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Be flexible

By Andrew Roebert

Change is one of the unavoidable aspects of our lives. The dynamic of life is based on this unknown. We know the past and we know the present but we know little or nothing about the future. For all we know it may not happen. Each day presents us with new and different challenges. To be flexible is to have the capacity and ability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements. The new, the different and things that are changing, are things we cannot escape. Our ability or our readiness to be able to make the adjustments quickly and effectively is a key to success in life.

THE ROLE OF CHANGE

Constant change is here to stay. It is the one sure thing in life. I remember some years ago I was in the army. It was dynamic, changing environment in which we never really knew what would happen next. Information was never given to us and everything was on a need-to-know basis and it seemed we never needed to know. We would wake up in the morning and have no idea what would happen next. To add to this there would be many rumours. The rumours would cause the troops to fly from insecurity to anxiety to anger. My friends and I soon discovered that by simply making a statement we could start a rumour and it would spread like a wild fire and cause havoc. It was easy to see those who had learned to be flexible. Those who did not have the ability to be extremely flexible cracked.

Life may be slightly more predictable but the same principle still applies. The greater your ability to embrace the new, the different and the changing, the greater your likelihood of success. I once read the following quote: 'A mind once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original proportions.' This 'stretching' is the flexibility. When someone is stretched, when they do not have the capacity to be stretched, it is destructive. But when the flexible are stretched, the sky becomes the limit!

BLESSED ARE THE FLEXIBLE

I once heard someone say the following: Blessed are the flexible for they will not be broken. It sounds like it comes from the Bible but it does not! It does however contain an element of truth. There is special grace for those who are flexible. When we are flexible God can get our attention. When we are flexible we are ready and able to embrace change. Lack of flexibility is often caused by pride. Proud people are often stubborn and inflexible. Humble people are generally teachable and flexible.

Proverbs 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

THE ONE CONSTANT

In all this change that so surrounds every aspect of our lives, we often long for something constant. I was speaking to lady the other day. Her life had been on a bit of a roller-coaster ride. She said how she longed for her life to just plateau out. Although we long for progress and forward movement, at the same time we seem to want things to stay the same. This is because within each one of us is a longing for the constant. This longing can and should only be satisfied in our relationship with God. God is the only constant that we can hold onto.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

John 8:58 Jesus said, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

The challenge is to live with flexibility in our hearts while holding on to the One who never changes!

DESIGNED TO CHANGE

You and I were designed with the innate ability to change. We may be creatures of habit, but we have the ability to make decisions and change.

Matthew 3:2 Repent (think differently; change your mind, regretting your sins and changing your conduct), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Preconceived ideas and stubbornness make for a potential breakpoint. God is at work in our lives. He is pruning, disciplining and leading.

Proverbs 3:12 For whom the Lord loves He corrects, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

As a result we are constantly adjusting, co-operating with God, becoming what He wants us to be.

Proverbs 15:10 He who hates correction will die.

ADJUSTING YOUR SAILS

As a teenaged I used to windsurf. I grew to love the sport and learned some valuable skills. At the same time I learnt many life lessons. I learnt that if you do not adjust your sails you will not have much joy. You have to constantly adjust your sails to take best advantage of the prevailing winds within your ability and strength. There were times when I felt I was stronger than the wind and inevitable I would be thrown off.

Sometimes in life we are like this. We constantly want to challenge the prevailing circumstances. Then we wonder why we are being thrown around. The skill is in the ability to adjust our sails effectively. To be able to realize which things we can handle and those things we cannot.

When I would windsurf I would often teach others how to do it. The first thing that a novice would do was to adjust his/her sail perpendicular to the wind. The sail would suddenly fill up with air and whip the person into the water. They would always respond and say with shock: 'What did I do wrong?'

In our desire to be flexible we need to learn to adjust our sails. In the process we take on enough to facilitate progress but not so much that we land ourselves in trouble.

BE READY

We need to be ready for whatever changes life may demand from us. We do not know what will happen next and this is why we need to be flexible and ready to change. This readiness is primarily an attitude. If we have the attitude: 'This is how it has always been and this is how it always will be and we will not change', change will demolish us when it arrives. If however we say: 'Lord, I entrust my life and my future into your hands. I cannot see the future, but You can and I trust You to help me through', then we will be able to flow with the change and go from strength to strength.

2 Timothy 4:2 Be ready!

LIFE – A SERIES OF SEASONS

Life is a series of seasons. Winter gives way to spring and spring gives way to summer. Summer gives way to autumn and autumn gives way to winter. Each season calls for a different approach. If we do not approach winter with a different strategy we may be ill-prepared.

In South Africa, where we live, summer is the time when we expect the rain. It is however not guaranteed. Sometimes summer can come without rain and this leads to drought. In this way we constantly adjust ourselves to the changes. In life we must do the same. We must be able to identify the different seasons we may be in and adjust accordingly. Seasons change! This is important to notice. We were not designed to live in winter forever. We were meant to enjoy spring and summer as well!

