

One Bible

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

It's the mid 1990's. Rick Liggin and I (along with our families) are living and preaching in the newly freed and newly formed Slovak Republic in Eastern Europe. Communism had banned the production and sale of Bibles; therefore they are a hot commodity in the context of the new found freedoms. With the help of many of you, hundreds and hundreds of Slovak language Bibles are given away. It is a blessing to put God's word into the hands of tearful recipients who dreamed their whole lives of having a Bible. However, most of those Bibles are never seen by us again.

We fight off discouragement with the words of Isaiah 55:11: "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Fast forward to 2019. A man named Akos sends me a Facebook message, which I reluctantly open, suspecting it is spam. He introduces himself and says he is looking for the David and Rick with whom he studied the Bible in Slovakia in the mid-nineties. When I acknowledge that it was us, he says, "I'm very happy to find you..." and tells this story: "I was approximately a 25-year-old Jehovah's Witness. We met several times to discuss the Bible. Now I have to say in many ways you were right. At this time I'm not an active JW."

I'm fascinated that he remembers us. Then he tells me something extraordinary that happened sometime around 2003:

"You gave me a Bible and there was your name stamped in the front. I had it in my bag, which was stolen at the end of the 1990's. It also contained my address and many notes. Many years later, one day, I got a letter from a guy from Germany. He wrote: 'Only this book (your Bible) is what saved my life. I was a gambler. Now I am a believer. Thank you Mr. Akos and Mr. Dave and Mr. Rick.'"

We plant. We water. God gives the increase (1 Co 3:6). I don't have more details of this story and don't need them. God's word in the world can and will do what we cannot—save the souls of men and women, many of whom we will likely never meet in this life. Give someone the Word. You don't know where it will end up, but God assures us, "...it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose..." (Is 55:11)

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Would You Eat Barf?

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Man's best friend does it. Dogs are known to eat their own barf. It's disgusting to us, and it's supposed to be revolting when Peter uses it as a vivid picture of a Christian returning to the pollutions of the world after having escaped them through Jesus Christ (2 Pe 2:20-22). You may not want to talk about it, but remember, the Holy Spirit is the One Who wants us to think about it!

So, why do dogs eat their own vomit anyway? I had to ask, and Google provided some unappetizing, but rather insightful and unexpectedly applicable answers:

Vomit smells and tastes delicious (to a dog). Rover.com says that a dog's incredible sense of smell (which is 10,000 to 100,000 times more powerful than ours [iheartdogs.com]) is able to recognize food particles in barf and thinks, "Yum!" Spiritual vomit is the same for many of us. There are particles of good, of fun, of pleasure, and of pride in sin. We are attracted by the particles while thinking they somehow outweigh or justify the disgusting pile of revolting sin we have to swallow to obtain them. The devil showed Jesus, "...all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Mt 4:8). He didn't show Jesus the revolting filth he and sin had caused in this world. But remember, even these particles of glory were not worth Jesus worshipping the devil—and they aren't worth it for us either!

Vomit doesn't taste bad (to a dog). Dogs have one-sixth the taste buds of humans, so they are not nearly as sensitive to flavor (wisconsinpetcare.com). Vomit seems like a good food source when you don't care about how it tastes. So, when our sensitivities to this world become dulled and darkened (He 5:14), we'll consume things we would have found distasteful had our senses not been seared by the world and sin (1 Ti 4:2). Paul describes the unbeliever's walk as one of darkened understanding, ignorance, blindness of heart, being past feel-

ing (Ep 4:17-19). The world is desensitized to what is good and bad. It's no wonder sin is consumed without gagging.

Vomit has roots in natural behavior (to a dog). According to Rover.com, in the wild, mama dogs may chew up a meal and regurgitate it for their puppies. Things can seem like a good food source because of how we were raised, what our parents or friends or neighbors or culture did or didn't do. Sin can seem natural, not only because of our sin-soaked environment, but also because without Christ we are "by nature children of wrath..." (Ep 2:3). Sin and the desires of the flesh feel and seem "natural" to us. We have to look outside our natural world to Jesus to find anything different, and few are willing to do that.

Vomit is a special opportunity (to a dog). Dogs view vomit as a quick and easy way to eat again. It is "a second opportunity to enjoy a good meal" (iheartdogs.com). How many compromises do we make, how many sins are tempting because they are quick and easy? And the devil presents sin as a special occasion, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a rite of passage, and an exception, the only option. "Seize the moment," the devil says. The Lord says, "Today is the day of salvation" (2 Co 6:2).

