

August 2005

August 1

What's your favorite Bible passage?

Here's more of mine. 2 Corinthians 5:10 reminds me that I'll have to account for my life: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

Of course, when that final judgment comes, it'll be too late to get my act together. Some of my favorite passages warn me not to be complacent right now. 1 Corinthians 10:12: "If you think you are standing firm (in your faith), be careful that you don't fall."

Psalm 139:10-12 is a favorite prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

When my father wanted to warn us not to do something, he'd say, "You dasn't do that." Dasn't. I think that word has some German background. The heavenly Father says, "You dasn't," but still I do what I dasn't. My judgment would not turn out well if it weren't for this favorite passage of many sinners: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

August 2

Here's an encouraging story from Martin and Elisabeth Feucht of Good Samaritan Orphanage in Cambodia .

"A boy named Luka was abandoned by his father when his mother died and given to the care of his grandmother. But she did not want him either and tried to sell him twice. He was passed from person to person until, at eight, Luka found himself at the Orphanage, deeply traumatized by rejection.

"I always had a problem with lying and stealing," said Luka, now 12. "During devotions one day, I was pursued by bad thoughts. Mr. Feucht told me that those thoughts were not coming from Jesus but from Satan, but not to worry because Jesus was far stronger than Satan. That same evening I surrendered my life to Jesus."

"The Feucht's explain, "Our human power is not enough to give the children everything that they need, but we know that Jesus can meet any needs and desires that they have. He is the 'father of the fatherless' (Psalm 68:5), and he has a wonderful plan for them all. Our task here is to tell the children about this message that God has for them in the Bible."

That's a good model for anyone anywhere who deals with young people! Thanks to the American Bible Society for that story.

August 3

In the church circles I live in, Lutheran circles, we emphasize salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9: "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

But we promoters of salvation through faith sometimes skim over the next verse, Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." When I was a child in grade school, we had workbooks called "Think and Do." Thinking should lead to good doing. Believe and do. Faith in Jesus Christ should lead to doing good works.

I've been listing my favorite passages. Another is John 9:4. "As long as it is day," Jesus says, "we must do the work of Him who sent me."

The One who sent Jesus, God the heavenly Father, enables us to do good works. Philippians 2:13, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose."

So do good works, but remember Psalm 115:1: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your name be the glory, because of Your love and faithfulness." A favorite verse to keep us from getting the big head!

August 4

"Lizzie Borden took an ax

And gave her mother 40 whacks;

When she saw what she had done

She gave her father 41!"

Today's the anniversary of Lizzie Borden doing in Andrew and Abby Borden in 1892 in Fall River, Massachusetts. Or was it Lizzie? She was brought to trial and acquitted. Whatever happened back then, kids today still have their moments with dad and mom...and sometimes for good reasons.

"Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). Martin Luther commented on that commandment: "Young people...must be taught to revere their parents as God's representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God" (Large Catechism,

108). The test of the genuineness of faith is not intellectual assent to heavenly ideals but practicing them with less-than-ideal people.

As kids in grade school, we used to sing this ditty...and we sang it out of any adult's hearing...

"I love Bosco; it's rich in poison D.

Mommy put it in my milk and tried to poison me.

But I fooled Mommy and put it in her tea

And now there is no Mommy to try and poison me."

Sorry, Mom. That was quite the wrong attitude on our part!

August 5

My last installment of favorite Bible verses, at least for a while. I hope you can add a few of mine to your own repertoire. Bible passages can literally change your outlook. "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul" (Psalm 94:19).

Have you asked yourself, "Where did the years go?" Psalm 90:10, 12: "The length of our days is 70 years – or 80, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." I'm not 70 yet, but I know the last installment of earthly life is close.

Passages about aging remind us how good God's been over the years: "I was young and now I am old, (that's what the passage says; don't think I'm quite there!) yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken" (Psalm 37:25).

Another favorite puts aging in a future-oriented perspective. Hebrews 13:14 , "Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

Wow! That heavenly city will truly be the last and greatest installment of all. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

August 8

Back to school! Paul Turner in "The Spokesman-Review" of Spokane , Washington told what you should NOT say to a 13-year-old when shopping for back-to-school clothes. (August 17, 2001 ; D1)

"Hahahahaha. Yeah, right. Like we're going to buy that."

