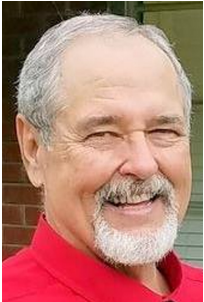


MAGNOLIA MINDS: There's Power in the Positive

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There is much advantage in being a positive person, but even positive people get discouraged in the face of continuing adversity. Each day as a pastor is both rewarding and challenging. So much has been said about the trials and burdens of being a pastor, especially in these changing times, but I would like to focus on the positive.

Rather than focusing on that stereotypical, hatchet-faced church member who never misses an opportunity to discourage, pastors are better revitalized by seeking out the grains of encouragement wherever they may be harvested.

Recently, I posed a rhetorical question in my worship service message to make a point. A six-year-old boy promptly answered me with the desired answer. I have to admit, I was joyfully uplifted that (1) he was listening, (2) my question/point was clear, and (3) his parents had him in church with them.

Back when I was six years old around the middle of the last century, my parents had me in church with them but if I had spoken aloud I would have probably gotten a church pinch from my mother. I'm encouraged that youngsters can feel free to talk with their pastor.

In this time so impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic when we are still trying to seek the best ways to minister to our flocks, discouragement seems to greet us around each bend.

During an invitation time last month, an older member of our congregation whom I had the privilege of baptizing several years ago came forward to take my hand and share that his heart was burdened for my ministry and me. His words, "Preacher, may I pray for you right now?" melted my heart. He may never know what his expression of prayerful concern did to lift my heart and lighten my steps.

One excellent asset to my spirit is a group of pastors who gather regularly to talk, share, and fellowship. This is not one of those Monday morning brag/moan sessions, but rather a group in which one can share in full confidentiality whatever is going on in one's life: health issues, ministry issues, praises, sadness, anything can be shared with freedom.

Such groups are special places of healing and recovery, and I am blessed to be a part of one. It helps to know that you are not alone in some of your trials. I usually leave this group feeling ready to pick up and carry on!

That brings me to another point. Solitude is often a great time for growth, prayer, and study. Isolation is a terrible situation that can leave one vulnerable to the enemy's weapons of attack. I am greatly encouraged when friends, church members, and neighbors reach out with a visit, a call, or a text, especially if I am invited to join some fun activity.

So many times when a phone call summons a pastor, it is not good. Someone is sick, has died, or – my goodness – has been offended. I am encouraged by random remembrances; to get a call just to check on my family or me lifts my day. I am blessed to serve a rural congregation.

What a treat to return to my truck after a worship service and find a gift on the floorboard! I have found fresh eggs,

vegetables, fruit, fish fillets, even packs of steaks and sausages. As much as the physical gift was enjoyed and appreciated, it pales in the light of the encouragement the act shines upon my heart and soul.

Scripture reminds us that a cup of water given in His name shall be rewarded (Mark 9:41). I can only imagine the reward for these wonderful gifts to their pastor.

Recently I came across a reference to a “God-wink,” and discovered that it was used to note a perceived affirmation of something as being pleasing to the Lord. I was taken aback at first but as I thought more upon this, I realized that our Lord has indeed given many small reminders of such.

For a season my wife and I spent time with two young sisters telling them of Jesus and His plan for their lives, but they moved out of state. We continued to communicate with them as we could and encouraged them to become involved with a church near them, but we wondered if they would.

My “wink” came some two years later, when I received a call from their dad telling me that they had accepted Christ and wanted me to baptize them at our church since that’s where their spiritual journey started. Oh my! What an affirmation!

Just a few weeks ago as I was speaking to people as they left the sanctuary, a youngster passed by, stopped, then turned and rushed back to wrap her arms around my leg in a tight hug while looking up at me and exclaiming, “You crazy, Preacher!” I still haven’t figured out if that was an original statement or something she had heard, but I took it in the loving spirit in which it was offered and thanked the Lord for yet another wink!

Take heart, stay in God’s word, love on people (yourself included), and remember Romans 8:31 – “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

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