



## Acting Christian!

by Mark Brunner

### *Try It On For Size!* (Philippians 3:12-15)

***What will you take with you when you die? Well, nothing you say? Perhaps we will be able to take something with us as long as it is something we leave behind first. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.***

G.K. Chesterton wrote: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and not tried." I grew up with the corrective phrase: "Is that acting like a Christian?" Perhaps I had just tagged one of my brothers with a nasty blow to the shoulder. Or it could have been an act of selfishness that would prompt the question. "Share with you brother. Is that acting like a Christian?" It was one of those questions to which neither Mom or Dad expected an answer. It was rhetorical. Deep down they knew that what really mattered to an 8-year-old boy wasn't how I could act like a Christian. What mattered was winning, coming out on top and not being some kind of altar boy in regard to my brothers' feelings or needs. Justice and fairness were for grown-ups and we boys were content with trench warfare; for us, acting like

a Christian was difficult and not the first choice when it came to dealing with our stuff, our space and our egos.

It isn't always easy to set a good, Christian example for others, even as adults, when our stuff, our space and our own egos are concerned. But, although difficult, it's the path God keeps steering us toward. We need to mind His direction.

Here's a story: Back in 1966, Doug volunteered to work on a cleanup crew late one night in preparation for a faith conference the next day. Around 12:30AM, as he swept the floor, an older gentleman approached and asked if he was in the right place for the conference. Doug assured him he was. "I told him I would see if I could find him a place to sleep." The place Doug found was the room where he had been sleeping on the floor with about 50 others. Laying some padding and a blanket on the floor, he handed the man a towel for a pillow. Doug asked him if he had eaten. "No," the man said, "I've been traveling all day" The two shared some Corn Flakes and milk. Upon awakening the next morning, Doug discovered that the man he'd been sharing Corn Flakes with, the man he had accommodated on a cold, hard floor, was none other than the conference speaker, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the most famous Christians of the past century. Doug later related. "This humble man of God sleeping on the floor, eating Corn Flakes! This was the kind of man I wanted to be." (Author unknown. If anyone has a proprietary interest in this story please authenticate and I will be happy to credit, or remove, as the circumstances dictate.)

We leave little behind when we leave this earth. For most it's a few items in a will, perhaps a home and an engraved tombstone. For Doug, Francis Schaeffer left behind a much greater treasure than these, he left behind a legacy of humility, grace and service. He found Christianity to be difficult just as you and I. He tried it anyway and left others richer. I pray it will be said someday of you and I. We put our stuff, our space and our egos away and "acted like Christians."

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

## *The Land of Beginning Again!* (Philippians 3:12-15)

***Do you tend to shoulder check your life? When you spend too much of your time looking at the past and wondering why, you don't have your eyes on the road. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.***

Starting over. Isn't that a warm and comforting thought? How often haven't each of us felt that if only we could go back and do it all over again. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of the grief, regret and sorrow that we carry with us every day could be translated into joy by simply wandering back into those good old days when things were better; when the bad things in this life had not as yet happened? "Dropped like a shabby old coat," we could shed our burdens and leave them behind in a place that we need not visit again.

When I look back at my life there are many things that I would like to change; mistakes that I made buying the wrong car and then ending up with massive repair bills. This happened not once but several times in my life. Then there were the relationships that were affected by one little misplaced word. People have passed in and out of my life because of small things. If we had but the power to capture time, to reach out into space and recapture the reflections of the past now hurtling heavenward and forever distancing themselves from us, it would be so wonderful to step into those brief moments again and right the wrongs, heal the hurts, avenge the injustice and enhance the wisdom. Unfortunately, no one has yet come up with a way to walk into yesterday. What is has been. Putting our hopes in what might have been just doesn't pay.

Leaving the past behind is hard for many of us. Shoulder checking is fine when driving. But when walking through life it does little to enhance the present or assure the future. Focusing too much on what could have been is one of the chief reasons why we have trouble grasping the opportunities that exist in the here and now. Starting over isn't a product of going back to where

we first strayed from the path. Rather, with feet planted firmly in today, now is the time to start. Waiting on the past can only lead to missed opportunities. Moving on may be difficult; but it's the only option. Forgetting what's behind is an important part of understanding what hope is all about. Hope is about what is to come not what has been. The Apostle Paul understood this well. His past was filled with pictures of hurt, sin and abuse. He had done many sinful things. He knew that he had to let go of the past and live fruitfully in the present because tomorrow would soon be here. Focusing on our relationship with God in the here and now is the only promise of hope and joy in life. Christians need to move on because there's a "wonderful place" where all "mistakes and heart aches" are removed. It's the land of beginning again. It's called the moment. In THIS time we're forgiven and in THIS time is our only hope.

