

Wisdom to Live By

I think it was in the Fall of 1983 -- or maybe it was 1985... I can't remember exactly. The date of this story is not that important -- the nugget of wisdom it contains is beyond important. I was home from Tennessee Tech University for a year to work in Huntsville, Alabama, as an engineering Co-op student. During this time, I was helping to lead the youth group at the Park City Church of Christ.

On one particular youth outing, I remember we took about 15 kids to a nursing home to see one of our ailing sisters. The lady was probably in her mid-60s -- I thought that was old at the time! Although I cannot say I was super-close to this sister in Christ, I had observed her from "across the aisle" at church. If anyone was a servant, it was this lady. She was always cooking food for someone, visiting someone, caring for someone, making something for someone. She had worked hard in her life, and this was evident from the lines on her face and her weathered hands. I remember her as being strong -- and so reliable. She was always ready to help.

But now, things had changed. Her once powerful body had wasted away due to cancer. Her face, which always seemed to have a smile, was now swollen so that she was almost beyond recognition. She did not have many days remaining on this earth when the 15 young people (a mix of pre-teens, early teens, and late teens) filed into her room at the nursing home.

Nursing homes have a certain smell. A mixture of strong cleaning solution, human waste, alcohol, and various air fresheners. For someone who has not spent a lot of time in nursing homes -- especially a young college student or a teenager -- they can be quite disturbing. Down the hall someone shouted for help... someone across the hall moaned loudly. Tired-looking nurses worked steadily moving from room to room -- busy as bees -- doing 1,001 things that must be done every day... and that will need doing again tomorrow.

The 15 of us gathered around her bed. As the leader, I thought I was supposed to say something. It has been several years, and I do not remember today what I said then. I think I said something like, "We are from the church, and we just wanted to come and see you and let you know we are thinking about you." Not eloquent, but I guess it was enough. I do not know what I expected from this visit -- I didn't want us to stay there too long. In fact, I wanted to leave as soon as I could -- this whole scene was disturbing to me, and I was not sure how to handle it!

But then, the sick sister in the bed spoke to us. Her face -- although greatly swollen -- still had that smile I remembered from before. She weakly called us closer -- and we drew into a tighter circle around her bed. In a voice just above a whisper, she said, "I want to tell you all something." We leaned in closer. She whispered, "Live life one day at a time... one day at a time." We all nodded in agreement. I think I led a prayer. We all gave her a hug, said good-bye, and filed quietly out of the room. My head was spinning a bit after this. Her words were still burning in my ears. She passed away a short time after our little visit.

I have thought back on that visit many times through the years and have remembered the priceless wisdom shared that day: "Live life one day at a time." These were some of the last

words on this earth from a precious sister. She had suffered much in the prior months -- her body had been ravaged by disease -- and she had learned through her trials and sufferings that the words of Jesus had proven true: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34). Her life was being cut short by a horrible disease, but she was not bitter... not angry... not hateful. Instead, till the very end, she lovingly shared the love of God with others... with us.

Are you troubled by the future? Are you troubled by the weight of this world bearing down on you? We are all battling something, but there is only so much we can do. What are the dangers you fear that are lurking in the future? Why borrow trouble? Hear the words of Jesus -- and of this wise sister -- do not worry about the troubles of tomorrow that "might" or "could" happen. Deal with the troubles of the present. Live "one day at a time." And sometimes, we must narrow this to: "Live life one moment at a time."

We all have to deal with worry somehow -- either we just give in to it, or we effectively deal with it. Jesus gives us a way to truly deal with our looming troubles. In the previous verse, Jesus said: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). When Jesus says "these things," He is talking about the things we really need in life. Seek after God, seek His righteousness, seek His rule in every facet of your life -- and He promises to provide what we need! God will take care of us -- if we will trust and obey Him!

It is easy to worry. It is easy to fret. It is easy to cower in fear. It is easy to wring our hands and wonder, "What am I going to do? How am I going to make it?" In fact, left to our own devices, I think worry and fear are our "natural" approaches to life. But Jesus does not want His people to live that way. He does not promise to immediately give us all the answers to every problem and issue that might arise. But He does call us to trust in Him -- not in ourselves. He invites us to hold His hand, to walk with Him, and to take life one day at a time.

Hear the wisdom of a precious Christian sister. And hear the wisdom of Jesus. Powerful wisdom to live by -- one day at a time.

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