

Good News Daily

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Sunday, November 12

Luke 14:12-24 *“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”* (v.13 NIV)

This passage reminds me of the life of author and Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen, who died in 1996. After holding tenured faculty positions at the divinity schools of both Yale and Harvard, Nouwen felt that his academic career had lost its meaning as a ministry. He gave it up to spend the remaining years of his life as pastor of Daybreak, the L’Arche community for the mentally disabled in Toronto. Its founder envisioned L’Arche as a home where handicapped people would be valued, contributing members of small communities. Nouwen’s biographer wrote, “At L’Arche, Jesus’ friendship with the outcast and marginalized is the model for community: Emmanuel, God-among-us.”

Nouwen never became entangled with status and prestige even while teaching at Ivy League universities. He later wrote in his book *Road to Daybreak* about his experiences: “If we truly want to see the glory of God, we must move downward with Jesus. This is the deepest reason for living in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and handicapped people. They are the ones through whom God’s glory can manifest itself to us. They show us the way to God, the way to salvation.”

Ezra 10:1-17; Psalms 93, 96; Acts 24:10-21

Monday, November 13

Psalms 80 *You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors and our enemies mock us.* (v.6)

Have you ever been laughed at? It doesn’t feel very good to realize that other people think you’re stupid, bumbling, ignorant, or a failure at whatever you did that made them laugh. The feeling you have inside is that you want to shrink away from the crowd and disappear.

However, I can think of at least three lessons I have learned from experiences with humiliation. First, it’s relative. What one crowd considers as a stupid thing to do, another group of people will consider courageous. Second, such an experience will make you tougher, more courageous, and less likely to worry about other people’s opinion. Finally, humiliation gives you more compassion and sensitivity to others you meet who are objects of ridicule.

Humiliation is an emotion caused by suddenly shrinking to one's normal proportions. It just brings us back to the opinion we should have had of ourselves to begin with.

Nehemiah 9:1-15; Revelation 18:1-8; Matthew 15:1-20

Tuesday, November 14

Revelation 18:9-20 *"They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.'"* (v.14)

It's difficult not to become preoccupied with "things" that will eventually disappear. A wealthy and influential man in the town where I grew up owned 1,800 acres of land. Just a few weeks ago I heard from a mutual friend that he had died and left all the land and little cash to his only son. As a result, the son had to sell all of the land at an IRS tax sale to pay the \$3 million in inheritance taxes.

As Sam Walton's wife admitted, "I kept saying, Sam, we're making a good living. Why go out and expand so much more? The stores are getting farther and farther away. After the seventeenth store, though, I realized there wasn't going to be any stopping it."

Materialism isn't confined to the wealthy, however. I own thousands of items of furniture, clothing, food and personal care items, electronic gadgets, tools, books, and more. Each of these items requires time to be cleaned, maintained, used, or consumed at some point. When we spend all our time taking care of our "things", do we have any time for people? Remember that God expects us to enjoy people and use things—not the other way around.

Nehemiah 9:26-38; Psalm 78:1-39; Matthew 15:21-28

Wednesday, November 15

Matthew 15:29-39 *Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."* (v.32)

A man got up in the middle of the pastor's sermon and walked out. After church, his embarrassed wife sought to explain to the pastor, "I hope you don't think he disagreed with what you said. He just tends to walk in his sleep."

In the story of the feeding of the multitudes, the most neglected angle is that people actually sat and listened to Jesus for three days until they were out of food. Think of it—three days of sitting and listening to one person speak.

That may be why we can read the gospels over and over again, hear hundreds of sermons and read dozens of books about Jesus, and never tire of

him. After many, many years as a Christian, I can still say he is the most fascinating person I have ever met. The source of wisdom that his life and teachings reveal is unending.

Nehemiah 7:73—8:3, 5-18; Psalm 119:97-120; Revelation 18:21-24

Thursday, November 16

Psalm 23 *You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* (v.5b)

If your church uses olive oil for special blessings and anointing, then it follows a practice as old as the Scriptures. In the ancient Near East, anointing persons with oil was widespread for medicinal and spiritual purposes. The Hebrew word *shemen*, translated as “oil” in this passage, is used 190 times in the Old Testament and usually refers to olive oil. According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, olive oil was applied on wounds (Isaiah 1:6, Mark 6:13, Luke 10:34, James 5:14). Specially prepared oils were used to anoint the head (Psalm 23:5, Matthew 26:7, Luke 7:46) and feet (Luke 7:28, Luke 7:46, John 12:3). Anointing with oil set persons and objects apart and dedicated them to divine service.

The beloved Psalm 23 was written by David during a time when he was fleeing from Saul. He had been wandering from place to place. He was in exile from his own people and living among strangers. David’s sense of anointing by God during this time gave him a sense of blessed protection and helped prepare him for his future leadership role.

1 Chronicles 10:1-14; Psalms 27, 83; Revelation 19:1-10; Matthew 16:1-12

Friday, November 17

Psalm 88 *For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength.* (vv.3-4)

Psalm 88 reveals a tremendous outpouring of pain and anguish. The Christian faith does not seek to deny the reality of pain, evil, or suffering, but embraces them as part of life. I’ve learned that pain isn’t something to be avoided at all costs. I encounter situations when it is healthier to endure the pain or unpleasantness that it brings than to run from it. Suffering has also taught me to talk about the situations that cause it. My experience can bring comfort to other people, just like the psalmist’s written record of his anguish has since given comfort and solace to millions.

Martin E. Marty, the great church historian and spiritual writer, said that the idea for his book *A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart* was conceived from Psalm 88. He wrote the book shortly after his wife of 40 years died of a terminal illness. While he was reading some psalms to her one evening, she asked why he skipped Psalm 88. He replied, “I didn’t think you could take it tonight.” She asked him to read it anyway and after he had finished, she replied, “I need that kind the most.”

1 Chronicles 11:1-25; Revelation 19:11-16; Matthew 16:13-20

Saturday, November 18

Matthew 16:21-28 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (v.24)*

You have probably heard dozens of sermons on this passage, which is rich in meaning. Quaker theologian Richard Foster calls it "the touchstone for the biblical understanding of submission" in his famous book *Celebration of Discipline*. Submission is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. He writes, "The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished."

Most church fights and splits occur because people do not have the freedom to give in to each other. Everyone believes that he or she is fighting for a sacred principle.

Recently I had a dispute with a relative. Although I believe I was right, I chose to drop the matter because it wasn't worth damaging the relationship over a matter with no long-term consequences. Denying yourself sometimes means "letting go" of a lesser situation so that we can attend to the greater work of following Jesus Christ.

1 Chronicles 13:1-14; Psalms 87, 90; Revelation 20:1-6

by David E. Sumner

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