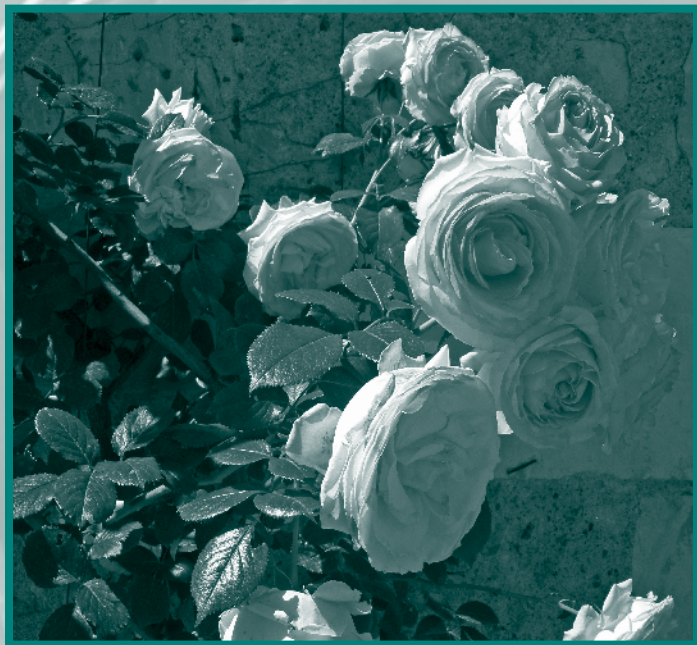


Matters of the Heart

Volume 4



DEVOTIONAL ESSAYS BY GENE SHELBURNE

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal



Matters of the Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” Jesus tells us. **But what if our hearts instead are polluted? What if we allow anger or lust or hate or envy to control the way we talk and think and act? Then we get the opposite of “blessed” (or “happy,” as our newer Bible versions say it). Senior Editor Gene Shelburne’s series of devotional essays in this issue should help us reflect on both the positive and negative outcomes determined by what fills our hearts.**

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Blessed
are the pure in
heart, for they
will see God.

✻ Matthew 5

John Gulley

Matters of the Heart

Errant Apostrophes

A friend who knows that for years I have spent an inordinate amount of my time and energy writing and editing asked me recently, “Have you seen Lynne Truss’s book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*? I had not.

“Well, I’m going to send it to you. In fact, I’ll order you a copy right now from Amazon. I think you’ll really enjoy it.”

Sure enough, in just a few days the FedEx truck pulled up to my office door and the driver had me sign for a package. It was the promised book. And my friend was right. It’s a strange book, different than any book I’ve ever read, and I have enjoyed it a bunch.

Subtitled “The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation,” this bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic contains a professional British grammarian’s rants against the utter sloppiness of modern punctuation habits in Great Britain.

Truss calls on English language sticklers everywhere to unite to bring back clarity and order in the writing and speaking of a generation who often graduate from school without learning a single rule for positioning commas and apostrophes. Her book is rife with examples of instances when


people put these marks in ridiculous places.

Although I found this book delightful in a host of ways, I was troubled the whole time I was reading it. Why? Because, for the life of me, I couldn’t remember which friend sent it to me, so I couldn’t say a proper thank-you.

Emails to several guys who seemed to be likely suspects showed that I had guessed wrong. I checked a batch of old text messages, but that turned up nothing. I was just drilling another dry hole.

I had written these words before the book-giver finally revealed his lost identity. Until he did, though, I could hardly rest. No blessing is ever complete until the giver has been thanked.

This is true when we’re talking about personal gifts like that book. But it’s even more pertinent when we realize the Lord has given us something we otherwise never would have received.

What is the best thing God has done for you in the days just past? Have you taken time to thank him? The most often repeated verse in the Bible tells us, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.” 

Matters of the Heart

Covering the Grave

In the epilogue of Greg Isle’s incredibly thick adventure novel *Mississippi Blood*, he takes his readers to a cemetery for the burial of his multi-volume hero, former Texas Ranger Walt Garrity.

For readers who might not know the usual post-funeral routine, Isle explains that most of the time graves are filled quickly and effortlessly. After the last mourners load up and drive away from the grave, cemetery workers using backhoes or tractors take only a few minutes to shove the dirt into the hole atop the casket.