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## *Push And Pull!* (Philippians 3:13-14)

*I like to think about the past. There’s nothing wrong with thinking about where we’ve gone and how we got where we’re going—unless we forget about today. My friend, life’s a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.*

Garden Tractors are great things when we’re riding on them and they’re doing all the work. A simple click of a switch and the power takeoff engages, the drive belt connects with the pulleys, the blades spin and the grass gets cut. All I need to do is turn the wheel and occasionally backup when something gets in the path of the mower. It’s nothing like the days gone by when horsepower was provided by your feet and cutting velocity began with how hard you were willing to push. It’s pretty simple as long as the tractor is doing most of the work. That changes pretty quickly, however, when you become the pusher and the tractor is the puller. I hung the tractor up over a ditch near the highway last Saturday. I could- n’t backup and I couldn’t go forward. What had been a pretty easy ride had now become a whole lot of

work. Now I had to get off and push. The weight of that big machine pulled one way as I pushed the other; and, the harder I pushed, the heavier that tractor seemed to get.

For Christians it's similar when we reflect on past mistakes, the weight of which we haven't put away can sometimes push against our tomorrow's; especially when those mistakes are amplified over time.

Here's a thought from Rob Chaffart. "What we think we remember is often exaggerated by the memories of our youth. We were exploring botanical gardens recently. My wife had been there before, as a teenager, and she vividly remembered a beautiful flower that had caught her attention. She remembered them to be large yellow and red flowers. But after exploring for some time, we just couldn't find it! In the end, we stopped at the information booth to ask. That's when the gardener showed us where they were. This time we were successful. The only problem was, the beautiful flower my wife remembered had shrunk into a flower no bigger than a small Impatient! She couldn't hide her disappointment: "I remember them being a lot bigger than this!" she lamented. Reality was, they were not!" (Rob Chaffart)

Our past may often look pretty large to us, but in all reality, if we look a bit closer and bring it into focus, we realize that it contains many unpleasant memories that have grown quite a bit larger over the passing of time than they really were in the first place. To put the past into perspective, we need to decide where we want to live. Instead of dwelling on our past, it would be best to put it behind us, putting our energy into pressing forward, while keeping in mind the goal that God has set in front of each of us. Pushing against the past is often futile and it only seems to get heavier the harder we work at it. The past will work for itself if only we let it be. Today is always a better and safer place to be.

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*Mother Dog!* (Philippians 3:14-16)

*We all need to look ahead in life. The trick is this: do we simply look at thing down the road or those on the side of the road as well? My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.*

Holly and I were moving furniture recently. As we moved the bed from the north end of the room to the west end we uncovered one of the many extension cords that snakes around the mopboards of the room. Since the original builder of our home wasn't generous in the number of installed outlets, Holly and I have had to make use of a few extension cords. At first I really had no idea where the cord was coming from or where it was going. One end disappeared behind a book- case and the other snaked in the general direction of Holly's bedside table. I had to pick the cord up in the middle to determine where it's was going and where it came from. As I pulled higher, one end indicated a tight connection behind the bookcase and the other moved Holly's alarm clock. Problem solved by pulling in the middle instead of either end.

Responsibility is like that. You need to pick it up in order to find out what brought you to it and where it will lead you.

Here's a thought from Lyn Chaffart: My dog recently gave birth to puppies. As soon as she had given birth, instinct took over, and she's been the personification of a good doggy mom ever since; a week old now, the puppies are no longer requiring all her attention. She continues to stay with them most of the time, but every once in awhile she gets restless. Yesterday she begged to go outside. I marveled at the joy she found in sniffing the bushes and rolling in the new grass and generally, being a dog! After just a few minutes, she was ready to go back home, and the restlessness was gone for the day. As I was contemplating her behavior, it occurred to me that God has also given each of us responsibilities, and in order to accept those responsibilities, our values have to change. Just like the focus of my dog's life became her pups, our desires and our drive must also become focused on our God-given assignment. That often means picking up the responsibility God puts directly in front of us first in order to find out where it came from and where it's going. (Lyn Chaffart)

God desires us to complete the tasks He's given us. Like that mother dog could have chosen to romp and play forever, you and I could easily look down the road at the enjoyment we'd like to have and that would become our central focus in life. Then, however, we're in danger of not going back to our God-given responsibilities. He understands that we're still human and allows us to go out and "roll" and "sniff". Let's just remember as we do so, to put our God-task at the top of our priority list, and like that mother dog, return quickly to our main responsibility: trying to figure out where our responsibility came from and where it's going! Doing that will always give us a better perspective on where that responsibility came from and where, ultimately, it's leading us. No hard pull needed; just a gentle tug will do.

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