2 Timothy 4:2 Be ready in season and out of season.



COME LET'S REBUILD

By Andrew W Roebert

We are living in challenging and interesting times: the worldwide economy and the politics. People seem to be under great stress and pressure. Loss of jobs. This stress is affecting almost every aspect of life and it influences families, marriages, health and a host of other areas. At face value, it can seem as though the economic 'melt-down' has a far-reaching effect.

The nation of Israel went through a similar experience. The city of Jerusalem had been destroyed and the walls had all been broken down. In addition the gates into the city had been burnt down. The nation was vulnerable and exposed. Read Nehemiah 1 and 2 and consider what area of your life lies in ruins? What areas of your life are broken down or burned? How should you respond? What should you do?

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN THINGS HAVE BEEN BROKEN OR DESTROYED

Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept and mourned for days and fasted and prayed [constantly] before the God of heaven.

There is a time to face the fact and confront reality. There is a time to cry. Look at what Nehemiah did (5 Things):

1. He sat down.
2. He cried/wept.
3. He mourned for days.
4. He fasted.
5. He prayed. (Including confession and repentance) v 5 - 10

There needs to be a progression. We can't just sit down and do nothing indefinitely. We can't mourn, weep and cry forever. We need to start to turn to God and believe.

THE VISION!

Nehemiah 2:4 The king said to me (Nehemiah), "What is it you want?"

Nehemiah tells the king his vision to rebuild what had been broken and destroyed. Your vision is what you want to do. It is what God has placed in your heart to do.

Nehemiah 2:12 I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

What has God put in your heart to do? That is your vision and perhaps it is even your destiny. Think about that for a moment!

THE PLAN!

Not only did Nehemiah have a vision but he put it into action with a plan:

- He had an interest in what was happening in his home town - Nehemiah 1:2
- He investigated the situation - Nehemiah 2:12-15
- He started by communicating - Nehemiah 2:17 *Then I said to them!*
- He starts motivating the people so that he could get co-operation. Nehemiah did not do all the work alone.

Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

Nehemiah called for help. Sometimes you and I need to get the help of others in the rebuilding process of our lives.

They prepared themselves...

Nehemiah 2:18 And they said, Let us rise up and build! So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Nehemiah and those with him were determined. We need to have determination.

Nehemiah 2:20 I answered them, The God of heaven will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build.

Then he put together an action plan in Nehemiah 3.

THE OPPOSITION!

The gracious hand of God was with Nehemiah he had favour.

Nehemiah 2:8 And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

BUT there was also opposition. Often we think that if God is with us there will be NO opposition. There will always be opposition.

Nehemiah 2:19 But when Sanballat and Tobiah, and Geshem heard of it, they laughed us to scorn and despised us and said, What is this thing you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?

When you and I take the decision to arise and rebuild, there will be opposition. This opposition can take many forms. Don't let opposition stop you from rebuilding!

ROME WAS NOT BUILT IN A DAY – BUT A LOT CAN BE ACHIEVED IN A SHORT TIME WITH GOD'S FAVOUR!

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was finished in fifty-two days.

Nehemiah had the God-given vision. He had the favour of God on his life and endeavours. He had the favour of the king. But we have to ask the questions:

- Build what?
- Build where?
- Build with what?

Notice Nehemiah built on exactly the same foundation. He used the same stones.

Nehemiah 4:2 "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they are doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a day if they offer enough sacrifices? Look at those charred stones they are pulling out of the rubbish and using again!"

Sometimes we think we must go somewhere else and build. We may even think that we must use new materials to build. God often uses the very ruins and uses those very materials to rebuild what He has in mind.

GETTING OUT OF A HOLDING PATTERN!

When we have been through a difficult time when things have been ruined or destroyed, we can often go into a 'holding pattern' waiting for things to 'return to normal'. I once went to Zambia on outreach. We flew direct from Johannesburg to Lusaka. On arrival in Lusaka the pilot was

informed that the president's plane had just arrived and the policy of the Zambian government was that no planes were allowed to take off or land until the president had landed, completed his arrival ceremony and left the airport. We were advised that we would have to maintain a holding pattern and circle the airport until the processes were over on the ground. After 30 minutes of flying around in circles we were allowed to land. Some people in the plane moaned and groaned I even heard some people cursing and getting angry. Some settled down to reading a book or magazine and others took out their laptops and started working.

In life, sometimes due to circumstances beyond our control we can settle into a holding pattern in which no progress is made. These holding patterns are costly, emotionally and in every other way. Don't settle for a 'holding pattern', trust God to give you vision and then have the courage to GO FOR IT!

GOD MOVES ON OUR BEHALF WHEN WE STEP OUT!

Nehemiah 4:19 – 20 And I said to the nobles and officials and the rest of the people, The work is great and scattered, and we are separated on the wall, one far from another. In whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.

Nehemiah 6:16 When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

IT'S TIME TO REBUILD!

- Build what?

Your marriage, Your career, Your finances, Your health, Your relationships, Your future, Your dreams, Your hopes.

- Build where?

Right where God has planted you! In your marriage, in your career, in your financial situation, in your relationships and as you step into your future, dreams and hopes.

- Build with what?

With what you have and with what God will give and provide for you!

