

...from the heart

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 - > Bible Studies from Pastor Nick
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Patchogue Church of the Nazarene Group

Is God Here?

Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took most of its people as slaves back to Babylon. One of them was a teenager named Daniel. Babylon's goal was to change Daniel from a follower of God to a follower of the values of their culture.

How did Daniel resist this? He did two things:

First, he determined that he would not defile himself by certain behaviors and customs of Babylon.

Daniel 1:8 – But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king.

Second, he was determined to care for his inner spiritual life and his relationship with God. When a law was passed that any person who prayed to anyone except the king would be thrown into the den of lions we read this:

Daniel 6:10 – But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.

Notice that Daniel was not praying only because it was a time of crisis. Spending time with God was not unusual for Daniel; it was something he had always done. Because of these two things: refusing to live like the Babylonians, and spending much time shut in with the Lord, Daniel was known as a servant of the Living God (Daniel 6:19).

Daniel resisted the temptation to fit in with the culture around him by doing what Paul said we should do: Romans 12:2 – Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you...

Not too long ago I shared the following scripture with our leaders at a Church Board meeting: Ezekiel 48:35 TM: "From now on the name of the city will be Yahweh-Shammah: "God-Is-There."

I told the board that this is what I want our church to be known as, "Yahweh-Shammah" which means, "God-is-there." I want people to say

of our church, "God-is-there." I want people entering our church to sense Yahweh-Shammah: "God-Is-There."

Now here's the thing: if our church is to be known as Yahweh-Shammah: "God-Is-There" then each one of us individually must be known by that name; after all, we are the church - that's right, not the building, but us - we are the church.

Do others say of you, "the Lord is with that person"? Are you known as "a servant of the Living God"? If people are not sensing the Lord's presence in each of us, they will not sense His presence in our church. Each one of us must do more than spend time in religious activities; each of us must also spend time in the secret place with God.

If others are going to experience God's presence in our church it will have much more to do with our individual lives than with the singing, praying, and preaching. We can't fake God's presence in ourselves or in the church. If we are to be a Yahweh Shammah church, it will take each of us not conforming to the behavior and customs of this world, but letting God transform us by spending time with Him in the quiet place, intimate with God, as Daniel was.

And that's ...

F.T.H.
Pastor Jerry



Pastor's daily "GOOD MORNING!" message includes updates and announcements on church activities, prayer requests, a devotional, of course some jokes, quotes, trivia, news and some other things of interest. To begin receiving "Good Morning" send an email address to: pastor.jerry@verizon.net and he will add you to the daily distribution.

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Campbell.

"The last thing I remember is Thanksgiving dinner.
I asked for wings."

Forever Family Update

DEDICATED TO THE LORD

Damon Jamie Boutsikos
Michael Giuseppe Bernard

Nathan James Franco (Dedicated by his Grandfather, Pastor Nick)



NEWLY BAPTIZED

On August 3 Pastor Nick and Pastor Jerry had the privilege, honor, and blessing to baptize: Aliyah Ivory, Michele Lento, and Kasha Marie. Their testimony was read before they were baptized. Aliyah's was read by her sister, Destiny; Michele's was read by Jennifer Mercurio, and Kasha's was read by Lauren Barker. We thank the First Baptist Church of Patchogue for once again allowing us to use their church for our annual Baptism Service.



BLESSINGS IN OUR MIDST

Melanie Ollett preached in our Sunday Service on August 24. Melanie grew up in our church and so this was a real blessing for us. She is a Ministry Intern at Capitol Hill United Methodist Church and attends Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C.



Megan Mahler and Dan Reder are getting married in our church on September 1. What a blessing. Megan also grew up in our church.

The Springfield Gardens Church of the Nazarene will be using our church again for their annual Prayer Retreat on November 1. You are invited to attend.

MOVING FORWARD

Tom Fordham moved to Florida. We hated to see him go, but we know this was a good move for him. He was part of our church for many years and even served as our custodian for a while. He called me recently and asked that I say hello to everyone for him.

Here is his new address:

3 Cerrudo Lane

Palm Coast, Florida 32137

ATTENTION GOOD NEWS BOWLERS!!

