



Don Worden

Inspiration comes from a variety of sources—some positive and some negative. During these past few years, I find myself almost arguing with some of the negatives I run across from time to time. In 2010, inspiration came from my surprise and dismay when someone whom I had admired reacted negatively to the notion of “organized religion.” This past year, I’ve been influenced by two concepts presented in the newspaper toward the end of 2010. The first idea is a flat assumption that there is no hereafter—nothing to life but the journey itself. The second notion tries to depict God or the author of religion as a dictator who demands blind obedience without any allowed deviation from the party line.

These ideas remind me of what my college biology textbook said about the existence of God, that we proceed on the assumption of God being unnecessary for the everyday working of the universe. If such an approach is not saying that God doesn’t exist, what is it saying? I hope to add a few worthwhile thoughts to the opposite point of view.

Carolyn and I still live in Dalton, Ohio. We attend Canton First Friends Church and enjoy our hobbies that take us to craft shows throughout the year. The picture above is of me with my bride of over fifty years! Carolyn and I celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary on July 23, 2011.

BIBLE READING: Psalm 14:1-5

In 2010, *USA Today* had an article about a baby boomer (Ian Schrager) said to have had a significant impact on current trends, starting with his design of Studio 54, and then moving on to the hotel industry. The story detailed his various innovations and “bold” moves to revolutionize the industry (Barbara DeLollis, “Boomer hotel icon Ian Schrager is far from done,” *USA Today* [December 30, 2010]).

Late in the article, his response to the question, “How do you feel about being labeled a ‘baby boomer?’” gives a telling insight: “I have never had an issue with it. It never really affected me. In life, there’s no point other than enjoying the trip. There’s no destination.”

His matter-of-fact answer startled me. It was if he has ended the sentence with an exclamation point! No destination? His philosophy must be hedonism personified! No wonder he has devoted his life to providing opulence and luxury.

Is he the fool of Psalm 14:1? The idea of an afterlife or consequences to choices made is like a foreign language to him. Perhaps he is the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21, of whom Jesus says God declares: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Luke 12:20 NIV).

He is foolish, but is that much different than most of us? Remember the bumper sticker, “He that dies with the most toys—still dies”?

Are we living our lives as though this is all there is, or do we live as though we understand that this life is a preparation ground for the hereafter?

SONG: When We See Christ

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may I live so you never will have an occasion to call me a fool.

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: Hebrews 11:1-6

Toward the end of 2010, the comic strip *Non Sequitur* (Wiley Miller) had a one-frame piece showing two cave men watching another cave man who had just finished a sculpture—with *his own* face on it. The caption to the side said, “The invention of religion.” The two were listening to the sculptor say, “Ok, here’s how it works: first, you *never* question anything I tell you.”

Think about that a minute. Is that how God operates? It is true the Bible begins by assuming the existence of God: “In the beginning, God...” However, if we jump to the book of Hebrews, we get a better perspective. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Anyone who comes to him (God) must *believe* that he exists and that he *rewards* those who *earnestly* seek him” (emphasis added).

Someone has defined faith as “the ability to live with unanswered questions.” That is a far cry from never questioning anything God either says or does. I would submit you can’t really have faith until you have had an honest doubt.

I’ve had an argument with someone over what they claimed a friend of mine had done. I responded, “I have known this person in too many situations and observed his actions too many times to doubt him now. I will wait for his explanation.”

How is your faith? Has it been tested? Has God proven himself to you in a variety of situations and circumstances? I would encourage you to put God to the test. Let him reveal himself to you in his own way.

SONG: My Faith Looks Up to Thee.

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I thank you that you are a hearing and answering God through prayer. I thank you for revealing yourself in your own way and time.

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: Proverbs 12:5-16

This passage comes from a section of Proverbs that seem to alternate between wise and foolish, good and evil, a word of admonition and a word of condemnation. The *fool* seems to be the one who acts in haste without regard for others or for the consequences of his actions.

On Sunday, I suggested that a baby boomer who revolutionized the luxury hotel industry might be a fool. Why? Because he operates on the assumption that there is no destination in life—only the experience, the journey. He is bent on getting as much personal satisfaction as he can. Does he remind you of anyone? What about the rich young ruler in one of Jesus' parables?

“What’s in it for me?” seems to be the order of the day. A few years ago before baseball salaries reached the level they are today, one player had a clause in his contract that stated his salary must always be one of the top ten among Major League Baseball players. What if twelve, or twenty, or fifty players decided to include such a clause?

Wise is the man whose destination is heaven and makes his choices accordingly. *Wiser* still is he when he actively works to insure that others join him in the journey.

Acquisition itself is not wrong, if acquired for the right reasons. The danger is when those things acquire you rather than the other way around. The truly wise person uses what God has allowed him to accumulate to make the ultimate destination—heaven—seem even more attractive.

SONG: When We All Get to Heaven

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, help us be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: Luke 10:25-37

This passage of the Bible is so familiar. You may wonder how popcorn found its way into the story.

