

## I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER FOR YOU

**R**emember 4<sup>th</sup> grade English? Hapless Mrs. Participle (with the purple hair) labored to teach you the difference between Subject and Predicate, Transitive and Intransitive, Objective and Nominative, and..... What! You *don't remember?!*

Don't forget Comparative and Superlative. As in .... "Left-overs again, Gladys??" vs "Honey, could I please have seconds on your yummy Cumquat Surprise?" Or ... "When the tech bubble burst, our portfolio went from Small to Smaller to Smallest."

Jim Collins' best-seller, *GOOD TO GREAT*, is another example.

**DISCUSS: Grade yourself on how you're living out the following traits, using GOOD, BETTER or BEST, not A,B,C. Select at least two of these and explain your grade: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23).**

In some things we may never nudge the needle above FORGET IT. For me, that list includes: joining The Flying Wallendas, winning the NBA Slam Dunk contest, and becoming a Speedo model.

**DISCUSS: Name two or three areas in which you'd like to move up to BETTER or even BEST. In each one, what are the first two steps you'd take?**

Our culture trains us to bootstrap our way to success. But one who's walking with Christ knows that his strength to accomplish anything of eternal worth comes only from the Lord (Philippians 4:13).

### ***HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT***

Can we ever really know what's **BEST** for us? To the believers in the ancient Roman city of Philippi (in northern Greece), Paul passionately prays for them to experience God's very **BEST**, even as he sits in irons awaiting his beheading:

*I thank my God for you every time I think of you; and every time I pray for you all, I pray with joy because of the way in which you have helped me in the work of the gospel from the very first day until now. And so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus.*

*I pray that your (unconditional) love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgment, so that you will be able to choose what is BEST. Then you will be free from all impurity and blame on the Day of Christ. Your lives will be filled with the truly GOOD qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce, for the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1).*

**DISCUSS:** What did Paul NOT ask God to give them? What DID he ask for? How would what he requested change you?

Writing six centuries before Christ to fellow Jews held captive in Babylon (Iraq), God's prophet Jeremiah assures them that God hasn't forgotten them, that the BEST is yet to come:

*" I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out - plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. I'll make sure you won't be disappointed. I'll turn things around for you. I'll bring you back from all the countries into which I drove you -- bring you home to the place from which I sent you off into exile. You can count on it." (Jeremiah 29:11-14)*

**DISCUSS:** Ever felt like a captive? By whom or what? How were you set free?

In Jesus' day on earth there were bogus messiahs (read "presidential candidates"). Jesus warns about those imposters:

*" I am the Gate for the sheep... Anyone who goes through me will be cared for -- will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary." (John 10)*

**DISCUSS: Who would be today's thieves? Guilty of what?**

When we accept God's forgiveness of our sin (Jesus' death paid for it in full), God declares us to be as sinless as Jesus is! Paul explains:

*It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free --- signed, sealed and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life. (Ephesians 1)*

Once we receive God's forgiveness by faith, He *makes* us **GOOD** and sinless in God's eyes ... and *keeps* us that way 'til we're with Him:

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the GOOD of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son ... he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself ... Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else? (Romans 8)*

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to bring you faultless and joyful before his glorious presence, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from all ages past, and now, and forever and ever! Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)*

Faultless! And forgiven *forever*. That's what GOD says is true about those who are committed to Christ.

That's why it's the **GOOD** News! The **BEST** News.

You **BETTER** believe it.

His Deal

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