It's not too late to sign up for our once a month bowling league at Patchogue Bowl Long Island. This is a mixed fun league that runs through June. We close out each year with a luncheon and some prizes. Teams are made up of 4 people (should be mixed male/female). Cost is \$30 to join first month and \$20 each month thereafter (any missed prize fund money must be made up). If you are interested send me an email at corinnefchurch@verizon.net



Warm
**HARVEST
COBBLER**

These fall flavors will remind you of all the season's goodness.

What you need:

- An adult to help



Fruit mixture

- 4 cups apples and/or pears (peeled, cored and diced)
- 2 cups fresh cranberries, halved
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 3 Tablespoons cornstarch

Crumble topping

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup butter

What you do:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease 8" or 9" baking dish.
2. Prepare fruit mixture and place in baking dish.
3. In another bowl, combine dry ingredients. Add in cut butter until it's a crumbly texture. Sprinkle over fruit mixture.
4. Bake for 45-50 minutes or until fruit juices bubble and topping is browned.
5. Optional: Serve with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.

On Our Calendar

Holy Communion Served the first Sunday of the Month



- 1** The Wedding of Megan Mahler and Dan Reder
- 6** 8am Men's Breakfast at Island Grill Diner
- 8** 7pm Christian Training & Ministry Board (CTMB) meeting (at HPYC)



- 11** Patriot Day
- 20** 9:30am Ladies Brunch (Fellowship Hall)
- 23** Fall begins



- 4** 8am Men's Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)



- 1** 7am – 3:30pm Springfield Gardens Church of the Nazarene Prayer Retreat

- 2** Turn Your Clocks Back 1 hour before bed!



- 4** Election Day – VOTE!
- 11** Veterans Day
- 27** Thanksgiving Day



- 30** First Sunday of Advent





Ladies' Sewing Circle

Over the summer break a few ladies decided to meet to start work on a small quilting project called the "Women of Christmas" designed by Carol Honderich. We are learning some new techniques in "paper-piecing", and having a lot of fun and laughs during the process. Each night we meet, we read a chapter from the book The Women of Christmas by Liz Curtis Higgs. We are working our way through the Christmas story in Luke, discussing the three women who played major roles: Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna. Anyone who would like more information on the table runner or the book can find it at: www.patternsofffaith.com

I am planning a date for a group project in the fall with the "Quilt for Kids" organization. Look for more information to follow - this will be a sewing machine project, so if you have one and know how to use it, we will be looking for you :-)

We continue to work on baby dedication blankets. If you can crochet, knit, or quilt, perhaps you would consider making one for donation. The Ladies' Sewing Circle will resume our normal schedule September 18, meeting on the third Thursday of the month at 7pm in the Youth Center building. Please bring your sewing or stitchery project and any supplies you will need.

Looking forward to seeing some new faces in the Fall.

Keeping you in stitches :)
Corinne Franco



PSALM 100:2, ESV

Women's Ministry

We are midway through a pretty nice summer and it is usually hard to think about the autumn calendar now but plan ahead we must.

During these summer months, our Tuesday night ladies group has continued to meet on a regular basis. We have been taking turns sharing a weekly devotion from a book entitled Devotions from the Heart by Pamela Kennedy. It is amazing how each lady has found a devotion that has really spoken to heart. After it is read, we have a lively discussion as we share our thoughts on the message. In the fall, the group will be studying Choose Joy by Kay Warren. From the title, you can gather that it is about finding the true joy of Christ in our daily lives. All ladies are welcome to attend.



We continue to collect items for Operation Christmas Child each month. Our generous congregation has brought in an abundance of most of our requests. Between our Packing Party in November and individual shoe box donations, I hope to reach 200 boxes for less fortunate boys and girls in our own country and around the world.

We will be having a brunch on Saturday, September 20th at 9:30am. Mark your calendars and plan to join us for good food, fellowship and fun. I will hand out flyers as we get closer to the date.

