



*Bruce Butler*

Gina and I met in high school and have been together ever since. Married in 1987, we attended Barclay College in Haviland, Kansas, and started a family. We have two boys, Andrew and Zachary, and a daughter, Katelyn. We have been pastors of two Friends churches in California since 1990, first at Midway City Friends Church in Orange County and for the last 13 years at Glendora Friends Church, located 25 miles east of Los Angeles. I received my undergraduate ministry education at Barclay College and seminary degree at Azusa Pacific University's Haggard School of Theology. Gina has worked as a floral designer and an instructional aide within our local school district. She is now working on education and training for a career in nursing.

This week's devotionals focus on what I have learned through the years regarding faithful living, lessons I've learned through painful trial and error, through the faithful witness of family members, through worship and the mission of God's church, and through God's holy Word. They remind me that the heart lessons I learn must be lived out in my everyday world.

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5*

How do we live the successful Christian life?

That was the question I posed to our church's men's breakfast group one day. The answer is deceptively simple: work on the fundamentals. Good coaches like Vince Lombardi, Tom Landry, and Lou Holtz preached and practiced the fundamentals of football as the key to a team's success: practice the basics, over and over again, with excellence, then learn from your mistakes and incorporate new stuff to keep things fresh.

What are the fundamentals to successful Christian living? Things like hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Scriptures. Worship, pray and commune with God, love Jesus and serve your neighbor.

Simple, right? So why do they end up being so hard? Because both our internal sinful nature and the devil war against the good we want to be and do for Christ Jesus. But practicing the fundamentals helps us be victorious in this fight.

Former Notre Dame coach Lou Holtz led championship football teams by preaching and practicing the following fundamentals of teamwork (notice how close they are to Christian living):

Become a person people can trust because you do the right things.

Be committed to excellence and do everything to the best of your ability.

Genuinely care about other people.

*SONG: O Perfect Love*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, the fundamentals seem so simple, yet so hard. Help me today to put on Christ and practice the fundamentals of loving you and others.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:25-34*

Do you know what the trouble is with Trouble? Trouble makes itself out to be the school bully and the class trouble-maker, always hogging attention and taking advantage of everything and everyone. Trouble wants to worm its way into our every thought. It wants preeminence in our lives. It thrives on being magnified. It tells us, “I’m the boss and I demand your every attention.” Think about it: Why is it that we can focus on little else when we go through health problems or financial concerns or relationship issues or emotional troubles? It’s because trouble is a bully and demands control of us.

But think about this: The best Christians you know—the ones who seem to have it all together—have troubles of their own. It’s easy to presume God shields some Christians from trouble, but I don’t necessarily think this is the case. God blesses wise, Spirit-led decisions and actions, of course (“clean livin’” is what we used to call this kind of lifestyle). But good Christians can suffer financial setbacks or raucous relationships with family or at work. They can get cancer or other diseases or suffer from anxiety or depression. Mature Christians learn to live *with* trouble without letting trouble live *for* them, because they let Christ in them overcome whatever trouble may demand their allegiance.

“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” is not just a cute Christian motto for them, but our scriptural way of life (1 John 4:4 NASB).

*SONG: There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Dear Lord, I give you the preeminent place in my life. Thank you for helping me overcome what troubles me, through the power of Christ.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 13*

The worship services in old Corinth weren't going too well. Paul the apostle addressed the sticky situation. "And now I will show you the most excellent way," (12:31) he writes the immature church, then uses himself as an example by explaining that if he could worship by speaking in tongues more and better than others (which he could) and prophesying the deep mysteries of God (which he could) and exercising faith to move mountains (which he had) and being super self-sacrificial (which he was) *but does not have love*, then "I gain nothing" (13:3).

He reminds the Corinthians of their jealousy and quarrels (3:3) and tells them that love doesn't envy. He reminds them of their pride (4:6) and tells them that love does not boast and is not proud. He reminds them of their selfish behavior in seeking to continue to attend idol feasts in spite of the fact that it hurts others and themselves (chapters 8-10) and tells them that love is not self-seeking. He reminds them of their penchant for lawsuits against one another (chapter 6) and tells them that love keeps no record of wrongs. Love, on the other hand, protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres.

Finally, he encourages the Corinthians to grow up in regard to these matters and realize that demonstration of giftedness—whether tongues, knowledge, prophecy, or any other gift—will one day pass away. But one thing remains. The one enduring act and attitude of worship will be love.