The Popcorn Theory comes from the story behind the movie *The Blind Side*. If you have seen it, you know the story of the rich couple in Memphis on their way to eat when they see this big, black kid from their children's Christian school. The boy was walking slowly, wearing only a t-shirt and shorts on a cold, raw morning. When the wife said, "Turn around," the husband did so, and it turned their lives around in some amazing ways.

I don't have enough room here to give the whole story, so I won't try. Instead, I want to focus on the Popcorn Theory. To fully understand the meaning, I would recommend the book *In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving* written by Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy (the couple mentioned above) with Sally Jenkins. It is their attempt to explain themselves and the adoption of this big black boy as their son.

The Popcorn Theory says that we need to see what "pops up" around us. The movie has a double meaning in its title. Michael Oher (their adopted son) became a left tackle, protecting the quarterback's *blind side*. It also refers to the *blindness* we often exhibit as we go about our daily lives. The men in Jesus' parable were going about doing legitimate business, but they missed the opportunity to help someone. They were blind to his needs.

How blind are we? Do we recognize the needs and opportunities all around us?

SONG: Open My Eyes that I May See

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, open my eyes to the needs around me.

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: Psalm 53:1-5

An atheist once brought suit against a group of Christians, claiming their right to celebrate religious holidays somehow injured him because, as an atheist, he had no holidays to celebrate. He saw himself as a “victim,” forced to endure scenes on television and music in stores celebrating the Christmas season. After listening to arguments on both sides, the judge ruled that the atheist’s case had no merit.

“Why?” demanded the atheist.

“Do you have a deity or some other entity to which you give homage or recognition?” asked the judge.

“Of course not!” responded the atheist.

“If you had someone or something you wished to honor but were unable to so do because of what the Christians do, then you might have a beef,” explained the judge. “But you have no one to worship. Their worship of God is not an infringement of your rights at all. Case dismissed.”

How pathetic, and yet unusual! Do you know people who spend their lives in pursuit of something or someone to impress? Why? Is it because they lack a relationship with the God of the universe? Augustine said, “Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.”

Some refer to faith as a *leap*, a desperate grasp for something that is elusive. But is it? Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled...I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3 KJV).

I would rather trust him than simply take my chances with the great unknown. Like Augustine, my heart is no longer restless, for it *rests* in him.

SONG: I Know Who Holds Tomorrow

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, continue to reveal yourself in reassuring ways.

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: John 14:1-6

In the movie *The Bucket List*, Jack Nicholson's character takes his new friend (played by Morgan Freeman), both of whom are dying, on a whirlwind trip to complete their *bucket list*—all the things they hoped to accomplish before they die. While looking at the Egyptian pyramids, Jack's character (claiming to be either an agnostic or an atheist) says, "We live. We die. And the wheels of the bus go round and round." He asks Morgan Freeman's character, "Know something I don't?"

Morgan Freeman says, "No, I just have faith."

I feel sorry for both characters. Jack believes this world is all there is. Morgan thinks or hopes there is more. Jesus assures his followers, "Let not your heart be troubled...I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am there you may be also."

The writers of *The Bucket List* (a very good movie) tried to illustrate the difference between hope and having no hope. But they left out the most important part! What good is faith in the wrong thing? Have you driven for several miles on the wrong road, only to realize that you are not going where you intended? Weren't your intentions honorable? Someone has said the road to hell will be paved with good intentions!

Early in Luke 21, the disciples ask Jesus about the signs of his second coming. He embarks on a lengthy discourse about end times, which he concludes with the comforting words: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Jesus' word is good today. We know what is coming!

SONG: The King Is Coming

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may we be ready.
Even so, come Lord Jesus!*

—Don Worden

BIBLE READING: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Halley's Bible Handbook has a subheading for the chapter on the book of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of earthly life apart from the sure hope of immortality exemplified in the experience of Solomon." Ecclesiastes begins by saying, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2 KJV). Everything taken to excess becomes vanity, meaningless, a vapor.

I have been reading a book by William "Fishbait" Miller, the former doorkeeper to the U.S. House of Representatives (*Fishbait: The Memoirs of the Congressional Doorkeeper*). Written in 1977, it is his behind-the-scenes look at what goes on in Washington, D.C. He said he had been told, "The rule around this place is 'Every man a king'—and don't you forget it!" Sounds like they were trying to outdo Solomon!

Contrast this sentiment with the last object lesson Jesus gave his disciples. After the meal, the Last Supper, Jesus took off his outer robe and began washing the disciples' feet, something a servant had apparently forgotten. After finishing, Jesus said, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me Teacher...and rightly so. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:12-14).

What was Jesus' point? He was modeling the concept of *servant leadership*. As Jesus had said many times before, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26 NLT). Solomon eventually figured it out. Pursuit of the good life is not the goal. Serving God and helping others—seeing the *popcorn* from Wednesday's devotional—is the true pursuit.

SONG: I Will Serve Thee

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, help me see others as you see them and find a way to make a difference for you.

—Don Worden