

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, January 27, 2018

As a child, we moved every few years during my Dad's military career. Like most young boys, I quickly learned to avoid close friendships, since I knew they would soon end once my Dad took his next assignment. I gradually developed a defense mechanism to keep from being hurt by the potential loss of friendships. All the other kids faced this same challenge and I'm sure that many acted likewise. Seldom would we get to know others for much more than a year. After a while you simply learn to not get too close thereby reducing the chance of pain. Once my Dad retired, I still found myself limiting the number of kids I let get close. Psychologically, I had not developed the coping skills to properly embrace friendships. Relationships are risky business.

Once I started playing organized baseball as a twelve-year old, I finally developed some friendships with teammates at least. Still, I limited the depth of those relationships and once the baseball season was over I'd often wait to establish new friendships the following season. Even into my first few years of college, I limited my socializing to other athletes as we shared rooms and activities in the athletic dormitory. During college, almost all of my energy went into studies and sports. I didn't even start dating until my sophomore year in college and first truly opened my eyes to normal relationships as a young lieutenant in the US Army. You could say that I was a bit slow in maturing.

Upon returning from Vietnam as a 24-year old captain and having survived 18 months in a combat zone, I was finally ready to move on with my life and truly take some risks socially. Within a few months I impulsively married and kept focused on a successful military career. Within the next five years, I found myself out of the service going through a bitter divorce. Yet, I had no regrets and had come to understand that I needed to take more risks to truly live life fully. Success in the business world allowed me to not only survive but actually thrive through a second marriage that unfortunately also failed after nearly five years of bliss. I had become insensitive to relationships and came to understand that I could only control my part of each friendship formed.

Through it all, I now consider the first forty years of my life to have been quite superficial. I had become hardened in both my personal and business relationships. Perhaps you can relate to my dilemma. That's when I fortunately first experienced a special relationship that would change my whole outlook on life. I'm so thankful that I accepted an invitation one Sunday to attend a small church in Ontario, California 34 years ago. I had been far away from any organized religion since I graduated from college.

During those years, I distanced myself from God. Now I was being coaxed by God to come near to Him and His people. The personal relationship that has come out of that initial visit has changed my outlook forever. This was not a risky relationship, since I came to understand that Christ had already taken all the risk in His death, burial and resurrection. All I needed to do was simply love and serve Him.

Janet and I first met within that intimate church family a few months later. Within less than a year, we were married and I must admit that I've never been closer to anyone. Once I developed a right relationship with God, I found it quite simple to let down my guard and give my heart to my future wife. Life has not always been blissful, but we've gone through the tough times together and I wouldn't change anything we've experienced. All is well and relationships are now an integral part of my life and I look forward to God continuing to build many meaningful relationships where I can be a blessing to others.

I'm often encouraged by the words penned in Hebrews 10:24-25 as the author relates *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

So, how are your relationships? Perhaps you too have experienced some shallowness and perhaps even an emptiness in your life. I know God wants us to all have a close walk with Him as Enoch experienced in the early days of the patriarchs. He wants us to sense His love and pass it on to a world that is suffering in so many ways.

Passages to Ponder: Genesis 5:21-24; Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; Colossians 1:21-23

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Genesis 5:21-24 New International Version (NIV)

²¹When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²²After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. ²⁴Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Romans 5:1-5 New International Version (NIV)

⁵Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 New International Version (NIV)

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21 New International Version (NIV)

²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Colossians 1:21-23 New International Version (NIV)

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.