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## CHURCH NEWSLETTERS PLUS

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### PRAISE LOUDLY; BLAME SOFTLY

By most political and worldly standards, Catherine II was a successful monarch. She had her share of enemies and detractors, and there were those who questioned her legitimacy as the ruler of Russia. Her moral and ethical choices might have raised some eyebrows. However, in diplomacy, border expansion, economic development, arts, and culture, her accomplishments earned her the title, "The Great."

This quote attributed to her is telling, "I praise loudly; I blame softly."

The most cursory reading of history makes it evident that even absolute despots cannot hold absolute power without the support of others. And even if a ruler is able to maintain a position, without leadership skills, people will be led nowhere.

You can occupy a throne and accomplish nothing. If Catherine was being honest, this philosophy of leadership is one of the most vital skills any influencer can develop.

Praise must be over-the-top. When it is public, specific, clear, and generous, loyalty is earned. The people who praised will follow their leader anywhere. Others will follow as well in hopes of earning such praise.

To blame softly is to also be clear, direct, and specific, but private. It is to keep the circle of criticism as small as possible and make corrections quickly, gently, and graciously. The person who blames softly knows that no loyalty is won through humiliation and that a person who can save face can develop into a valuable leader as well. We must not destroy people in the process of making them better.

So, Catherine the Great was on to something. If we make a big deal of praise and handle criticism forthrightly and discreetly, we will develop the kind of leadership that can help us accomplish great goals.

# PATH LIGHT



*Thy word is the light... to my path.*  
Psalm 119:105

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## SHARPEN UP

Are you taking full advantage of the opportunities that come to you with arms and legs every day?

You have been gifted with associates above you and below you on charts made by human hands who have the capacity to add value to your life with every conversation and through observation of their examples.

Some of them make big mistakes, but even they are not useless. You can use them as examples of what not to do. You can learn from everyone with whom you come into contact.

Proverbs 27:17 in the NIV says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

How does this happen? Many ways. Perhaps we can touch on a few of them with the word, **SHARP**.

**S = Seeing** - We observe the other person's life, choices, habits, techniques, strategies, behavior, and interactions and learn. If we will watch people closely, we will collect valuable information and will observe timeless principles being fleshed out in their lives. Paul once told some of the disciples to follow him as he followed Christ.

**H = Hassle** - The word means "struggle" or "contest," but we use it to refer to the resistance we sometimes get when we need to reevaluate our behaviors and choices. It is a struggle that begins within us and continues as others compete with us or challenge us

about our behaviors. We get sharper and either change our choices or become stronger in them. Never discount the benefit of a good hassle.

**A = Accountability** - If we are never accountable to anyone, we will drift into an undisciplined and unproductive life. This is true in many areas of life because God has made us for community and has designed systems of accountability into the framework of churches and businesses. Every business employs that principle. So, call your leader, your pastor, or your accountability partner and do it regularly.

**R = Respect** - We learn respect for ourselves by respecting others. We learn respect for others when we reverence and respect God and His handiwork in fashioning people so magnificently. When you look upon one of those polished pieces of iron with arms and legs, you are looking upon the very handiwork of God. You will get sharper by respecting people.

**P = Practice** - People give us the opportunity to practice the principles we hold dear and to practice how we present those principles. People sharpen people through practice, interaction, conversation, struggle, and shared labor.

Don't be a loner. If you make the choice to do it all yourself, by yourself, you will suffer unnecessary setbacks and delays. Let other people make you sharper and let them benefit through their association with you as well.

## DOING WHAT CAN'T BE DONE

*"The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do." - Walter Bagehot*

It is such an enduring truth and ever inspiring plot of great drama - the triumph of the underdog against all odds. Some soul, armed only with a great idea and audacious belief, makes a commitment and follows through. Ridicule is spurned. Obstacles are overcome. Criticism is ignored. Hardships are endured. The price is paid daily. The goal is pursued.

*"Smith wrote a term paper based on an idea for reliable overnight delivery. His professor gave him a C because the idea wasn't feasible. Years later, many potential investors agreed with the professor, refusing to send capital Smith's way. The funds he did raise in 1971 and '72 were gone by '74, along with his investors. One catchy slogan and several million dollars of hard-won capital later, Federal Express was on its way to profitability and long-term success."*

- Entrepreneur Magazine

The key for people of faith is one simple concept: **"What is impossible with men is possible with God."** (Luke 18:27)

## IT COULDN'T BE DONE

*Somebody said that it couldn't be done,  
But, he with a chuckle replied  
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one  
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.  
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin  
On his face. If he worried he hid it.  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;  
At least no one has done it";  
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,  
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.  
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,  
Without any doubting or quiddit,  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,  
There are thousands to prophesy failure;  
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,  
The dangers that wait to assail you.  
But just buckle it in with a bit of a grin,  
Just take off your coat and go to it;  
Just start to sing as you tackle the thing  
That "couldn't be done," and you'll do it.*

- Edgar Albert Guest



## STUDY: YOUR BRAIN THINKS MONEY IS A DRUG

*If you've ever thought of money as a drug, you may be more right than you know. New research shows that counting money — just handling the bills — can make things less painful. "It is surprising," says Kathleen Vohs, a professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management who participated in the research. "It still surprises me." The experiments were conducted by a colleague of Vohs' in China. Students came into the lab and were told they would be participating in a test of finger dexterity. One group was given a pile of Chinese currency to count. Another group was given blank pieces of paper to count. - By David Kestenbaum*

Another addiction? For the church, the inclusion of yet another application of brain science brings us back to some old debates and mind-wrestling matches.