I don't know about you, but as I watch/read the news, I can't help but be reminded of how fragile life is. As we hear about the wars, natural disasters, crime and the brokenness of so many, it draws me closer and closer to my Heavenly Father. It is so important for us to study His Word and learn about the truths found in the Bible so that we don't crumble under the pressures of this world. We are blessed to have 3 pastors who preach the Word shamelessly, guide and counsel us, and love us with the love of the Lord. My prayer is that each of us will have our spiritual eyes and ears open to draw strength and hope from our Savior. Let's put our relationship with God before anything else in our lives; that is what He wants from us. It will be your best investment of time!

In Christ,

Mary Ann

The Power of Prayer

On Monday July 14th, a friend of mine was riding by my house on her bike. She stopped to talk and told me that her Aunt, (Sister) Carol, and Carol's friend (Sister) Beth, (both Nuns) were going to the Holy Land that week. It was their 50th Jubilee, and they decided they wanted to go to Israel to be closer to God. My friend joked all the other Nuns had parties, but not these two!

She knows I go to "Women In Touch" on Tuesday nights and asked if we would pray for their safety. I told her we would, and we did. During the week, Maryann Malcolm asked me how the nuns were, had my friend heard anything. I said no.

Monday July 21st, my friend called and said that no one had heard from the two nuns, other than a quick text saying all they'd done since they got there was run in and out of bomb shelters. That message was Friday the 18th. She said they were extremely shaken by the entire ordeal and just wanted to come home. My friend asked again for prayer for them. No one had heard anything else. The news that night said all flights in and out of Israel to the United States were being suspended on Tuesday July 22nd.

On Tuesday July 22nd, just before I was leaving for "In Touch", I got a text from my friend that Carol and Beth had made it onto a flight just before the suspension took effect, and had landed on American soil safe and sound!! How Awesome to see the mighty hand of God at work, up close and personal! Romans 8:28

Faith First,

Diana Ivory



Annual Church Picnic

Sunday afternoon, July 27, the Men's Group again sponsored our Annual Church Picnic under the Big Top. With BBQ's blazing, Kenny Kreamer, Bob Bier and Bob Dapelo manned

the charcoal grills skillfully turning out tons of hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken. Thanks Guys!

A veritable smorgasbord of delectable foods and desserts filled the serving tables; congregants and guests laughed and chatted as they filled their plates with the special dishes of all who contributed to the event. Grateful hearts thanked the Lord that the

predicted threat of rain never materialized, allowing close to 150 people to enjoy a dry afternoon, a good meal, and a chance to get to know each other a little better. I'm sure our former director, the late Jim Brennan, would have been pleased.

Special thanks to Bob and Felicia Beer who did most of the preparation and leg work, to Bob and Chrissy Dapelo who generously covered the cost of the big top tent, and all who helped set up and take down and clean up: you made it all happen. On behalf of the Men's Group, I want to offer a special word of thanks to all.

John Mercurio
MEN's Group Director



How Do You Fuel Your Fire?

2 Tim. 1:6-7 - "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline." (NIV)

I am a pyromaniac of sorts. I inherited this trait from my father, and I seem to have passed it along to my sons in varying degrees. I love to sit on my patio with my fire pit roaring into the night. Sometimes I get distracted while the fire is burning away. I don't really notice that it is going out slowly while I am right there. An outdoor fire uses a lot of wood. The heat is not being captured for any useful purpose, although you can keep warm if you sit near it on a cool night. However, I don't light my patio fires for the purpose of keeping warm. I just enjoy the flames, the crackle, and the fact that I'm burning a fire.

I really don't want that fire to dwindle down and die until I'm ready, but sometimes that's exactly what happens. I find myself with more wood, sitting on the concrete and blowing on the partially glowing embers trying to get a fresh flame started to keep the fire burning. I probably look foolish, and I stink like smoke, but I get that fire burning again no matter what. I may have to get some newspaper and small dry sticks and wood to reignite it to flame. No matter what else I should be doing or how long it takes, I am compelled to get that fire going again.

