

Something to think, reflect, and pray about . . .

Prayer:

Eternal God, we bear your name, your imprint, when we are called Christian. Help us to grow up into Him who has given us His name. May we mirror Christ's love, reflect His grace, and bear His stamp on our lives, to your glory. Amen

Text:

1 Peter 2:11-17; 4:7-11

Are you a balcony person or a basement person?

Joyce Landorf in her book "Balcony People," distinguishes the two. Balcony people are those who affirm others, lift them. Basement people on the other hand, drag people down, belittle them. There are many ways of dividing people in the world – good and bad, sheep and goats, givers and grabbers, haves and have-nots. Balcony and basement is just one more designation, and a helpful one.

Balcony people are the ones who encourage us when we have a new idea or plan. They are the ones who shout "Yeah!" "You got this!" "You can do it!" At the same time basement people are shouting, "That was dumb!" "We've tried that before!" "Are you kidding me?"

Landorf writes:

"I am sure, if there were a way to view a movie and see instant replays of all the strategic change points in our lives, that we'd instantly spot the people who either broke our spirits by their critical judgmental evaluations, or who healed us by their loving, perceptive affirmations."

The two texts from Peter tell the story. He describes how Christians are expected to act towards one another. "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another." We remember that to love, in this sense, is not necessarily to be "liked", but to care for.

To be honest, all know the feeling of being respected and all know, likewise, the feeling of being put down. Some recall being ridiculed as children; put down by those they thought to be friends; or some may think of the time when an employer administered a dressing down with co-workers standing around. The world is loaded with rejection mechanisms that make us feel judged, found wanting, and condemned.

But this is not intended to be just another "be nice to others" meditation. We are dealing, rather, with the heart of the gospel. What Peter is saying is that the love of God long ago dealt with all our inadequacies and weaknesses, and with the failings of our neighbors too. God loves us and them, despite the many reasons why such love is unthinkable. So who are we then to stand in judgement of another?

Peter gives some helpful direction, “Live as servants of God.” How do we do that? “Honor all people, love one another, honor God, respect those in authority.” Sound simple? Probably not, but let’s concentrate for a moment on those first directives.

To honor another is to make space for the differences between us. It is not necessary to agree with the other, but to take the other seriously. Encouragement is a major ingredient of the style that Peter is advocating here. That means not doing for another, but encouraging the other to do for himself, herself. Not too long ago, I attended an anniversary of ordination celebration for one of my colleagues. During the celebration, someone commented about this particular pastor and the way he usually got folks to do jobs for him. They laughed about his subtle methods of talking them into accepting various tasks, yet each acknowledged, with affection, how his prompting had resulted in personal development and growth. Balcony people are those who “honor” others, who take others seriously.

But the difference between balcony and basement is probably never as significant as it is in parenting. Children’s author Jean Little describes balcony parents delightfully in her book, “Hey, World, Here I am.” She writes:

“In my family, we don’t talk much about loving. My mother never bakes us pies or knits us socks. More than once she’s put cream in my father’s coffee, although he takes it black. When she gets home from work she collapses with her feet up. I have to shake her awake when it’s time to eat. My father never sends her roses or Valentines. He just says to her, “April listen to this – April . . .” while he reads her something, written by White or Tolstoy. I listen too. And they listen when I find something so perfect it must be shared. Nobody ever says, ‘Not now, I’m busy.’ ...loving isn’t as simple as I once thought. Talking about it isn’t what matters most.”

Balcony people honor and respect.

So back again to my original question: Are you a balcony person or a basement person?

Prayer:

Our God, we are dazzled by your love for us, the unworthy. We are humbled by your care. Yet even with this assurance burning in our hearts we are capable of coldness of heart and meanness of spirit to those around us. Draw us near to you, that your unfailing love may enlarge our hearts and your amazing grace brighten our spirits, through Christ our Lord. Amen