*"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*  
- 1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV)

Psychologists, pastors, and health care professionals have suspected the results of this research for years. Everyday people have known this. Experience has proven it. Now brain research is suggesting that there are neurological explanations for how spending and acquisition of money can be like drugs creating feelings of exhilaration and well being.

Like with any addiction, major life interferences result, mood swings are common, and relationships are disrupted.

In other words, it can be a root of all kinds of evil.

Are there spiritual implications? Indeed.

Are there spiritual solutions? Of course, in the same way there are spiritual solutions to all manner of brain re-patterning concerns.

We got into this mess by the way we trained our brains and we can get out of it the same way. But now that we know what it is, we can address it more effectively.

As with other behaviors and addictions, there is no legitimate tug-of-war between sin, behavioral, learning, and disease models of why we get trapped in various patterns. The disciplines compliment each other and round out our understanding of treatment options.

As a theologian, my understanding of sin is fairly rugged. I know that it permeates other issues and concerns in my life and in society. My theology of grace is even more hearty and where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

Choices have entered into the mix along the way and choice is the playing field of sin. Without choice, there is not sin.

There is much grace in the forgiveness of sin which levels the playing field for grace to be expressed in self-understanding, therapy, behavior modification, and discipleship.

People are complex ("fearfully and wonderfully made") and fully integrated beings. Addictions, of which we have all partaken in one way or another, must be addressed with integrated approaches, weaving together spiritual, emotional, cognitive, biological, chemical, nutritional, and social solutions and understanding.

For the Christian, this is all in Christ, under His Lordship, and through grace. There is no push-pull necessary between disciplines, theories, and approaches.

We can welcome such research. This burgeoning field of study of inner space is as fascinating as that of outer space. Everything I am hearing and reading is making me more and more hopeful and worshipful of the God whose creativity is seen in it all. Deo Gloria!



## STEPS TO CHRIST

**God loves you** and wants you to live forever in His presence, experiencing His love and living under His kingship. However, He has made you free and offers you the choice of receiving or rejecting Him. He does not wish to coerce your love or force you to receive His. Rather, He offers it to you as a free gift. Sin has separated us from God. Sin is simply choosing our will over God's will and rejecting His rule in our lives (not "rules" like a list of rules, but "rule" like a sovereign rules his kingdom). All of our bad choices are rooted in our problem of sin—a problem that is common to all people. Jesus died to free you from your sin and paid the price for your forgiveness. That is why Romans 6:23 says, ***"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."***

There are three choices in that verse:

- The first is to choose between wages and grace (gift). We must swallow our pride and admit that we need what only God can give. We cannot earn or deserve His grace.
- The second is to choose between sin and the Lordship of Christ, directing our lives and ruling our hearts.
- The third is the choice between life and death which follows the other two. Eternal life is in Christ. Apart from Him is eternal death and separation from God.

Here is what you must do: **A—B—C**

- A -** Admit to God that you are a sinner and need Christ. *"Lord I have sinned and I need You."*
- B -** Believe—Put your faith in Jesus. *"Lord, I believe in You, that you died and rose for me."*
- C -** Confess Jesus as Lord of your life. *"Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned and am in need of your grace, forgiveness, and help. I believe that You died on the cross and rose again, I confess You as Lord. I receive You as my Savior. Come into my life and save me. Thank You for the free gift of salvation"*

# DIMINISHING GOD

*"A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell." - C. S. Lewis*

We don't vote on God's existence. Belief does not alter reality. Nor does unbelief nullify it.

Are we disillusioned with God or God's people? Are we angry with sermons and institutions and the God they describe? Do we perceive God as unfair and ruthless?

The importance of personal belief lies in what happens inside of me when I believe and identify with ultimate truth. Like a river, the current of truth flows with overwhelming force in whatever direction it will.

Twice I encountered being swept away by a river. In one instant, I had a wonderful time experiencing the rapids as I bounced about and felt the mighty flow beneath me. On the other occasion, I was exhausted and frustrated from nearly drowning. In the first, I was floating

in a tube with the current. In the second, I was desperately swimming against a similar current trying to make my way to shore with no floatation device.

I cannot change the truth by refusing to believe in it. What I can change is whether it will sweep me away or if I will flow with it for the ride of my life.

Our thinking is limited by our finite minds. We think in time and space about that which is beyond time and space. When we think about God, faith is a beginning where believing is seeing. As we make our minds available to be stretched beyond capacity, we start to comprehend that which is beyond comprehension.