“That’s fine, honey. Go ahead and embarrass our whole family.”

“I’m sorry my mere presence here in the store humiliates you. But I wish you would remember that I’m the one with the credit card.”

One thing I learned as the parent of teens: Our children are not our appendages. They are independent human beings, fully equal to us in the sight of God. God is no respecter of persons (1 Peter 1:17). Yes, parents have an authority over their children (Exodus 20:12), but that is oh so temporary. Children should honor and obey their parents, but we parents should give the highest respect to these children of God.

Heavenly Father, help us be good parents to your children...and teach them to appreciate that we’re the ones with the credit card! In Jesus’ name. Amen.

August 9

“Just before we sat down to eat lunch, we heard and felt a tremendous explosion,” said Akiko Onitsuka. She was only five-years old, but this is the kind of thing you remember. “Almost immediately we felt this incredible wind. It knocked out all the windows but left our house standing. Fortunately we were inside and my father was out of town. Our house was less than two miles from the hypocenter. The blast destroyed the Mitsubishi shipyard where my mother worked. If she had gone to work, she would have died.”

70,000 people did die in Nagasaki 60 years ago today. By the end of 1945 13,000 more died from its radioactive fallout and 74,000 were injured.

Bill Roberts interviewed Akiko and her husband Todashi, both survivors, now in their 70’s. Roberts said Todashi “patiently answered every question. He had done dozens of interviews over the years and never tired of doing them. “It is my responsibility,” he asserted. “There are fewer people now who remember.” (Detroit Free Press, July 31; E 1, 5)

We are shaped by our experiences, some by World War II, others by Viet Nam, today’s young people by relativism and much more. Even if we’ve been spared the truly horrible it becomes our duty to study history. Without history, without remembering, the Christian message becomes unreal.

August 10

Was it moral to drop those two atomic bombs 60 years ago?

One consideration is fear. In Romans 13 the Bible stresses fear of government. Fear of what the government can do promotes a more peaceful, orderly society. “Rulers hold no terror (the Greek word is fear) for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right.... But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing.” (3, 4)

You don't hear politicians and pundits praise fear of government. True, our republic was not intended to be a fearful government, but if you are a law abiding citizen you know in the back of your mind that fear is one reason for your good conduct. And that applies between nations. Were the bombs moral? They certainly ended the war quickly by instilling horrific fear.

Back to you and me and Romans 13. The last time the word fear occurs is verse 7: "Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect." It doesn't say "respect" in Greek. It says "fear." You want relevant religion? The Bible is very realistic about how things work in the real world.

August 11

Could your family life be better?

Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, asks how you'd react if your half-brother came through the door one day and announced to the family that he is the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah. As Dr. Maier said, "You'd run for the phone book and start looking under 'p' for psychiatrist." Something like that happened in the family of Jesus. "Even His own brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5)

Times change, and so can families. Some time later we find Jesus' half-brother James (half-brother because the Bible teaches God is Jesus' Father, not Joseph the carpenter) in the group of believing disciples and even a leader of the church. James was the first bishop of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14 ; 15:13 ; 21:18).

What happened to James and quite possibly the rest of the family? We know that mother Mary was among the believers. As Dr. Maier put it, the family was changed because of the resurrection of Jesus.

The promises of the Bible are easily heard as extravagant claims, especially in the difficulties of family life. But resurrection can start to make believers. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says the resurrected and living Jesus (Revelation 3:20). Let Jesus come into your home; believe the promises He makes!

August 12

Vacationing last week in Michigan , Diane and I drove south on M-22 from Frankfort to Camp Arcadia . It's a very winding and hilly road, working its way through the sand dunes along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan , a good challenge for the bikers we saw in their Lance Armstrong style outfits. There was one biker who drew an immediate comment from Diane and me. He was dressed in the spandex stuff but slowly walking his bike up an incline. My kind of guy! The kind of guy a lot of us are. We buy these athletic outfits to cover our unathletic bodies. Unfortunately, wearing the right clothes doesn't shape up the body.

When a daughter attended a Christian university, she told us that some students would skip church on Sunday morning but would still put on their dresses or suits and ties for the rest of the day. Spandex doesn't make athletes and, while I'm all for going to church, Sunday clothes don't guarantee a soul that's in shape before God.

