

Within three years West End Hardware had greatly expanded the items it sold and the business had literally tripled in size. Within two years, Uncle Elmer had opened four more hardware stores in nearby towns. Before his 40th birthday, Uncle Elmer had a chain of 14 stores in central Ohio. He also started a wholesale hardware company that was the first to promise next-day delivery of orders instead of the usual once a week. Large and small trucks with his company logo were popping up all over the county.

Uncle Elmer was chairman of the Board of Directors of the Harleysville Savings and Loan Bank, a past chairman of the Rotary, Better Business Bureau, the Red Cross and other civic organizations. The only organization that he totally ignored was the church. Uncle Elmer was an honest, sincere, moral man who believed in the "here and now." With the exceptional "clean record of living" he had produced, he was quite willing to "take his chances with the Man upstairs." Good Ole Uncle Elmer really seemed to have it all!

I became a Christian my last year in college. For the first time in my life someone explained to me that I was a creature made in the image of God. I was made by God and I was made for God. They also explained that I, along with every other person ever born, including Good Ole Uncle Elmer, was guilty of the great sin of deliberately ignoring every claim that God my Creator had on me. Even worse, by totally ignoring the Lord Jesus Christ, I was literally treating God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son with the utmost contempt simply by refusing to even think about the gospel story of God giving his Son to die in the place of poor sinners. Right before Christmas vacation, God graciously opened my heart and brought me to a living faith in Christ. The very first person that I wanted to tell about my new found faith was my Uncle Elmer.

I will never forget sitting on the porch and explaining the gospel to Uncle Elmer. He listened without saying a word until I finished. He then looked me straight in the eye, and said, "Wally, if you are so emotionally insecure that you need a religious crutch, that is fine with me. I think your present course will greatly limit your accomplishments in the real world. However, that is your choice. I prefer the choice I have made. I believe that God, if there is one, helps those who help themselves. I think you know that my accomplishments are an excellent proof

that my philosophy works. I am not an expert in religion and have no desire to become one. I am, however, an expert in life and how to conquer it. I urge you to follow my example and get off this "religious kick." He finished by quoting his favorite line, "Always go with the experts who have the experience."

Uncle Elmer was not angry. He did not raise his voice nor did he use a sarcastic tone. Uncle Elmer was always honest, practical, and did not think or act with his emotions. The closest I ever came to "giving up my faith" was at that moment. The one man that I loved and admired the most (actually, I almost worshipped him) was trashing, even if kindly, my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember that I had tears in my eyes and a knot in my stomach. I will never forget Uncle Elmer's voice saying, "Always go with the experts!"

As I rose to leave, Uncle Elmer said, again in that matter-of-fact tone, "Wally, my past experience with people who claim to have this experience you speak of is that they can't leave other people alone. I do not want you to ever bring up this subject again. I expect you to honor my wishes. Do you understand?" I said, "Yes." Uncle Elmer smiled, put his arm around my shoulder, and said, "Good. How about a glass of ice tea before you leave."

I never spoke to Uncle Elmer again about the gospel. I remember walking off the porch that day and thinking to myself, "Uncle Elmer, you are the greatest human being I ever met. In so many ways, I would give my right arm to be like you. But how can you have such an obvious and deliberate blind spot and refuse to look at the evidence concerning the claims of Jesus Christ? Uncle Elmer, how can you act as if you are the 'expert' on life while totally rejecting the advice of the only One who has ever conquered both life and death?"

I will never forget the screaming siren of the ambulance early the next morning. I ran to the window and saw the ambulance pull into Uncle Elmer's driveway. He lived at 1235 Maple Street and we lived at 1242. We were almost directly across the street. Before I dressed, two men had put Uncle Elmer onto a stretcher and wheeled him out of his house and drove him away to the emergency room at St. Mary's Hospital. For two days it was uncertain if Uncle Elmer would live or die, but the third day the good news came that he would not only live, but would probably have a full recovery. We were all thrilled.

The heart specialist who operated on Uncle Elmer was amazed at the rapid recovery. The doctor said, "Now Elmer, you are going to feel a whole lot better than you actually are physically. You will be tempted to do more than you are really capable of doing. I am warning you as plainly as I can not to do any heavy work. I don't care how good you feel, or what anyone tells you, don't do anything that makes you sweat or short of breath. I'm an expert in this area. Please do as I tell you! If you don't wait for complete healing before doing anything strenuous, you have had it. I assure you, the next time could easily be your last!" Uncle Elmer wisely followed the expert's advice for six weeks.

