



Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie

March, 1998



Dear friends,

We were expecting to give you a report of my scheduled trip to India in this letter, but the Lord had other plans. Something urgent kept me home. It was time for my dad to go from earth to glory!

A blessed homegoing...

The day after mailing our last prayer letter, I brought Dad to the Veteran's hospital. He had become unusually weak was losing his appetite. His blood tests pointed to cancer, but nothing could be confirmed. Jackie quickly felt in her spirit that I should stay home, which soon became clear, as we needed to step in to help him and Elsie, his wife of several years. (My mom went to heaven in 1990.) Thankfully, the conference in India could go on fine without me.

And so, March proved to be largely given to my dad. His weakness increased, his appetite disappeared, and trips to the VA hospital were frequent, as they tried to diagnose his illness as an outpatient. On 16th, he was admitted to the hospital. On the 26th, he was admitted to heaven!

His medical diagnosis was never confirmed. He and the doctors agreed to stop testing, when it became evident his body was somehow shutting down. He never had any pain, and passed into the presence of the Lord during an afternoon sleep. In it all, we saw the kindness and mercy of the Lord. He and mom had prayed years ago that God would take them quickly when their time had come. The Lord answered for both of them.

As Dad's strength failed this month, Jackie and I felt that we should begin to pray that, when his time came, the Lord would be glorified in his homegoing. (No one knew it would be so soon.) The Lord was indeed glorified in it all. The tormentor had no access. In our tears, there was a gladness and rejoicing. Dad knew he was ready for heaven, and was eager to get there. My two sisters, Janice and Gerri, and I were able to be together at his bedside.

Having planned to be in India, my schedule was thankfully uncluttered. This made it easier to serve Dad in his need, and to be there to help "usher" him as he got close to heaven's door. His last words to us were expressions of praise to the Lord and love for his family. The day we read to him of heaven in Revelation 21 was the day his faith in Jesus became sight -- for we know that *"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."*

When I think of my dad, I think of the day Jesus was baptized. A voice came from heaven, saying, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* That was ALWAYS my father's voice to me (and my sisters). He would say, "I'm glad you're my son; I love you; I'm proud of you." No greater gift, no greater inheritance can a dad leave than the assurance of his love, and the reality of his faith in Jesus.

I'll miss you, Dad, and I love you. I'm glad you were my dad. I'm proud of you. I'll see you later.

A time to stop, to look, to listen...

It has been an important time for me to reflect on what is really important in life. The Lord used these weeks to slow me down on the inside, bringing me to a fresh inward quietness. I realized I may not have really "stopped" on the inside for a long, long time.

Have you?

Some years ago I happened to be watching a baseball game on TV. During this game, the pitcher did something illegal. He "balked". As a result the batter was allowed to go to first base. For you who know less about baseball than I do, let me explain what that pitcher did, or rather, what he didn't do. He didn't come to a complete stop between pitches. That's what it means for a pitcher to "balk". Between every pitch, the pitcher must come to a complete stop in the motion of his body before he starts the next pitch. That pitcher didn't stop between pitches. He balked. As I watched that, the Holy Spirit spoke to me. He said, "My church does that all the time. They are always 'balking'. They refuse to stop between pitches."

I understood quite easily what the Lord was saying to me. Do you? Churches, especially leaders, are always "throwing pitches". These pitches represent the initiatives, the plans, the events, the ministries, the activities that are always being set into motion. It seems the Lord was saying to me that we keep making plans, starting things, initiating things one after the other, or many things together -- without ever stopping. Really stopping. Stopping to commune with God, wait on Him, and consult with Him before continuing.

The pitcher I was watching only did this once. Once out of perhaps a hundred pitches. How many times do we "balk"? How often do we stay in motion, just keeping "the game moving"? I would think, if a heavenly umpire had his say, we should all get thrown out of the game for our refusal to stop between our pitches!