To convey the immense respect Garrity’s military and law-enforcement colleagues felt for him, however, Isle tells how several of those veterans impetuously picked up nearby shovels and filled his grave by hand.

I had been reading this best of Isle’s best-selling novels almost non-stop during the first three days of this year’s spring getaway with my brothers at the Key Place, our mother’s old home. Reading Isle’s graveside scene would have impacted me regardless of where I read it. But being there with those guys in that place caused it to hit home a lot harder.


Just that morning my brothers had driven out to the family cemetery

south of town to check on the growing cluster of gravestones, including those for our parents.

More than a quarter of a century has slipped by since the day when we gathered with kinfolks and a host of family friends to say goodbye to my mother. And I’ll never forget what happened there that day.

When the proper words had been spoken, the final prayer prayed, and the last hugs and tears shared, we came to the time when folks normally start leaving. Only when all of us are gone can the undertaker and his grounds crew tend to the final closing of the grave.

But that day, on the spur of the moment, without a smidgeon of pre-planning, my brothers and I spontaneously grabbed several shovels and, while our friends and family drove back to town to begin lunch at the church, we paid our final tribute to our mother. We filled her grave by hand.

The blessedness of that long-ago experience ignited anew in my heart as I sat at my mother’s childhood table and read Isle’s account of a similar graveside tribute. In his story it is a powerful scene. I’m sure the writer thought he was being original. But I’ve been there, done that, and I’ll always be grateful for that blessed hour. 

Matters of the Heart

One by One

When he was performing in our town, Guy Penrod told us of his recent visit with a Christian psychologist who came to a Kentucky gospel concert.

“My prescription to all my older patients,” the therapist told the singer, “is quite simply: ‘Count Your Many Blessings.’” Of course, he got that line from the grand old song by that name.

Sometimes, though, I’m afraid that we who do give thanks for our blessings overlook that old song’s later advice to “name them one by one.”

Our thankfulness tends to be like a lot of the prayers I heard at church when I was a boy. We prayed long, and loud, and a lot, but we usually prayed “en masse.”

“Bless all the people who are hungry and hurting *the world over*,” we prayed during almost every service.

Somehow nobody ever suggested that we pray specifically for the crippled veteran Tommy who sat and begged every Monday at the west door of the JC Penney store. Our prayers never zoomed in to focus on widow Thompson on Clay Street or on little Johnny who lay trapped in an iron lung because of polio.

We prayed for everybody “the world over,” and in doing so, in

effect we prayed for nobody.


“Help us take the gospel to a lost and dying world,” we intoned Sunday after Sunday. But I don’t recall a time when the prayer leader in my childhood church asked the Lord to help us introduce Bob or Tom or Sam to Jesus. We never asked God to help us share the gospel with the post office clerk or our newspaper boy.

As I matured in my faith, prayer took on a different meaning for me—it became real and valid and necessary—when I quit praying in generalities and began making specific requests to the Lord for specific people.

Let me challenge you to apply this same strategy. All of us are thankful all the time, but our gratitude truly takes on substance when we zero in on specific blessings to give thanks for.

Has some special person “been there” for you in recent times? Have you thanked them?

Of all the things you own, has some single item brightened your days? Maybe a hearing aid, or a better jalopy? Or a new iPad, or a warm coat? Have you taken time to tell God how grateful you are for that blessing?

Our blessings bless us most when we do “name them one by one.” 

Matters of the Heart

A Place to Rest

When we first visited Angel Fire high in New Mexico’s northern mountains, wildlife often roamed right in the village. On lots of early mornings we’d see a herd of deer grazing in our yard, and more than once we saw a black bear sauntering down the middle of the gravel road behind our timeshare condo. Every spring it took the golf course crew at least a month to repair the hoofprints left by herds of elk tromping on the greens.

But that was forty-plus years ago. Last fall when my lady and I hid out in the tall pines for a quiet week, we were surprised at how few critters we saw.


Aside from a flock of busy ground squirrels on a plot west of our condo, during our first days we saw not one furry animal. Even birds were in short supply. One afternoon while I vegged out on our deck, I watched two busy chickadees peck their way across our grassy slope.

Once I looked up just in time to see a buzzard swooping high above pine trees he wouldn’t be caught dead in. But the most amazing view appeared when I just glanced upward one afternoon and saw four buzzards so high they looked like black specks against the white cloud, spiraling like fan blades in the updraft of a towering thermal.