*SONG: The Bond of Love*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Dear God, help me be an agent of love in the midst of my congregation. Guide my worship with the act and attitude of love.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:2-9*

My brother and his family planned to visit us and I realized I had not yet fixed our shower. Our home has two showers, but at the time one worked fine while the other worked only by prayer and supernatural intervention. The problem was the valve. Sometimes valve cartridges erode and need to be replaced. I had replaced them before. Really, it's not a lot of work.

But for any number of reasons we lived months on end with that bad shower valve, learning to live with the problem instead of fixing it. It still sort of worked. That's part of the reason I hadn't yet fixed it. It would cost a little money, and a little time. All in all I estimated about two hours and \$40. So why hadn't I fixed it? Good question.

Why is it that so often we don't fix what's broken? Why do we leave bad situations unaddressed?

Why don't we apologize when we know we've hurt someone? Why do we let sour feelings toward another linger within us?

Why don't we address tough, sticky issues sooner?

Why don't we lend a helping hand before deep crisis sets in?

Why would we rather live with uncertainty?

Why would we rather live with half-measures?

Why do we underestimate the long term costs of inaction?

To procrastinate is human. To seek healing and reconciliation is Christlike. Fix the shower.

*SONG: God Leads Us Along*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, bring to mind the reasons I put off doing what is necessary and helpful, and give me courage to act rightly.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

The act of sex is a spiritual act, uniting the participants in body, mind, and spirit. Referencing an everyday occurrence in ancient Corinth, Paul reminds his young church, “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh’” (v. 16). Our world today often has us believe that “It’s just sex,” that nothing else happens in the sex act except the biological functions of our species; no harm, no foul. Paul will have none of this line of thinking as there are profound spiritual implications to our sexuality.

Some may say, “So what if I sin against my own body. It’s my body and I can do with it what I want.” Paul won’t let us get away with this faulty and shortsighted line of reasoning. The apostle has already told us that our body is reserved for the Lord. And now Paul offers his central argument for reserving the sex act for marriage: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (vv. 19, 20).

“You are not your own” are powerful words. When tempted to misuse your body in any way, remind yourself that *you are not your own*. You belong to Another, who resides *in* you.

*SONG: Take Time to Be Holy*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, preserve me for yourself. Convict me of my sin, convince me of your worth, and compel me to live for you.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15*

The apostle Paul uses the farming cycle to demonstrate for the ancient Corinthian Christians that the grace of giving is a cycle that blesses all Christians. We start with seed, then plant it, tend it, harvest it, enjoy the yield and the increase, then share our abundance, place some seed in reserve for next year, then plant once again.

Paul was asking the Corinthian believers to give to the desperately poor Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. The apostle was collecting a special offering from among the Gentile churches to meet the Jewish Christians' needs. Paul's strong advice to the Corinthians: plant (sow) lots of seed. In other words, give generously to begin with. In this way will we (and others) see an abundant harvest.

We give because giving is good for us. It turns us into farmers of the good in our world. According to Paul, the grace of giving builds partnerships with others who may not be like us. Giving evens the playing field by allowing my plenty to fill your want, and vice versa when the time calls for it. Giving helps to break the habits of greed on the part of the rich and envy on the part of the poor (yes, the poor are required to give as well). Giving produces spontaneous eruptions of thanksgiving to God. Finally, giving speaks deeply to others about our love for Christ Jesus.

*SONG: Lord, Thou Lov'st the Cheerful Giver*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, help me live the grace of giving through regular giving at church, consistent giving toward missions, and spontaneous giving toward the needs of others.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Habakkuk 3:1-19*

The prophet Habakkuk was prepared to accept God's judgment upon God's own people, and he could do so with utter trust as he took to heart God's words to him, "the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4). In the midst of the chaos Habakkuk's nation was in (3:17), Habakkuk found joy in God, for he knew God would be with his people (2:20). It is the presence of God that makes the difference between trust and despair. God himself is the reason we have hope for the future—not possessions, not politics, not people—God himself.

When tough times come along I always think of my Grandma. In her years on earth (1900-1991) she had plenty of reason to despair: dozens of business troughs and recessions, many wars, a dizzying array of potent new philosophies and a Christian church that seemed more polarized than unified. Though poor and lacking advanced education and living many years as a widow, Grandma always trusted Christ her Savior and never gave in to despair. A committed Christian and member of Alva (Oklahoma) Friends Church, her faith grew as she daily read her Bible and prayed and tithed and taught her children and grandchildren to follow Christ.

Today we have similar despair-inducing issues, but we can declare with the prophet, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights" (v. 19).

*SONG: My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, when I am tempted to despair, help me turn to you in complete trust. Help me live faithfully in your presence.*

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