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It's What We Make Of It

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An old man was sitting on the porch of the community store when some settlers came by in their horse-drawn wagon. "What kind of people will we find in this area if we choose to make our home here?" asked the settlers. "What kind of people did you find where you came from?" the wise old man queried. "Terrible," was the reply, "hard to get along with." "That's funny," said the old man, "we have the same kind of people here. If I were you, I would probably move on."

After awhile, another load of settlers stopped. The questioning began much as before, but this time the settlers could hardly say enough about the wonderful people they had left behind. To which the old man replied, "That's funny—we have the same kind of people here!"

People are pretty well what we make of them; and so is a job, a community, or life in general. We often hear of someone who "has had a rather unhappy life," but then we think of others who have been faced with equally severe losses and trials who have not had unhappy lives at all. They have learned that "life is what we make of it".

The apostle Paul comes immediately to mind. No one could have been more deserving of love and appreciation: "I labored more abundantly than they all," he wrote (1 Corinthians 15:10). Yet, no mere list of sufferings adequately describes the heartaches, disappointments, and setbacks experienced by this one man. Friend and foe alike contributed to his hurt. "What an unhappy life!" someone might think. Unhappy? No one wrote of "joy" and "rejoicing" more than did Paul. He found joy in his sufferings in behalf of others (Colossians 1:24; Philippians 2:17). He found joy in his hope of glory (Romans 5:2). Paul was a happy Christian. Paul had learned that life is what one makes of it. He had learned where real happiness lies—that real happiness comes from qualities that are within, not from circumstances that are without; that real happiness comes through Christ, not through ideal surroundings. So, from his Roman imprisonment, he could write: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:11–13). Paul could take what, for others, would have been an unhappy life, and "through Christ" make a happy life out of it.

What Paul teaches us concerning life, Barnabas teaches us concerning people: people are often what we make of them. Barnabas could see hope and promise where others could see only failure and hopelessness. He looked for the best in others; he believed in others; he could extend the helping hand; he was truly "the son of exhortation." If the view of some toward their fellow-man was basically, "You aren't—You can't be—You won't be," Barnabas' view was, "You may not be now, but I know you can be and you will be." And people not only looked better when they were with Barnabas, they became better. People rarely rise above what is expected of them. People are to a great degree what we make of them.

This writer had occasion several years ago to visit a friend dying with cancer. He found the patient alone. Totally absent from his room were the morbidness and gloom generally expected under such circumstances. The friend spoke of how wonderful life had been; he expressed gratitude for his good wife, his son, his daughter-in-law, his brothers and sisters in Christ; he spoke of his faith and hope; then he spoke of his funeral, of his lost friends who would be there, of his excitement in knowing the gospel would be preached to them, and of his confidence that their hearts would be touched.

The faith that had sustained this friend in life was shining most brightly in death. In death! Yes, even death is what we make of it.

Faith is the key—the ability to lift up our eyes from the cares and worries of this life “to the hills, from whence cometh our help;” to see life in its relationship to eternity; to see life and people and job and community and death through the eyes of one who has been transformed into the image of Christ rather than through the eyes of one who has no hope. Such faith is worth more than all the gold in the world.

Strange as it may seem, the question, “What kind of people and life and job and community do you find where you come from?” requires more self-evaluation than evaluation of others. Improving others starts with improving me!

(1987). It’s What We Make Of It. Christianity Magazine, 4(5), 7.

Speaking Evil of Another

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” Ephesians 4:31

Let all evil speaking be put away from you. Do we realize how often we do not speak well of people. We speak evil of a person in a hurry in their car when we know nothing of the circumstances for their hurriedness. We speak evil of our waiter or waitress because they didn’t fill our empty glass fast enough, knowing nothing of just how busy they may be with an understaffed business. We speak evil of a speaker for being boring, awkward or longwinded.

Christians must put this behavior away. We must replace it with kindness, patience, understanding, forgiveness and love. “Love...thinks no evil” 1 Corinthians 13:5 (See also Ephesians 4:32)

We must also remember Jesus’ powerful words, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

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