

Things I've Learned Over the Years

By Paul R. Blake

Some lessons come later in life. I might be tempted to say, "Why couldn't I received these lessons when I was younger and could have made good use of them?!" Here begins the first lesson: sometimes we have to grow in faith, wisdom, experience, and patience before the lessons can be understood. I am thankful that the longsuffering Lord gave me time and space to learn them.

Children need to hear their parents pray for forgiveness and confess that they have the same temptations as their children, not to imply permission or justification for the children's sins, but to communicate that they are striving together against the same sins.

Explaining bad behavior is not the same as excusing it; excusing it is not the same as accepting it; accepting it is not the same as forgiving it. Forgiveness has conditions: honest regret and unqualified confession.

Wherever there is guilt, there is a "should."

Your heart is a mission field for your mind and faith.

God never violates our "no." Free will is a blessing to the faithful and a burden to the rebellious.

Doing everything perfectly results in no profit (Rom. 4:1-4). God has to add to our account to make us profitable (vs.8). "When you have done all you can, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have only done our duty" (Luke 17:10).

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to a better understanding of ourselves.

Mature love will inevitably experience pain. Pain ultimately reinforces mature love.

God doesn't tell us why we suffer; He just tells us how to get through it. If we knew the why, we would focus on fixing something that cannot be fixed rather than focusing on enduring what will eventually pass.

No one on his deathbed ever regretted obeying the gospel.

At the moment of exhalation: archers release their arrows, weight-lifters release their hefts, mothers release their babies in childbirth, and Christians release the encumbrance of the flesh in this world as they pass to Paradise. Each of them experiences a great relief and ease from the task of carrying their burdens. It is an exhalation that expresses a profound liberation.

Jesus is not the Firstborn redeemed by a lamb (Gen. 13); He is the Lamb that redeems the firstborn.

The things that are true of Christ are true of me when I am in Christ. I am free to live the way Christ wants me to live (Rom. 6-8).

Ahab was a successful king: politically, economically, and militarily; but by the only standard that matters, Ahab was a failure. A truly successful leader must submit to God. This is true for presidents and politicians, as well as elders and evangelists.

The atheist has to look at a baby sleeping, at a child at play, at a summer sunrise, at a quiet snowfall, at aged folks laughing, at a sun-warmed ripened tomato, at a dew-drenched rose, at the star sprinkled sky, and at spring bursting forth and try very hard not to think about God. How sad is his life; how tragic is his passing!

I will not say, "Here endeth the lesson." Lessons come daily. I must be a humble student, alert and watchful for them.

More than Anything in the World

There once was an eager student who wanted to gain wisdom and insight. He went to the wisest of the town, Socrates, to seek his counsel. Socrates was an old soul and had great

knowledge of many things. The boy asked the town sage how he too could acquire such mastery. Being a man of few words, Socrates chose not to speak, but to illustrate.

He took the child to the beach and, with all of his clothes still on, walked straight out into the water. He loved to do curious things like that, especially when he was trying to prove a point. The pupil gingerly followed his instruction and walked into the sea, joining Socrates where the water was just below their chins. Without saying a word, Socrates reached out and put his hands on the boy's shoulders. Looking deep into his student's eyes, Socrates pushed the student's head under the water with all his might.

A struggle ensued, and just before a life was taken away, Socrates released his captive. The boy raced to the surface and, gasping for air, choking from the saltwater, looked around for Socrates in order to seek his retaliation on the sage. To the student's bewilderment, the old man was already patiently waiting on the beach. When the student arrived on the sand, he angrily shouted, "Why did you try to kill me?" The wise man calmly retorted with a question of his own: "Boy, when you were underneath the water, not sure if you would live to see another day, what did you want more than anything in the world?"

The student took a few moments to reflect, then went with his intuition. Softly he said, "I wanted to breathe." Socrates, now illuminated by his own huge smile, looked at the boy comfortingly and said, "Ah! When you want wisdom and insight as badly as you wanted to breathe, it is then that you shall have it."

There is much of a spiritual nature that we do not receive because we don't want it enough. But, when we desire knowledge of God's word, when we desire a close relationship with God, when we desire wisdom (the ability to make good decisions) to such extent that those things take first priority, when we truly want them more than anything else in the world, then they lie within our grasp.

Our problem often is that we desire them, but we also desire many other things. That's why Jesus told to rich young ruler to sell everything and follow him (Mark 10:21). He wanted to see how strong the young man's desire was. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.' " (Matt. 16:24-25, NASV).

You Can

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

(John Wesley)

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all..." (Gal. 6:10).

A Moments Wisdom

--From fanaticism to barbarism is only a step.

--Little strokes fell great oaks.

--An empty bag cannot stand upright.

--A little house well filled, a little field well tilled, a little wife well willed are great riches.

--Where there is marriage without love, there will soon be love without marriage.

--Useless laws weaken necessary laws.

--A man should never be ashamed to admit he has been in the wrong, which is simply saying in other words, he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

--To love is not to give of your riches, but to reveal to others their riches, their gifts, their value; and to trust them and their capacity to grow. So it is important to approach people in their brokenness and littleness, gently, so gently, not forcing yourself on them, but accepting them as they are, with humility and respect. (Jean Vanier)