

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

“My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.”—Psalms 101:6-7

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Tool of the Devil

By David Palmer

“Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).



CAN SOMEONE IN GOD’S CHURCH ever become a pawn in the hands of the devil? Have *you* ever allowed Satan to influence your decisions? We are warned to be careful—Satan is extremely subtle and can influence people much easier than we might think. How does Satan devour? The dictionary describes the word devour as to “prey upon,” “destroy,” “consume,” “bedevil,” “dispose of,” “make short work of,” “get caught up in” and “watch or listen with eager persistence.”

If someone wanted to devour and destroy God’s Church, how might they do it? During the time of Rome, the devil’s method was cruel persecution. Today with freedom of religion in most of the world, the devil uses a different set of rules—a method we call divide and conquer.

If someone wanted to devour and destroy God’s Church, how might they do it?

The destructiveness of division is illustrated by what Jesus said in Luke 11:17-18—any organization or effort that is divided will be so weakened that it will eventually fail.

The tool of gossip

One of the devil’s main tools, both outside the Church and especially inside the Church, is gossip. Any of us can so easily become guilty of gossip. Idle talk often degenerates into gossip. Furthermore, the information passed on does not have to be false to be gossip. Even truth, especially in a negative light, is gossip.

“Don’t let the facts get in the way of a good story” seems to be the slogan for most tabloid publications, based on the premise that inquiring minds want to know. But those stories are often based on innuendo and half-truths. A tiny drop of poison in a glass of water makes it undrinkable. In the same way, a little distortion added to truth makes it poisonous gossip. Paul used the same analogy in his letter to the Corinthian church when he wrote, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Remember the childhood saying, “Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me”? This simple children’s rhyme is untrue. Words can be more harmful. Physical bodies can heal, but wounds caused by gossip can last a lifetime. “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (Proverbs 17:9). “A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends” (Proverbs 16:28).



God hates gossip. “These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

“Here is a description of worthless and wicked people. They are constant liars, signaling their true intentions to their friends by making signs with their eyes and feet and fingers. Their perverted hearts plot evil. They stir up trouble constantly” (Proverbs 6:12-14, New Living Translation).

God’s interpretation of a fool is not someone who is harmless, as we often think today, but rather one who is dangerous. “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18). Gossiping lacks total discretion, and often involves meddling in someone else’s life “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips” (Proverbs 20:19). An individual who continually gossips is someone who spends words like a fool spends time and money.

In many ways gossip is like a time bomb. It can cause an explosion scattering fragments, bits and pieces of truth, mixed with exaggeration and lies.

Hurt and division

Gossip causes contention, hurt and destruction of character, serving only self-interest. “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer [one who gossips] are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Proverbs 18:7-8, King James Version).

Gossip creates anger, causing strife and division. “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Proverbs 26:20).



In many ways gossip is like a time bomb. It can cause an explosion, scattering fragments, bits and pieces of truth, mixed with exaggeration and lies. It will often cut people who were once the best of friends so deep that the wounds, at least in this lifetime, may never fully heal.

One of the most deadly weapons we can use is our tongue. The “tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness” (Psalm 52:2-3).

James issued this strong warning: “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell...But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:5-6, 8).

Gossip is one of the worst curses we have in this world; and if we let it, it can be a terrible curse for God’s Church. The problem is simple, but solving it is extremely difficult. We know what gossip is. We know we should not get involved, yet how often do we pay attention?

Notice this poignant instruction: “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:1-3).

Our Savior made it abundantly clear. The words we utter could eventually come back to haunt us. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:35-37).

Before we repeat a story, let’s ask a few questions? Is it true? Do I really need to know this? Do other people need to know it? Is it fair? Is it necessary? “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:37). This is an important lesson, a lesson we can all work on, because the last thing any of us want to be is a *tool of the devil*.

Liar, Liar

By Lorelei Nettles

How important is being truthful and just how much lying will we accept into our lives?



Inspired by John Elliott

I HEARD A SERMON RECENTLY on a subject that has always been very important to me—the subject of honesty. I have always prided myself on being truthful; but over my lifetime, I have, as is often said, “bent the truth.” Although it is now infrequent for me to do so, it nonetheless happens. I never intend to do it, and it is never blatant; but after the fact, when I review my words, I realize I have indeed lied. Sometimes we reason we have not truly lied because we never actually said the words. If we are caught doing something we don’t want to admit to, we may act innocent or talk around the deed, a tactic often used by children. This, too, is a form of lying. It is a sin I strive to correct in my life, as I am sure is true for most of God’s people.

