



Christ Our Priority!

by Mark Brunner

If You Want to Dance! (Matthew 8:21-22)

TWO OF MY THREE DAUGHTERS ARE DANCERS. They have taken classes since they were three or four and one, Hannah, yet has three more years of commitment to dance before she is finished with instruction. Dance, especially a commitment to pointe and ballet, is extremely demanding physically and emotionally. There are the three to four lessons every week that must be fit somehow into an otherwise busy schedule of home school classes and and personal time.

Dance commands a regimen that only the strong and the committed can afford. There are the sore muscles, broken toes and many, many hours of practice, practice, practice.

Recently I looked at Hannah's feet and saw the bruises and already gnarled toes. For a fourteen-year-old it appeared that she had the feet of a woman much older. I asked her if she thought it was worth the pain? Not even looking up she answered me plainly, almost methodically, "If you want to dance, the pain is secondary."

Over the triple doorways of the cathedral of Milan there are three inscriptions spanning the splendid arches. Over one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath it is the legend, "All that which pleases is but for a moment."

Over the other is sculptured a cross, and there are the words, "All that which troubles us is but for a moment." But underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle is the inscription, "That only is important which is eternal." If we always realize these three truths, we will not let trifles trouble us, not be interested so much in the passing pleasures of the hour. We should live for the permanent and the eternal. (Source Unknown.)

Being a Christian is like being a dancer. If you want the goal, really crave the outcome of eternal life, then you have to be willing to accept the pain that goes along with it. There really isn't any way of getting around it. Following Jesus means following Jesus from the low and humble manger to the rough and splintered surface of Calvary's cross. There is only one pathway to heaven and it isn't free of pain and suffering. Each of us needs to take stock of the costs and regularly examine our walk. As my daughter must regularly check and care for her feet, so we too need to make our faith a priority, always fussing and primping over it, but never allowing the bruises and breaks that affect it to stop our walk to glory. Following Christ is hard work. But, if we are willing to make it the priority in our lives, He will give us the ability to overcome the pain so that we can find the gain.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

A Domino Standing! (2 Chronicles 1:11-12)

I RECENTLY HEARD A RADIO REPORT about a group of young men in Holland who were trying to break the world's record for domino toppling. For many weeks they plied their skills, setting up one domino after another until there were ten's of thousands in place. Knowing that all it would take is one small mistake for the entire setup to topple, they made a wise choice. They built their set inside of a locked warehouse, making sure that the windows were closed. They also built into the set a failsafe design. Every thousand dominoes they placed a small stop that would be removed later. If something should happen to begin a cascade, the stop would prevent the entire set from being knocked over.

The domino players had made the right choice. They were soon rewarded when a small sparrow somehow got into their set. The sparrow tripped a section of dominoes into falling, but the failsafe stop prevented the entire set from falling. Making prevention their top priority ensured that their other priority, breaking the record, would be saved.

What we value as a first priority says much about where we are going in this life and how we intend to get there. Soon after Angi and David's sixth anniversary, the couple's home burned to the ground. Angi's first act, when they were allowed to hunt through the blackened remains, was to search for their photo albums. When she went to tell David that the pictures had indeed survived, she found him carefully placing in a box some charred, folded pieces of paper—their courtship love letters. "As I watched David kneeling there in the ashes," she says, "I was overcome with the certainty that we were meant for each other. There, in the face of our greatest tragedy, our first thoughts were not of our material loss but of the potential loss of these precious parts of our life together. As I knelt to help him with the letters, I was certain that we hadn't lost anything that mattered after all." (Reader's Digest, August, 1982.)

King Solomon knew the wisdom in putting the right things first. When God asked him what he wanted out of life, Solomon chose a fail-safe, a first-thought that would bless the rest of his life no matter what trials or troubles might happen along to "knock over" all his best work. Solomon asked for wisdom. He ordered his priorities in such a way that should all else fail, wisdom would provide the margin of error he would need to make sure that his other priorities, ruling a nation and building his kingdom, would not be jeopardized.

Putting God first may not insure of us never coming face to face with trouble and hardships. But, when God is our failsafe, we can be sure that when troubles start, they won't go on forever. There will always be a domino standing.

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Move Away From Our Blessings! (Rev 3:17)

WHAT A BLESSING! How often have you said it? Something happens for good, you gain something or increase in some way and you declare, “What a blessing!”

I felt that way over a year ago when the Lord bestowed upon me a very large blessing. He brought me employment when I needed it the most. We simply didn't know which way to turn. Our finances were so stretched and the future appeared dark and unforgiving. He gave me an opportunity to work again and the future, although still murky, began to brighten considerably.

As I look back on those days not long past, I still feel the impact of that blessing. My heart is filled with thanksgiving because God is a gracious God. Yet, it is always good to keep things in perspective. As worthy and essential as employment may be, it is not more needful than some things. It is good to be reminded that however basic earning a living is, God gives us other things, things much more essential and good that must never be regarded second-rate even though they might seem of lesser importance at the time.