As I sat there fanning my coals into flame, I thought of Paul's admonition to Timothy. "Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you." Yes, we have a gift from God in us, whatever that may be. It is up to us to keep it alive and active for use for the Kingdom of God. Sometimes we get lazy; sometimes we get tired; sometimes time is flying by and we just get caught up in the momentum. Whatever the reason, we may find ourselves going through the motions and just existing rather than actively ministering for The Lord. We need to recognize when this is happening and do something about it.

Like my fire, I hardly notice that it is going out, even when I'm right there; I get distracted. We can get distracted in our spiritual lives as well. We are expected to be diligent in nurturing our spiritual life. God has given us His Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit to help keep us on track. However, life happens, and the reality is that we sometimes drift a bit. We can become comfortable or possibly numb, and not notice that our spiritual life is dying down in intensity. Be diligent, and pray to be in tune and aware of the condition of your spiritual life. Then do whatever it takes to get it back on God's intended path. It's our responsibility before God to nurture our spiritual lives and be ready to serve Him constantly.

As I diligently watch my fire and jump in when I notice it is dwindling down to reignite the flame, the Bible tells us that God is doing the same thing with us. In Isaiah, the prophet tells us that God will never let the fire in us go out completely.

Isaiah 42:3 - "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

Matthew, speaking of Jesus in prophecy says this same thing...

Matt. 12:20 - "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

We have God's word on this. He is not willing to let us die spiritually. God will never snuff us out, and Matthew quotes this prophecy to tell us that Jesus will never snuff us out either. God will be prompting us to get back on track, because He never wants us to wither up and die spiritually. So be diligent. Pray constantly. Stay in the Word, and keep guard for your spiritual well-being. I pray that you, like me, really like to see the fire burning brightly with beautiful flames and generating a lot of heat. Throw another log on the fire and enjoy His blessings.



Grace and Peace,
Pastor Nick ☺

In God We Trust

The phrase, "In God We Trust," has become one of many *politically correct* battle grounds of the 21st Century. Using the first amendment, clause "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ..." and the twisted, out of shape phrase of Thomas Jefferson, Separation of Church and State, the battle to remove God from our currency and public profile continues to rage on in our courts.

The motto, "In God We Trust," was first added to our money in 1862 under The Legal Tender Act, by Solomon Chase, Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of Treasury. Chase was a devout Christian, an Episcopalian, and an abolitionist. It was reported that he often sang hymns while bathing, the equivalent of our singing in the shower today. The first paper dollars displaying a national trust in God were called greenbacks. This marked the first time the Federal Government printed paper currency. Prior to this, each state printed its own paper money. It was 49 years later that the first serious challenge to this ruling was presented. Surprisingly, it came from a religiously devout Christian, our 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, who believed it was sacrilege to put God's name on money.

More than 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ was publicly challenged with a cleverly planned, no win scenario from several of the religious leaders of his day. Trying to trap Jesus, they interrupted his teaching with a premeditated question designed to get him in trouble no matter how he answered it. "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" they asked. I can picture them wringing their hands in evil anticipation, thinking, "Now we've got Him!" There was no way to come out of this without it hurting him ... or so they thought. A *yes* would discredit him among the people, making him appear to favor the hated Romans. A *no*, would give them cause to report him as dangerous rebel who incites the people to disregard Roman law. Unlike so many leaders today, who double talk their way out of loaded questions, Jesus answered it directly.

Matthew records: "But Jesus knew their evil motives. "You hypocrites!" he said. "Why are you trying to trap me? Here, show me the coin used for the tax." When they handed him a Roman coin, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Well, then," he said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." Matthew 22: 17 – 21 (NLT) Jesus' answer left them dumbfounded and awestruck, leaving them to ask each other another question ... What just happened?

Christians living in the 21st century face situations on a daily basis that sometimes feel like the trap question presented to Jesus, the kind where any choice you make will result in negative results. How many restless nights have you tossed and turned grappling with a no win scenario? Wishing you had the kind of wisdom Jesus demonstrated that day. But how does a regular person find that kind of wisdom?