In the sermon, we were reminded of how many lies people are willing to tell in their lives, even to those closest to them. Parents lie to their children about Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, Easter bunny and even where babies come from. Innocent enough, right? Wrong! When asked a sensitive question, people might lie. “Just a little white lie,” they say. People reason they have to tell these lies so as not to hurt someone’s feelings or to spare themselves from an embarrassing situation.



It has become commonplace for people to lie and then say they have misspoken if called on it. This often happens in politics, when each party makes up stories about the other, or if they try to make themselves look better than they really are. It is common for people to pad their resumes, tell you they know something when they really do not, but do not want to appear ignorant. It is a horrible practice benefitting no one.

Little white lies

In a 2007 *Family Circle* article titled “Truth, Lies and Consequences,” this line appeared: “Honesty isn’t always the best policy. Learn how to tell the difference between little white lies that help a marriage and those that hurt.” The article goes on to say, “Fibbing is okay when you want to protect your mate, but it can harm a marriage when you’re trying to protect yourself.” The overall message is that lies can hurt you, but at the same time, it is saying that it is okay at times to gloss over the truth so as not to hurt someone.

It has become commonplace for people to lie and then say they have misspoken if called on it.

I think the old saying “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all” applies here. Why do we find it necessary to cover our true feelings with untrue words? I, for one, would love to know if I am leaving my home looking worse for wear, or if I have spinach in my teeth before approaching someone at a party. I also would rather have you say nothing at all rather than telling me how fat I may be or that one of my ears may be longer than the other. These are not useful comments and are unnecessary to convey. A person is fully aware of his or her body flaws and may or may not choose to change them.

Think about the following scenarios. Have you ever gone to the dentist and had him ask you if you brush twice a day and floss? Do you tell him “yes,” even if you do not? Do you ever tell your husband or wife how good they look, while in the back of your mind you are thinking you wouldn’t be caught dead in what they are wearing? Have you ever told a police officer you were not speeding or never saw a sign? How about telling your parents you cannot come home to visit because... (insert lie here). When we stop and think about it, we can probably come up with many instances where we tell “white lies” or maybe even bold-faced lies.

Scamming the other guy

Even everyday advertisements are often based on lies. A product may be called new, even if the brand has been around for four decades. It’s new and improved, so does that mean last year’s model was junk? If it states it is an advanced formula, does that mean there was a basic formula? Stores may say they are having a big sale and then jack up their prices before marking them down. They may put one or two items on sale and then convince you that all the other items they have at higher prices are actually cheaper than before.



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Most of us have walked through a car lot, found a car we liked and then watched the salesman fidget as we try to offer a lower price before he goes running to the manager, who then at the last moment approves it. I once walked all the way to my car and had gotten in, when suddenly the salesman came running out the door with the good news—it seems my offer had suddenly been approved by the manager at the last minute. Oh what a surprise! These claims can be very subtle or in your face. We probably brush them off as just doing business, but if it walks like a duck...

The pastor also spoke about people living in poorer areas of the world who will use ploys and deception to con people out of their money. The people are poor and need the funds to survive, so it is okay, right? So what, if a few “richer” people lose a few dollars? What’s the big deal?

A product may be called new, even if the brand has been around for four decades. It's new and improved, so does that mean last year's model was junk?

It reminded me of a news story, broadcast in 2006. It talked about disingenuous people, outside the United States who make money by conning others. They are people in poorer countries and they have worked out a scam that, while making them rich, lays claim to plenty of unsuspecting victims and their cash. If you use e-mail, you have probably been contacted by one of them. You would recognize them by their words—the people who say they are princes, widows, etc. They have a lot of money, they say, but it is tied up in an account somewhere and they need your help and your money to get it out of the country and, of course, there would be a hefty cut for you if you comply. The greed of the person being called also plays a big part in their scam, but that is another subject.

People willingly send these scammers their cash and, of course, never see anything in return. It is such a lucrative business that some of the con artists have even made music videos about it, with lyrics that talk about how they have taken the money of stupid people, although they use their own term for the word “stupid.” They especially victimize those in America. They make their living off of lies and deception.

