



Playing A Better Game!

by Mark Brunner

“A Game Only Half Over!” (2 Samuel:12:20-24)

Is there anyone who hasn't felt the sting of regret and discovered just how bitter it is to live with the thought that if only we hadn't done this or said that we'd be a whole lot happier at the moment? Beginning again is one “power” I wish that I had above all things in this life. I guess it is because I do many things that I regret doing. As a Christian we all know that life is all about consequences. God forgives the sin but He doesn't remove the consequences. Unfortunately, that's why the doing and the regret are connected over time, with doing on one far end and regret on the other. If only we could link these two things more closely; if only each of us had the power to start over when the end did not suit our intentions.

Here's a story: Years ago Georgia Tech played California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. That strange play came in the first half, and everyone wondered: “What will Coach Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?” At half time Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, “Men the same team that played the first half will start the second.” The players got up and started

out, all but Riegels. The coach looked back and called to him; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? Then Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with a strong man's tears, and said. "Coach, I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played in that second half. (Haddon W. Robinson, Christian Medical Society Journal.)

The Bible teaches us that what is done is done. There is no use in going back and reliving it or redoing it. God has one direction in life for us and that is forward, not backward. When King David sinned and displeased the Lord, God punished him for that sin and he grieved over it. Then, recognizing that the grief would not undo what he had done, David put away his grief and "got back in the game." Therein lies a valuable lesson for you and I. There is no way of going back, only going forward. When we sin, it is good to realize that the game is not over, only half over. With repentance and sorrow for our sin, God gives us an opportunity to "face" our sin with the knowledge that there doesn't need to be a repeat of it in the "second half" of our lives. A better "game" can still be had if only we put off regret and put on hope.

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

"Big Godder, Little Godder!" (2 Samuel:22:3)

Do you think big or are you more inclined to leave "big" thinking to others. As a business consultant I've had the privilege of leading a number of visionary sessions with business owners and their staff. These vision sessions focus on what I call "being able to visualize the invisible." That alone; tends to cull the group out a bit. I always try to present a few, classic mind exercises just to get everyone thinking broadly and within a broader perspective. Nevertheless, invariably there are always a few who just are more comfortable thinking in narrower, less visionary and certainly more

concrete terms. They are what you might call “small” thinkers. No amount of testing or prodding is likely to move them. They’re just comfortable letting others “visualize the invisible.”

When it comes to visualizing God, which camp would you put yourself in: “broad thinker” or “narrow thinker?”

Here’s a story: Donald Barnhouse, tells of preaching one Sunday and discovering his mentor, Dr. Wilson, coming to hear him preach. He came up to Barnhouse after the service and said, “I will not come to hear you again. I only come once. Now I know that that you are a Big-godder. When my students preach, I come to see whether they are Big-godders or little-godders, and then I know what their ministry is all about.” Barnhouse asked him to explain. Wilson explained: “Some men have a little God and are always in trouble with Him since they don’t believe His miracles. He doesn’t intervene on behalf of His people. Then there are those who have a great Big God. He commands and it happens. He knows how to be strong on behalf of them that fear Him. You, Donald, have a Big God and he will bless your ministry.” (Author unknown)

I like Wilson’s description of how we see God: “Big Godder” or “Little Godder.” In a very real sense it reminds me of those business customers who are always striving to see the bigger picture as opposed to those who are content with the narrower one. Where are you? Would you consider yourself on fire to learn more about God, or, are you content to surround yourself with programs, organizations and conventions that talk about Him but put Him into a narrow perspective? Do “religious” activities, the spiritual externals, take up all of your time with little left over to reflect on the sheer awesomeness of our Creator God? We ought to long after God, not just seek Him. We need to aspire to Him not just worship Him. We need to be willing to risk it all to visualize what our senses can’t see but our hearts ache for. We need to be Big-Godders because you and I serve a very, big God indeed.

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Bringing Your Weight To Bear!" (2 Samuel:22:3)

Trust! If we had it perfectly, it wouldn't matter what the old year or a new one had to throw at us, we would be well armored—well provisioned. Yet, unfortunately, trust is often a scarce commodity. Like the old man who went on his first airplane flight and then announced upon landing that "It wasn't too bad. Just as long as I didn't put all my weight down!" Like that old man, we sometimes approach life with an attitude of "Sure, I'll give it a try. But, I'm going to be ready to bail out at the first sign of trouble." The funny thing about trust is this, when you don't "put all your weight" down on it, it tends to slip out from under you. Trust is something that needs to be held onto securely and kept firmly under one's feet. Trust is something that must be possessed and guarded, not meekly reached for and then loosely grasped. When it is staring you in the face, you'd better be ready to recognize it and then grab onto it with all your might.

Here's a story: A man who lived on Long Island was able one day to satisfy a lifelong ambition by purchasing for himself a very fine barometer. When the instrument arrived at his home, he was extremely disappointed to find that the indicating needle appeared to be stuck, pointing to the sector marked "HURRICANE." After shaking the barometer very vigorously several times, its new owner sat down and wrote a scorching letter to the store from which he had purchased the instrument. The following morning on the way to his office in New York, he mailed the letter. That evening he returned to Long Island to find not only the barometer missing, but parts of his house as well. The barometer's needle had been right—there was a hurricane blowing in. He should have trusted the barometer in the first place! (E. Schuyler English.)