Almost every pet website article ended with a warning that dog vomiting and its consumption may be a sign of pet illness. So, I'll end with the same warning from the Holy Spirit: "...if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Pe 2:20-22)

Reborn to Lead

By AL DIESTELKAMP

It seems that some people are just “born to lead.” By this I mean that there is something about their personalities that causes them to step forward to take the lead, and this attracts others to follow.

While recognizing this to be true, we want to appeal to others to discover their untapped potential for leadership by stepping out of their comfort zones. Perhaps more Christians should see themselves as being “reborn to lead.” This is especially needed in local churches that have not been able to “set in order the things that are lacking” (Tit. 1:5).

Much of what follows under the heading of “Defining Leadership” I have “borrowed” and adapted from material developed by Matt Hennecke for use in corporate management training seminars he has conducted. However, the focus here will be on spiritual leadership that will benefit our homes and our congregations.

Defining leadership

Leadership may be defined simply as influence, and everyone has some influence. Granted, some have more than others; but if we are living, we have influence. In fact, our influence might continue long after we have died. “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Heb. 11:4).

In a group, those with the greatest influence will likely be leaders, while those with little influence will more likely be followers. Of course, influence can be used or misused to lead people in either right or wrong directions (e.g., positive role model vs. gang leader).

Two basic types of influence:

Formal influence is the influence one possesses by virtue of title or position. In a proper family environment the husband/father is automatically given influence over his wife and children. A police officer, by virtue of his position, gives him influence over others. An employer has natural influence over his employees. An elder is granted formal influence by God.

Informal influence is the influence one possesses by virtue of his knowledge, expertise affiliations, charisma, etc., and not by title or position. Wives often exert their informal influence over their husbands. Even small children exert informal influence over their parents. Employees may exercise informal influence over their employers. Members often exert informal influence on elders.

Two responses to influence:

Legitimate influence is the perception of or response by the person being influenced that the influence being exerted on him by another is appropriate. In other words, the person doing the influencing is right or within his rights to exert influence. For instance, when a supervisor tells an employee to start work on a new project, the employee recognizes the legitimacy of the supervisor to influence him.

Illegitimate influence is the perception by the person being influenced that the person exerting the influence does not have the right to do so—that the influence is inappropriate. For instance, if a supervisor tells an employee to wash and wax his car, the employee may do so but may feel the request is *inappropriate* or even an abuse of power.

Four possible forms of leadership:

1. *Formal, legitimate influence* exists when a person, by virtue of his title or position, is perceived to have a right to exert his influence and leads in the right direction. An example from the New Testament is the apostles’ solution to the perceived problem of the Grecian widows being neglected in the daily ministration of necessities (Ac. 6:3,5).
2. *Informal legitimate influence*, wherein a person—by virtue of his knowledge or expertise—is perceived to have a right to exert leadership and leads in the right direction. An example of this is Barnabas vouching for Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 9:27).
3. *Formal, illegitimate influence* is exerted when a person uses his title or position to influence another and is *perceived* to be abusing or misusing his authority. Peter’s hypocrisy concerning the Gentiles might be an example of this (Gal. 2:11-12). Those drawn away by Peter may have *thought* “this isn’t right” but nevertheless acquiesced to Peter’s example because he was an apostle.
4. *Informal, illegitimate influence* exists when a person without formal authority uses informal means (threats, skills, persuasiveness, status, etc.) to get others to follow him even though they believe the direction is inappropriate. Negative peer pressure can be an example of this. The pressure of the group could get individuals to go along with a course of action that they deem to be wrong. Such was the influence a woman in Thyatira used to get Christians to commit adultery (Rev. 2:20).

Levels of spiritual leadership

Not everyone can serve as an elder. We do need men who will prepare themselves to take on this task; but due to circumstances, either within or beyond one’s control, this may not be possible for some men, including unmarried men or a qualified man in a congregation that lacks a plurality of qualified men. We have examples of men in the first century who, to our knowledge, never served as elders but were great leaders (Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus).