My cousin Jimmy was in his first year of medical school. While visiting Uncle Elmer on a beautiful summer day, the two began to discuss Uncle Elmer's recovery. Uncle Elmer said that he had never felt better in his life. He could not understand why Dr. Hivey, the heart specialist, was so adamant about not doing any work. Uncle Elmer loved to cut the grass. He loudly proclaimed that it needed cutting right now and he would love to do it. Jimmy went to his car and got a blood pressure kit and stethoscope. After taking Uncle Elmer's blood pressure, listening to his heart and breathing, and a few other things, Jimmy assured Uncle Elmer it was OK for him to cut the grass.

Aunt Carrie protested mildly that maybe Uncle Elmer should first check with the heart specialist. Jimmy assured her it was OK. He said, with great authority, "Doctors today are scared to death of law suits, so they exercise ten times as much precaution as is really necessary. Believe me, Uncle Elmer is fit as a fiddle." Uncle Elmer grinned and said, "Well, I sure feel fit as a fiddle." Jimmy beamed and said, "Go get 'em tiger."

Uncle Elmer rushed out to the shed, got out the mower, checked the oil and gas, and started her up. He began pushing the mower around the outside of the lawn as he always did. After several laps he felt great and began to walk faster. He was grinning from ear to ear. The longer he went, the better he felt. In ten minutes, he was sweating and took off his shirt, winked at Jimmy, and went back at it with a vengeance. Just as he reached the center of the yard, Uncle Elmer stopped, grabbed his chest, and fell flat on the ground. Aunt Carrie screamed so loudly we heard her across the street. Jimmy jumped off the porch, ran to Uncle Elmer, and tried to get

him to breathe, but it was a wasted effort. Good Ole Uncle Elmer was dead!

I saw all this as I was running across the street. When I came into the yard, Aunt Carrie was cradling Uncle Elmer's head and Jimmy was standing there with a horribly dazed look on his face. We all knew it was all over. I looked down at the man I had admired more than any other human being, and said to myself, "Uncle Elmer, you are one the biggest fools I ever met. You came up wrong on the only two really vital decisions of your whole existence! You just now trusted your whole earthly existence into the hands of a young arrogant amateur, and that tragic folly cost you your earthly life. You also just trusted your entire eternal existence into the hands of a self-sufficient amateur, yourself, who, by your own confession, knew nothing about eternity, and that tragic mistake has cost you your eternal soul. In both cases, you deliberately rejected the advice of the experts, and followed gross amateurs."

I cried as I realized that Good Ole Uncle Elmer had deliberately rejected the very clear principles he had lived by all of his life, and which had made him so successful in the things of this world. How could he be so wise in worldly things and at the same time be so ignorant about eternal things?□

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

Time flies. The years slip by with incredible speed, and are gone before we realize it. It seems as though they no more begin, than they are gone, passed into eternity. So, too, the happenings of the day soon recede into the distant past. Everything in this world is fleeting and transitory—nothing is stable and lasting. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (*Psalms 90:9*).

Being busily engrossed with the occupations, labors, and pursuits of life we are more or less insensible to the swiftness of passing time, of the solemn fact that life itself is fast getting away from us, and that the end of our earthly journey is speedily and surely approaching. Or, if we are conscious that our time is getting short, either we dismiss the thought or reckon that somehow or other all will be well in the end.

How important it is that we keep in mind that our death is ever on the horizon, that we are but a heartbeat from it, and that when we

die, we will be ushered into eternity from which there is no return or escape. Since death is so common, we do not give it sufficient thought. We seem to have developed a sense of immunity to such an experience. Because death seems so vague, unreal, and unlikely, we fail to take it into serious consideration. Instead, we live as though we were certain of many more years of life, whereas the Word of God faithfully warns us: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov 27:1).

We hear and read of large numbers being killed in war or by accident, of thousands starving to death in Africa, in India, or some other country. But we pay this little attention; it doesn't mean much to us since we are not personally involved. A neighbor down the street dies, or one of our own dear ones is taken from us. This may cause us to stop and think for a moment, but soon it is largely gone from our memory, and we go on our way day after day, probably with the thought in the back of our mind that we are safe and have no reason to be apprehensive. We have plenty of time yet.

Likely the thought of our death would take on a new and serious meaning if we knew that the moment we pass from this scene—and this could be and may be before this day is over—we would awake in hell, in the "everlasting burnings" (Isaiah 33:14), "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44) forever past all hope.

But this is just what God's Word makes known to every unsaved sinner, to every unrepentant man or woman, to every soul that is not washed in the blood of Christ. The Scriptures are clear: "The wicked shall be turned into hell" (Psalm 9:17). "The rich man also died, and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments" (Luke 16:22).

Many take thought for their bodies, but totally neglect the interests of their immortal souls; but, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36,37). Most people drift aimlessly through life without any care or concern as to what is before them after this fleeting life is over, seemingly taking it for granted that somehow or other everything will turn out all right with them in the end. This is what they hope; and they give themselves the benefit of any doubt.