There seems to be an inward pressure in our souls that takes on its own inertia, and we can find ourselves moving from one activity to another, just "keeping the game moving". Somebody should call "foul!" on us all, until we learn to stop INTERNALLY -- that is, to quiet our souls and minds before God; to re-enter that spiritual stillness where God's voice is always resident and waiting for us. It may only require a momentary stopping, a quiet spot in the middle of necessary business and activity. Or it may mean waiting on God for an extended time.

We are not called to avoid the burdens of life, but we must learn to pause in our heart and listen to God, even during a busy day. Jesus didn't spend His life running away from people or their needs. The call and compassion of God took Him right into the middle of crowds and their problems. But he knew how to stop, look, and listen....to His Father.

Luke 4:42 says, "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place". Luke 5:16 says "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed". Luke 6:12 says, "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."

I was reminded recently that I am actually alive today because of a church being willing to pray all night 55 years ago! When in my mother's womb, my mother got sick with toxemia, and her life was threatened by it. Finally she was in the hospital, and the decision was made to take my life the next morning, in order to save hers. At that time my parents dedicated me to the Lord, and to the ministry. That night their church went to prayer, all through the night. In the morning she was healed. And I was alive!

Must we not return to such a life as Christians, knowing how to separate ourselves even in the middle of life's cares, the burdens of ministry, or the crisis that may have come without welcome or warning?

There aren't many mountains to climb for a night of prayer here in Minnesota, but each of us can find a way and a place to get alone with God. Perhaps we must follow the example of Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, mother of many children. When she needed to stop, look and listen to the Lord, she would simply throw her apron over her head and pray, regardless of who was in the room. And everyone knew they better not interrupt her! It was her "instant prayer closet".

Psalms 23:2 says "He MAKES ME lie down beside quiet waters". Sheep aren't so smart. Sometimes the shepherd has to force them to lie down. Christians seem even dumber -- myself included, who ought to know better by now.

Our souls can operate on adrenaline rather than inspiration and guidance from God. Only God's presence and Word can separate between our enthusiasm and His divine energy. Only the grace found in face to face communion with Him can free us from the driving force of our sense of religious obligation, a force that can drive us right out of His perfect will.

Without a habit of "stopping between our pitches", without quieting down to hear His "still, small voice", we are destined for no more than second best. We can live life just outside the promised land, never crossing our Jordan river, never seeing the miraculous intervention of God that is our heritage, never coming into the anointed place that God has prepared for us.

Let this not be.

The "fringe benefits" of knowing how to stop internally and commune with God are many. Being made to lie down beside quiet waters has this result: "He restores my soul." We are also kept from "burnout" by developing this internal habit, which we call "resting in the Lord", "waiting on God", and "practicing His presence".

Don't "balk".

Stop. Look. Listen... to Him.

Thank you...

Jackie and I want to thank you for praying for us, though you didn't know what March brought to us. Dad left three children and spouses, nine grandchildren (seven spouses), and eight great grandchildren. Please pray for his wife Elsie, for whom we are so grateful. She loved Dad and was loved by him these past eight years, and she has now lost her third husband. May the Lord provide for her and give her new grace for the days ahead.

What's next, Lord?

Our travel plans were put on hold this month. Please pray as we reschedule outreach to Ukraine and elsewhere. Pray for the Lord's leading and provision in all aspects of our ministry. Our purpose remains the same: to help the Church of Jesus Christ respond to God's call into His throne room, and to His call to carry the light of Jesus Christ to the world.

Yes, time is short. For the world, and for all of us, as life rapidly passes.

Jesus said, "Work for the night is coming. Night comes, when no man can work."

Someone else wrote, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Lord, make our lives count for eternity.

Looking ahead... trusting Him and rejoicing!

As always, we are trusting the Lord for our needs. Your friendship, your prayer, and the giving of those who are able ...these are treasures to us.

May the Lord bless you in every way. May the Lord comfort each of you who, like us, know the loss of loved ones. How glad we are to know that this life is only the beginning of a grand eternity with the Lord! May our families, our friends, and all the peoples of the world know the same gladness!

"Let all the peoples praise Thee, O God;

Let all the peoples praise Thee.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!

God, our God, blesses us.

God blesses us,

That all the ends of the earth may fear Him."

Ps. 67

With love,

John and Jackie