It was mid-September, so we were not surprised that the mountain village was quiet. Kids were in school. Skiers hadn’t invaded the slopes yet. License plates in our condo parking lot told us we had neighbors from Ohio and Arizona and Oklahoma. More old folks like us.

But for the most part the village was still and quiet, almost deserted by man or beast. Except for the gravel-grating of an occasional pickup going by or the whir of wind gusts trying to thread their way through pine needles, Angel Fire was silent that week. It turned out to be an almost perfect retreat from the hustle and bustle and constant din of the world we usually live in.

As I roosted under the pine trees and soaked up that blessed silence, I had fresh appreciation for the wisdom of Jesus when he took his men away from the clamoring crowds to the mountain retreat called Caesarea Philippi. For a few hours they escaped the constant demand for healings and exorcisms and explanations.

In this hectic, digitally-driven age, all of us need times of rest to restore our souls. If not in the mountains, in the embrace of Jesus. “Come to me,” he tells the weary, “and I will give you rest.” 

Matters of the Heart

A Hairy Tale

Patience is not my strongest virtue, especially when I'm waiting in a medical facility.

Let that confession stoke your amazement when I tell you how much I enjoyed waiting to see Dr. Avery Rush to prepare for cataract surgery. I spent that brief wait marveling at the stunning array of photographs of our nation's earliest leaders on the walls of that exam room.

What interested me most was the fact that, without exception, every one of those patriotic giants wore a luxuriant beard. How could that be? I wondered.

As I gazed at those hirsute faces, I recalled my own pastor-father's reaction to facial hair. When one of his preacher students arrived in town with a mustache or beard, their fuzzy adornment didn't survive long. Decent young men in the mid-twentieth century always were clean-shaven, my dad believed. Always.

That explains the anti-social statement the Bandidos and Hell's Angels intended to make by the mops on their chins. But what caused the shift from beards in the White House to beards on Harley hogs?

The best answer I could come up with was the two world wars in the first half of the 1900s. All military personnel in that era shaved daily.


Our most honored heroes had bare faces. By the time my father became an adult, this was one norm of decency.

Having watched my dad's usually congenial countenance sour into a scowl when a student showed up with a beard, I'm glad for his sake that he went to heaven before Duck Dynasty came to earth.

It's probably a blessing that my Bible-scholar father never visited St. John's Lateran in Rome. Seeing the bushy hair on the faces of those exquisite marble statues of the twelve apostles would have agitated his soul.

I wonder if it ever occurred to my beard-banning daddy that some of the Bible's top heroes—men like Samuel and John the Baptist—honored God by taking Nazirite vows never to cut their hair or to shave. Can you imagine how wild and woolly those guys appeared?

We do well to recognize that every generation, for good or bad, sets its own peculiar standards for what is decent and proper. While young folks push the envelope, we who are older wince. But all of us ought to be trying to see things through God's eyes.

"Man looks on the outward appearance," the Bible tells us, "but the Lord looks on the heart." 

Matters of the Heart

Illegal Faith

If you and I lived in a Muslim-controlled country like Somalia, we would not be surprised when top officials issue orders to "prevent Christmas celebrations" because it is a Christian holiday.

Does it surprise you, though, that the same anti-Christian mindset is becoming common in the U.S.?

My heart still hurts for that poor first-grader in a Temecula, California, school. Her teacher told all the boys and girls to bring show-and-tell items that reflected their family's Christmas tradition.

This first-grader excitedly brought the star from atop her family's Christmas tree and began sharing with her class a one-minute explanation of the star and the wisemen in the Christmas story. But her teacher stopped her in mid-sentence and told her to go back to her seat.

The following day the school principal affirmed the teacher's decision to censor any expression of Christian faith in the classroom. Right here in America.


If we dismiss that as west-coast craziness, try the opposite shoreline. In Florida a federal judge in Melbourne barred the county commission from opening its meetings with prayers, although their meetings had begun with invocations for several decades.

Okay. But those of us in the heartland of our nation are still free to hold and uphold our faith, aren't we? If so, then why did the University of Iowa boot a Christian student group off campus simply because the group required their club officers to embrace Christian beliefs?

The Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty took this case to court and argued that what the university had done to this Christian organization was "unfair, illegal, and unconstitutional."

In what used to be identified as a "Christian nation," governmental restrictions and legal sanctions on biblical faith in Jesus now pop up far too frequently.

