

The Meyer Minute for August 1, 2002

Is it just me, or do you also get tired of hearing everybody spout their opinion?

My wife is an elected official in our town of Collinsville. Last Monday they had an "Open Forum", a time when citizens come and speak to the City Council about whatever's on their mind. There are some useful speeches made, of course, but other people dependably get up and blabber without thinking. As Diane was getting ready to go to that Open Forum, she smiled and said, "Everyone's entitled to my opinion."

We all know people who live by that motto. "Everyone's entitled to MY opinion." But do you, do I, sometimes operate that way, talking without thinking?

Guarding our tongues. The poet Johann Heermann put that challenge in the form of a prayer.

"Keep me from saying words that later need recalling;

Guard me, lest idle speech may from my lips be falling'

But when, within my place, I must and ought to speak,

Then to my words give grace, lest I offend the weak."

The Meyer Minute for August 2, 2002

Once again we've seen how the world works. The "world"? That's Christian code for life apart from God, life spinning out of control.

7 students killed at Hebrew University. Yasser Arafat says the Israelis provoked it. The "world" always blames someone else.

In Chicago a van accidentally jumps the curb and strikes 3 people. The way of the world is rage. Onlookers beat to death the 2 men driving the van.

Life apart from God, life spinning out of control, the "world" shows up in our lives too. Blame someone else, fly off in a rage, spin out of control.

"Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord--and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to You." (Psalm 32)

God calls you to be different from the world, to have different ways. I hope you'll use this weekend to reflect how special you really are.

The Meyer Minute for August 5, 2002

You hate paying taxes to that big bureaucracy in Washington? Listen to this.

Living in Illinois, I've made numerous pilgrimages to Springfield to see the Lincoln sites and I've stood with awe at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.

Now comes a book called, "The Real Lincoln." Thomas Dilorenzo writes that Lincoln was in fact a dictator who used slavery for his political gain, gutted states rights and created a powerful, centralized government in Washington.

And he gave us the income tax. It was first enacted on this date in 1861 and, although temporarily eliminated in 1872, it eventually came back with a vengeance. Who set the precedent? Lincoln, the Great...Emancipator?

Many people are rightly concerned about what goes on in our society and government. Christians come into that concern with a special desire to witness to their faith. Dilorenzo's book challenges us to learn the truth about our society and government and not just pontificate about how politicians should do things. The Bible puts it this way, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak." (James 1:19)

The Meyer Minute for August 6, 2002

"Can Individual Right's Tear Families Apart?" That's the title of an old tract that I came across, a tract that's now out of print.

"You have the right to be happy." "Put yourself in a position of power." "Take charge of your life."
"Don't get mad; get even."

Author David Ludwig wrote, "These are familiar bits of advice. However, to follow such advice is deadly for the family."

When one of our daughters was still in grade school, she would occasionally challenge us. "I have my rights," she would announce defiantly. Oh, yeah? In family it's not about me; it's about we.

Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. It's the same way with the Son of Man. He didn't come so that others could serve Him. He came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many people." (Mark 10:43-45)

Jesus, we pray, teach me the right way to take care of myself so that I might serve others for You. That way, we'll all be better off. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for August 7, 2002

Put things in perspective. You'll have a better day.

"Professional baseball is on the wane," wrote one team owner. "Salaries must come down or the interest of the public must be increased in some way. If one or the other does not happen, bankruptcy stares every team in the face." ...Oh, that was written in 1881!

"Nothing new under the sun," says the book of Ecclesiastes. It's not just baseball. We work, we pursue our pleasures, day after day after day. It's easy to give into the feeling that it's all futile. Ecclesiastes sums it all up this way: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (12:13)

If you acknowledge that so much is routine but go at it for the sake of God and the joy of the daily things, won't you be better off?

Thanks to Alan Schwarz for the baseball quotes. In 1914 people complained that ball players had joined the "recent evil tendency to purchase and maintain automobiles." Put things in perspective. You'll have a better day.

The Meyer Minute for August 8, 2002

"But you said..." We've all been caught in embarrassing contradictions.

August 8 recalls some major failures of personal integrity. On this date in 1968 Richard Nixon won the Republican nomination for president but also on this date in 1974 he announced his resignation. "I'm not a crook," he once said...but accepted the pardon.

On this date in 1973 Vice President Spiro Agnew called reports that he had taken kickbacks from contractors were...expletive deleted...lies. Time revealed that his denunciations weren't true either.

Here's the question. How do you and I live a life that is truly consistent, that has integrity, that will on the Day of Judgment call forth a "Well done" from our God and Savior?

