



# Pray for Us...

## Advice for my Children

*Some Reflections on the Occasion of my Birthday*



Last week I turned 55. I often become especially reflective on my birthday. I like to think about how the Lord has guided and been faithful to his promises.

Not long ago I found a diary I had written when I was in college. It's hard to believe that was over 35 years ago. As I read it I saw

clearly how much the Lord has done for me since then. Reading it inspired me to write some lines of advice for my children, and I share some of that with you in the following pages. I am so grateful to the Lord for his goodness and long to be increasingly useful in his kingdom.

### Prayer Requests

1. Pray for Gary as he continues to lead MTW's Missional Learning & Development Team.
2. Gary will be traveling to the US/Mexico border on May 13<sup>th</sup> to help MTW's BEAMM team with the implementation of the plan the Missional Learning & Development team drew up for them last August.
3. Gary and colleague Rick Box (MTW Colombia) are in charge of preparing the Latin America Leadership meeting scheduled for this fall in Colombia.
4. Pray for the MLD team and especially Rodney Davila as they help develop leadership in Costa Rica.
5. Praise for good progress on Gary's data analysis for his dissertation. He is planning a trip to Mexico this summer.

### KEEPING IN TOUCH

I want to remind you of the website that is dedicated to giving you information about our ministry: <http://partners.waldecker.net>. This site has family pictures, previous prayer letters, thoughts on missions, and other information. It also includes a link to our page on the regional website, which is <http://www.mtwla.org>.

Thanks again for your prayers. We very much appreciate your partnership with us in the gospel. You might be interested in a website about us that is more personal: <http://www.gtw.me>

Gary and Phyllis  
Waldecker  
gary@mtwla.org



REFLECTIONS AND ADVICE  
FOR MY CHILDREN

1. Faith, which is a gift of God, is like a seed that is planted within us. It doesn't look like much when it begins, and it takes a lifetime or more to grow, but it has within it everything you need for life and godliness.

So many times I remember wondering about the strength of my faith and comparing myself to others. Not knowing what I was missing, sometimes I would see my faith as very strong and look down on others. Other times I had the feeling that I was missing something and shrunk into the shadows as I compared myself with others whose faith seemed to be stronger.

For example, I remember having a vague notion of what it meant to live for God's glory. I remember thinking, "Do I really do that? What does it mean? I must be missing something." And I was, but I had a basic idea of what it meant. And I'm sure I'll go on learning what it means, even throughout eternity.

I remember having a number of peak experiences with the Lord as I grew up. At times I would wonder if I had even been a Christian in comparison to my new understanding and experience. But as I look back I see the Lord working in my life from a

very early age, cultivating, watering, pruning his plant. He was not in a hurry. Skipping steps to get there more quickly wouldn't have been helpful or good. A strong tree takes time to grow.

So be patient with where you are right now, even if you feel you are missing something. Because you are! There is a lot more ahead. But God isn't in a hurry. On the other hand, patience doesn't mean complacency. Always be eager for the *more* God has in store. And ask for it! If an earthly father would never give his children a stone when they ask for bread, how much *more* will the Heavenly Father give us the *Holy Spirit* when we ask!

2. The most important thing about the seed of faith isn't its strength, but where it is planted: in the house of the Lord where it receives good nourishment. It is like a tree planted by a river. Even in times of drought, such a tree will continue to prosper. In New Testament terms, we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. We draw our nourishment from him—from his love, faithfulness, wisdom and power demonstrated in his death and resurrection. Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of our union with Christ and how he nourishes us. As we partake we are

saying by faith that our joy, identity and sense of worth don't depend on anything but Christ—not even on the pleasant feelings of peace and joy that he can give. Of course we are never fully consistent with that, but we are growing in that direction. So when you are discouraged, remember that God has given you everything you need for life and godliness in the seed of faith he has given you, and that he assures the growth of the seed by planting you in the house of the Lord.

3. Affliction might be due to any number of things. If it's due to some specific sin, the Lord will let you know. But affliction is not always due to some specific sin. Many times we suffer simply because we have been growing well. The loving Father gives us challenges to exercise our faith. It needs exercise to grow just as athletes need exercise to do well in their sport. When the coach sends you for one more lap, it hurts. But you know he's preparing you for the big event.
4. Knowledge of the Lord and of the Christian life is deepened through experience. You read a passage of Scripture and it moves you. You read it a year later and you understand it more deeply. It's the same passage with only one meaning. But the



meaning is rich and multifaceted. The point here is that meaning is not found only in words. The locus of meaning is found at the integration point of words, actions and motivations—as these are integrated around Christ. God’s words provide the authoritative interpretation of our experience. But our experience helps us see things in Scripture that we hadn’t noticed or understood well before. When you are young with little experience, you can understand everything you need to know to put your faith in Christ. But as you get older and continue to exercise your faith, your understanding deepens. It’s not so much that you learn new things—although that happens too—but you learn what you already knew more deeply. And this deeper knowledge will make you increasingly productive in the kingdom. Sometimes you will understand some spiritual truth as if “from afar.” You understand it, you think, but you also sense you are missing something. Experience with the Lord will make things increasingly clearer. But in the meantime, don’t worry about it. Be faithful with the level of understanding you have now.