IT IS TIME TO START REBUILDING!

Believe God for a fresh vision. Believe God for a plan. Don't be side-tracked by any opposition that may present itself. Ask God for His provision and favour. Get out of the 'holding pattern'. Start rebuilding!



Looking after our hearts

By Andrew Roebert

Matthew 6:19–21 Don't store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. 20Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves. 21If your profits are in heaven, your heart will be there too.

God is after our hearts. Our hearts represent our affections. Our hearts influence every aspect of our lives. God wants to have a place of priority in our hearts. Our hearts are very important. We need to protect and guard our hearts.

This is important. Our hearts have a way of attracting us in a certain direction.

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart – NIV

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence - KJV

Our hearts can become distracted. Our hearts can become hard. We need to work on our hearts to keep them in the right condition. What is the condition of your heart today?

LIFE SPRINGS OUT OF OUR HEARTS

Our hearts influence our entire lives. That is why it needs our attention: life springs out of our hearts.

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

If our hearts are hard we will be hard people. If our hearts are full of bitterness we will be bitter people. If our hearts

are full of joy we will be joyful people. If our hearts are soft and tender, that's the type of people we will be. It affects every area of our lives.

OUR HEARTS INFLUENCE OUR LIVES

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life. (Living)

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

The issues of life are a direct response to the condition of our hearts. Every aspect of our lives are influenced by our hearts. We see life through the filter of our hearts and our lives are affected and influenced in this way. That is why our business should be look after our hearts.

IF WE LOOK AFTER OUR HEARTS IT CAN LEAD TO REAL LIVING

We need to look after our hearts. If the condition of our hearts is right, life will be great.

Proverbs 4:13 Carry out my instructions; don't forget them, for they will lead you to real living. (Living Translation)

If our hearts are tender, then we will be tender towards our families. That could change your family. If our hearts are full of kindness, we will be kind-hearted people. That could change our situations. If we look after our hearts it can lead to real living.

KEEPING OUR HEARTS IS IMPORTANT

Our hearts are challenged every day. Every day there is occasion to negatively affect our hearts. Our hearts are also easily tempted, but we must keep our hearts on the right path. If we get off the path it is not always easy to get back.

Proverbs 23:19 Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path.

It is a wise thing to do to keep your heart on the right path.

SERVING GOD CALL FOR THE DEDICATION OF OUR HEARTS

1 Samuel 12:24 Be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

Serving God demands our hearts. God is looking for our hearts and He wants to have first place in our hearts. It is a heart issue. God cannot just be one of the many issues in our lives. 'Serve him faithfully with all your heart'. Our hearts are a place of dedication.

OUR HEARTS NEED TO BE GIVEN DIRECTION

We need to instruct our hearts. We need to tell our hearts in which direction to move.

1 Chronicles 22:19 Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God.

It starts with a decision. It starts with determination. I have chosen to do this. My heart wants to seek God. How about yours?

Joel 2:12 Now, therefore, says the LORD, Turn to Me with all your heart

DON'T HARDEN YOUR HEART

This is a vital issue. Hard hearts rob us of real living. It is easy to allow our hearts to become hard. We face many experiences that can cause our hearts to become hard. We must identify such experiences and not allow our hearts to become hard.

Psalms 95:8 Don't harden your hearts as Israel did in the wilderness

Look after your heart.

GOD WANTS TO STRENGTHEN OUR HEARTS

This is the great news!

Psalms 31:24 Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all you that hope in the LORD.

God wants to strengthen your heart. Listen to the words of Jesus.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

A photograph of a person's hand holding a lit lantern in a field of tall grass at sunset. The lantern is red and has a warm glow. The person is wearing a floral dress. The background is a soft, orange-hued sunset sky.

Let's look after our hearts



The Lord Our Restorer

By Andrew Roebert

Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery - Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 20:1-11 Amplified Bible (AMP)

In those days [when Sennacherib first invaded Judah] Hezekiah became deathly ill. The prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not recover.'" Then Hezekiah turned His face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, "Please, O Lord, remember now [with compassion] how I have walked before You in faithfulness and truth and with a whole heart [entirely devoted to You], and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle courtyard, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go back and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father (ancestor): "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold, I am healing you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life and save you and this city [Jerusalem} from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will protect this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" Then Isaiah said, "Bring a cake of figs. And they brought it and placed it on the [painful] inflammation, and he recovered."

Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will [completely] heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day?" Isaiah said, "This will be the sign to you from the Lord, that He will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow [indicating the time of day] go forward ten steps, or go backward ten steps?" Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to go forward ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps." So Isaiah the prophet called out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow on the steps ten steps backward by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

THE NATURE OF LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE

Hezekiah was a good man. He was one of the greatest kings that Judah had had. He had achieved great things. He was someone who was ready to turn to God for help. God had blessed him to an unimaginable degree. He was exceedingly wealthy and blessed with much wealth and riches. He was living his life the best he knew how. But one day things changed.

2 Kings 20:1 'In those days [when Sennacherib first invaded Judah] Hezekiah became deathly ill.'

In 'those days' when everything was going so well, things changed. And it did not come at a good time, because Judah was being invaded. At the very moment he needed to be strong for the nation, things change in his personal situation and a deathly illness strikes.