I don't have a fail-safe answer. Integrity is not easily achieved but it should be our goal. And since true integrity is not easily achieved, it should be our 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." (Psalm 139:23-24)

The Meyer Minute for August 9, 2002

I have a friend who is getting into Bible reading. That's a formidable task, but the benefit is something to hang onto.

Sunday's Gospel reading in many churches will be Matthew 14, Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee. "Lord, if it's you," Peter says, "tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus did. Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water...until he got scared and sank. "Lord, save me," Peter cried. Jesus reached out His hand, saved him, and then chided him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

That's the story. Here's my point. These days people understand "faith" as some warm, personal, feeling. In the Bible, however, faith is more; it's also outside of you. It's those Bible stories, those teachings, those objective statements you hear, you read, and you trust. You can hang onto them, just as Peter hung onto the saving hand of Jesus when he was going down. That's why it's a good thing for my friend, for us all, to read the Bible.

The Meyer Minute for August 12, 2002

Hope, a good word for Monday.

When I was working my way through school by delivering milk, an old co-worker named Pete Iverson told me this story about hope.

Back in the days of home delivery, if you could have asked the lady of the house where she was going in the darkness of the early morning, she would have said, "To the front door to bring in the milk."

If you'd ask, "But how do you know the milk's here?" she'd reply simply, "I just know it is."

"Did you hear the bottles clanging?"

"No; I just know it's here!" She would brush past you, open the door, put her hand out into the darkness and...sure enough...milk bottles are at the door.

"We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us." (Romans 5:3-5)

So if some darkness is in your life, reach out with hope!

The Meyer Minute for August 13, 2002

What makes you feel secure?

President Bush is convening an economic forum today at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. The President said, "the economic forum will strengthen our economy and make workers and investors more secure."

I hope so. I've heard people quip that their 401ks have turned into 201ks. A good economy coupled with informed and prudent personal financial habits can make a person feel financially secure. Note that I've added an adverb to the President's promise. Financially secure.

Financial security is only part of security. Good health is a factor. Fine family life contributes also. But none of those, I venture to say, should be the foundation of your security. Rather they should be built upon this foundation, that your heavenly Father knows and cares for you.

"Do not worry, saying, 'what shall we eat' or 'what shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear?' Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33)

The Meyer Minute for August 14, 2002

Where do our children get their sense of belonging?

Years ago I was chiding the 8th grade confirmation class for being mean to kids who weren't in their clique. One of those 8th graders told me I didn't understand. "We act this way," she said, "because we're scared we won't fit in."

It must be so scary to be an adolescent, full of naiveté but with no experience of living in the real world...It must be so overwhelming to fear deep down in your young heart that you're a loser.

In Sunday's St. Louis Post-Dispatch Chern Yeh Kwok wrote that there are 27.2 million tweens (children between 6 and 12) and they spend about \$20 billion a year and influence the spending of \$200 billion. I wonder how much pressure they put on mom and dad because they think that they'll fit in if they have the right clothes, the right jewelry, or what have you.

An old professor told me that he had seen many families in his long life. The only common denominator that he could find in well-adjusted children was...love.

The Meyer Minute for August 15, 2002

"I'm in a hurry!" "Let's grab a bite to eat." Fast food, that's the way we eat.

Today is Julia Child's 90th birthday. Julia Child has taught Americans that eating is not something to squeeze into our busy schedules. Meals should be a savored experience, not a drive-through.

Jesus did so much good over leisurely meals. The wedding of Cana, feeding the 5000, then the 4000, dining in private homes, like the homes of Zacchaeus the despised tax collector and Simon the proud Pharisee...meals gave Him the opportunity to help people. And what is Holy Communion? It's His supper, the Lord's Supper, for the good of His followers.

There is good waiting for you, not in the drive-through lane but at your kitchen table. Over more leisurely meals the hearts of family and friends can be drawn closer together in understanding and love. And when your dear ones gather at the table and begin with a word of grace, the Lord Jesus Himself can join you with His heavenly blessing.

Happy birthday, Mrs. Child...and thanks for the reminder!

The Meyer Minute for August 16, 2002

Long live the King!

Elvis week climaxes today, the 25th anniversary of the rock and roller's death. Reporter Joe Williams of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch capsulized Elvis' career: "In the arc of 42 years, he was defined by his dualities: Mama's boy and pill-popper, patriot and rebel." (August 11, F1)

If you're an Elvis fan, this has been a week of pleasant memories. But a fan of the King or not, let me point out a significant contrast between Elvis week and all the 52 weeks of the year. Elvis week marks time from his death. By contrast, our yearly calendar, under the influence of Christianity, marks time from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The 52 weeks of the year begin on Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Admittedly, most Americans don't make that association, but we Christians do. Each week we renew our hope because Sunday is a day of resurrection and every Sunday worship service is a celebration of the triumph of life over death.