Not long ago, in morning prayer, I asked God for help to deal with a problem that I've wrestled with for years. I opened a daily journal that documents God's personal involvement in my life. I read an entry from May of 2012. In a dream I walked along a country road making good progress until my way was blocked by an abnormally huge snake. It stretched itself completely across the road, and no matter how I tried, I couldn't get around it. For a moment it would recoil leaving part of the way open, but immediately fill the gap when I'd try to pass. I knew the snake wasn't deadly to me, but it preyed on my fear to keep me from getting where I was supposed to go ... where God wanted me to go. No matter what I tried, I couldn't solve the problem of the giant snake. God was showing me that only He could lift me over and above this obstacle. The snake represented the problems, questions, and obstacles of life that stand in my way. God is willing to lift us by His Spirit, giving us power over the no win scenarios we face on a daily basis. But how do we gain the wisdom and understanding that we need?

"If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought." James 1: 5 -7 (The Message)

God knows the answers to the tough questions of this life, and he often uses them to get us to turn our focus back to Him. Life is made up of individual days, each with its own specific challenges. Let's seek Him early each day for the strength, wisdom and answers that only He can provide.

Serving Him Together,

John Mercurio

Children's Ministry at Its Best



“Discover, Decide, Defend” was the motto for our Vacation Bible School, **Agency D3**, this past August. For an entire week of fun and learning, kids from our church and our community looked for evidence to discover who Jesus really is. Field agents, a.k.a. teachers and aides, helped new recruits collect evidence to study

the facts about Jesus, decide to follow him, defend their faith with the truth revealed in the Bible, and become special agents of God.

Based on 1 Peter 3:15 -“But honor the Messiah as Lord in your heart. Always be ready to give defense to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”, **Agency D3** offered a fun and sound way of teaching kids about the gospel, Jesus’ purpose and mission as our Savior, and the steps to becoming a Christian. They answered questions like “Is Jesus Really the Son of God?”, “Was Jesus More Than Just a Good Man?”, “Was Jesus’ Death Real?”, “Is Jesus Alive?” and “What Do I Do with the Evidence About Jesus?” Using their special agent gadgets in The Evidence Vault, recruits investigated the eye witness reports and documents in the Bible that proved all these questions true. The truth about Jesus was revealed!

In addition, recruits had the opportunity to observe the work of two special agents, ZZRoe and Hacker, learn about the gospel, and observe a mission during the Worship Rally in Headquarters. They sang and danced to great theme related songs in The Communication Hub, performed some incredible experiments (crafts) in The Lab, exercised in The Training Grounds and ate great snacks in The Break Room. In getting ready to become better Christians, children collected special offerings each night for “Kids Reaching Kids”, a denominational Church of the Nazarene mission program that provides recordings of biblical stories to non-readers around the world.



Agency D3 was a magnificent experience and blessing to every one who was part of it from children to adults. Our entire congregation helped to bring this very rewarding project to fruition in one way or another. At Children’s Ministry, we are extremely grateful to those who donated money, those who put their talents at work by developing promotional skits and printed material, creating props and decorating, the volunteers who helped organize the event and the workers that came every night to make sure our special agents were taught, had fun, and remained safe for the period of time they were with us. May this experience be of motivation to everyone to continue participating in the various children’s programs offered in our church. This is the right time to be part of the great task that God has put in front of us of spreading the gospel. Let’s start with the children!

Blessings,
Nereida Gazzo

The Progression

Get to know Jesus well because the more you know him, the more you’ll love him. And the more you love him, the more you’ll want to follow him. And the more you follow him, the more you’ll become like him. And the more you become like him, the more you become yourself.

—Ned Erickson

Who is My Neighbor?

Hi, I'm Liz Duffy. I have been attending our church for many years now, and I have begun a new task: I will be interviewing people in our church and posting it in each edition, along with a picture, if they are willing ☺. This is a new and exciting addition to our newsletter, and I am looking forward to speaking to all of the members of our Forever Family in an effort to bring us all a little closer together.