It is in the very nature of the lives we live for things to change. Life is unpredictable, but God is good. Life is unpredictable, but God can be depended on. Life is unpredictable, but the Lord is our restorer. Life is unpredictable, but God is always faithful!

KEEP YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

In the midst of all of this the prophet arrives and gives him the worst possible news and the best possible advice.

2 Kings 20:1 The prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came and said to him, Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not recover.'

This was truly dreadful news. In those days the words of the prophet were direct words from God Himself. The prophet spoke with authority and said: 'Thus says the Lord!' He then gives him this terrible news, 'for you shall die and not recover.' At the same time he gives him the best advice under the circumstances, 'Set your house in order'. Perhaps there was something that was not in order? We don't really get much information, but the instruction was given. The best thing we can do is to ensure that we 'keep our house in order'.

I want to encourage you to keep your house in order. Don't say, 'I will get things in order at some later stage'. You may not get the opportunity that Hezekiah got. Live a righteous life, do the right thing, and stay on the straight and narrow, live a life that honours God every day.

THE VITAL COMPONENT OF PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

In this difficult situation Hezekiah turns to God. When we face difficult situations, the best thing that we can do is to turn to God.

2 Kings 20:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord.

Hezekiah obviously had a personal relationship with God and he realized that he needed Divine intervention, he needed a miracle. When we need a miracle in our lives or situations, we should turn to the Lord. It's an interesting note that was added to say that he turned his face to the wall. He looked away from anything else that may have been a source of hope. Perhaps, because he was so sick he could not go to a private place and in this way sought some privacy. It reminds me of what Jesus said: 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:6) This is the prayer that he prayed:

2 Kings 20:3a "Please, O Lord, remember now [with compassion] how I have walked before You in faithfulness and truth and with a whole heart [entirely devoted to You], and have done what is good in Your sight."

It's a very interesting prayer. At face value it could appear to be self-righteous but it was anything but that. He basically said: 'Lord I've tried to do the right thing and live in a way that pleases You. Please remember me now with compassion.' He prayed for himself. Often we think others must pray for us and this is good, but we can pray for ourselves and our own situations, knowing that God hears those prayers too.

2 Kings 20:3b And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Sometimes it's not the length of the prayers that matter, but rather the weight of the prayers.

GOD CAN TURN ANY SITUATION AROUND

Hezekiah was faced with an impossible situation. He had been given a death sentence and what was worse was that he had not had children and as such had no heir to take over the kingdom. He realized the magnitude of the situation that he and the nation faced. The nation was being attacked and the king was deathly sick and there was no heir. This is the worst possible position for a king to be in. BUT he had prayed and wept to God. In the midst of all of this God intervenes.

2 Kings 20:4-5 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle courtyard, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go back and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father (ancestor): "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I am healing you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord."

The prophet was on route out of the palace and half way across the courtyard and the Lord changes everything and sends him back with the best news ever. Never underestimate your calling and prayers to God. The prophet must have been confused. It is almost as if the prayers of Hezekiah changed the mind of God. Hezekiah was a descendant of David. This was a very important

fact! Then God promises to turn both his health and situation and the nation's situation around.

2 Kings 20:6 'I will add fifteen years to your life and save you and this city [Jerusalem] from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will protect this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'

Here we notice the Lord says: 'for my servant David's sake.' Years before God had made promises to David and so He was not only healing a man and saving a nation, He was also being faithful to the promises He had made to those who had gone before.

DO THE POSSIBLE AND LEAVE THE IMPOSSIBLE TO GOD

Sometimes we may think that we must just leave everything to God. It is true that we should leave things in His hands, but I believe that we should also do what is in our power to do and especially if He tells us we need to do something.

2 Kings 20:7 Then Isaiah said, "Bring a cake of figs. And they brought it and placed it on the [painful] inflammation, and he recovered."

Why figs and why such a strange instruction? Was this just the prophet Isaiah's instruction, or was it part of the instructions from God? Do figs have some special healing quality that humanity knows nothing about? We do not know! What we know is that this instruction was given and they did their part in doing this simple thing. They obeyed and followed this strange, yet simple instruction. From the scripture it appears that this brought relief from the acute suffering that the king was facing and it was instant. But the king knew he needed to be completely cured.

2 Kings 20:8 Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will [completely] heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day?"

He had done the possible and seen the start of the miracle and was wanting reassurance that the healing would be complete. Then God offers him a phenomenal sign.

2 Kings 20:9 Isaiah said, "This will be the sign to you from the Lord, that He will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow [indicating the time of day] go forward ten steps or go backward ten steps?"

GOD CAN TURN BACK THE CLOCK FOR YOU

The Lord gives Hezekiah a choice.

2 Kings 20:10 Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to go forward ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backwards ten steps."

His choice was interesting. He wanted every doubt to be removed and so he asked that the sun would 'move backwards' as this was more unlikely than having the sun move forward as it would do naturally. In a moment God did a great miracle and turned back the clock.

