



Acceptance!

by Mark Brunner

## *Love And Understanding!* (Proverbs 21:3)

My son Dan and son-in-law Andy helped me with a big job this past weekend. Since my knees aren't in real good shape any more, they volunteered to install a new ridge vent on our A-Frame home. The job was an arduous one since the pitch on an A-Frame is steep and there isn't any way of doing the job practically—except by saddling the ridge and pulling yourself along ripping off the old vent and then pulling yourself along again installing and shingling the new vent. Dan has always had a problem with heights, so the job was even more difficult for him. I watched from the ground as he tentatively crawled along the ridge, mindful of long drop, the tools he was grasping and the work he had to do. I had done the job a few times over the years and was pretty comfortable up there. He, however, was tentative. I smiled as I watched him inch his way along the ridge knowing he was trying to look confident even when he was a little apprehensive.

As you and I go through life, we often find ourselves trying hard, but going along tentatively. How does God view that?

Here's a thought from Joseph Mazzella: "I was in a local grocery store the other day when suddenly I heard the sound of breaking glass behind me. I turned around to see what had happened. A young mother had turned away from her shopping cart for a second to look in one of the freezers. That

second was all it took for her baby boy to test out his newfound ability to grab things from his seat in the cart. Unfortunately, the big jar of spaghetti sauce was more than he could handle. His arms were still outstretched where the jar had been a few seconds before. On the floor below the puddle of red was slowly oozing across the aisle. As I glanced at them, I saw the baby had finally taken his eyes off the shattered jar and looked up at his Mom. Instead of scolding or giving him an angry look she smiled down at him with eyes full of gentle understanding. Her tender gaze never changed not even when a friend gave her some good-natured teasing about the mess. I knew then that this Mom was going to give her son a lifetime full of laughter and love.” (Joseph Mazzella)

I think that God must smile down on us with that same look at times. Often we're tentative like Dan. And, sometimes as hard as we try, we often make a mess of things too. We want to learn to love. Still, we stumble, fall, let important things slip through our fingers, and even break a few hearts along the way. God never gives up on us, however. He forgives us and fills our hearts, souls, and lives with His gentle understanding and unconditional love. May we all learn to love each other as He loves us; may we all learn to live our lives in joy, laughter, love, and understanding—always trying our best.

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

## *Remembering Dandelions!* (Matthew 12:26-29)

Recently, as I was walking past the old Airstream parked in our driveway, I saw a glint of light near one of the trailer tires. I reached down to pick up an odd-looking bolt. It had an odd triangular marking on the head and it was a bolt with a hex-head indentation. That meant it had to be turned with hex wrench; a type of bolt that I seldom-used around Beech Springs. I thought for a moment and then plopped it into my pocket. I'm not sure where I put it but I think it ended up in one of those catchall cans in the back garage. The mystery of the odd bolt was solved, however, the next time Holly and I went camping. As I pulled out the awning, one of the support arms felt right off the

awning. That odd bolt I had carelessly tossed into a can would have uniquely fit the missing hole in the awning arm.

Sadly, that's the way we sometimes treat relationships; quick to discard or relegate to storage only to miss the value later.

Here's a thought from Mary Daniel: "How well I remember being taught how and when to pull out the dandelions. But oh, how I loved the fluffy, soft, yet sometimes prickly little yellow 'flowers'. Many are the moms who have received countless beautiful bright bouquets proudly presented from the grip of a tight little fist. How we used to love sitting in a field or on the grass, seeded white fluffy dandelion in hand, taking a big breath and letting it out as we blew it away bit by bit. There was a time too, years later, when some friend's came to visit, and during the course one afternoon, I sauntered off into the field, paring knife and stainless steel bowl in hand, to carefully gather dandelion leaves to be brought home, washed, and made into a delicious salad. Or, once tasted, who could forget the pungent tangy taste of dandelion wine? Yet to most, it's considered a weed. Often, dandelions lie amongst the flowers, so to pull them up, we may also pull up those things which we consider to be more important, or of more value. How like life that is. Often, by finding some things unacceptable, we end up missing out on some things priceless in value." (Mary Daniel)

Life is like a dandelion. There are members of society or life situations that some consider useless; yet others receive them as having been given for a purpose, to learn from, to teach—they're priceless. To remove them or to take them away would cause those lessons to go unlearned; opportunities to help or make changes gone. Just as God gave us the dandelions, He also gives us each person, each situation, and with them, an ability to accept or reject them. When we're faced with what we may consider "weeds" in our life, it's best to clutch those relationships in our hand that we might use them as opposed to putting them in our pockets and losing them.

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## *Believing In Believing!* (Romans 8:15)

Accepting who you are and the hand that God dealt you, so to speak, isn't always easy. Most of us, if we're honest, often entertain thoughts of grandeur beyond the physical and intellectual realities of our lives. I remember a friend of mine, Mike, who taught me a valuable lesson about not only accepting our shortcomings, but actually excelling in them. We went to college together and, in our early twenties, competed to see who would go bald first. Mike had that won easily by the time he was a mere 24. His nickname was "Cueball" and Mike never objected to it. He polished his bald spot to a reflective sheen every day. And, every summer he entered the "baldy" contest at the county fair. Mike taught me that any hand God deals out, is a hand you can play. It's just a matter of accepting less even though you might want more.

As Christians, life can often come across as unfair. We live the Godly life, but the "bad stuff" just keeps happening.