Unless we allow the word, "beyond" to enter our vocabularies, we will continue to beat our heads against the wall trying to understand and diminish God into something manageable and controllable. When we let go of that, we enter a realm of limitless possibilities for our views of God and for ourselves.

*"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." - Isaiah 55:9*

## MENTAL NOTES

A mental note isn't worth the paper it is written on.

You can make mental notes all day long, but they lack the safety features of paper and digital notes. For one thing, you lose them. They exist, but they are floating out there in a closet of cerebral clutter and are only retrieved when looking for something else and usually after a deadline has long expired.

A basic problem with mental notes is that they are subject to the distortions of time. It has been demonstrated by neurological researchers that eye-witness accounts are often unreliable and altered by time and

intermingling with other memories.

Perhaps that is why the Bible required two eye-witnesses before a person could be convicted of a capital crime.

Mental notes are often relegated to lists of lesser leverage in our thinking simply because we did not render them important enough at the moment to write them down.

Entrepreneurs eat ideas for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Good ideas are worth remembering and writing down. So are not-so-good ideas. They can be sorted out later or even trigger good ideas.

Make a note of that.

## HOW BIG IS YOUR FIG TREE?

Proverbs 27:18 NIV) says, "He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored."

This is pretty simple:

### Do your job. Do your best. Then, do better.

Treat your job, if you still have one, like it is your own business and act in the boss's interest as if his or her success is yours.

Your goal to retire . You are devoting your energy and ingenuity to that end on your off hours by building your own empire. Stay with it, but continue to be diligent and conscientious in your day job.

It is your training ground and it is where your integrity is tested and refined.

There will be fruit from your labor. Sometimes the fruit will grow in places you do not expect, but it will grow and you will eat your share of it.

## JUST BE

Tonight as you prepare to rest, just be.

Being is what you were meant for, made for, and are maturing into.

You are, after all a being, human and developing.

Be yourself. Be **REAL** - Responsible, Evolving, Authentic, and Loving.

Be what you are becoming as in what you will COME to BE (BE -COME). Your future is as real as your past and present. There are just more obvious unknowns.

Be strong, courageous, honest, and full of wonder.

And since it is Saturday night ... Be-HAVE Be-CAUSE there is a new day tomorrow and we need you on the team.

See you in church

## CHAOS

The only thing that is consistently predictable in the universe is the consistent persistence of chaos...

And in that, we behold the emergence of divine order at a magnitude that stretches our minds ... Beyond their capacity.

## DIGGING UP THE DEAD

### Man takes father's remains from cemetery

VERSHIRE, Vt., Aug. 4 (UPI) -- A man who said he missed his late father allegedly brought home the man's remains from a Vershire, Vt., cemetery, police said. Dominik A. Bailey Jr., 43, was charged with felony removal of human remains, WPTZ, Pittsburgh, reported.

Bailey told family that he did this because he missed his father. I wonder if he found that his dad was not as much company as he had been before,

And the hygiene issues!

Many of us miss our dads, but there comes a time to let go.

We might miss our hair, but it would be foolish to collect it off the shower floor and glue it



back on to our scalps.

We miss our youth and the youthful irresponsibility we once enjoyed.

We need to stop digging up dead things and start investing in what is alive. The extreme teaches us in the mundane that we do the same sort of thing as Dominik Bailey. We just do it in more social respectable ways.

We dig up old grudges, old habits, old communication patterns, and old hurts just to feel comfortable with the familiar.

We are grave robbing.

What have you dug up lately that needs to go back in the ground?

**"AN ACRE OF PERFORMANCE IS WORTH A WHOLE WORLD OF PROMISE." - JAMES HOWELL**

## "MY HAT'S IN THE RING... STRIPPED TO THE BUFF"

Teddy Roosevelt is quoted in 1912 as saying, "My hat's in the ring. The fight is on and I'm stripped to the buff."

It strikes the eyes a bit crude and un-presidential, but the blunt truth is a pretty fair template for our undertakings whether they are in business, ministry, or social entrepreneurship.

**Throw your hat in the ring.** Make and announce your commitment and do it in such a way as there can be no backing down. If you decide to do something, tell some people who will ask you about your follow-through. Secret goals are too easy to lay aside when things get tough. Assemble your group of encouragers and keep them posted.

**Get in the fight.** To know that the fight is on is an invitation to engage. Don't wait for a second invitation. Do something today in movement toward your goal. Make a call. Write a note. Explore an idea. Take tangible actions. Make sure at least one of those actions involves interaction with human beings.

Then, at the end of the day, pause and report to your encouragers.

### Strip to the buff.

Do keep your clothes on, but strip off all the other encumbrances. You know what they are. They are excesses, unnecessary expectations and activities, unreasonable expectations, old messages playing in your brain, defeatist attitudes, excuses, and a million other articles of luggage that will hinder you. Prepare to travel light and let your team know what you are shedding.

So, what are you waiting for ... and second invitation?