Elsa no longer remembers what the argument was about, but it began before breakfast one morning and continued as Steve started off to work. “How can you just go off like that?” cried Elsa. “We haven't settled a thing!” Then Steve did what few men as ambitious and driven as Steve is could do: he turned around and went to the phone and canceled all his appointments for that day, “saying to me, in effect, that our relationship meant more than business meetings, saying that I'd married a man who would sacrifice work for love.” (Reader's Digest, August, 1982)

God may have richly blessed each of us in many ways. There is nothing wrong with having material things to ease our way in this life. These are indeed blessings from the Lord. The Laodiceans, a congregation richly blessed with many good things were such a people in the Apostle Paul's day. They seemed to have it all and they reveled in the warmth of those blessings. They had become content and secure in them to the point that these became more important than faith itself. They equated material blessings with God's approval of their faith when all along their faith had become weak and lukewarm. They weren't willing to sacrifice what seemed basic and important

for that which was founded in love, their faith in Christ. Each of us must be willing to move away from our “blessings” to keep focused on those things which are truly needful. Sacrificing our blessings for love is the mark of a Christian mindful of what is truly important in this life.

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God on the Shelf! (Haggai 1:9)

WHERE DO WE GET OFF THE TRACK when it comes to making godly priorities in our lives? When you look at the society that we live in, it is hardly a difficult question to answer. Shopping at Wal-Mart the other day, we happened into an end-of-aisle display of boxer shorts. As we passed the display I noticed that one of the pairs of shorts had emblazoned on it this little phrase. “It IS all about me!” We live in a society that is sold on the idea that everything is about us. Where once selfishness was seen as a disgrace, it has now become cute, a short phrase on a pair of boxers. What’s even worse, many are buying into it. “Why shouldn’t it be all about me? Who else is going to put me first?”

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck. “Where’s Harry?” he was asked. “Harry had a stroke of some kind. He’s a couple of miles back up the trail.” “You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?” “Well,” said the hunter, “I figured no one was going to steal Harry.” (Bits & Pieces, March 3, 1994, p. 5.)

When the children of Israel returned from their exile in Babylon, then went to work doing what seemed most important at the time, rebuilding their houses and fields. It had been a long time since they had inhabited the land that God had given them and they were filled with an enthusiasm to get to work and rebuild their paradise beyond the Jordan. Unfortunately, in their haste to bring back the prize of milk and honey, they forgot the most important thing—the God who gave them the land in the first place. Figuring He would always be there and no one was going to steal their God from them, they put themselves as priority one and put their God on the shelf. Although homes and fields were

important, God reminded them that these without Him were nothing but dust, easily blown away in the wind.

Is life about us or is it about the God who gave us life in the first place? God wants you and I to put Him first in our lives, then others and lastly ourselves. It isn't cute to be selfish nor is it practical. Life is far more meaningful than a trite phrase on a pair of boxers. Life is all about the God who created it, designed it and chooses when to give it and end it. It has everything to do with Him and little to do with us.

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Falling In Love Is Not Enough! (Matthew 6:33)

WHEN I FIRST MET MY WIFE these many years ago, it was love at first sight. Although I had dated other girls, the first time our eyes met at that restaurant, across the salads and glasses of water, I just knew that she was the one. I had found the love of my life.

Nevertheless, despite my strong feelings, I was also suddenly struck by the thought that I really knew very little about her. We had met just weeks prior in a church choir and I had only spoken with her once or twice. I knew that she was from a little town in northern Wisconsin, that she and I shared the same faith and that her last name was Vieth. Other than that, I didn't know much more. It was at that moment I decided to make getting to know her a top priority in my life. As we munched our salads and waited for the main course to be served, our conversation quickened and the information began to flow. That evening and in the weeks and months to follow, we saw each other often. I hungered to know everything about her in the shortest possible time. My life had become dominated by thoughts of Holly.

Marriage was high on my priority list when I met my future wife. But, I also knew that if this was going to work, getting to know her had to be my top priority. How sad it is that when it comes to our faith, we seldom attach the same urgency to getting to know God. If we long to make Him first in our

lives, how can we do it when we don't know who He is? Wouldn't it be a good idea to match priority with purpose?

Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas cowboys said, "The thrill of knowing Jesus is the greatest thing that ever happened to me . . . I think God has put me in a very special place, and He expects me to use it to His glory in everything I do . . . whether coaching football or talking to the press, I'm always a Christian . . . Christ is first, family second and football third." (Source Unknown.)

The Bible tells us that we are to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). If we are going to make God number one in our lives there is only one way to do it. We need to "seek" him constantly. A wedding banquet has been prepared for you and I in Heaven and the time may not be far off when we will be personally attending it. Time is of the essence. Looking across the "salads" and just longing for God isn't sufficient if we want to be joined with Him in eternity. We need to fill our thoughts with Him every day; getting to know Him through His Word, consistent worship and frequent prayer. Falling in love with God is great. Getting to know Him makes the love worthwhile and . . . eternal.

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