We can see a wannabee Lance Armstrong but we can't judge a person's soul. God can and does. "Jesus perceived their thoughts..." (Matthew 22:15) You may look good when you go to church...How serious are you about getting your soul in shape?

August 15

Stephanie and Brad stopped by the other night. My niece Stephanie will be a senior at St. Louis University and nephew Brad will be a first year student at the St. Louis College of Pharmacy. They drove down from Chicago with their mom's Suburban loaded with stuff for Steph's apartment. A Suburban, a vehicle so big you could probably load all the provisions for the 101st Airborne in it. Not all; Steph told me it didn't have her furniture in it. Furniture? I didn't take furniture to college. Then again, few of us lived in apartments. I guess Brad's haul next week will be lighter, though not as light as Uncle Dale's 40 years ago. The car trunk and some of the back seat was enough when Art and Norma drove me to college.

I understand all this but I really don't "get it." College students see life so differently than I did. How in the world can we cross the generational gap? Perhaps by admitting to them that we don't get it? Perhaps they'll admit the same to us? Would it be possible then to talk about things all generations instinctively understand? Anxiety, guilt, elusive happiness, love? It's either that, or wag our heads and complain about the other generation. A lot of good that will do.

August 16

Think about workplace safety...

Know the name Ray Chapman? He was a professional baseball player, a good shortstop for the Cleveland Indians from 1912 until 1920. To be exact, his career ended on this date in 1920. Chapman was batting when a pitch from Yankee pitcher Carl May struck him in the head. Taken to the hospital, Chapman died the next day, the only major league player to die from injuries received in a ball game.

Safety at work is something most of us take for granted.

But military personnel don't. Enemy booby traps, suicide bombers, friendly fire, equipment failures.

Pulling over a suspicious car, entering a burning building? Police and fire fighters don't take workplace safety for granted either.

And the rest of us? Innocent Americans can be terrorist targets even as the Spanish learned in Madrid and the British in London last month. We all know that freak accidents happen at work, as the Ray Chapman story reminds us.

So for today: Be careful; it's dangerous out there. Be prayerful; ask for those protecting angels. Plan your day with more dependence upon God today than you did yesterday. "You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15).

August 17

It's a little thing but it's always bothered me. Here's the latest installment. I've been building some book cases for my study in the new house. When the carpentry work is done, Diane and I paint the book cases red. Do I paint the back side of the cases, the backside no one will see? Do I paint the bottom of the individual shelves? Again, no one will see whether they're painted or not.

The other day I discovered why I usually solve the dilemma by painting the unseen sides, or doing whatever other unseen thing it might be. Writing about the role of faith in the founding of our Republic, Michael Novak said, "Faith adds to a morality of mere reason an acute sense of acting in the presence of a personal and undeceivable Judge, Who sees and knows even actions performed in secret.... Thus, faith adds motives for maintaining high standards, and for seeking to do things perfectly even when no one is looking. Faith gives us reasons to paint the bottom of the chair, and clean the unseen corners of a room: godliness entails attention to details that no one but God sees." (*On Two Wings*, p. 42)

Do you know the dilemma? Is Novak's explanation the reason why YOU do the things no one will see?

August 18

When I casually started reading a theological journal that came in the mail, my attention perked up at this sentence: "Disposing of sin apart from God's Word is...an essential feature of sin." ("Studies in Reformed Theology and History," p. 2) That is, we find ways to forgive ourselves or others apart from what God teaches us in the Bible about sin and forgiveness.

"I was born this way; I can't help it." Not good enough. "Original sin," our nature sinful at birth, shows itself in the actual sins we commit every day. It's all still sin, still an offense against God.

"Not my fault! I'm a victim of my environment." For some this makes life especially hard, born into poverty, child of an addict, and so on. True but not good enough. We're still responsible for our conduct and for our sins.

“Forgive yourself” is a familiar advice. Some truth there, but on what do you base forgiving yourself? Yourself? Or on God?

The true nature of sin is shown us by the Bible: “I would not have known what sin is except through the law” (Romans 7:7). And that’s how we learn the only way to dispose of sin: “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10). Or are you sinning by the way you absolve yourself?

