



## Building Up!

by Mark Brunner

### *For Such A Time!* (Esther 4:17)

I didn't sleep well last night but awoke at my usual appointed time of 4:15. For some reason my body clock goes off at 4:15. Each day as I open my groggy eyes I am confronted with the same thought. Should I stay in bed and go back to sleep? Some choice? The first thought always seems to be the most motivating one. Staying in bed has all kinds of advantages. It's warmer and softer there. Getting up means I have to hunt for my glasses before trudging off to the closet to find my robe and slippers. The dogs will want to go outside as well, the minute they hear my feet touch the floor. Nevertheless, getting up usually wins. The wakeup call is coming from above. "Good morning! This is your morning wakeup call. I have things for you to do today." And so it goes for me every morning. "Good morning, Lord! Thanks for the call."

God has chosen to give us choice. In His wisdom He has made choosing a gift, something that we can use to benefit others as well as ourselves.

Here's a thought from Drew Stephens: "My favorite Christmas present was given to me by my mother-in-law in 1982. The gift that she gave me is a wedding ring. It was the set that her husband had given her on their engagement. He had died in 1978, and she graciously gave to me. She gave it to me with the understanding that I would in turn give it to her daughter,

Rebecca. However, I was free to use it as I wished. I could have sold the diamonds and melted down the platinum, and used the money from the rings on myself. I chose to use it for the purpose for which it was given. Nineteen years ago, I gave this ring to Rebecca and asked her to be my wife. I have never regretted that decision. That ring offered promise. It represented a life of joy and fulfillment with my bride. What that ring promised has been fulfilled a thousand times over and in ways I could have never dreamed of. (Drew Stephens, Sermoncentral.com)

Like that ring, God has given us a gift for which He has a designed and intended purpose. That gift is our lives. His intent is that our lives be eternally wed to His Son, Jesus Christ. But God gives us the freedom to use our lives as we choose. Much like that ring, we can take its value and spend it on us. We can pursue a life of pleasure and selfishness. We can pursue other gods or we can give our lives to Jesus. The choice is ours to make. So—"Good Morning! This is your divine wakeup call! I have things for you to do!" It's sometimes a difficult choice. But, who knows, perhaps you awoke today for just "such a time as this!" Seize the day!

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

## *Line Freaks!* (Esther 6:25)

Waiting in line is something that I try to avoid at all costs. I've never been sure of all the reasons why. Perhaps it has something to do with not being able to move freely, a feeling of being trapped. It may also have something to do with a high level of impatience or an inability to control the situation. These are all character traits that I sometimes, regrettably, possess. It just seems nerve wracking to someone who really enjoys getting things done and moving on. Waiting in line seems so wasteful when you could be doing something constructive. Nonetheless, try as I might to avoid the longest line at the food store or congestion at the auto parts counter, there simply comes a time when waiting is all that I can do and the most constructive thing available to me is, well, waiting.

Here's a story: Years ago I remember registering for my sophomore college courses on the floor of the old Marquette University gym with hundreds of college students and dozens of lines. Some lines snaked in and out of others—making it easy to get into the wrong one. Since this was in pre-computer days, lines moved slow. There were no I-Pods in those days either. You simply had to content yourself with looking at the back of someone's head; sometimes for a very long time. On this particular occasion, I found myself waiting to sign up for a mandatory biology course, and the line was very long. And, it just so happened that this line crossed with the line for a course at a table situated next to the one I was aiming for. After waiting for what seemed like hours, I reached the table only to hear that dreaded reply "I'm sorry. But you want the table to the right." I trudged to the back of the "other" line. It was at that moment that I felt the grasp of a firm yet friendly hand on my shoulder. "Hey, man. What's your beef?" "I got in the wrong line," I said. "And now I have to wait all over again. What a pain!" He then said something I've never forgotten. "Who says you have the right to be happy while you wait?"

Waiting for anything is a pain in a culture in love with the quick, the easy, and the disposable. Waiting? That's for those who aren't capable or are just plain unlucky—right? With God, however, quick, easy and disposable won't get you too far. One of his favorite tools is the "waiting" tool. He uses it a lot because it is an effective shaper and molder of good character. So, the next time you find yourself waiting in line remember this, there may be a blessing at the other end of the line. Don't spoil it by being a "line freak." Besides—who ever said that waiting had to be fun?

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## *Robert Ripley Character!* (Acts 2:17)

I don't know about you but I've always been fascinated about people who do strange and amazing feats. When I was a kid the best part of going to the

carnivals that came to town was visiting those booths that showcased the amazing and the unusual. That's why I've always been a big fan of Robert Ripley's "Believe It Or Not". There's just something amazing about a man who holds the record for walking backward, blindfolded, the world's largest ball of twine, or the guy who holds the record for driving the farthest and longest on a unicycle. I guess I just like being confronted by the idea that, perhaps, if I tried hard enough, I could walk backward farther, roll an even larger ball of twine, or learn how to ride something as difficult as a unicycle. Perhaps it's just my competitive spirit. Whatever the case, I find Ripley's compendium of the amazing both entertaining and, for the most part, believable.

There's another thing I also find curious, however, is how our society takes what should be considered the "norm" and turns it into something amazing; just the opposite of Ripley's.

