

“The Big Three”

Proverbs 4:10-13

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One of my favorite teachers at the Seminary was a New Testament professor, Dr. Harold Songer. Every lecture was presented with confidence and clarity and I took extensive notes.

On two occasions, I recall him moving from behind the lectern and sitting on the edge of the desk. He looked at us and said, “Put your pencils down. Today, I want to talk to you about life.” The first time he did this, he talked about what it meant to be a parent. The second time, he shared with us what it meant to be a pastor. Both lectures were priceless.

Today, I want you to put your pencils down. If I had a table, I would sit on it. I want to talk to you about life.

I don't imply by this that I don't do this every Sunday. This is always my goal. I suppose I am going to do it a little differently this morning, though. Instead of dissecting a passage of scripture as I usually do, I want to share with you from the passages of my life. I want to tell you three experiences in life that have had a great impact on me.

I'll begin with the time I went to the funeral home and saw the mortician embalming a corpse. What made this so startling, other than the fact I was only twenty-one years old, was that I had been talking to the deceased less than an hour before he died. He was a patient at the hospital but gave no indication that he was moments away from dying.

I'll never forget how I felt standing in that room. I could hardly believe that this man who carried on a conversation with me moments prior to this was gone. It seemed impossible.

What did I learn from this incident? I learned how quickly change can come, even radical change. Life is fragile, we are vulnerable and death is final. Life is too precious to waste a moment and procrastination is one of our greatest enemies. If something needs to be said, say it. If something needs to be done, do it. As I read some time after this experience, “So live your life that when it comes time to die, that is all you have to do.”

Another experience in life that had a great impact on me was going to the anatomy lab at a medical school. Jackie and I did this last fall while visiting our daughter and son-in-law who is in medical school. There were eighteen cadavers in the room and we looked at just about all of them. It was late at night and we were the only ones there, so we took our time.

What did I learn from this experience? I learned how foolish it is to look at people and see differences rather than similarities.

On the outside, these cadavers were completely different. They were different shapes, sizes, ages, colors and nationalities. On the inside, they were the same. They all had a heart, a brain, lungs, ribs, kidneys, veins, arteries, muscles and tendons. By merely looking on the inside of these cadavers, I could not tell you if they were black, white, American, Oriental, pretty, or ugly. They were all the same.

Furthermore, these people were similar in their need to love and be loved. All of them were searching for the same things in life, meaning, purpose, peace, security, joy, happiness and fulfillment.

I stood there and thought how foolish it is for us to be prejudice and despise our differences rather than see what we have in common and embrace our differences. I suppose this was my “Vision in Joppa” similar to Peter’s in Acts 10:9-48. We are all God’s children and there is no place in this world for feelings of superiority or hate.

The last experience I shall mention today that had a great impact upon me was visiting a Third World country. I have been on mission trips to several Third world countries and have seen abject poverty. I saw tens of thousands of people in a two square mile area on the outskirts of Nairobi living in cardboard shacks with no sanitary conditions, medical care, transportation and very little if any food. I saw adults in Russia cry because it was the first time in their lives they had been treated by a dentist or doctor. I saw children in Africa who could hardly walk because their legs were covered with open sores due to unsanitary living conditions. I saw people in Brazil stumbling and getting injured because they had no glasses or hope of ever getting any. I saw people in Honduras suffering from respiratory diseases because they cook with open fires in their little homes and have no ventilation.

I have been to parts of the world where I had to explain what a window is and did not even attempt to describe a grocery store, a department store or a hospital.

What have I learned from my travels to Third World countries? I learned that we have been blessed so we can be a blessing to others. One thing my travels have taught me is how fortunate we are to live in this country. We have so much!

In light of this, I believe God will ask us on Judgement Day “What did you do to help alleviate suffering and pain in the world? How did you use your time, talents and resources to make the world a better place?”

I am not implying that everyone needs to go to a Third World country on a mission trip. I am saying, however, that all of us need to see people who are carrying heavy burdens and reach out to help them. We need to be good stewards and live with less so we can give more. We even need to pray that God will show us how we can be used to make the world a better place.

I refer to these experiences as “My Big Three.” Actually, I could add many more to the list. This morning, I want to challenge you to write down three experiences in life that have had a great impact on you. Then, share them with family and friends. I believe all of you will benefit immeasurably.