

Bind them and Write them!

by Dwight Lagore

Changed Circumstances sometimes change people but changed people always change circumstances!

If you had to give me a choice between...

Changed Circumstances or Changed People...Changed people is my choice every time, any time!

It was 1993 in Maputo Mozambique...we anxiously drove to the lot a national church had made available to unload the two 40 foot containers of baby milk formula. Babies were dying of starvation and malnutrition and we were so grateful a big company had donated this life-giving aid. **A changed circumstance one imagines!**

But then we opened the containers and from front to back, instead of baby milk formula, was suntan lotion! We must be mistaken, but no, row upon row, stack upon stack, skid upon skid was...sun tan lotion! Instead of a generous donation from a major U.S. company, **we received the cruel-end** of supplies they needed to dump on some developing nation and get a tax right-off from the US government for dumping them!

So I went to work to make a bad circumstance better and negotiated the sale of this very expensive sun-tan lotion to a few South African companies. We could then use the money to buy the much needed baby milk formula. A changed circumstance! Wow! But then I opened the warehouse where we had stored the precious product so we could finalize the quantity we had to sell and only 6 small boxes remained! I was later to confirm my suspicion that it was the Mozambican who I was supposed to train to take leadership of this fledgling NGO (Non Governmental Organization) that had stolen the lotion and sold it to the Indian traders in the city! This man was also a prominent deacon from a main church in town!

My experience in life tells me that regardless of what I say I believe, and regardless of how wealthy or well-placed I think I am in this short life on the planet...

- * it is how I behave towards others that makes the difference.
- * How I behave makes a difference for my family!
- * How I behave makes a difference in the lives of those I work and worship with!
- * How I behave is what makes a difference in my world!
- * How I behave relieves suffering in the lives of those in circumstances beyond their control.

A wise King once wrote (Pro. 3:3&4), "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man."

Favor and a good name...with God & with People

Our desire as a mission (and I am sure for you as an individual) is to bring Glory to God (this is our primary purpose), is to please the heart of our Father we love, it is to find favor and a good name in the sight of God!

And Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt 5:16)

These passages challenge us with the reality that when we live a life that finds favor and a good name with God, there is a good chance we will find favor and a good name with people. The reality is that when we find favor and a good name with people, it opens doors for us to do things and reach other people we could only dream of; and this is a good thing.

Bind them and Write Them

Every time I read this I am impressed with how intentional this calling is. Love and faithfulness don't just happen, they have to be pursued!

Bind them around your neck! Although the first thing that comes to mind is a neck-tie, or a hangman's noose, other passages seem to indicate this is in reference to something like a beautiful necklace you put around your neck to make it visible. The implication is that our love and faithfulness have to be visible... they have to be more than good intentions, we have to make sure they are lived out!

Write them on the tablet of your heart! Here the challenge is for us to consistently make sure that we have integrity... that our outward acts of consistent compassion flow from a heart that is passionate about the things that our Father is passionate about. Our ongoing challenge is to write...purposefully inscribe on our hearts the values of love and faithfulness and make sure in doing so that our motivation is right.

Love and Faithfulness

Love...in other versions of Scripture, this word is translated Mercy... the Greek translation of the Hebrew text used the word "Bethesda" here which means house of mercy...or FLOWING WATER... this same name was given to a pool at the sheep gate who's waters had curative powers. Very simply put, this love spoken of is much more than a feeling, it is a commitment to a life of giving! The moment we stop giving is the moment we start stagnating, so the call here is to ensure our lives are ones that give, give and keep giving...and the outcome of that kind of giving is and will be healing to many others!

Faithfulness...in other versions is sometimes translated "truth". But the word used here is more than simply truth... it is persistent truth, or truth that persists...

Persistence alone is not what we are talking about because people can persist in evil. I tracked and talked a lot this furlough about Joseph Kony who is a War-Lord who has persisted for the same 25 years we have in Africa...and the results are devastating!

But when persistence and truth come together it expresses faithfulness... and it is this quality that pleases the heart of God and impacts people!

The coaching staff of a high school cross-country running team recently got together for dinner after winning its second state championship in two years. In the past few years they went from good (top twenty in the state) to great (consistent contenders for the state championship, on both the boys' and girls' teams).

"I don't get it," said one of the coaches. "Why are we so successful? We don't work any harder than any other teams. And what we do is just so simple. Why does it work?"

He was referring to the Hedgehog Concept (Jim Collins, "Good to Great") of the program. In Jim Collins book Good to Great he studies companies who were good companies but became great companies and studies why. One thing they found is what they call the "hedgehog concept" taken from how a hedgehog responds to the variety of threats it faces compared to the fox...A fox is sly and tries many ways to catch the hedgehog, but the hedgehog just does the same thing every time... he just roles up in a ball...the fox tries something else, the hedgehog doesn't get complicated, he just roles up in a ball again. A simple but successful strategy! This running team's "hedgehog concept" was captured in the simple statement: We run best at the end. We run best at the end of workouts. We run best at the end of races. And we run best at the end of the season, when it counts the most. Everything is geared to this simple idea!

As individuals and as a mission, let it be said of us, we love the best at the end! At the end of a long day, at the end of a difficult month, at the hardest moments in life! The fact that we have tied love and faithfulness around our neck and written it on our hearts is clearly what characterizes us because that is who we are by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.