A woman’s leadership role in churches, though limited by the Word (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35), is not absent. There’s Priscilla, who participated in privately showing an eloquent preacher “the way of God more accurately” (Ac. 18:224-26). We see Lydia, shortly after her conversion, using her influence to convince Paul and Silas to stay with her a little longer (Ac. 16:14-15). In his letter to Roman Christians Paul took note of several women who clearly had significant influence among the brethren. The apostle Peter even urged some women to use their influence to lead their unbelieving husbands to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1-6). Older women are instructed to be “teachers of good things,” instructing younger women how to behave in ways that would honor God’s Word (Tit. 2:3-5). It has been my experience that when godly women have humbly exerted their informal influence in their homes and in the churches, God is glorified; and conversely, when women’s influence is absent, churches suffer.

Preparing for leadership

To be a successful spiritual leader, one must study the Scriptures to know where to lead (2 Tim. 2:15), worship consistently (Heb. 10:25), work diligently (1 Cor. 15:58), and be courageous “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). A leader may want to be liked but must be prepared to be disliked. In other words, we should all work to develop our knowledge of the Word and skills in being Christ-like. Such gives us influence to lead. Interestingly, elders should be selected to formally lead from those men who have already demonstrated over the years their informal influence achieved through a knowledge of the Word and Christ-like behavior.

A successful spiritual leader must guard his reputation by avoiding situations that can destroy one’s influence (2 Tim. 2:22). He must avoid bitterness and selfish ambition (Jas. 3:13-14).

Be the kind of leader you can be. Someone is looking to you for leadership. Accept the responsibility and look for ways to increase your influence for good.

'WHAT ABOUT?'

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Have you ever noticed that when informing, instructing, or correcting someone (especially about a matter that is not particularly pleasant) that there is often a defensive response that points to others with a “what about” question? When one of my parents would tell me to do a chore, I know there were times when I thought it manifestly unfair that I was chosen for the task. “What about Laura or Suzy or Lance?” That was my attempt to suggest the inequity of me being burdened and them unburdened. To me, fairness would require that my siblings also be burdened.

These “what about” responses are often used in an attempt to avoid hard work or personal responsibility. When I instructed my children to help me pick beans in our garden, it was not surprising to hear the “What about?” line employed. (We reap what we sow.)

Having attained the status of a grandparent, I have three generations worth of experience in observing and practicing the human tendency to deflect calls for action or points of emphasis by using distracting techniques and technicalities. These methods are employed by adults as well as children.

This has been happening from the beginning of sin. We all know the response of Adam when God confronted him about his eating of the forbidden fruit. “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate,” (Gen. 3:12) is a classic attempt to shift blame. What about Eve? What about the fact that God gave her to Adam? Surely we can see that such maneuvers are lame attempts to avoid focusing on the point being made. Granted, there were others to be blamed (Eve and Satan), but that reality did not diminish Adam’s sin.

Consider the tragic account of King David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent cover-up that resulted in an innocent, fiercely loyal, mighty man of David being killed in battle according to plans delivered by his own hand (2 Sam. 11). While this is a scandalous low in the reign of David which precipitated all kinds of trouble for the remainder of his life, we are nevertheless impressed with the sincerity of his repentance after being confronted by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12) and as powerfully expressed in Psalm 51. Yet, imagine if David’s response to Nathan’s “You are the man!” (vs. 7) was “What about Bathsheba’s bathing on a rooftop?” While readers of the account may differ on whether or not Bathsheba was complicit in the affair, it is impressive that

David did not attempt to deflect from the powerful point made by Nathan’s parable of the lamb. This is an example of why David was called a man after God’s own heart (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). May we all respond so humbly when confronted with our own sins, whatever they may be and regardless of the sins of others.

Recall the post-resurrection conversation which Jesus had with Peter when He asked him if he loved Him. It seems that Peter got a little impatient with being asked at all, let alone three times (Jn. 21:15-17). It was after this that Jesus proceeded to inform Peter of the manner in which he would die and then said, “Follow me” (v. 18,19). You do recall Peter’s reactive reply. Referring to another who was following them (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”), Peter said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?” Jesus replied, “What is that to you?” In other words, Peter’s deflecting question was immaterial to the point being made, and so Jesus reiterated “You follow Me” (vv. 20-22).

There is much to be learned from these examples and many applications that could be made. Allow me to make just a few, and I challenge you to not respond to them with “What about ____.” First, a point of clarification—I am not saying that others should not be held accountable for their part in sinful problems. My point is simply that God is looking for humble and contrite hearts who don’t distract and deflect from their obligations or sins. Yes, this certainly applies in all directions and to all sides of an issue. However, we can’t control the response of others. We can only control our own replies.