August 19

Faith and finances don’t always go together nicely. Take the case of Brandon and Shereen Solaiman Metzger, both Muslims. Since the law of the Koran forbids interest, how do you buy a house? When the Metzger’s bought a home in Ypsilanti , Michigan , they did it the conventional way because there was no other option, a conscience troubling situation. When they recently relocated to Canton , Michigan , they had an option. Through the innovative efforts of a local bank, they bought a home in a way that did not violate the Koran. Although costing a bit more than a conventional mortgage, some 50 Islamic mortgages have been written totaling over \$11 million. The faith question: Save money by ignoring your faith or pay more to keep your conscience clear? (Detroit Free Press, August 6; 1A)

Christian stewardship is different because the motivation is gratitude, not meeting a legalistic requirement. Because a Christian sees Jesus Christ as the only way to God (John 14:6), Christian stewardship is a grateful response of all that I am and have to God’s salvation in Christ. In fact, without that motivation our gifts are not God-pleasing (Hebrews 11:6). Question: If Muslims like the Metzger’s strive to be faithful in their finances, do we Christians show gratitude in our stewardship for the One who is the Truth?

August 22

Setting aside any judgments you might have about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I assume you feel sorry for the people forced out of their homes. I do. It reminds me of every time I drive by a newly burnt out house. Where is that family now? It reminds me of many elderly people I have visited in nursing homes. Visit after visit I would sadly hear how homesick they were, sadly and helplessly.

And I’m reminded of exile. Adam and Eve exiled from their home in paradise. The children of Israel in exile for some 400 years in Egypt . Their descendents forced out of home and country in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem . A repeat in 70 A.D., this time by the Romans. In the context of history, last week’s evictions are not new.

Christianity has inherited from Judaism a keen sense of exile. “Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). This goes beyond homesickness; this is positive anticipation for the future, for the end of exile.

God “has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

August 23

I fear, really fear, Interstate 70 from St. Louis to Kansas City . Reason: truckers often pull in front of you willy-nilly. I know most truckers are careful, but some aren't. A friend says it's greed. There's great pressure to deliver as many loads as possible as quickly as possible.

A “Minute” reader passes along this from AP writer Kristen Gelineau: “A rush to purchase \$50 used laptops turned into a violent stampede Tuesday, with people getting thrown to the pavement, beaten with a folding chair and nearly driven over. One woman went so far as to wet herself rather than surrender her place in line.”

Greed again. Harmless...or deadly to civilized society?

“Jesse Sandler said he was one of the people pushing forward, using a folding chair he had brought with him to beat back people who tried to cut in front of him.

“I took my chair here and I threw it over my shoulder and I went, 'Bam,'" the 20-year-old said nonchalantly, his eyes glued to the screen of his new iBook, as he tapped away on the keyboard....

“They were getting in front of me and I was there a lot earlier than them, so I thought that it was just," he said.”

“Everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

August 24

A lover might press a rose into a book; I put postcards and pictures and notes into my books. Looking something up the other day I came across a note from August 24. I don't know what year, probably the late 60's. The note was a list of the milk this college student had to deliver to the Ford Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights . On August 24th I unloaded 106 cases of milk, each one taken off the truck by hand...no hydraulic lifts back then.

Life is made up of piecework, of countless little cases we do day-in and day-out. Those are trusts to you from God. “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (Luke 16:10). Our media-minded society pays attention to the big things, the celebrity lives, the big stories. But God looks at our little piecework. “Does He who formed the eye not see?” (Psalm 94:9)

A little irony... I found that list for the Ford plant in a Greek dictionary under the word "anthropina." "Anthropina" means "human." How appropriate...human life under God is all about the little cases you and I have to lift every day.

August 25

Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich issued an emergency order requiring pharmacists to fill prescriptions for the morning-after pill. Many pro-lifers object to that pill, seeing it as a form of abortion. Acting on their conscience, some Illinois pharmacists are refusing to fill those prescriptions. Says Peggy Pace, "I cannot in good conscience dispense a drug that is designed to destroy human life. In order to comply with this rule, I have to pretend that what I believe is false." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 21; B4).

Questions of conscience evoke many opinions, and people aren't hesitant to share their opinions. Please shift now from what "they ought to do," to this: What do YOU do when your conscience is troubled by what others want you do?

The Bible teaches that conscience reflects truths that God has planted in every heart (Romans 2:14). That innate knowledge, however, is not always correct because it's been corrupted by sin. For example, 1 Timothy 4:2 speaks of liars, "whose consciences have been seared." So the goal is an informed, clear conscience. Paul: "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16).