Father of lies

Who was and is the father of all lies? John 8:44 says that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

Satan would like nothing more than to separate us from God. He has made the most progress with us through lies, beginning in the Garden of Eden and continuing with his corruption of the true Holy Days, the calendar, the Sabbath and the list could go on and on. He works continually on breaking us down, and we help him do it. Every time we lie, we hurt our reputation, our friendships, extended families, our marriages and our business dealings with others. Think about it, how often have you wanted to deal with someone who you know has lied to you in the past? Being a liar is so bad that people who lie are named as being among the abominable.

Being a liar is so bad that people who lie are named as being among the abominable.

In Revelation 21:8 we read, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Throughout the Bible, we are told repeatedly how important truth is, and yet we are still so willing to lie. White lies, bending the truth, compromising the truth and making excuses do not make what you say any less of a lie.

God is truth

God wants nothing but truth to come from our lips. It is very important to Him and should be very important to us.

Christ said in John 3:21, “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

In Zechariah 8:16 we see, “These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace.”

God is truth and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Everything with God is truth—
 “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34: 6). In Zechariah 8:3, we are even told that Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth during God’s Kingdom. If God lied even a little, how could we follow Him? It is critical we remember how important truth really is to God. Do we want to be of God? To do so, we must all live according to His way and His way is truth.

*God is truth and He cannot lie.
 Everything with God is truth.*

Lastly, in Philippians 4:8 God says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, , whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

How to Live on \$25 a Month

By Melvin Rhodes

Try to imagine living on \$25 a month—less than \$1 a day. That’s how much the average worker earns in the West African country of Ghana.



YES, \$25 A MONTH. Based on the dollar’s value in 2001, that’s the average income in Ghana, which means many people live on less. Because of the gap between rich and poor, and because many at the upper end of the income scale are extremely wealthy, it is accurate to say that most Ghanaians live on less than \$25 each month. Yet Ghana isn’t the poorest country in the region.

Ironies abound. I'm writing this on my laptop computer at a desk in one of Ghana's relatively less-expensive hotels in Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti region and Ghana's second-largest city. One night in the hotel, with tax, costs the equivalent of two months' wages for the average Ghanaian, perhaps three months' wages for a hotel employee. My laptop, moderate by American standards, cost the equivalent of more than four years' wages for the average citizen.

What do people get for \$7 per month? One room and a chamber (hallway) in an old ramshackle house that saw better days 50 years ago is the norm.

It's impossible to eat a meal in a restaurant in this country without thinking of comparisons. Most meals are reasonably priced by Western standards, but the cost of one would feed a Ghanaian family of five for two days. So how do they do it? How do people here manage to live on such meager incomes? It's no wonder Ghanaians have often been called magicians.

Ghanaian realities

Let's see how it works.

Rent is cheap—unless you insist on good accommodation. Westerners who move to Ghana on one- or two-year employment contracts can pay \$2,000 per month in rent for a Western-style home (money that goes to the wealthier members of Ghanaian society). For most Ghanaians, rent is 30,000 to 50,000 cedis (pronounced “seedies”) per month. Sound like a lot? Not really. Fifty thousand cedis are about \$7! There are 7,000 cedis to \$1. Go to a bank with a \$100 bill, and you will walk out with 700,000 cedis in exchange.

What do people get for \$7 per month? One room and a chamber (hallway) in an old ramshackle house that saw better days 50 years ago is the norm. Kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared with the other residents of the building. Although homes are “only” 50,000 cedis per month, residents must pay at least six months' rent in advance, and three or four years' rent is becoming the norm, before a family can move in. That's as much as 2.4 million cedis. You don't have to be a mathematician to realize that 2.4 million cedis on a salary of 175,000 per month is impossible for most people. Added to the rent cost is the price of utilities—unreliable at the best of times. The average cost is about 50,000 cedis per month.



After rent and utilities, Ghanaians must still pay for food. A family of five needs about 30,000 cedis per day, enough for two meals. Breakfast is bread and porridge made from maize. The evening meal varies but usually consists of yam, cassava, plantain or a popular local dish called fufu made from cassava and plantain. These are skillfully pounded together to form a substance that feels like dried glue. Most of these staples are served with soup or stew made from local vegetables and the occasional fish or other meat.