Nobody seemed a bit surprised two Christmases ago when that federal judge in D.C. backed up the local transit authority when they rejected a Yuletide ad because it contained a religious message. Like the Somalians we started with, they refused that ad because its content was clearly Christian. Increasingly, speaking publicly about our Christian faith is becoming illegal.

The apostles Peter and John asked the court, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him?" How many of us are ready to stand beside them? 

Matters of the Heart

Out of Control

“Don’t sin when you’re angry,” the Bible tells us in both testaments. But folks in today’s society obviously don’t pay much attention to the Bible.

Not five miles from my own door last year, road rage caused one furious driver to open fire on another. He missed, thankfully, but that wasn’t his fault.

A month later some gal in Nevada knifed her live-in partner to death because he kept talking during a TV show, and when she screamed, “Shut up!” he called her a dirty name. The arresting cop said, “She told me she has anger problems.” Really?

Just a month after that, up in Glendale, Wisconsin, a mother named Megan Gumbus, enraged at the school bus driver who wouldn’t let her daughter off his vehicle, smashed the bus windows with a hammer.

Fox News reported that this out-of-control woman “rained terror” on that bus full of students when she learned that her daughter had got into a fight on the bus after experiencing what she called a “meltdown.” Like mother, like child, it would appear.

Fast forward one more month and cross the Pond. Over in Great Britain a gal spotted her lover in another woman’s arms. She got so livid that,


according to the arrest records, she used pig’s blood to write lewd messages on the walls of her lover’s house. That’s mad.

Just a week later on our side of the Atlantic, during dinner hour at an upscale mall in Raleigh, North Carolina, anger struck again. AP reported that a 74-year-old was “ranting about a broken phone” when he crashed his car through the window of a Verizon Wireless store.

For some reason that the news source did not report, the store was closed. And this impatient dude wanted his cell phone fixed now!

The tales about out-of-control angry people today are countless. Let me share one more for this go-round. A Fox News headline told us, “Massachusetts woman enraged by Trump bumper sticker intentionally rammed into car, police say.”

The story that followed told us that this Hyannis female got so ticked off that she yelled at the Trump-supporting driver and called him a racist. Anger and politics seem to go hand-in-hand these days, don’t they?

“Be slow to become angry,” the Bible warns us, because anger seldom makes us good. It seems these days that we need a double dose of that biblical wisdom. 

Matters of the Heart

Doing It God’s Way

Second Chronicles 15 tells us of a time when Judah’s army went to fight a battle under the leadership of King Asa, great-grandson of the more famous King David. As the army was on the road home, God sent a prophet to meet them with a special message for the king.

“Listen to me, Asa!” he shouted. “Listen, all you people of Judah and Benjamin! The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with him!”

Could it be that this is also his message to us in America today?

Some of us are old enough to remember when the United States really was a Christian nation. We recall “the good old days” when we truly were “one nation under God”—days before a high-ranking federal court judge tried to strip those words of faith out of our nation’s Pledge of Allegiance.

We remember when it was still against the law of our land to slaughter unborn babies.

We remember decades when people were actually ashamed to be caught sleeping with someone other than their spouse, when a marriage license was required before a couple could assume the biblical privileges of man and wife, when public nakedness was both illegal and shameful and not a way to sell


merchandise and boost television ratings.

You don’t have to be very old to remember when same-gender sex was against the law in almost every state in the union—laws that reflected Judeo-Christian morals plainly set forth from Genesis to Revelation.

But we’ve abandoned those moral standards today and in their place we’ve passed laws protecting behavior the Bible calls wicked, shameful, vile, and degrading. Now on TV daily in advertising and sitcoms we normalize and standardize lifestyles God outlawed.

“Honor your father and mother,” God commands in the Big Ten, and he promises that things will go well for us if we do. But in America’s largest metro areas, we’re told, almost three-fourths of the kids have no idea who their fathers might be. Crime rates soar in those places.

“Listen, you people!” heaven warns us. “The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with him!”

But what will happen to us if we don’t? If we jettison faith in our Creator and violate his eternal rules for our behavior, what will happen to the God-blessed liberties our land has so long enjoyed? 

Matters of the Heart

Taking the Leavings

The first car I owned was a 1941 Studebaker. Jet black. In mint condition for a vehicle more than a dozen years old. Its proud owners decided they were too old to drive it anymore, so they parked it. Now it was mine.

