

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

July 12, 2016

For starters this week, I invite you to consider this picture for a little bit. What do you see? What images or metaphors does it conjure?

I have an old friend who is fond of telling stories about stupid things I've done. I asked him once why he kept telling such things, and he had the audacity to respond, "Well, if you'd quit doing stupid things, I wouldn't have such stories to tell!"

Sadly, I've done another stupid thing.

Last week I used a "weed eater" to trim some grass in my small patio area. I'm always extremely careful to wear eye protection when using a string trimmer . . . but it hadn't occurred to me that the trimmer might throw a rock into the patio door. Sad. Very sad.

When I finished my work and turned the machine off, I heard a sound like a steady rain, and I looked up to see to my horror that I had in fact broken the window, and hundreds—nay, thousands; maybe tens of thousands—of tiny cracks were being born right before my eyes.

There are many lessons to be learned here, not least of which is how very expensive sliding glass doors are these days. But here's the thing. I don't know this for sure, but it appears to me that these cracks are stress fractures that simply make visible the stresses that were already in the glass, but were imperceptible.



This seems to me to be rather a parable of how we spend our lives. We may, like a duck, look calm and collected on the surface, but we're paddling like everything beneath the water, trying not to sink (I'm not sure ducks sink, but we do). Indeed, much of the unseen stress we carry and that quietly elevates our blood pressure may not even be apparent to us.

One concept that has been helpful to me over the years is represented by the simple equations

load > power = crisis; load < power = non-crisis.

The idea is that in any life situation, we compare our understanding of the "load" or "need" in this situation to our understanding of the "power" or "resources" available to us to meet that need. If load exceeds power, we experience a crisis. If power exceeds load, we may have a problem, but we don't have a crisis. My broken window is a situation of this sort, but so are most circumstances of life.

One very useful approach to crisis management, then, is to consider ways in which to "reduce load" or to "increase power." The graphic on the next page illustrates this.



In terms of reducing the “load” or “need” that pressures our lives, the first thing we can do is to “**shed loads**” (as in saying “No”). None of us can do everything, and the task for discernment is to discover what it is that *God* has for us to do in this season of our lives.

We can reduce stress by “**staggering loads**,” coming to terms with the fact that many things in our lives are optional, not essential, and that even the essential things don’t have to be done all at once.

We can reduce stress by “**sharing loads**,” giving other persons in our lives the opportunity to live into the gifts and responsibilities that do not belong to us alone. And sometimes we just need to ask for help.¹

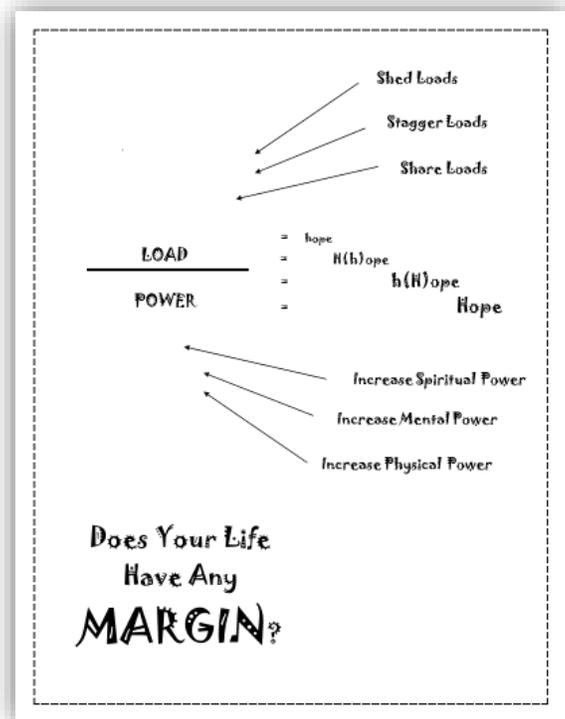
In terms of “increasing power,” we likewise have at least three avenues open to us. In the first place, we can **increase our spiritual power** by giving focused and meaningful attention to “the five things” (WORSHIP, CONNECT, GROW, SERVE, GO). The weekly disciplines of worship, fellowship, ministry and mission, when combined with the daily disciplines of prayer (“spiritual breathing”) and Bible study (“spiritual nourishment”) go a long way toward increasing our awareness of and access to eternal strength.

We can **increase our mental power** by giving attention to lifelong reading and learning. Where do you go to expose yourself to thoughtful reflection on current events? What are you reading that’s actually worth reading? What are you watching that’s actually worth watching? How are you exposing yourself to beauty? “Killing time” is unwise at best. Filling your time with meaningful mental gain and growth will increase your ability to face most anything.

Finally, we can **increase our physical power** by eating wisely, sleeping adequately, and exercising regularly and vigorously. Not only do physical health and strength provide greater power for facing the challenges of daily life, but we have no way of contacting, hearing, or experiencing God at all except through the cells of our bodies. Our bodies are our antennae. But there’s more.

These musings are not all I see when I look at that broken glass in my door. I also see the tangled web of unseen effects that my life and your life have in the larger processes of human existence. Every sin you or I commit, whether public or private, recognized or denied, adds poison to the common well and damages others in ways of which we may never know. That’s the Bad News.

The Good News is that as we live our lives in joyful community with one another and with our Living Lord, there is woven a fabric of unseen effects of a different sort that proceeds from my life and from your life into the larger processes of human existence. You may know this song by Ray Boltz that beautifully affirms the fact that our every act of Christian kindness



¹ I’ve been over “the four hopes” in this column recently, so I won’t go over that again here.

and witness, whether public or private, recognized or not, adds redemption to the common well and heals others in ways of which we may never know . . . at least on This Side:

Thank You for Giving to the Lord

Music & Lyrics by Ray Boltz

I dreamed I went to Heaven, you were there with me.
We walked upon the streets of gold beside the Crystal Sea.
We heard the angels singing, then someone called your name.
You turned and saw this young man,
and he was smiling as he came.
He said, "Friend you may not know me now,"
and then he said, "But wait -
You used to teach my Sunday School, when I was only eight.
And every week you would say a prayer
before the class would start.
And one day when you said that prayer,
I asked Jesus in my heart."

*Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am so glad you gave*

Then another man stood before you,
he said "Remember the time,
A missionary came to your church,
His pictures made you cry.
You didn't have much money but you gave it anyway.
Jesus took that gift you gave
And that's why I'm in Heaven today."

*Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am so glad you gave.*

.....

*And we know that in all things God works
for the good of those who love him, who have been
called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*

And all God's people said, "Amen."