But we haven't finished yet. There's transportation to pay for. Most people rely on taxis to get them to and from work. Few hire a taxi solely for themselves. Taxis travel along popular routes and pick up people who are going their way. It can

take two or three taxi rides to get to your destination, each one costing a few hundred or more cedis.

Then there are school fees. Even public schools charge students' families for educational services. About 40,000 cedis a month is needed per child. We've still not added up clothing (often castoffs from people in rich countries), medical costs (the birth of a baby, without complications, costs at least one month's wages), weddings and funerals.

Add all this up and you will find that the average couple with two children needs at least two million cedis a month just to survive at a minimal level. Two adults working full time earn an average of only one fifth that (an amount that is still taxable). So where does the other 80 percent come from?

Food is the greatest single expense. Some people can grow a great deal of their own food on ancestral land. But increasing urbanization has removed that option for many. Corruption is rife. Seemingly, everybody wants a "dash"—a little extra payment—for doing his work. You can't even get your own money out of the bank without tipping the teller. People in service industries all live off their tips. Foreign residents, and visitors in particular, are expected to be generous.

Many families have a close relative who immigrated to richer lands and is expected to send money on a regular basis to help his family back home. Some overseas relatives will even send back a car or some other expensive item so a family can start a business. Still, many people go hungry when that \$25 runs out, and many have to share accommodations with others.

In poor countries, the officials who run the country are the ones who receive the foreign aid, which they are then supposed to disburse to those most in need. This rarely happens.

What can we do to help?

Understandably appalled at such poverty, many people in the West want to do something about it. Often misguidedly thinking that government programs have solved their own domestic inequities, they believe that giving money to other countries will solve others' domestic inequities.



Foreign aid has been described as money taken from poor people in rich countries and given to rich people in poor countries. There is a great deal of truth in this. In rich countries, some of the wealthiest people often escape taxes through loopholes in the tax system aided by offshore bank accounts, leaving the burden of taxation on others. In poor countries, the officials who run the country are the ones who receive the foreign aid, which they are then supposed to disburse to those most in need. This rarely happens. I am not the only one who has paid exorbitant amounts for food items with the inscription clearly written on the side, *"A gift from the people of the United States of America. Not to be sold."*

The book of Proverbs has these cautionary words for people who take advantage of the poor to increase their own wealth: "He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich will surely come to poverty" (Proverbs 22:16). This ancient warning has proved true

countless times in Africa as corrupt officials enrich themselves at the expense of the poor, only to be overthrown and killed later in a revolution or coup. In 1979, many learned a bloody lesson when every previous Ghanaian president was killed after a revolution brought on by the increased gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Is writing off debts the solution?

Debt forgiveness is a popular concept. Many poor nations are heavily in debt to rich countries. They have to pay interest on top of the capital they owe. Although debt reduction could be helpful, we should realize that corrupt former leaders who stashed away the borrowed money in their own foreign bank accounts incurred much of it. If such corruption were a problem only of the past, then it might make sense to cancel the debts and relieve the burden of heavy monthly payments. But, sadly, this isn't the case. If anything, corruption is getting worse in many poor countries. Cancellation of debts would only lead to greater borrowing, with little or nothing achieved as the cycle simply repeats itself.

The G8 countries (the wealthiest seven nations in the world plus Russia) think they have a solution to this in the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The goal is to cancel so-called "third-world debt" but to ensure no further abuses. Money donated or lent will be for specific projects. Lenders will require proof that the money will go for the intended purpose. However, bureaucrats will have to do the verifying, which would surely lead to more corruption.

What about giving money through private charities? This is a better idea. Private operations do better at getting aid to people in need. Whereas an employee of a prominent Western governmental-aid organization admitted that 80 percent of the aid his country sent simply disappeared, one small church group claimed it loses only 5 percent. But governments that don't seem interested in helping their own people often hamper charities.

Jesus said the poor would always be with us (John 12:8). There will always be those who have less than we do. Also, poverty is relative. A book published this year noted that the minimum hourly wage needed just to pay for the basics in the United States is \$8.89, yet nearly 30 percent of Americans earn less than that (Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in Boom-Town America*). When I pointed this out to a group of Ghanaians I work with, they agreed they could live quite comfortably on \$8.89 per hour. With a legal minimum wage of only 5,500 cedis per day (that's less than 80 cents *per day*), \$8.89 per hour would make anybody living in Ghana an aristocrat.