So, if your son is guilty of behaving like Shechem, don’t defensively say, “What about Dinah?” And if your sister is guilty of behaving like Dinah, don’t justify your vengeance with “What about Shechem treating our sister like a harlot?” (Genesis 34). Defensive deflecting and distracting from making applications to ourselves or our own friends and family in a matter is not helpful to repentance and rectifying the issue at hand.

So, how would you feel if your daughter/sister was the victim of a sexual predator and your cry for justice was met by others with “What about men? They are victims too.”? While that observation is certainly true, as a reply to your legitimate, specific plea, it is a statement that does not logically follow (non sequitur) and thus has the effect of deflecting or distracting and thus minimizing your present primary concern. It would undoubtedly anger you.

Similarly, when people shout that “black lives matter” in the context of a cry against



perceived racial injustice, the retort of “What about me? All lives matter,” sounds like a deflecting dismissal of the specific plea being made. Since most of us who are deficient in melatonin are in total agreement with the truth of the phrase, and, in context, the phrase is not being used to mean that only black lives matter, then the better response is not to deflect but affirm. Black lives do matter because black lives are made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 9:6; Acts 17:26).

Now, I am not naive to the political agendas that are behind many of the organizers of protesters (on the left and right) calling for what they believe to be justice on a variety of issues. We are not ignorant of Satan’s divisive devices (2 Cor. 2:11). Just as we have seen violent opportunists attach themselves to otherwise peaceful protests, we know that political opportunists (on the left and right) will likewise invent and/or attach themselves to phrases like “black lives matter” or “make America great again.”

So, instead of taking sides among worldly parties and being so easily “tossed to and fro and carried about” by the politicians and media, we must affirm the truth in love (Eph. 4:14,15). Therefore, let us not be dismissive of true statements with “what about” rhetoric. Let us rise above the fleshly fray in solidarity with Jesus Christ alone because, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

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*"I will say of the LORD,
'He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust.'"*

~PSALM 91:2

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Philippians 4:8

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WHERE TO TURN IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The emergence of a viral epidemic in China quickly developed into the threat of a worldwide pandemic and prompted warnings and appeals for extraordinary precautions in a concerted effort to slow or stop the spread of the pernicious virus. This has created a period of uncertainty throughout the world.

Understanding this, governmental and scientific agencies have tried to assure us through news conferences and public service announcements that "we will get through this" if we will heed their voices. The appeal is to rely on the knowledge and expertise of the scientific community.

One particular ad sponsored by Pfizer Pharmaceuticals caught my attention by its blasphemous message. The announcer, speaking in an authoritative tone, boldly says, "At a time when things are most uncertain, we turn to the most certain thing there is...Science."

There was a time when the word science meant "knowledge," but some modern dictionaries list that as an "archaic" definition. Today, the most common usage of the word refers to "the study of the physical and nat-

ural world," much of which is unproven and therefore uncertain. The apostle Paul warned Timothy to "avoid the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20).

I am confident that a remedy to this scourge will be found, but when this hap-

pens it will be because God has supplied it. He may let the virus run its course, or He may allow men to discover a solution; but it is God who will deserve the credit.

When looking for answers in uncertain times, what is "most certain" is not a thing—He is God Almighty!

Concerning This 'Present Distress'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Our "present distress" brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic and social unrest is minor when compared with what Christians were facing when the apostle Paul used that phrase. Without getting involved in controversies created by responses to this distress, I want to remind all that this, being "unfamiliar territory" to us, requires extra care in "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

People are hurting. Many have lost loved ones, and have not even been able to get "closure" by honoring them with friends and relatives. Stay-at-home orders have created anxiety and depression among many, especially the elderly who feel iso-

lated and lonely. Many have lost their jobs. This is a time for compassion and understanding—and above all, love (Col. 3:14).

A Personal Loss

On May 31st Covid-19 claimed the life of my 96-year-old mother-in-law, Virginia M. Hennecke. Preceded in death by her husband Fred Hennecke and her eldest child, Connie Diestelkamp, she is survived by three other children, Karl Hennecke, Matt Hennecke, and Ardis Howell. Also surviving are seven grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren, and 18 great-great grandchildren. She died in the Lord.

