Psalm 103:9-16; Luke 1:76-79; Luke 3:4-6; Romans 9:14-18

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Isaiah 40:3-5 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>3</sup>A voice of one calling:

“In the wilderness prepare  
the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Psalm 103:9-16 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>9</sup>He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;

<sup>10</sup>he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.

<sup>11</sup>For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

<sup>14</sup>for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>15</sup>The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;

<sup>16</sup>the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.

Luke 1:76-79 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>76</sup>And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
<sup>77</sup>to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
<sup>79</sup>to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Luke 3:4-6 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>4</sup>As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.

<sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.

<sup>6</sup>And all people will see God’s salvation.”

Romans 9:14-18 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>14</sup>What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup>For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

<sup>16</sup>It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. <sup>17</sup>For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup>Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.