Christians who are aware of history know that mankind has never established a perfect government and that men have always treated their fellow men badly.

Reflecting on Christ's words also makes us realize that poverty, traced to its roots, is caused by human nature, which is why we will not rid the world of poverty until human nature is changed. Christ said there would always be poverty because He knew that while man ruled himself without obedience to the laws of God there would be never-ending human suffering.

Nation's potential not realized

Ghana hasn't always been poor. Before independence, in 1957, Ghanaians enjoyed a per-capita income higher than that of some European countries. Great Britain gave the Gold Coast (Ghana's

former name) independence ahead of other African nations, because it was richer and better educated than many of the others, and because there seemed to be no reason that this happy state of affairs could not continue. However, after Ghana gained independence, corruption and economic mismanagement proliferated. For 25 years, the country continued a downward spiral from which it seemed impossible to free itself.

The last few years have seen some improvements, but much remains to be done. The situation before independence illustrates that Ghana has the potential to take care of itself. No reason exists for people having to live in the appalling poverty that plagues so many. A few decades of good government could put the country back on its feet and enable ordinary people to live on their incomes.

Many people have confidence in the government of Ghana's president, John Kufour. They have high hopes that his administration will move the country forward. His first priority is to stabilize the nation's currency.

Priorities also include improving the infrastructure, encouraging foreign investment and stamping out corruption. Abolishing visa requirements would encourage tourists to visit this country, which is rich in African traditional culture and one of the friendliest places on earth.

All mankind will realize full potential

For the sake of the people of Ghana, we hope these goals will be realized.

Christians who are aware of history know that mankind has never established a perfect government, and that men have always treated their fellow men badly. Only the establishment of a completely different government—the Kingdom of God—will put an end to all the misery that exists in the world. To this end, Christ told His followers to pray for arrival of that Kingdom and that God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

The prophetic book of Isaiah tells us that "with justice he will judge the poor and defend the humble in the land with equity" (Isaiah 11:4, Revised English Bible). The good news for Christians is that Jesus will return to establish His and His Father's government on earth. One of His priorities will be to end the suffering and exploitation of the poor.

Recommended reading

Even in relatively wealthier countries many of us struggle with money troubles. To learn how to handle your money based on biblical principles, please request our free booklet [*Managing Your Finances*](#).

Time-Out!

By John Gould

A time-out is not only useful in sports, it can be a time of rejuvenation you call for yourself.



IN ATHLETICS SUCH AS BASEBALL OR FOOTBALL, a time-out is often called when the team needs to stop and consider what has to be done.

How about you? A time-out can be called any time we need to confer with someone else—a parent, a mentor, a companion, a subordinate, a family member, a friend—even God.

Steady makes ready

The noise and the hype of competition in sports sometimes can be overwhelming. The time-out is an opportunity for players to steady their nerves and focus on the needs of the situation, both strategic and tactical. Sports commentators sometimes call it clock control, when a team wants to score a final few points and deny the same opportunity to the opposition.



Football teams practice the “two-minute drill” when they need to be especially focused on their playing, the timing and especially the player-to-player assignments. Both basketball and football are sports that depend tremendously on timing, and seconds can separate success from general disorder and failure.

No one deliberately wants to fail in this life or in our sports and recreation. One way to ensure that we do have the optimum opportunity for success is to occasionally take a time-out.

Jesus took time-outs

Jesus Christ is the perfect example for all humanity—not just for the pastor of a church, not just for the deacons, not just for the family next door, but also for you and me.

Think about it. One of Jesus' time-outs is described in Matthew 14, just after he finished feeding the crowd with the five small loaves and two fishes of a boy's lunch. "Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there (verses 21-23).

One of the best times to take a time-out is when you are already alone. Perhaps when walking between classes or taking a coffee break at work.

Following this prayer time, conferring with God the Father, Jesus appeared to the disciples by walking on water. That's the kind of regeneration and renewal that taking a time-out with the right person can bring!

God also makes a special opportunity for us to have a time-out to confer with him. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden," Christ says, "and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Perhaps you've read this passage and this promise before. But perhaps you never noticed the possible connection with baseball, football, or basketball. It's there!

One of the best times to take a time-out is when you are already alone. Perhaps when walking between classes or taking a coffee break at work. It helps to stop momentarily and lift our eyes upward from the ground, where we tend to avoid stumbling over the many obstacles in our way. It usually gives me a refreshing surge of mental and spiritual energy, a surge that can often last for an hour or more.

