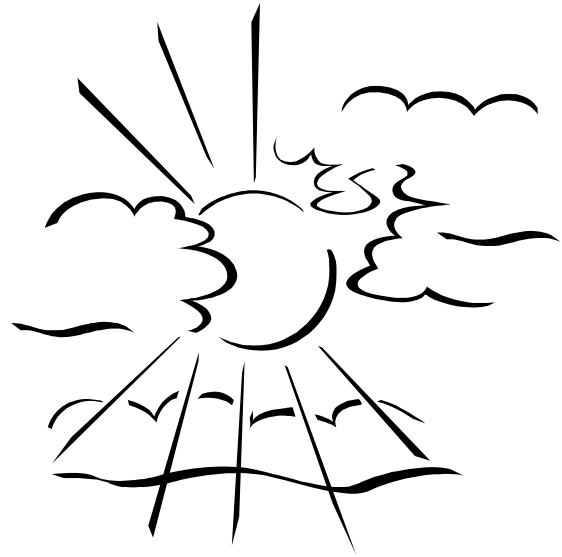


EDITORIAL

EVERY DAY'S A BLESSING



This summer I celebrated a landmark birthday – the one they say life begins at! Likewise did a work acquaintance of mine a couple of months earlier. Neither of us especially relished the transition from “young” to “middle-aged” - something this particular birthday seemed to herald. Birthdays, anniversaries and the dawning of a New Year are often times of reflection and taking stock. In my case, a number of things in the run-up to my birthday made me stop and re-evaluate my view of the approaching landmark. The national news just 4 days earlier led with the story of how a talented, newly wed 25-year-old doctor had been murdered whilst on honeymoon in Antigua. Listening to the local news just 30 minutes later, I was horrified to hear a young woman killed in a car accident the previous morning was the daughter of a former work colleague. Two young lives, full of potential, cut off in their prime before they reached their 30th birthday, never mind their 40th. A comment made to me the week before brought both these tragic incidents into sharp focus. A lady on a course I was attending, in remission for cancer for two years, related how her brush with death had radically changed her perspective on life – “Every day you wake up, you realise just how much you have to be thankful for, and you remember that every day’s a blessing.” We all know this to be true, especially when we consider the numbers of precious lives aborted in the United Kingdom every day, before they ever had the chance to be born, live, and make an impact on our world. Yet, as we journey through life, we will face difficult days, which, on the face of it, seem far from a blessing. How can we positively face such days, and what attitudes and actions should we avoid? In this editorial I would like to glean from the pages of Scripture some words of encouragement and instruction to enable us to respond to the more difficult days we may face at whatever stage of life they may occur.

1. They can be days of **FRUSTRATING PAIN**. A friend of mine has observed that life gets more complicated as he gets older! It is ironic that children often can’t wait to grow up, yet in facing the adult roles of student, employee, spouse, parent, provider or carer, they may yearn once more for the care-free days of childhood. I have witnessed in my own parents the complications – often physically painful – that the ailments of old age can bring. Yet so many of a much younger age are suffering from different types of pain – that of shattered dreams, unfulfilled hopes, loneliness or bereavement – to name but a few. How wonderful for the Christian to know in such times the reality of the Lord’s *presence* – “... Lo, I am with you always...” (Matt 28:20) “... I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Heb 13:5) We can take succour from His *portion* – “... As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” (Deut 33:25) And we can derive much comfort from His *promises*: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” (2 Cor 12:9)

2. They can be days of **FRAGRANT PRAISE**. As I write this, the price of food, power and seemingly everything bar our houses is soaring. As the credit crunch bites, pay rises bear little resemblance to the current financial climate. Add to this the wettest August on record, plus a headline-dominating global recession, and there is much we could complain about. Being a Christian in no way exempts us from the problems common to all, yet a watching world closely scrutinises *how* we react to them. If we grumble and complain just as much as our unsaved colleagues or friends, what message does this send out about the joy of the Lord, His ability to satisfy, and our faith in Him to meet our daily needs? But what a difference if we do just the opposite, saying with the Psalmist, "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Ps 34:1). What a tremendous impact has the Christian who, through lip and life, demonstrates a real difference and distinctiveness in how they face and deal with problems and adversity. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me ..." (Ps 50:23). When others see that having Christ in a life really works, they may consider trusting Him too.