Here's a story from James Anderson: "Many years ago in college I knew a girl named Claire. On a physical, material level, Claire had absolutely nothing going for her. She had a dumpy figure and a bad complexion. Her father was a drunken bum who had deserted his family. Her older brother, a drug addict, was always in and out of jail. When I first met Claire I was sure she was the ultimate wallflower. I didn't think there was any way she could compete for acceptance in a college-aged society that is attracted to physical beauty and material success. But to my delight, I learned that every-body in the group liked Claire and loved to be around her. She had lots of friends. And eventually she married the nicest guy in our college department. What was her secret? Claire simply believed what she perceived herself to be: a child of God. She accepted herself for who God said she was in Christ, and she confidently committed herself to God's great goal for her life: to be conformed to His image and to love people. She wasn't a threat to anyone. Instead, she was so positive and caring toward others that everyone loved her." (James Anderson-Harvest House Publishers)

Claire's experiences illustrate the importance of establishing our Christian lives on what we believe instead of how we behave. She knew that she

couldn't compete with the world, so she gladly accepted her spiritual heritage, believed God, and lived accordingly. We need a firm grip on God's Word before we will experience much success at practical Christianity. We need to understand who we are as a result of who God is and what He has done. We are the byproduct of a solid belief system. It may not be the most romantic or materially fulfilling life, but it's the hand that God has dealt us. Now He expects us to play through and make the best of it, bad stuff or not. That's what winning is all about.

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## *There Are Trees and There Are Trees!* (Romans 8:15)

Variety is the spice of life! Holly reminds me of this quaint old adage often. The reason? I tend to be someone comfortable with things as they are, patterned and predictable. Change isn't something I look forward to. And, the spur of the moment has always been something I prefer to avoid. Recently, however, that which I have long avoided happened. It was Friday night and Holly said let's go do something! I said “What?” and she said, “Who cares?” Before I knew it I was in the car parked in front of a local pizza establishment. Next followed the park and a trip to two or three stores for no good reason at all. When we got home I pinched myself to confirm that I really had survived the unknown. Holly smiled and I had to admit I had a good time. I guess there is room in my life for the unpredictable as well as the predictable. Both have their merits and, as much as I hate to admit it, neither one hurts nor amuses more than the other.

It's like that with people in our lives. Most relationships are a mixed blessing.

Here's a thought from Liz Price: The Loquat tree, a fruit tree native to southern California, flourishes, flowers and fruits without any period of leaflessness. It is never boring, bare or barren. In season and out, the Loquat tree is gracious, green and gifted. By contrast, the apricot tree loses leaves, loses luster and loses life. It droops, drops and dies. Out of season it is

pricked, pruned and punished. Of the two, you would choose the Loquat tree to have around in all seasons. It is good company any time of the year even when it is not producing fruit. Indeed, its fruiting period is brief and its fruit is not particularly versatile; you have to eat it while it's fresh and when it's gone, it's gone. The apricot tree is enjoyable for only half the time. For the other half, it is uncompromising, uncomfortable and uncaring. But let me tell you something: when the apricot tree is off-season and not at all nice to have around, my pantry is still full of its goodness. There are dried apricots, cooked apricots and jam apricots. It might be less attractive than the Loquat tree but it gives food for the down season. (Elizabeth Price)

People are like the trees. Some are great to have around all the time. They are fun, likable and lovable. Others bear fruit that lasts for years. They are stimulating, stalwart and storable. Life is a filled with both options and God usually presents us with the choice. He tells us in Scripture that despite our inability to be righteous, to be a comfortable fit for His righteousness, He has "adopted" us as His own. He sees us and sees Christ. That works for Him. In like manner, we also ought to adopt those whom God brings into our lives, even when they aren't the best fit. Making room for a variety of trees in our life's orchard is not only the spice of life, it is also the spice of eternity.

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## *Precious For a Lifetime!* (10.24.08--Acceptance!--2 Peter 1:7)

My best friend Kermit lives over 300 miles away. He moved away over a decade ago. My state is no longer his state. It might be raining over his house while the sun is shining at Beech Springs. Over the years he's made new friends where he lives and I've invited some into my life as well. Where once his circle-of-friends were mine and vice versa, that is no long true. I see Kermit perhaps twice a year now. We exchange only occasional emails and telephone calls; yet, we're still best of friends. Before Kermit left so long ago we had a picture taken together. We donned comfortable hats, put our arms around each other's shoulders and smiled for the camera. That picture is still

on my desk today as it is on his. Despite the fact that we don't see each other often, there was an exchange of emotions and, in some way, a gift of self that happened when the camera shutter clicked. No matter the miles or years, that exchange remain fresh even today.

Kermit and I are gifts to one another. Time can't erase that. And so it is with all those God brings into our lives.

Here's a thought found scribbled on the back cover of an airline magazine: "Persons are the gifts of God to me! They're already wrapped, some beautifully and others less attractively. Some have been mishandled in the mail; others come "Special Delivery." Some are loosely wrapped; others very tightly closed. But the wrapping is NOT the gift, and this is an important realization. It is so easy to make a mistake in this regard. To judge the contents by the cover. Sometimes the gift is opened very easily; sometimes the help of others is needed. Maybe it's because they're afraid. It could be that they were once opened and then discarded. Maybe they've been hurt before and don't want to be hurt again. They may now feel more like "things" than human persons. I am a person; like everyone else I too am a gift. God filled me with a good-ness that is only mine. Every meeting and sharing of persons is an exchange of gifts. My gift is me; your gift is you. We are gifts to each other." (Wit & Wisdom, January 2005)

The Apostle Peter wrote: "make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love." As we mature as Christians, the fruit of that maturity is love. How fitting it is that God gives us the ability through friendships to exchange that fruit with one another. Persons, in that sense are the most precious of gifts in this life. No wonder the bond of friendship spans miles and years. All we need to do to preserve that bond is to hold that exchange as precious. When we do, God preserves the fruit for a lifetime.

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