I mention this ancient jalopy to tell you my questionable technique for keeping it running. Its aging motor ran like a fine clock. It started every time I turned the key, even in blizzard weather. But it burned oil. Lots of it. You could see me coming several blocks away because of the smoke cloud billowing up from the tailpipe.

So, whenever I pulled into the curate service station near our home, I'd tell the attendant to check the gas and fill it up with oil. Usually it took three quarts of oil per tank of gas.

To keep from bankrupting myself for all that oil, I opted for the drippings collected from cans emptied in previous days. I took what Depression-era folks called "the leavings." And it worked. That old motor still ran just fine when I foolishly sold it.


Growing up in a teetotaling family, I didn't know it at the time, but right down the street some of the less scrupulous bartenders were also salvaging "the leavings." Their customers had no idea that their mugs

of beer or shots of whiskey had been diluted with dregs left in the bottoms of previous customers' glasses.

Health department officials probably would have frowned on that. Maybe the alcohol killed any germs in leftover liquor, but such was not the case when many generations ago thrifty café owners padded profits by adding plate scrapings to soup and stew and by serving leftover entrees to unsuspecting diners.

We seldom throw food away at our house. Leftovers make up a major part of our menu. But that now out-of-date expression "the leavings" usually had a negative ring to it. Possibly because of the practices I just described to you.

I think it works that way at church, too. This week I nodded affirmation when I heard a pastor colleague apologizing because he's never been comfortable using another preacher's material. Neither have I.

We Christians share a centuries-old faith based on eternal truths, so the basic ideas we share are not new. And some of our best hymns and prayers come from the past. But this doesn't mean that people who come to hear me preach should have to put up with leftovers. 

Matters of the Heart

Long Prayers

I never have outgrown my childish disapproval of prayers that seem to be a way to practice for eternity.

In my boyhood church we had an old-timer whose prayers seemed endless. It usually took him at least fifteen minutes to remember the word "Amen." Do I need to tell you that he lost my eight-year-old attention a long time before he got there?

I realize that most of what I'm sharing with you here is just my personal (and maybe selfish) preference. But let me just blurt it out: I like short prayers.

When I say this, I must confess that I stand a bit in awe of any human being who could utter chapter-long prayers like Solomon did in 2 Chronicles. I marvel that any psalm-writer could stay focused long enough to compose the 179-verse prayer we call Psalm 119.

Those marathon prayers impress me, but I much prefer the dart-to-heaven petition Nehemiah shot to God that day when the king asked him why he was sad. No bowed head. No bent knee. No elaborate ritual. Just a silent, ardent request (probably three words long) asking God to help him give the right answer to the king.

Long public prayers loaded with the pious phrases learned


from generations long past too often turn out to be nothing but words to fill that slot in worship time. And Shakespeare got it right when he warned us that "words without thoughts never go to heaven."

Bullet prayers like Nehemiah's—prayers generated by the urgency of the moment—tend to express reality and embody genuine concerns that frequently are missing in ritual.

Could this be why Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount not to be people who expect to be heard because of our "many words"? As he teaches us how to pray, he says bluntly, "Do not be like them."

Even the most famous saints tell us that bowed heads and distractions seem to go together. The longer our prayers, the more likely our minds are to wander.

I like C. S. Lewis' advice about this in his *Screwtape Letters*. Instead of feeling guilty when our minds drift during prayer, Lewis suggested that we pray about whatever distracts us. This just might be God's way of showing us the proper topic for our present prayer.

As Jennifer Schuldt noted, "a persistent worry or even a sinful thought" may be what we need to discuss with the Lord right then. But do it briefly. 

Matters of the Heart

Tutoring at Tivy

In today's scholastic circles, such a practice would be frowned upon as discriminatory and humiliating to challenged students, but back in my earliest school days, you stayed in first grade until you could read and count.

At the time, I never questioned the wisdom of such a rule. It made perfectly good sense. After all, everything we were taught after grade one required us to be able to read and count.

But, of course, I wasn't one of the kids who flunked first grade three or four years in a row. I wasn't like my friend Jacob, who finally made it to second grade when he was eleven or twelve while the rest of us were seven.

I was ready to start second grade when my family moved to the central Texas town of Kerrville. On my first day in Tivy Elementary School, I quickly spotted Jacob in my class. How could you miss him? He dwarfed the rest of us.