2 Kings 20:11 'So Isaiah the prophet called out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow on the steps ten steps backward by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.'

What a wonderful thought that God would turn back the clock just as a sign of His promise to Hezekiah.

It was a sign that He would turn back the situation the king was facing in his health and turn back the attack that the nation was facing. God can turn back the clock in your situation. Perhaps you have things you look back on and wish you could just have the time over or turn back the clock. God is a clock turning back God. He can turn back the clock on the shadow of lost opportunities. He can turn back the clock on the shadow of mistakes we have made. He can turn back the clock on the shadow of wasted time. He can turn back the clock on the shadow of happier days. He can turn back the clock on the shadow of lost love ones - for one day we shall see them again if they too have followed God.

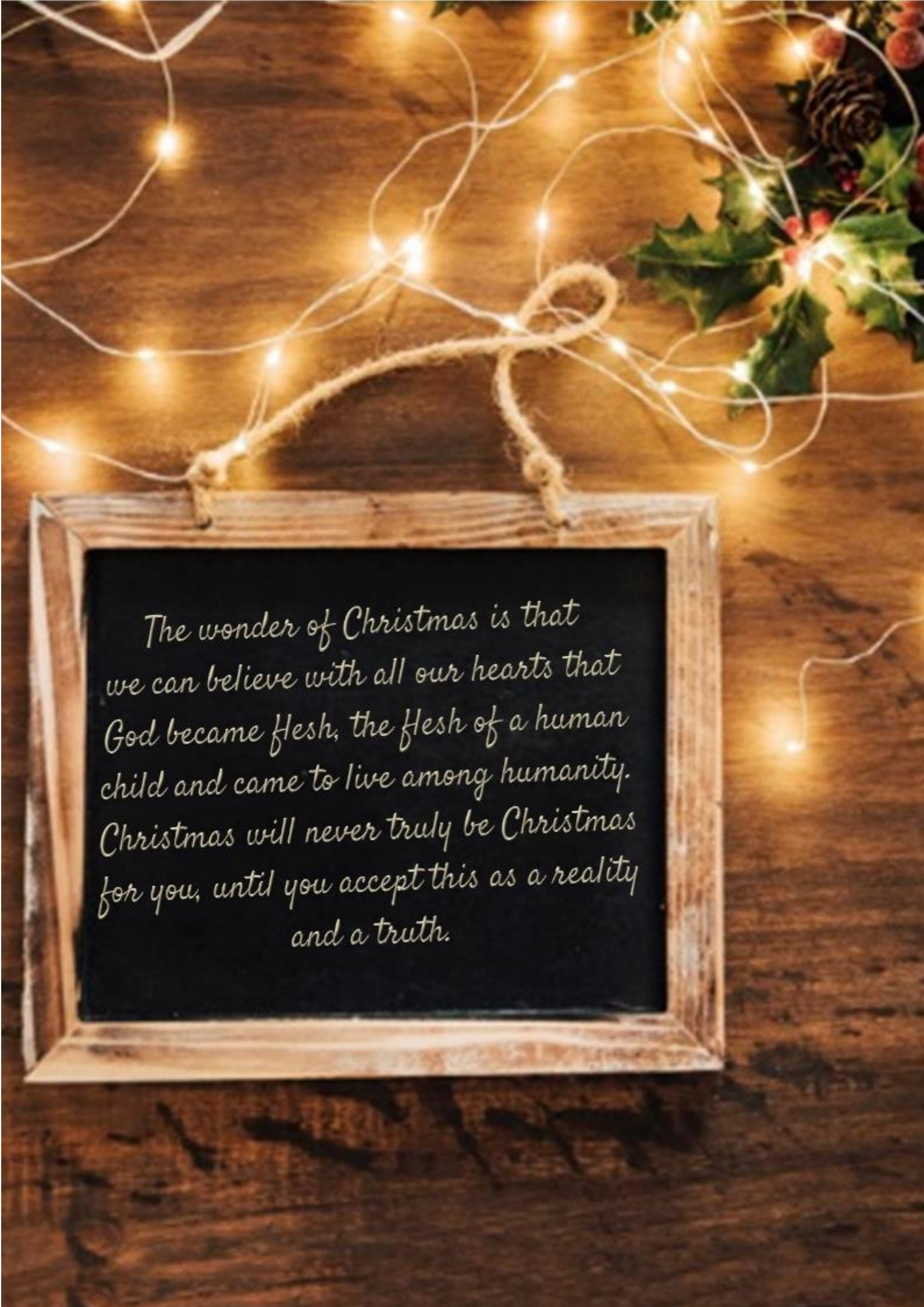
Joel 2:25 'And I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, and the consuming locust, and the cutting locust, my great army which I sent among you.'

THE LORD IS YOUR RESTORER!

God knew exactly what He was doing. He was restoring a man's life and saving a nation, but He was also fulfilling His great plan for humanity. You see Hezekiah was in the blood line of David and out of David would one day come the Messiah, Jesus. Had Hezekiah died without an heir the lineage would have been broken. The Lord was making sure that His eternal plan was being fulfilled.