5. There is a sin beneath all other sins. I’m talking about the sin of unbelief, which opens the door to and gives strength to all

other sins. Dealing with this sin is also the best way to deal with all other sins. Unbelief is always an implicit (if not explicit) rejection of Christ and what he has done for his people. And unbelief is always a sign that something has become more important than Christ. Find out what it is. In addition to talking to the Lord about it, and getting insight from trusted friends, also talk to yourself about it, as the Psalmists did. Ask yourself what’s the worst that could happen if you lost this whatever it is? Would Christ still love you? Would he still work all things together for your good? Remind yourself of Christ’s love, power, faithfulness, and wisdom. In this way you are proclaiming the gospel to yourself. Then turn away from the Christ-substitute and look once again to Christ in belief.

6. Everyone longs to have a life with significance. What’s the point if you have no impact for the kingdom? But God measures kingdom impact very differently than most people. You might be good at something, but kingdom impact is not in direct proportion to the strength and development of your gifts. What counts is the integration of your gifts with belief in and love for Christ. An inch of integration is worth infinitely more than a mile of gifts. Interestingly

enough, it’s gifts that most people pay attention to. But when we get to heaven I have no doubt that the recognition will not be given as we might expect. The “sheep” on Jesus right in heaven were not even aware of their kingdom impact.

Jesus says, “Drink of me.” What he meant by that was “Believe in me.” If you do, rivers—the Holy Spirit—will flow out from you to bless others and make a kingdom impact. Others may or may not notice. You may or may not make the local, national or world news. Kingdom impact isn’t necessarily tied to being noticed and recognized by others. But it will change the world.

7. Don’t be afraid to use your gifts. The Lord gave you gifts for the benefit of others. If you don’t use your gifts, others will suffer. Don’t be cowered into unbelief by the social pressure that would make you believe using your gifts is not the humble thing to do. Don’t let false humility keep you from being a blessing in the kingdom of the Lord. Christ brings humility and boldness together in a way that goes beyond our comprehension.
8. It’s often hard for us to see the difference between using our gifts for our own glory and using them for God’s glory and kingdom. The difficulty here is due



to the blinding effects of sin. From God's point of view there is a huge difference. Bold humility is replaced by an alternation between two mutually exclusive and yet mutually necessitating poles that I will describe for now as significance leading to pride and freedom leading to fear. We attempt to find significance apart from God and so end up with pride. We try to find freedom apart from God and end up being anxious and fearful. It's possible to learn to balance these in a way that for a while might look like bold humility. But they are really complete opposites. One is the fruit of the Spirit while the other is produced by the flesh.

Because of the existence of the flesh, we will always be tempted to turn away from the bold humility produced by Christ to the alternation between pride and fear. Fighting against the flesh is normal. Just make sure you keep using the weapons the Lord has given you to fight against the flesh so that sin doesn't capture you.

Don't let the constant battle make you think you aren't progressing. Make every effort to find out the difference between using your gifts for God's glory and using them for your own, but don't wait until you have it all figured out because it takes a whole lifetime. So in the mean time, jump in and use your gifts as you maintain a

good conscience before the Lord. It's in the process of using your gifts that the Lord will show you how to use them better and more effectively.

9. We have a kind of secret weapon: the Holy Spirit. I say "secret" because he isn't obvious except to the eyes of faith. But he gives us power to live for him and to impact the kingdom. It is in the context of the Holy Spirit living in us that we have use of spiritual weapons. Our battle is not only against the flesh, but also against the world as organized in opposition to God and against the evil one. So make extensive use of the weapons the Lord has put at your disposal for making use of his power. For example, the Word of God is a sword, and faith in Christ is a shield. The Christ-like character that comes from believing his Word—at whatever level of experience you have with the Lord—will also protect you. This character includes truth—the sincerity of mind that is the opposite of deceitfulness and hypocrisy. It also includes righteousness—obedience to God that results in a good conscience. It includes the readiness to reach out to others because of the peace with God the gospel has brought you. Prayer is another weapon he has given you. As you believe

the gospel and so maintain a good conscience before the Lord, the Lord builds up in you a kind of defense against the evil one, the world and the flesh.