This endeavor is in keeping with *Mizpah*; this offers another way to remain connected by catching a glimpse of each other's lives as we walk with Christ. It is an extension of worship. As you may know, I am an avid volunteer in Children's Ministry, and one week, while I was downstairs with Nereida Gazzo, we read Acts 2: 43 – 47. The word "shared" is repeated in the text. The Apostles and early Christians shared their lives together for the glory of God. The breaking of bread, providing resources to those in need, teaching, bringing the good news to the world, and being in constant fellowship was an act of worship. I hope through these interviews we learn something new from our brothers and sisters, find encouragement and insight, and ultimately bring greater glory and praise to Jesus

I recently spoke with Angelo Vitale, a business owner and a fellow brother in Christ. He is 35 years old and was introduced to the Nazarene Church by Mrs. Maria Mahler and family. Angelo says, "Mrs. Mahler really got me focused on The Lord by attending bible studies at her home. God bless her; she is truly a wonderful person."

Liz: *What is the name of your business?*

Angelo: Vitale's Karate Academy, a Karate school for girls and boys ages 3 and up.

L: *What do the different color belts mean?*

A: The darker the belt, the more advanced the student. For example: white, yellow, orange and green are beginner based belts; blue, purple and brown are advanced.

L: *What does a student have to accomplish in order to move up to the next color belt level?*

A: In order to move up the belt system, there is a curriculum that has to be met for each level of training. The higher the belt level, the more advanced the training. With our children, we really concentrate on school and family, so the school teacher and parents must also agree that the student has achieved a new level. They are given a form to fill out prior to the student's test.

L: *You are teaching the younger students positive moral lessons. What are some of these?*

A: With the younger students we concentrate a lot on school and family values. We also make it a point to focus their curriculum on stranger danger, bully awareness, and peer pressure avoidance.

L: *How do your methods change for your older students? Give some examples.*

A: With our teen and adult students, the curriculum is really based towards their needs, such as weight loss, stress relief, confidence building and practical self-defense.

L: *What are some of your goals for your school and students?*

A: I really just want my students to progress and feel great about themselves and their progress.

L: *It would seem that you, as teacher of karate, are actually sharing some of the ways for living that Jesus taught us in the Bible. Would you like to comment on this?*

A: All of our classes are positively reinforced by the instructors. No negativity is allowed. We really try to emphasize that our students are to be leaders and role models wherever they go. It's easy to be a follower, but it takes a great person to step up and be a leader.

L: *What is it you hope to accomplish in the future with your work as a karate instructor?*

A: I would really like to continue to see our students' lives just keep on changing for the better!



“What Did You Learn About Yourself?”

On August 9th I attended a block party in Selden, invited by my sister-in-law Ginny and her husband Karl, along with other friends and family. Later that evening, another friend, Sal, walked down. He came to America from Italy with his wife, both not yet 20, to live with relatives here. Some years later, they bought their own home at the other end of the block from Ginny and Karl. They’ve been there for over 40 years. Sal still speaks with a soft accent and the slow, deliberate speech of someone who searches for the correct English words, even though he’s been here for so long and is perfectly fluent.

A few years ago, Sal had visited during that particular year’s block party. I had mentioned my faith during a point of conversation about my divorce, which caused him to ask very direct questions about why I believed and my relationship with God. He did not have any particular faith, but believed in “the Man up there.” It didn’t surprise me that this year I found myself in another conversation with him about religion. He asked me how I was getting along. Unlike a few years ago, this year I was in a much better place emotionally and spiritually. Through extreme difficulties, I’ve learned to trust and believe more than ever before. This all flowed out in my conversation. It’s interesting - and wonderfully satisfying - to speak to someone who is completely enamored with every word that you have to say. His entire being was Ear. Entirely listening: Absorbing. Every so often he questioned me so he could fully understand something I said. Eventually, I stopped talking, as I was becoming repetitious. He was silent for several seconds, and then asked a single question,

“So, what did you learn about yourself?”

I didn’t quite know what he meant. I had just spoken at length about how God had been with me through great hardships. I had been very deliberate in giving God the honor for it all. So I tried to rephrase some of what I’d already told him. I added that I wasn’t bitter and angry. Like I had been in the past. I included some of the ways God has opened doors of ministry for me, but Sal still wasn’t satisfied.

“No, what did you learn about *yourself*?”

“I’m sorry Sal; I don’t know what you mean.”