Hezekiah's son was Manasseh and he was not a good king and did many bad things and some have ventured to ask if Hezekiah's prayer would not have been better unanswered. But God knew that there was a bigger plan and so He stepped into the situation and restored it so that His promise to David and His plan for humanity would come to pass.

In the same way the Lord is your restorer and He knows the bigger plan and wants to restore you so that His plans and purposes will prevail in and through your life. The Lord is our restorer! He moved heaven and earth to reassure Hezekiah and to bring about His plans. He will move heaven and earth to be faithful to you and bring you to His place for you. So lift up your eyes, to the One from whom your help comes. He is your restorer and He is more faithful than the rising sun.



*The wonder of Christmas is that
we can believe with all our hearts that
God became flesh, the flesh of a human
child and came to live among humanity.
Christmas will never truly be Christmas
for you, until you accept this as a reality
and a truth.*



The Wonder of Christmas

By Andrew Roebert

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."
Isaiah 9:6*

IS THIS FACT TRUTH?

The whole basis for what you and I believe comes down to the simple question: Do you believe that this is true. The question as to whether Christmas is real or not, is based on whether we believe that a child was born and that this prophecy was, in fact, fulfilled. Some time back I was watching some of the documentary channels on TV. A program came on about the life of Jesus. The narrator made that following comment: He said: 'The greatest attested fact of ancient history was Jesus Christ!'

I have never forgotten this statement. But is it true? Is it true or is it just fable, legend and tradition? The wonder of Christmas is that we can believe with all our hearts that this is true. That God became flesh, the flesh of a human child and came to live among humanity. Just think about it, the same planet that you and I live, walk and work on, the Saviour of the world, the creator of the universe, lived, walked and worked on. Christmas will never truly be Christmas for you, until you accept this as a reality and a truth.

IS THIS FACT TRUE FOR YOU?

More than just a historical fact, more that just a part of ancient history, we need to ask ourselves the question: 'IS THIS FACT TRUE FOR YOU'?

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."
Isaiah 9:6*

Let's personalize this verse. Take the word 'US' and replace it with your own name. "For unto Andrew a child is born, unto Andrew a son is given." - Isaiah 9:6 This is the true wonder of the Christmas story. The Child and the Son was given to you and to me. Not just to humanity and history, but to you and to me! Not only must we accept this as a historical fact, we have to go a step further. We must accept it as a personal gift! Not for the person next to you, but for you!

A Child was born for you! A Son was given for you! Have you received Him as your personal gift? Strip away, for a moment, all the history, the commercialization, the carols, the presents, the holidays and let's get back to basics. Have you received this Child, this Son that God gave to you!

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ACCEPTING THE CHILD AND BEING A CHILD

So we realize that that we must accept the historical event as the truth. We have to receive this Child as a personal gift to us. But we also need to be changed as a result.

My children are teenagers. Ever since they were born we have been under pressure to get them grown up. I remember someone trying to encourage me to get my daughter to start reading just after her third birthday. Other people would tell me that their daughter had a vocabulary of 1000 words at 3 years of age and asking me how many words were in my daughter's vocabulary. This question took me by complete surprise. We rush our children to develop into mature, well-rounded adults and then we speak of lost childhoods and missed youth!

As a child you believe what adults say and tell you, but as we grow up we expect our children to question and decide for themselves, on everything they hear. We move from belief to rational explanation. But when we receive THE CHILD, something needs to change!

Matthew 18:2-4 And He (Jesus) called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Truly I say to you, unless you repent (change, turn about) and become like little children [trusting, lowly - humble, loving, forgiving], you can never enter the kingdom of heaven [at all]. 4 Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving] is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

We must become like a child. This is so foreign to human nature and what society tells us. There is a difference between childlike and childish.

Childish – Immature, simple/silly, befitting a child.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Childlike – Having the qualities of a child, innocent, trust, humble, loving and forgiving, teachable, obedient and willing to do his father's will.

Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Luke 10:21 Then Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit and said, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way."

As we accept the Child, let us return to childlikeness. Childlike faith, childlike belief and childlike confidence in the Child that was given to us!

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ACCEPTING THE SON AND BEING A SON

Yes, we must accept the Historical fact as truth. Yes, we must accept the Child as a personal gift to us. Yes, we must be changed as a result. But it goes a step further.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."

Isaiah 9:6

We have been given a Son. The question is: 'Are you a son yourself?'

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.

Make the connection - Accept the Son and be a son or a daughter of God. As you receive the Son, you can become a son and a daughter of God. Are you a son or a daughter of God? Do you trust your Heavenly Father? Do you trust Him to be a father, a provider and a friend to you? Accept the Son and be a son! Don't settle for anything less!

IF GOD HAS GIVEN US A CHILD AND A SON, IF GOD HAS ALLOWED US TO BE HIS CHILD AND HIS SON, SURELY WE CAN GIVE OURSELVES COMPLETELY TO HIM!

Have you given yourself to Jesus Christ? Have you given EVERYTHING to Jesus Christ? There was an old hymn we used to sing: JUST AS I AM. Here are the words: *Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!* God has given us everything.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Surely we can give everything in return?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? You are not your own, You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for, made His own]. So then, honor God and bring glory to Him in your body.