You probably check the weather each day and pay attention to your investments. Do you study so that you can face your ethical dilemmas with a clear conscience?

August 26

Communications have changed.

Dale, everyone knows that.

Do we?

The evangelistic zeal of many Christians is encouraging, at least to those of us who take seriously Jesus' command to spread the Gospel. Many seminary students have that zeal, but when I ask if they know what a "blog" is, only a few have any idea. "Blog" is short for "web log," a kind of on-line diary by which a person, the "blogger" can put into cyber space whatever word he or she wants to get out.

Around our house it's a she, my wife Diane, who's been blogging stories and pictures for over a year. When Diane blogged pictures of our week at Camp Arcadia , a beautiful setting on the shore of Lake Michigan , I thought, "Family pictures? Who wants to look at family pictures?" Wrong. Almost 3,000 people have visited her blog just to look at those pictures.

Yes, communications really have changed, but church people can be slow to get into the new era. Martin Luther wasn't when he embraced the printing press to get out the message of God's forgiving grace. Back in the 1920's a man named Walter Maier wasn't slow to see the possibilities of radio. The message of the Bible doesn't change, but how about the ways we get it out today?

P.S. You can visit Diane's blog at...[Respublica](#)

August 29

Let's gossip! Some people are driving away from gas stations without paying. Last year there was about one drive-off for every 1,100 gas purchases. The average gas station lost about \$2,141 last year, totaling \$237 million throughout the entire United States. This year station owners are seeing more drive-offs. Those people! Tsk, tsk, tsk.

Another thing... Some people are busy filing for bankruptcy. Last year 1.6 million people filed. Back in 1978 the number was only 200,000, but back then there was a stigma attached to bankruptcy. Some legitimate filings, I'm sure, but many people think, wow, what a clever way to get out of debt! The rate of filings for personal bankruptcies this year suggests a year-end total of 1.8 million filings. Tsk, tsk, tsk. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 21, A3, August 22, A1)

As you suspect, this "Minute" really isn't about them, those people driving off, using bankruptcy to dodge debts, misstating income on taxes or loan applications, or what have you. It's really about your core convictions and mine. Do you believe that God is the Creator of all? If your answer is yes, then you and I are creatures. The Creator has no limits; creatures do. Our attitudes toward money, using credit, honesty... reflect the conviction that we creatures have limits...or drive-off survival of the fittest.

August 30

Cars on interstates, going only one way, out of New Orleans. Katrina is coming, and when Katrina has left...Worried people return wondering, "What will we find?"

They'll find, have already found, the "Why, God?" question. Why would God let this happen, God whom we've heard is good? It's a good question, nothing sacrilegious about it. Why does God strike a young person with cancer? Why does God sit by while people are born into cycles of poverty and injustice? Why does God let marriages and families fall apart, even though every member has tried their best?

Writes one scholar about the 16th century: Martin "Luther laid down the principle of avoiding wild God-chases, for he believed that searching for God apart from His Word could only lead to arrogance or despair." (Robert Kolb, Bound Choice, p. 35)

Evacuations? OK if we must, but please, no wild God-chases. It only gets you conceited arrogance, an unreal view of things, or despair: God sent this storm, literal or figurative,

to get me. Luther concluded we can't know those answers. All we can know is what God tells us, trust His suffering Son, Jesus.

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted” (Psalm 46:10). “Let it be.”

August 31

Since His eye is on the sparrow (Matthew 10:29), God sees you, sees you as a father sees his child (Psalm 103:13).

Unemployed? It hasn't been easy, but He's brought you this far and will help the rest of the way (1 Kings 17:7-16).

Family is disarray? David was a man after God's heart, but his son Absalom rebelled against him. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble" (Psalm 50:15).

Have you been lied to, slandered? "Their flattering lips speak with deception" (Psalm 12:2).

Whatever...He sees...and sometimes looks at you as He looked at Peter, sadly. It could be that you got yourself in this pickle. Will you admit it? But no means look away from Him. Some theologians stress the sovereignty of God. True, God is sovereign, but the sweetest theme of the Bible and the theme that is most persuasive is His presence, His compassion, His self-expression in His son, the Man of sorrows.

"Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap (113:5-7).