Reading God's Word, reminding yourself of the gospel as you face different situations, praying and reaching out to others in faith aren't magical, but the Lord uses these things to give you power. Do them, not simply as a duty, but in faith that as you make use of these weapons, the Lord gives you kingdom power—the same power that was at work in the resurrection of Jesus. I suggest spending time every day reading God's Word and praying. How much time? I don't think there is a formula. But just as important is reaching out in faith to use your gifts to be a blessing to others. This is also a way of finding spiritual nourishment. How much time? Again, I have not found a formula. Also, partake regularly of the Lord's Supper. It will help you remember that all these things come together only in Christ. How often? I don't have a formula. But if you find the works of the flesh showing up in your life more than the fruit of the Spirit, I suggest you take a look at your spiritual nourishment habits.

Of course, we don't do these things so God will love us. He already does! No, we do them because



we want to be increasingly useful in God's kingdom. You won't always feel like doing these things. And sometimes you will miss a day, or even more. Don't be too concerned. Sometimes you're too busy serving others to read the Word, and other times so focused on reading and prayer that you don't have extra time to help others. But I have come to see that lack of spiritual nourishment through reading the Word, prayer and reaching out with one's gifts is as debilitating spiritually as not eating food is physically.

Introverts will tend to focus on the reading and praying while extraverts will tend to focus on the reaching out. But these must go together or else the reading and prayer become inward focused and irrelevant and the reaching out becomes selfish.

- 10. Get regular exercise and eat well. It will help you think more clearly and will make you healthier, thus giving you a greater and longer impact in God's kingdom. Enjoy a good meal—and sometimes you might eat more than you need on some special occasion—but don't make a habit out of overeating.
- 11. Get enough sleep. The Lord gives his loved ones sleep. You can't do everything, and the Lord

doesn't expect you to. When the Lord finished his ministry on earth, there were still many sick and many unbelievers. But he finished what the Lord gave him to do. The more you love the more you will be able to discern the things that take priority. This will help you focus on the important things, and allow you time to sleep. Taking time to sleep is a statement of faith: I believe that God can get done what he want to do through me even if I take time to sleep. God doesn't need me to be sleep deprived to get things done through me. I don't mean to imply that you can never stay up late. There are special events and special circumstances. My point is your sense of worth should be tied to the Lord and not to getting things done.

- 12. Live with margin financially. Don't live beyond you means. Save money. Give a tenth to the Lord. Doing all this is a statement of faith that the Lord is more important to you than anything, and that he can do great things for his kingdom though those who have little as well as through those who have much.
- 13. Introversion is not bad. I feel a need to say this because in our society introversion has negative connotations. I want to say clearly that introversion is a gift from the Lord and

reflects his glory. Of course, any gift can be affected by sin, and introversion is no exception.

Because of my introversion I sometimes became morbidly introspective. It's as if I put on my scuba diving gear to plumb the depths of my interior and find any sin that might be there. I later understood that what I was doing was a result of practical unbelief. The forgiveness of Christ wasn't enough for me. I also wanted to avoid the embarrassment of having sin come up from inside and become public. So I wanted to find all of it and get rid of it. But because God made us as beings who learn and grow over time as we relate concepts to outer and inner experience, the only way to get rid of it all immediately would be to go to heaven. I later understood what David and Paul meant by having a good conscience before the Lord. At first I thought it sounded arrogant. But understanding it saved me from morbid introspection. Having a good conscience doesn't mean being perfect or without sin. It means that as far as you know yourself you are walking in faith, and you see in yourself a sincere desire to please the Lord. No doubt there are still sinful tendencies in the flesh, but the Lord will reveal them to you as you are able to bear it. And this



illumination is often a process—you gradually become aware of the sin. In the meantime, those sins are all forgiven.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after I went to Chile for the first time, I discovered more deeply that my introversion was indeed affected by sin. I saw more deeply how it was more due to indifference than to wisdom. I was using my gift of introversion to keep from having to reach out to others.

But don't ever think that true spirituality is found in extraversion—which also has traps due to sin.

Also, introverts can express just as much emotion about the Lord as extraverts. They just usually prefer to do it alone before the Lord. I'm not, of course, saying that it's wrong to express this emotion in public. What I'm saying is that the way you express it is more an issue of personal preference and giftedness than a matter of spirituality.

Introverts can be very good at thinking things through, sometimes taking information from various people and putting things together into a meaningful whole. This is one way you can use your introversion to bless others. I enjoy listening to extraverts talk because it gives me an idea—usually from various perspectives—of what people are

thinking. It can fuel my own thinking.

Introverts are usually good at listening carefully to others—something we need a lot more of in a society that tends to value extraversion.

14. Remember both parts of the answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: the chief end of man is to 1) glorify God, and to 2) enjoy him forever. Having fun is very biblical. I still have a long way to go here, but if you had known me when I was in college, you would agree that the Lord has brought me a long way.