So now all that remains is to spend the rest of your life bringing glory to God in everything you do and say! Let the Child that was given to you be everything to you!

1 Corinthians 7:23 You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for by Christ]; then do not yield yourselves up to become [in your own estimation] slaves to men [but consider yourselves slaves to Christ].

God can use our problems

By Andrew W Roebert

Why do we face problems? Why does it seem that we just cannot go through life without problems? These are questions that many people ask. In the course of life we face many problems and situations that call for us to deal with problems. Problems come from different directions:

1. From things we have done.
2. From things done to us.
3. From things that are beyond our control.

But God can use the things we are going through to work in our lives.

PROBLEMS HAPPEN

I have discovered that in life problems happen. It is an inevitable part of life. No one lives without it and no one escapes it.

Job 5:7 But man is born to trouble as the sparks and the flames fly upward.

Things happen in life and we end up dealing with the resultant problems. I once read a little statement that said: 'be gentle with everyone because everyone is facing a hard time'. The truth is that everyone is contending with some problem or challenge. These can range from physical to relational to financial. It is how we respond to these problems and challenges that is the secret to life.

HANDLING THE PROBLEMS

This is a very crucial point. We know that problems are part of life and we know that we cannot escape them. The issue is how will we respond or handle the problems? If we respond to the problems by becoming bitter and offended, this will eventually destroy us. But if we will allow God to help us as we go through the problems, I believe we will come out on the other side as a better person. Often times when we face problems we still have the opportunity to make choices. These choices are the most important key to stepping through the problem to a point of breakthrough.

GOD USES OUR PROBLEMS

God uses the problems that we are facing to be able to work in our lives. Primarily God is interested in our hearts. We need to respond wisely to the problems that life brings our way and not get into a reactionary mode. Sometimes one problem can lead to a new solution that could change our lives. One thing that you can be sure of is that God knows what you are facing and what you are going through. He wants to use those things and turn them out for good.

Romans 8:28 We are assured and know that all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.

God is able to turn the most desperate problem around into something good. God's intentions are clear.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

PROBLEMS CAN BRING US TO A PLACE OF TRUSTING GOD

Often times problems come because we do our own thing. We do not allow God to lead us and guide us. And as a result we end up with problems. When we trust in ourselves and in our own abilities we are setting ourselves up for a problem. God wants us to trust Him and trust Him completely.

2 Corinthians 1:9 But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.

Life does not always make sense. We don't always know why certain things happen. Even when things don't make sense, God is still in control. As a result we can learn to rely on Him and not on ourselves.

PROBLEMS CAN BRING ABOUT CHANGE IN OUR LIVES

I have seen people who are so convinced of their opinion and position that it is impossible for them to change. God wants our lives to be a process where we are changing from strength to strength and from glory to glory. When we are confronted with problems we are also confronted with change.

A person is seen from behind, hiking up a steep, rocky mountain trail. The sky is a mix of blue, orange, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The mountain's ridges are silhouetted against the bright sky.

God can use these problems to help us make those changes that He would have us make in our lives. Problems are a critical inflection point or a T-junction that calls for decision and change. There is a great song we used to sing: 'Change my heart oh God, make it ever new'. If you are facing a problem today, you need to evaluate if this problem does not call for change in your heart and in your life.

PROBLEMS CAN BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GOD TO GUIDE YOU

Sometimes it is only when we have problems that we turn to God for help. When everything is going well we tend to sail along without allowing the Lord to lead and guide us. God wants to lead and guide you. When trouble comes it causes us to return to God and call on Him in our situation and circumstances.

Nahum 1:7 The Lord is good. When trouble comes, He is the place to go! And He knows everyone who trusts in Him!

Psalms 20:1 May the LORD answer you when you are in distress

Psalms 120:1 In my troubles I pled with God to help me and He did!

No matter what you may be facing today, let it be an opportunity to call on God for His guidance in your life. Expect the unexpected. You may feel God guiding you to do something unusual and from a human perspective it may seem strange, but remember God is God and He sees things differently. It tells us in the Bible that God has got a plan for each of our lives. We may feel things are falling apart but God may be co-ordinating affairs to bring us into the fulfilment of His plan.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans.

PROBLEMS CAN BRING US TO A PLACE OF MATURITY

Although we might not like to admit it, problems play a role of bringing us to a place of maturity. Here we see a clear parallel between real life and the things we go through. A child comes to maturity as it faces life's challenges and moves on. For the moment we may be facing difficulty, but God has a plan and His plan is that we become what He intended for us to become.

I have discovered that the people who can help me the most, in the difficulties I am facing, are those who have had similar difficulties and moved through those difficulties to a place of maturity and victory. This is a place where the problem does not rule them but instead they have learnt what they needed to learn and God has taken them onto the next thing that He has for them!

James 1:2-4 Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.

God wants us strong in character, full and complete – mature.