Here's a story: A 15-year-old boy wrote a letter to "Dear Abby" about finding a woman's wallet that contained \$127 as well as the woman's identification. He hopped onto his bicycle and peddled over to her house – about a mile away. He told her he found her wallet and she gave him a big hug. She also gave him twenty dollars. That evening the boy told his parents about the event and his father said, "I don't think you should have accepted \$20 for doing what you should have done. A person shouldn't be rewarded for being honest." He thought about his father's statement and decided he would return the money. He biked to the lady's home and gave her back the twenty dollars. She didn't want to take it, but he told her she had to – that his father pointed out something to him that he had never realized before. Her eyes filled with tears as she said, "This is one for Ripley." © 2002 Steve Goodier

When you think about it, it's truly amazing that this story made Ripley's column. Is a life built around principles so unusual that Robert Ripley should mention it in his column "Believe It or Not?" Doing the right thing ought to be the norm, and not the unusual and amazing. When ideals such as honesty and a personal standard of always doing the right thing guide our every action and decision, we actually change. These great principles shape our lives and make us into persons of character. It's what God expects of all believers—believe it, or not!

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## *Staying Positive!* (Acts 2:28)

“No!” Ask any of my children, now long departed from Beech Springs, and they will tell you that little two-letter word was one of my favorites whenever they wanted something and dropped it on me in an unplanned manner. “Dad, can I stay out later than 11:00 tonight?” You could be pretty sure that the answer was an automatic “no!” “No” was quick and easy and fit every situation pretty well. I learned from the best: my Dad. He was rather fond of using “no” as well. In fact, he put a real twist on it. He would interject his “no” bomb even before we got our “want” petition out. That way he was covered no matter what. I know that it was just his sense of humor and I remember that in most things he was a pretty easy touch. But, that little word “no” could really turn any situation into a negative fast. Even though both my Dad and I thought we were being funny when we said it, “no” isn’t funny and has little to do with having a sense of humor.

Here’s a story: She was a homemaker who became a nationally known author, speaker, and syndicated columnist with a sense of humor. A woman who could write that way must have had an easy life? Wrong. Erma Bombeck’s father died when she was only nine years old. At 20 she was found to have a hereditary kidney disorder that would eventually lead to kidney failure. In 1991 she had breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy. In 1993 she started four-times-a-day peritoneal dialysis until a kidney transplant. Complications from the transplant finally took her life. When fans wrote to say, “Things like this shouldn’t happen to you,” she had an answer. “Why not me?” she said. “I had a good long ride with it. I have written all these books with kidney problems. It doesn’t affect your brain. It doesn’t affect your sense of humor.” I suspect her sense of humor was a coping device. It helped her deal with her pain. It kept her from getting brittle and grumpy. It helped her live 69 years in a positive rather than negative way, with joy rather than self-pity. (Rubel Shelly)

People who succeed with life tend to have a great sense of humor that always errors on the positive side. It gets them through the tough times. They use their humor to diffuse, uplift and push through tough times. Remember when Ronald Reagan was shot in 1981? “Honey, I forgot to duck,” he told Nancy at the hospital. To the surgeons about to operate on him, he said, “Please tell me you’re Republicans.” A sense of humor, however, never has anything to do with being funny at someone else’s expense. The next time you’re tempted to take a positive situation and turn it negative, remember this: “no” is easy and “yes” may be hard but the reward of saying “yes” at the right times makes it worth the effort.

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## *I’ll Get Back To You!* (Acts 3:11)

“Let me think about it and I’ll get back to you.” If we could count the number of times somebody has used this as an excuse to not do something that needed to be done because they had to “think about it” more than they already have, we’d probably have lost count a long time ago. “I’ll get back to you” is one of the most common five-letter phrases in the English language. Not that planning ahead of our actions is something to be avoided. The Bible tells us that planning is a necessary part of doing. If Moses had not planned the long march through the Sinai it would have been that much more tedious. If David or Solomon had not planned, the building of the temple would have been more laborious. Nehemiah’s plans enabled an incredible rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in a very short time. No, planning is a necessary part of doing. Unfortunately, as with so many things in this life, we often substitute planning for thinking. Rather than taking the time and effort to think through something on the moment, we often procrastinate and hope that our “thinker” will do better tomorrow. Unfortunately, this often leads to poor timing even negligence on our part, when time is of the essence.

Here’s a story: Civil War general Stonewall Jackson’s army once found itself on one side of a river when it needed to be on the other side. After telling his

engineers to plan and build a bridge so the army could cross, he called his wagon master in to tell him that it was urgent the wagon train cross the river as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before daylight General Jackson was told by his wagon master, all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. General Jackson was surprised that the wagon master had built the bridge and asked where the engineers were and what were they doing? The wagon master's only reply was that they were in their tent drawing up plans to build the bridge. (Pulpit Helps, May, 1991.)

God wants each of us to be bold in our planning as well as our doing. That means thinking on our feet in a timely manner is probably a pretty good way of getting things accomplished in God's "to do" schedule for our lives. Acting with courage and boldness often means that we need to act decisively and with purpose, often on the moment. When we're dealing with other people's need to know about Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, there's no time like the present to make that impression with our words and our actions. When it comes to winning souls, there's no room for "I'll get back to you." Get that "thinker" going and make your timing, God's timing.

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