Many have no consciousness of their lost condition. While they do not consider themselves perfect, yet they are not aware that

there is anything seriously wrong with them. They are respectable, law-abiding citizens, and consider themselves no worse than their neighbors; and though they care little for God's Word, they fully expect to go to heaven when they die. Some will admit that they are sinners, but imagine that their good works will far outweigh their bad. Some suppose all will be well with them because they've been baptized or attend church regularly.

On the contrary, God's Word says we are not saved "by works of righteousness which we have done" (Titus 3:5). "There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt 19:17). "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags [in God's sight]; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). We are all "sinners" before God. So whether you're a prince or a pauper, rich or poor, moral or immoral, kind or unkind, religious or irreligious, it just doesn't matter—"there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

How prone is human nature to neglect or slight God's solemn warnings and threats of coming judgment! We are told after death is the judgment (Heb 9:27). Because this truth is alarming, it is ignored; and men put such thoughts from them and go on their way. Few indeed are disturbed enough to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). What foolishness is involved in such indifference when your eternal soul is at stake!

Soon, very soon, taking the longest possible view, you will go down to the dust and your spirit will return to God (Ecc 12:7). My friend, do not lightly dismiss this matter, or your folly will only add to your misery in that day. God hath no pleasure in your death, but would rather that you turn from your wicked way and live (Ezek 18:30; 33:11). "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Jesus "gave himself for our sins." He "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal 1:4; 3:13).

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). O sinner, will you go on another day with God's wrath hanging over your head? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6). Cast your eyes upon the exalted Christ by faith while time and opportunity are yours. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13).

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Rest from all your sins!—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (1John 1:7). Rest to all eternity!—"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Jesus welcomes and receives sinners: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt 9:13). The door is open, and the time is now. "Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psalm 2:12). □

*Eternity. Time will soon end,
Its fleeting moments pass away;
O sinner say, where wilt thou spend,
Eternity's unchanging day?
Shalt thou the hopeless horror see,
Of hell for all eternity?*

*Tonight may be thy latest breath,
Thy little moment here be done;
Eternal woe—the second death,
Awaits the Christ-rejecting one.
Thine awful destiny foresee,
Time ends, and then—Eternity!*

TOMORROW!

"Boast not thyself of TOMORROW; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1)

*He was going to be all that a mortal should be
TOMORROW.
No one should be kinder or braver than he
TOMORROW.*

*A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it too;
On him he would call and see what he could do
TOMORROW.*

*Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
TOMORROW.
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight
TOMORROW.*

*It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;
More time he'd have to give others, he'd say,
TOMORROW.*

*The greatest of workers this man would have been
TOMORROW.
The world would have known him, had he ever seen
TOMORROW.*

*But the fact is he died and faded from view,
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do
TOMORROW.*

[Good Ole Uncle Elmer was adapted from Sound of Grace]

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GOOD OLE UNCLE ELMER

Everybody loved Uncle Elmer. He was not only my favorite uncle, he was my hero, idol, role model, and inspiration all rolled up in one. I longed and prayed to be just like "Good Ole Uncle Elmer." Uncle Elmer started working as a paper boy when he was only ten years old. He was the youngest paper boy that the Harleysville Globe ever hired. He doubled his route within six months by spending all day Saturday knocking on doors and persuading people to "just try it a couple of months."

When he was fourteen years old, Uncle Elmer started to work evenings and Saturday at the West End Hardware Store as a stock boy. Mr. Stems, the owner, really liked him and within six months he was promoted from stocking shelves to sales clerk. Mr. Stems was pretty old and he had no children. He offered to help pay Uncle Elmer's way through college, providing Uncle Elmer would work twenty hours a week and full time on vacations. It was sort of understood that Uncle Elmer would continue to work for Mr. Stems upon graduation. He also hinted that "one of these days" he was going to hire a manager and "start taking some time off."

Three years after Uncle Elmer graduated from Harleysville Community College, Mr. Stems offered to make him a partner in the hardware store. It was one of those "unbelievable opportunities" and Uncle Elmer jumped at the chance. His mom and dad were beginning to gently suggest that "It is about time you found a nice girl and were married." Little did they realize that Good Ole Uncle Elmer already had his eye on Mr. Stems' only niece.

Christmas day of 1967 was a day that neither Uncle Elmer nor Carrie, Mr. Stems' niece, would ever forget. They announced their engagement and wedding date for June 15. At the same party, Mr. Stems announced that his wedding gift to his niece, Carrie, was his share of the partnership in the hardware store. Uncle Elmer and Carrie started their marriage as sole owners of West End Hardware.