Just why he was so much bigger than any of us tadpoles, I didn't know at the time, but in the years that followed, Jake was always there. We got used to having him around. He was a classmate. A friend.

So, three years later, it never dawned on me how embarrassing


it was for him to be the only guy in our fifth grade class whose voice had changed and who needed to shave.

Nor did I see anything even slightly unfair to me or uncomfortable to him when Mrs. Davis, our fifth-grade teacher, asked me to take Jake out into the hallway to tutor him in basic world geography while she and the rest of the class explored the globe in more detail.

After all, Mrs. Davis had a classroom of thirty sharp kids to teach and no special ed assistant to take care of Jake while she did it. So I became that assistant. And gladly so. I liked Jake, and she knew I already had the globe memorized. Her system suited me just fine.

Little did I realize that the good Lord was using that first tutoring experience to help me discover and develop gifts I would enjoy using for the good of his Kingdom for the rest of my life.

Most of us who ponder our pasts can see the Lord's hand pointing us, shaping us, preparing us to serve him in ways we could not have perceived at the time.

"We are God's workmanship," the Scriptures tell us, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). 

Matters of the Heart

Each Day's Trouble

"Happy birthday!" was the text message that woke me up on the morning when I turned 80. And I must say that my family and friends did their best to make that day a happy one for me. I was surrounded by kids and grandkids and great-grandkids.

But they had no more control than I did on the water leak that left us with no way to cook or shower or otherwise get ready for our long-planned birthday trip to Victoria. Plumbing on that happy birthday eventually cost me almost a thousand dollars.

Birthday cards showed up in droves that day, and my e-mail was loaded with happy birthday wishes. But none of the people who sent those sweet messages had any control over the vagaries of the U.S. postal system that delayed my car insurance bill until that very day. So I got to celebrate my happy birthday by writing another three thousand dollar check. Whoopee!

The truth is that every day—whether a special day like my landmark birthday or a run-of-the-mill day just like any other—greeted us with unexpected delights or disasters. And none of us—not even the wisest or richest or most powerful—has any control over what happens.


Abe Lincoln doesn't plan to get plugged at the theater. Rick Husband doesn't expect to come home to Earth in ashes. My invalid neighbor doesn't dream that a lightning bolt will incinerate his uninsured home.

If we knew when calamity was coming, all of us would do something to prevent it, wouldn't we? For all of this we can be sure: it is coming. For all of us.

"Each day has enough trouble of its own," Jesus reminds us, but worrying about it won't change an ounce of the burden or a wisp of the pain when they do come upon us without warning.

Not just on birthdays but on every day I try to follow the wise advice of my colleague Joe Barnett. "Rejoice, no matter what," Joe bids us. "There's always sunshine after rain."

On that big birthday I chose to focus on the fun and ignore the high-dollar bombs that kept exploding on all sides of me. I chose to thank God that we do have a waterline, even if it picked that day to leak. I chose to thank the Lord that my wife and I today are driving the best vehicles we've ever owned, even if insuring them costs us a fortune.

On every day of our lives, whether we're happy or not is up to us. 

Matters of the Heart

Digital Distraction

Returning to Victoria, BC, to celebrate my birthday was almost like setting foot in heaven. With one exception. The only room our favorite motel had for handicapped folks like my lady had no air conditioning.

Even that turned out not to be all bad, though. Escaping the sauna bath atmosphere of that room gave me a holy excuse to roost on a bench and soak up the cool island breeze in my favorite little park alongside the Inner Harbour.

One morning I was vegging out on that bench when an athletic young tourist with a massive backpack came sauntering past me on the rock-paved path that diagonals through that tiny park.

I watched him, but I doubt that he ever saw me. In fact, he was so busy thumbing his cell phone that he totally missed the slice of the universe that was unfolding around both of us.

He saw none of the Seattle ferries that right then were docking to unload and load passengers across the street from us.

I doubt he saw any of the dozens of luggage-dragging gray-haired couples who were trekking down the sidewalk across the street, headed to nearby hotels.


Digitally obscured from him were the harbor taxis crisscrossing the water to and from the opposite shores.

As he punched keyboard buttons, he was oblivious to any of the lithe bicyclists who were flashing past us. Nor did he glance up a single time to ponder the horse-drawn tourist carriages that went clip-clopping by.

Although he almost stepped on them, I don't think that sharp-looking young man laid his eyes on even one of the blazing blossoms or on a single leaf of the luxuriant greenery of that storybook park.