MOVING THROUGH OUR PROBLEMS

The issue is that in life we face problems. It is not a matter of IF we will face problems but rather a matter of WHEN. If we are going to allow God to use the problems we are facing to bring us to maturity, we need to learn how to move through the problem and into victory. Many people try to squirm out of their problems or short cut things when God is not finished working in their hearts and lives. At the same time we must not get stuck in our problems and stay there.

God does not want to leave you in your problems, but rather He wants to move you through whatever it is that you are facing to a point of overcoming. Problems can be like a refiners fire that burns up the impurities so that something beautiful can emerge. God is after that something beautiful in each of us that He has placed there. Move through whatever you are facing, pass the test, the trial or the difficulty and let's believe God for great things.

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Weakening Relationship Walls that Separate

By Cindy and Steve Wright – MarriageMissions.com

Do you have disturbing issues that are causing divisions between you and your spouse? These issues or grievances are like relationship walls that are building up and are separating the two of you. If so, it's important to:

"Deal with grievances as they arise. Don't stack them on top of one another or let them fester inside until they turn to hostility. Anger is always a secondary emotion. If spouses back up to what preceded it, they will often find hurt. If they reveal the hurt, they'll weaken the walls that separate them." (Bill Hybels)

RELATIONSHIP WALLS THAT SEPARATE

There are so many circumstances that can cause walls of conflict to build up and separate us as wives and husbands. But the question is—what do we do when communication breaks down and hostility rises up to drive a wedge between us? If we let them fester, they will take us to a place where it's more difficult to deal with them.

In light of this issue, we'd like to share a story to bring insight into what we're to do in just such a circumstance. It's titled: What Do We Build? Unfortunately we don't know who wrote it so we can't give them proper credit, but here's how the story goes:

WHAT DO WE BUILD?

"Once, there were two brothers who lived on adjoining farms who fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift they'd had in 40 years of farming side-by-side. They used to share machinery and trade labor, and goods as each of them needed, without a single hitch. But then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and eventually grew into a major difference until it finally exploded into an ugly exchange of bitter words, which was followed by weeks of silence.

"One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. 'I'm looking for a few days' work' he said. Would you happen to have anything around here that I could help you with?"

"'Yes,' said the older brother. 'I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my younger brother's place! Last week there was a meadow between us. He recently took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there's a creek between us. He may have done this to spite me, but I'm going to do him one better. See that pile of lumber over there by the barn? I want you to build me a fence—an 8-foot fence—so I won't have to see my brother's farm or his face anymore.'

RELATIONSHIP WALLS

"The carpenter said, 'I think I understand the situation. Show me where you have some nails and a post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that will please you.' The older brother had to go to town, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day.

"The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing and nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped at what he saw. There wasn't a fence there at all. It was a bridge—a bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! It was beautifully built with handrails and all!

"He then saw the neighbor—his younger brother, coming toward them, with his hand outstretched. 'You're really remarkable—to build this bridge after all I've said and done.'

"The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then walked toward each other meeting in the middle, taking each other's hand. They then turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox onto his shoulder. The older brother yelled, 'No, wait! Stay for a few days. I have a lot of other projects for you to do.' 'I'd love to stay on,' the carpenter said, 'but I have a lot more bridges to build.'"

A PEACE PLAN

That carpenter had a peace plan. It was to weaken and tear down the walls that separate. And then he found a way to build relationship bridges to open up communication again. This is the same plan we should grab onto when we have grievances against each other as husbands and wives. We shouldn't let them pile up. We totally agree with something that Dr Sharon Hart Morris said:

"Whatever you do, don't allow your hurts to remain unresolved! The longer you leave them, the harder you will have to work to restore emotional connection to your relationship."

That's what Steve and I have learned. Grievances against each other pile up, roll around in our brains, and often become tainted by our own perspectives. And the longer they're there, the more damage they can do to our marital relationship. We need to get them out in the open, and dealt with in as short of a time as it is reasonable.

PLEASE RECOGNISE THAT:

"Most problems start with hurt. After the hurt mulls around in our mind for a while, it becomes infected. (You can end up being angry at 'the insensitive louse' that only cares about what they do.) That's why it's important to plan peace talks as soon as possible, before hurt turns to anger. ...Revealing hurt can build bridges of understanding and compassion. But venting hostility blows up bridges, because people are repelled by angry assaults." (Bill Hybels)

Are you one who blows up bridges in your family? Or are you a bridge builder—taking seriously the message of reconciliation that the Bible talks about? We need to keep in mind that:

"We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them." (2 Corinthians 5:19 – The Message)

Please look for ways to build relationship bridges, rather than separating walls that cause darkness to permeate our relationship. Keep in mind that we're told in Matthew 5:14-16: *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand. And it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

ALLOWING HIS LIGHT TO SHINE TO WEAKEN RELATIONSHIP WALLS

It's our prayer that we'll take this commissioning to heart to be Christ's representatives. We pray we will allow His light to shine, as His ambassadors wherever we are—especially within our homes.

"Watch what God does and then you do it, like children who learn proper behaviour from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that." (Ephesians 5:1-2 – The Message)

Lastly, as Christ's ambassadors, may we continually build relationship bridges.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (Romans 15:5-6)



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