Elvis died. Christ lives. In this King, we live forever.

The Meyer Minute for August 19, 2002

What did you do when you were 16 years old? Get your driver's license? High school sports? Sweet 16 and never been kissed? Probably not! 16 is a magical time in a young person's life. Or it's supposed to be.

Friday afternoon 16-year-old Charles Williams, nicknamed "Andy", was sentenced to 50 years to life in jail for the high school shooting in Santee, California. I happened to see the sentencing on TV. Young Andy's face was smooth...no wrinkles, no scars...smooth, as youth should be. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he apologized for what he had done. We've all seen teens apologize, cry, and then life moves on.

But for Andy life moves on to 50 years to life in jail. 50 years. That's 90% of my life. How much of yours?

I found it so, so sad. I am not...not saying he should have gotten off with a lighter sentence. I don't know. Our local paper buried this story in the back pages. A young life, out of sight, out of mind. It's just so, so sad.

The Meyer Minute for August 20, 2002

Listen to what Ms. Roberta Kitchen testified to Congress.

"The public schools...(were) infested with drugs and crime...Tiffany, my eldest, was promoted to the 6th grade, despite not being able to read. When I asked that she be allowed to repeat the 6th grade, I was informed she could not.

"When Toshika, my youngest, won a tuition voucher through Cleveland's new school choice program, I could finally breathe a little easier. In her six years at St. John Nottingham, a Lutheran school, she has always been on the honor or merit roll, the teachers know her, and she is happy.

"I couldn't-and still can't-understand why some people worry more about a cross on the wall than the drug dealers on the block or the prostitutes up the road."

In 1954 in *Brown vs. Board of Education* the Supreme Court ruled that race is no reason to keep a child from receiving a good education. Ruling this summer in favor of vouchers, the Supreme Court has again affirmed every child's right to a good education.

God, help all schools to meet the challenge.

The Meyer Minute for August 21, 2002

In Europe rivers are running wildly through the streets of ancient towns. Civilized cities, the homes of western culture, can't stop the anarchy of nature.

In the western United States there is severe drought. Because of the drought, forest fires have devoured homes and destroyed livelihoods. Because of the fires, when the much-needed rain finally comes, there will be destructive mudslides. Nature is in a vicious cycle.

In the eastern states, frantic efforts are being made to stop the spread of the snakehead fish, a voracious fish that eats everything it meets.

And in more and more states, West Nile Virus is claiming victims. The nuisance mosquito is now the feared killer mosquito. Stay inside! Mother Nature is on a vicious rampage.

So now I ask...is sin merely something innocent children learn from adults? Of might it be that all of us, old and young, people and nature, all creation has been corrupted by sin? That's why the message of Christ offers universal hope. "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay." (Romans 8:22)

The Meyer Minute for August 22, 2002

Diane and I live across the street from the American Legion. Monday afternoon the legion's parking lot was overflowing with cars. The public school teachers of Collinsville were meeting to talk about their labor situation. Despite ten meetings between negotiators, the school board and the teachers union have yet to agree on terms of a new contract. But here's the good news. The teachers voted to begin the school year without a contract while the two sides keep negotiating. Good for our children! Good for our community!

Compare that to the major league baseball players union. It has set a strike date for August 30, a week from tomorrow. do you know what the average ball player makes? \$2.38 million. And they think they're getting a raw deal. Hurray for the teachers. Boo to major league baseball.

I know that the teachers, just like the rest of us, don't have haloes on their heads. But they definitely set an example for all of us. Educating our children is worth sacrificing some of our own adult needs...and wants.

The Meyer Minute for August 23, 2002

"Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words," sang Eliza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady." Yes, talk can be cheap but an anniversary today reminds us that words-words well-chosen and spoken with conviction-have a tremendous power to move people.

On this date in 1963 Martin Luther King delivered his memorable "I Have a Dream" speech. The speech is a masterpiece, a weaving of Biblical and historical allusions that powerfully moved forward the civil rights movement.

As a public speaker myself, I've seen words work their power on a crowd. Preaching once about Christ's forgiveness for our every sin, a woman in the back of the church strained her neck so she could see me as the words touched her heart. "I'm not ashamed of the Good News. It is God's power to save everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16-17)

God's power. This anniversary of Dr. King's speech reminds us that words have power. The greatest power of all is God's Word, read in the Bible and preached in the church. It is God's power that works good in your life.