Not once did he look up to check out the cacophony being cawed right above his head by an amorous crow who was chasing his noisy harem as they darted from one branch to the next. That young man was so digitally distracted that he appeared to be both deaf and blind.

How sad, I thought, that we are producing multiple generations who are missing out on life while they are thumbing texts and gazing at screens.

People like that handsome young man in that Victoria park may need to hear God saying to them, as he did long ago through Isaiah, "Listen, you deaf people! Look closely, you that are blind!" 

Matters of the Heart

The Fury of Fools

"Stupid people express their anger openly," the Bible tells us (Proverbs 29:11 TEV). Of course, we could find that out just by reading the daily news.

In a single month, news reports told about a goofy gal in Henry County, Georgia, who lost her cool and pulled a gun on a Wendy's worker who was a bit too slow in handling her food order.

That same day in St. Louis an Amazon driver got paralyzed from the waist down when an angry driver shot him for daring to park his delivery truck in a handicap space.

That same day in Brandon, Missouri, a couple got into a fuss about heating a pizza. The upset guy blasted his wife with a shotgun. Who do you think won that argument?

Just a day later, when the wife and friends of another dufus in Mississippi wouldn't let him drive home drunk from her birthday party, he showed them. He killed them all.


It's not just down south. A week later up in Michigan, police arrested a female who threw a violent fit at a Burger King because her burger came with tomatoes.

Her fit was mild, though, compared to the one pitched just a

month later by that St. Louis hussy. She used an aluminum bat to smash the windows of a café when they told her they were out of chocolate ice cream. Do you suppose she got any in jail?

In Chicago a fuss over a parking space turned deadly. The angry arguers got into a gunfight, but evidently their aim was no better than their temper control. A stray bullet struck a nearby 16-year-old girl in the chest and killed her, and she wasn't even involved in the dispute.

Some of these anger outbursts are tragic. Others just sound goofy. But my heart hurt when I read about a recent road-rage event in Florida. An ex-Marine unintentionally cut off another car in traffic. When he stopped and got out to apologize, the furious passenger shot and killed him, but not before the well-trained Marine was able to fire a fatal shot in defense. Two men died because one couldn't control his temper.

Is there any wiser advice in the Scriptures than James' instruction for us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry"? And his reason for telling us this is obviously true: because anger seldom triggers godly behavior that any of us can be proud of. 

Matters of the Heart

Deceived Deceivers

We used to have a garage sale at least a couple of times a year just to avoid being buried in junk. I always enjoyed chatting with the folks who drifted by, but it's been several years now since we had that fun.

Our last sale wasn't really ours. Lightning struck a disabled neighbor's uninsured house. Late that night, long after the firemen put out the original blaze and rolled away, embers in a wall reignited and that fine house almost burned down that night. So we had a neighborhood barn-building, in effect.

Dozens of families on our street donated better-than-usual items for that sale, with all the proceeds going to repair the damaged house. Since my lady and I have the longest, most spacious driveway/patio on the block, we hosted that massive garage sale.

Together (because craftsmen and contractors in both the neighbors' church and mine did the extensive repairs at prices below cost) we raised enough money to replace our neighbors' burned-out attic and roof and to make their house habitable again.

Early this summer I thought of that garage sale when I saw the news report that a couple of crooks were passing counterfeit twenty-dollar bills at garage sales in our town.

I chuckled as I thought about how their crookedness would have backfired on them if they had come to one of my regular garage sales years ago.

Those dummies probably would have had no idea that I was going to have to pay somebody to haul away most of my left-over junk. So stealing my stuff by paying with bogus currency actually would have saved me the dollars they thought they were swiping from me.

Dishonesty and deceit often turn out that way. Most liars deceive themselves worse than their victims. Thieves usually pay a bigger price than their victims. If you doubt that, read the story of Achan in your Bible (that's in Joshua 7). Or turn to Acts 5 and see what Ananias and his wife Sapphira got for the lies they told.

Shysters think they are smarter than the victims they're conning. And they keep on thinking that until the prison door clanks shut behind them.

Fortunes made by telling lies vanish quickly, the Bible warns us, and they often turn deadly (Proverbs 21:6). But "people with integrity walk safely" (Proverbs 10:9).

The choice is yours. Take your pick.



“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”



Mark 12



John Guiley



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