Trust. King David was a shepherd boy at heart. He had been given the skills and wit of a shepherd and the physique of a shepherd; but, a king; can a shepherd be a king? A shepherd can be a king only when that shepherd believes with all of his heart God would give him the tools necessary to make it so. That is why David sang this song, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in who I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation" (2 Samuel 22:3). David was willing to "put his weight down" on that promise and believe in what God had told him. "You are a king! Trust

me!” Like David, you and I are also so challenged by our Lord. He says, “Trust me. You are, because of my Son, Jesus Christ, a king!” So crowned, we need only believe it and bear the weight of our trust down upon that promise. Thus captured, it cannot escape. There is no denying our kingship. We can do all things in Christ!

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“Hovering!” (2 Samuel:22:1-20)

When I was growing up I had a friend who always seemed to be able to avoid trouble when everyone else could not. It wasn't that he could solve every problem and it certainly wasn't because he had no courage. I can remember him standing by my side more than once when I felt threatened by a bigger kid or I was just having a bad day. No, in fact I never knew him to run away from anything. Yet, he always seemed to be on the right end of the choices equation. He simply knew when and where to take a stand and when not to. I remember asking him once why he seemed to be so lucky when it came to avoiding getting into trouble. He simply said, “When trouble comes I climb the stairs.” I stared with a puzzled look. “You know. It's kind of hard to describe.” He said. “But, when things get tense, I climb over the situation and look at it from above. I find myself looking down at trouble instead of looking up at it. That way, it gives me time to think, time to make the best choice!”

The real key to my friend's success wasn't his ability to punch his way out of trouble, it was his ability to know if it was worthwhile doing so. He knew that the key to solving any difficulty in life was the ability to get the right perspective on it first and then trust the decision you make. When he took the time to really “see” the situation, he knew that the odds would be on his side. In a sense he had the innate ability to have “out-of-body” experiences at will. He had the fullest confidence in his ability to rise above any situation and, in that pose, come out on top no matter what the odds were. Whether it was stand and fight or retreat, it didn't matter to him. He was confident in his

choices and his ability to make them. He had, therefore, great trust in his ability to avoid conflict because nine times out of ten, it worked!

The Bible's King David was a man like that, a man not afraid to go into battle against foes many times his size. David was able to rise above the battle and get a better perspective simply because he roared the wings of his faith. He knew the limitations of his body, but trusted in the unlimited power of his God. No matter what the situation, his faith could hover above the trouble, above sin and virtue, what is and is not, and above all things, so that his faith might remain pure, and his actions blessed. When we confess the first commandment, this is, in essence, what we are asking God to do with our faith. As we begin this blessed new year, may each of us grasp our faith in such a manner, to push it above all things that we might always rely not on ourselves, but on the unfathomable power of our God to rise above all things for us.

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“Pushing The Limits of Courtesy!” (2 Samuel:22:33)

Checklists! I keep a running checklist of a lot of things. For example, my morning routine. Checklist: Get jogging clothes on, let the dogs out, let the dogs in, put dogs back in their kennel, warm up my tea, go for jog, exercise, ice my knees, do my morning devotions, shower, kiss my wife goodbye and leave for the office. I don't need to write these things down, I just need to be sure that they get done in some sort of order. There are other lists however that need a little more thought. For example, before leaving for the office I need to take stock of the weather. Will I need a hat or cap today? How about an umbrella? Will a sports jacket do or will I need an overcoat? In the latter case, because there are options, it's important to take a mental inventory with a bit more thought so as not to leave home without the proper stuff to cover my bald, head.

Taking stock of things is one thing; but how about taking stock of our lives? Are there some aspects of character we shouldn't leave behind when we go out of the door in the morning?

Here's a story: A funny story has it that a police officer was investigating an accident. As he came around the corner, lights on and siren blasting, he saw a woman lying in the street, injured. He stopped his squad, called for an ambulance and then got out to investigate. It appeared that the woman was a pedestrian and had been hit by a car that was parked against the curb. He walked up to where the woman was laying and asked the crowd: "Who was driving the car?" Suddenly a man stepped out from behind the crowd and replied, "I was officer." The officer pulled out his report book and asked, "How did you happen to hit her?" The befuddled looking man stammered a bit and then offered: "I didn't!" As I approached the intersection, I saw that she was trying to cross the street. I slowed my car down and motioned to her to cross the street while I waited. As I stopped for her, she looked rather startled and she, I guess, fainted." (Steve Goodies)

"Knowledge, ability, experience are of little avail in reaching high success if courtesy be lacking," says George D. Powers. "It's the one passport that will be accepted without question in every land, in every office, in every home, in every heart in the world. Nothing commends itself so well as kindness; and courtesy is kindness." Call it what you may, courtesy is the one passport you can't be without if you intend to get where you want to go. If you keep a mental checklist of who and what you are, be sure of one thing every day before you start out; make sure that you do your best as a person who cares about others and puts them first. Put on a bit of courtesy each morning. Don't leave home without it.

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