

A Christmas Greeting

The Christmas season is usually one of the busiest of the year for each of us. It would be easy to allow ourselves to be caught up in the hustle and bustle, so focused on getting everything done, that we miss opportunities to be Jesus to someone else.

A CAR BATTERY IN JESUS' NAME ...

by Tim Throckmorton, July-2009

I preached Ray's funeral last week, he asked me if I would back in February. So I did my best to fulfill my promise to my friend. And it was during the preparation for the service that it dawned on me the great lesson I had learned from our friendship. Before I share the lesson, let me tell you how we met.

Back in the early 1990's I was the store manager for the Harts department store in Wheelersburg Ohio, just a few miles from where I Pastor today. It was late on a Sunday evening, the store was closed, the money was put away and I was headed out the door. In fact I was scheduled to preach at a church close by that night and I was already a little late. "I hate being late!" Anyway, as I was making a bee line for the front door the phone rang. We're closed I thought to myself and I'm late, but for some reason I sauntered back to the service desk and answered the phone. "Oh thank goodness your still there" A man said, "I really need your help."

The frantic voice on the other end belonged to Ralph Lavender. I had met Ralph a time or two at the store and I recognized his voice immediately, but was curious as to how I could help. "Tim" he explained, "My car has a dead battery and I have an important appointment in the morning and I need a new battery right now." But, I'm late I was thinking as I took down his cars information and headed back to the automotive department almost hoping that I was out of the model he needed.

"I've got one right here" I heard myself saying to Ralph, quite sure of what he was about to ask me to do next. "Tim, if you wouldn't mind, could you bring it out here to my house and put it in for me?" I'll do my best", I told him as I hurriedly loaded the battery in my car and headed off towards Franklin Furnace. The opposite direction of where I needed to go to preach that night. I arrived at Ralph's house, changed out the battery, and got back on the road as fast as I could. In fact I arrived at the church just in time to hear the last chorus of the last special before the preaching. I can still see the sweat beads on the pastors forehead as he introduced me.

Weeks passed and an elderly gentleman stopped in the store and introduced himself as Ralph's brother Ray. He stopped to thank me for helping out his brother, and so a friendship began. Ray loved show cars and he would often stop by and show me his prized possessions. We had mutual friends in other churches and old steel mill acquaintances that we shared friendships with. I always enjoyed Ray stopping by, and the talks we had.

Fast forward with me six years or so and I was no longer managing Harts, because there no longer was one. I was now pastoring in, you guessed it, Franklin Furnace Ohio. I would eventually preach Ralph's funeral and would visit with Ray from time to time. Ray even came to the church I pastored on and off but never made a commitment to Christ.

Press the fast forward button one more time and stop in February 2006. It was Sunday afternoon and Terri and I were taking a walk when my cell phone rang. It was Tim, Ray's son, and he was excited. "Pastor", he said, "I think Dad is coming to church tonight, in fact he said that if he went anywhere, it would be to where his friend Tim pastored."

Ray did come to church, and oh what a great service the Lord gave us that night. When the invitation was given Ray was the first to come forward. And what he said to me when he got to the front of the church will forever live in my mind. "Tim", he said, "I want to repent of my sins!" not I gotta tell ya, you just don't hear that everyday when people come forward! So Ray did, and God Gloriously saved him at the ripe old age of 82! He got it good too! And when the rejoicing subsided he looked at me and said. Tim, I want you to preach my funeral. Ray, I'll do my best was my response.

And so, six months later I sat preparing for Ray's funeral service and it struck me what a lesson our friendship had taught me. Not a lesson about visitation or making folks welcome when they attend our church. Not about church growth strategies and church expansion. But what kept coming to my mind were Ray's words when he would talk of how we met. We met because of a dead car battery, and not even his battery at that! We met because I picked up the phone even though I was late, and wasn't even happy about being late. "I hate being late." We met because I barely made to church in time to preach that night. "Did I tell you I hate being late?" Funny but I don't even remember what I preached that night or how the service ended, but I do remember Ray.

So what's the lesson you ask? The lesson I learned is this, sometimes when God is using us the most, we are completely unaware. Something trivial I did ten years prior still had a lasting influence on an 82 year old man who was seeking Christ. I had forgotten, he still remembered. So what of the unforgotten things in our lives? Will they point others to Christ, or are we just counting on the things we do on purpose to count. Could it be that we will all be surprised at what the Lord is remembering and we are forgetting?

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Matthew 25:37-40 KJV

Take a moment to remember that it was for the 'least of these' that a little boy was born in stable in Bethlehem.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

From your district NMI President, Betty Neighborgall, and the district NMI council.

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