Checking the field

A quarterback has a definite need to keep focused on what's ahead and around—to get the ball to the receiver and also to avoid being tackled. His eyes must be quick and he can't take much time to make a decision.

This can be looked at like a quick time-out. We need to make a decision but still need time to think. We grab a quick look at reality and are able to regain focus among the chaos around us.

We can take a breather and refocus, maybe repeat portions of Bible scriptures or just refocus on what is important. There are hundreds, even thousands, of ways that a time-out can be utilized.

Every once in a while we must take a time-out!



My Father's Saw

By Hector Earle

The feel of it in my hands brought back memories of a hard-working man who cared for his family. It also reminded me of the hope for the future.



IT WAS ON THE TOP SHELF, hanging from a nail above my workbench—my father's saw. I brought it home a decade ago, one of a few relics I found in his shed when my sister and I cleaned house shortly after his demise.

“My old bucksaw,” he used to say. “Best thing for sawing up slabs.”

I reached up, brought the old saw down and touched the thin serrated blade. Still sharp. Oh, how I still remember the sound of that back-and-forth movement. Fighting back the tears, I laid it down on the workbench and reflected on the memories hidden inside this simple tool of my father.

That saw was a special connection, a bond beyond words, between dad and me. It seemed that he would always find some answer in wood that otherwise might have eluded him. Thinking back over his past, that should not have surprised me. The forest was in his blood from the very moment he set foot in the woods as a lumberjack and a sawmill operator at the tender age of 22.

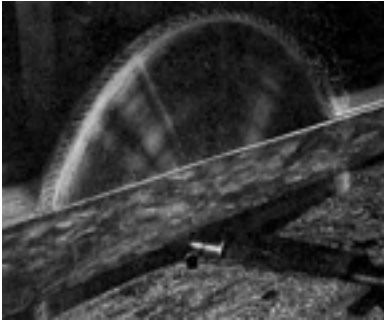
Many frosty evenings, as I held those slabs tightly against that old wood horse, I was given some nugget of truth as I watched the junks fall upon the frosty ground.

“Hard work will never hurt anyone,” he would often say as he loaded up my tired arms with kindling, tight to my neck.

Yes, he was the epitome of hard work. When it was all said and done, he measured success by the sweat of his brow, whether it was a box full of wood, a full barrel of water or food in the cupboards.



Rearing 10 children in an age when money was scarce and material possessions few was not an easy task. Yet somehow my father saw to it that each of us was well cared for. Our welfare always seemed to be his number one concern.



I was convinced as a child that my dad was among one of Newfoundland/Labrador's finest lumberjacks. One thing I know for sure, he spent practically his whole working life in front of a saw, as he pushed that old carriage to cut lumber to perfection. I can almost picture it, as if it was yesterday. I would be standing right beside him in that loud sawmill, watching in awe as he guided that push-bench until he was satisfied with the outcome. I thought he practically

walked on water.

That saw was a special connection between dad and me.

They say it takes awhile before one can understand the value of a father. When you are child, it seems you are too preoccupied with other things to appreciate a father's advice or the little things that a dad does for you. The great writer Mark Twain once said, "When I became 30 years old, all of a sudden my father became very wise." It does take awhile indeed sometimes before a father's advice sinks in. I often wonder why, in childhood, we rush to grow up and then miss the value of a loving dad.

I used to wonder why my dad never had much time to sit and play with us. All I knew was when I needed something fixed, he found a way to get it done. I used to wonder too why season after season he never took time off. It never occurred to me until later in life that we were the reason.

My father was never a church-going man when we were young. He used to say that he didn't need religion, despite my mom's continuous prayers to see him converted. But before he died, dad made his peace with God and repented of his sins.

"Hard work will never hurt anyone," he would often say.

That was a most comforting thought that day as I held that dear piece of family history—my father's saw—in my hands. For that, I am eternally grateful. I know some day I will see him again in the resurrection. Which one, I will leave to God.

My thoughts that day were interrupted by my wife's call, "It's supper time."

I placed the old relic back in its rightful place above the bench and left the precious memories locked up in my father's saw.

"Your eyes are red," she said, as I took my first sip of tea.

"A little sawdust in my eyes," I said.

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