He proceeded to tell me a story from his childhood. He and some friends were swimming in a lake. There was an almond tree growing on the bank and they had an idea to throw rocks at the almonds to knock some off the tree. One of the rocks came down and hit Sal directly on top of his head. He found it was bleeding pretty badly. He, as he said, “...found out what a wimp I was.” He thought he would bleed to death and cried like a baby. All of his young male bravado vanished in a flash, and he realized he was afraid of dying. He believed that he also found out he was a coward deep inside. “So,” he continued, “I later studied martial arts and became a black belt, as did my wife. I’ve used my skills for protection, and as an instructor. But I still wonder - if I was ever in a situation, such as with a gun at my head, and no way to defend myself, would I be a coward, or would I die like a man? You see, I learned something about myself back then with that rock. Deep down, I’m a coward. So, what I’m asking is this: what did you learn about yourself when you were faced with so much that was difficult? You must have learned something that you never knew before. Something that made you overcome it all.”



Learn
&
Grow

I realized Sal was looking for more than just my survival story. I thought for a while, during which time Sal did not say anything. He waited, giving me time to think.

“You know Sal, I lived with my parents until I went to college, where I lived in a dormitory with roommates and adult supervision. Right after I graduated, I lived with my last roommate’s parents as I began working. From there, I moved into my future in-law’s home, sharing a room with my soon-to-be sister in law. From there, I married; then, after 26 years, we divorced. For the first time in my life, at the age of 50, I was living completely on my own. I found out everything I had *believed* to be true about myself was not true at all. I found out I *could* take care of, and manage, *myself*.”

This was what he was looking for. He wasn’t looking for confirmation to an answer; he was looking for the answer itself: “*Everything I believed to be true was not true at all.*”

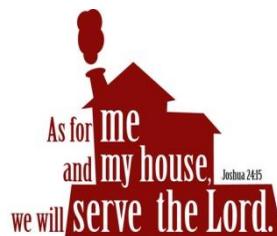
“My wife is not well. She and I have been together since we were teenagers. She is my life. Lately, I’ve been making sure to compliment her more. She still gets mad at me pretty quick, but I understand it’s because she doesn’t feel well. I help her. I do the shopping because walking is very painful. Sometimes I forget something she asked me to pick up. She gets mad, and I understand that. I love her. But what am I going to do if I’m alone? She’s my whole world. I’m 65 and, like you, I’ve never lived on my own.”

Interestingly enough, my dad said something similar not too long ago on my last visit. “All I’ve ever needed was your Mom,” Dad said. “As long as I have her, I don’t need anything else.” What an incredible statement of love and faithfulness.

“I’m finding my Roman Catholic faith again. I grew up with it, but find myself coming back now. I believe it’s the best kind of faith out there.”

I didn’t find any reason to refute what he said. I went to Mass for 20 years after I married because God told me to stop fighting about Him and which denomination was “right”. I met many, many wonderful, faith-filled Christians living out the “business” details of their faith through Catholicism. I supported Sal in this and said I was happy to hear it, which I truly was. I also believe that all I had said prior to the “Big Question” would play a role in giving Sal a sense of peace and calm about the future. Ultimately, I hope I pointed him to the reason for my success: Jesus.

Life’s circumstances may cause us to become emotionally, mentally or spiritually broken. Like Sal, who still believes that because he cried as a child, it meant he was, at his core, a coward. Like me, who believed that I could never manage my own life as a single woman. Like countless others who believe “THE LIE”; that crippling untruth, whatever it may be. It takes the furnace of God’s searing-hot, refining fire to show us that what we believed to be pure-gold truth, was actually pure-dross lie. We know where the lies come from, and who authors them. We also know He has already won the victory for us, and He asks us to believe Him instead of the lie. It’s so difficult to unlearn what is ingrained. And yet, the answer is simply this: we make a choice with every decision we face. Joshua stated it best, “Choose you this day (*this hour, this minute, this second*) whom you will serve (*align yourself with, give allegiance to, believe, take orders from*).... but as for me and my house (*spiritual, physical and the structural dwelling-place*) we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15



In His Love, *Sue Cerrato*