3. They can be days of **FOOLISH PROCRASTINATION**. Have you ever heard someone talking of having some free time to "kill"? It has wisely been said "Kill time and you murder opportunity." As countless scriptures testify, time is short (Job 7:6 & 14:1-2; Psalm 39:4-5 & 89:47). A 1970s song on the wonder of human life joyfully rang, "How I treasure every moment!" Do we, as the Puritan Joseph Alleine taught, count our time more precious than gold? Helen Steiner Rice so wisely wrote: "Life is not measured by the years that you live / But by the things that you do, and the joy that you give / And each day, as it comes, brings a chance to each one / To love to the fullest, leaving nothing undone." And doing what's right today means no regrets tomorrow. Whatever we are going to do for God we must do quickly. Our job is to make the best use of the present moment, as God-given opportunities, once missed, may be missed forever, so especially important with regards to our soul's salvation. Remember, life is uncertain (Jam 4:14; Pr 27:1), God's Spirit will not always strive with man (Gen 6:3), and His counsel is very clear "Seek ye the Lord *while* he may be found, call ye upon him *while* he is near." (Is 55:6) "Acquaint *now* thyself with him, and be at peace". (Job 22:21)

4. They can be days of **FULFILLING PURPOSE**. Caleb, aged 40, was one of twelve spies sent by Moses to Canaan (Num 13:6). He and Joshua were the only two of the whole number who encouraged the people to enter boldly into the land and possess it. Forty-five years later Caleb came to Joshua and claimed possession of the land of the Anakim, Hebron and the neighbouring hill country. This was immediately granted to him (Josh 14:7-14). The following chapter relates how he took possession of Hebron. Noah was 600 years old when he and, through his godly influence, his whole family entered into the ark he had been instrumental in building, having fully obeyed all that God had instructed him to do (Gen 6:13-7:6). Sarah gave birth to her son Isaac at the age of 90 (Gen 17:15-19). Isaac was 40 years old when he first laid eyes on Rebekah, the woman he would marry (Gen 25:20). Of course people may no longer live to 600 years old or have children at the age of 90, but the principle is clear – the happiness that God's blessing brings, and our usefulness in His service extend to all ages in our lives, and are in no way confined or restricted to our youth only.

5. They can be days of **FAITHFUL PLANTING**. A loving Heavenly Father has given every one of us gifts and resources to use for His glory, and the extension of His kingdom. Knowing that we will reap in proportion to what we have sowed, do we sow sparingly or bountifully? (Luke 6:38; 2 Cor 9:6-7) The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatian believers, encouraged them to “not be weary in well-doing” (Gal 6:9). Giving and investing in others, rather than impoverishing us, will do just the opposite. “The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” (Prov 11:25) As so often has been said, God is no man’s debtor: “Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? (Rom 11:35) So, dear reader, keep persevering, and keep sowing – “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” (Eccl 11:1)

6. They can be days of **FERVENT PRAYER**. J. E. Hartill once said “Prayer is the slender sinew that moves the muscle of omnipotence”, whilst the Apostle James wrote in his epistle, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (or woman) availeth much.” (Jam 5:16) The CSCU (NI) Committee is privileged to have in its ranks a stalwart of the faith in her nineties, who, though physically weak, is yet spiritually vibrant and strong, and widely regarded as a “prayer warrior”. She recognises the role that God still has for her, and heaven alone will reveal the value of those prayers. Dear reader, do you sometimes feel there is little you can do in God’s service? Take encouragement, you can pray, and do so in the knowledge that, even should you forget what you have prayed, yet God will never forget, with not a single prayer falling to the ground, wasted (Rev 5:8). Many a prayer unanswered in a believer’s lifetime has often been answered *after* they have gone to their heavenly reward. So persevere (1 Thess 5:17). Remember, too, if your troubles are deep-seated or long-standing, try kneeling!

7. They can be days in which we know the **FATHER’S PLEASURE**. Whether we are 18 or 80, in living the Christian life we learn that God’s way is always the best way, bringing happiness and fulfilment, rather than robbing us of them – “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:17) But, in a world which glories in youth and beauty, how wonderful to love and serve a God with whom there are no exclusion clauses on grounds of age! How precious is His promise, “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry ...” (Is 46:4). In His service we do not retire – we are re-tired! – “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree ... They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.” (Ps 92:12 & 14)

What can we say in conclusion? Difficulties may cross our pathway at any stage of our lives, but possibly more so as we grow older. Yet some words a dear friend wrote on my birthday card this year are so wonderfully apt as we consider these things: “... Just remember that you are in the best possible place. You are a follower of Jesus – and He knows your needs and the desires of your heart, before you even tell Him. You are in the palm of His hand, and He will never let you down. So just keep your eyes fixed on Him.” Surely this is wise counsel indeed.