

Words from Big Top

F-WORDS THAT COUNT

Seven Words That Carried Us 1,600 Miles

OCTOBER 28, 2026 • CURT "BIGTOP" MAREK

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10, 12 (ASV)

The Week of Crazy

Over the last couple of weeks I've been thinking a lot about the five F's: **Faith, Family, Finances, Fitness, and Fun**. I'd add two more: **Friends** and **Fellowship**. I didn't know how soon I'd need every one of them.

Two weeks ago my little brother Justin passed away suddenly in an accident at his house. He was working on his truck when the jack slipped. The first call came from his wife, so shaken she could hardly get the words out. Justin had just turned 50 in August, and he and his wife had just bought a new house in Aurora, North Carolina this year.

None of us were close. My parents are in Spicewood, I'm in New Braunfels, and my older brother Scott is in Virginia Beach. Scott and I worked out a plan to get my 80-year-old parents to the funeral: rent a 15-passenger van, and I'd drive 1,600 miles, about 28 hours straight. Mom has been in a wheelchair for around ten years and has to keep her legs up, so we built her a bed in the back of the van. We stopped almost every two hours to get her out for the restroom, and each stop added 30 to 45 minutes. My 20-year-old son came along to support me and keep Dad and me awake through the night.

And just to add to the fun, the rental van broke down eight hours in, on I-10 in the middle of Louisiana, at 1:30 in the morning. Roadside assistance was a joke. Help didn't come until 7:30 a.m. In the meantime we pushed Mom, over and over, almost a mile down the darkest highway I've ever seen to a gas station that was, thank God, open 24 hours. The Louisiana state bird was out all night long and drew blood from

every one of us. (That would be the mosquito.)

A tow truck carried us 138 miles north to Alexandria, and about eight hours later we were in another 15-passenger van. By 4:00 p.m. we were on I-20 heading east with 1,000-plus miles still to go to Washington, North Carolina. We pulled in two hours before the viewing, exhausted and ready for showers.

I tell you all of this because every one of the seven F's showed up that week.

There were so many places where we could have checked out and run out of the room. Some people did. Because of these seven F's, we all got through it.

Seven F-Words That Count

1 FAITH

“Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding.” PROVERBS 3:5 (ASV)

We had to have a ton of faith that God was going to get us where we were going.

I've always taught faith as **F**orsaking **A**ll, **I** Trust **H**im. Belief in God and in what Jesus has done in my life has carried me through births, weddings, funerals, marching band, six adopted kids, a divorce, and so much more. I thank God every day for what Christ did on the cross, and for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who has been my guiding light through every trial I have ever faced. A dark Louisiana highway at 2:00 a.m. was just one more place He showed up.

FROM THE WORD

Abraham knew something about a long road. When God called him, he packed up and “went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8). He didn't have the map, the timeline, or a working van. He had a promise, and the One who made it. Faith doesn't mean you know how the trip ends. It means you know who's riding with you.

2 FAMILY

“God setteth the solitary in families.” PSALM 68:6 (ASV)

We leaned on the strength of our family to overcome the strife and stress of the situation.

Family is the hardest piece of all of this, because family can lift you up, cut you down, and completely ignore you, and that’s just breakfast. Being family as a son is different from being family as a brother, and that’s different again from being family as a father. That week I was all three at once. The power struggles can be epic, but the love that comes out of that bond is like no other.

FROM THE WORD

Joseph’s brothers lifted him up, cut him down, and threw him in a pit, all before lunch. Years of distance followed. But when they finally stood face to face in Egypt, Joseph wept so loud the whole house heard it, and he told them, “Ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Family can wound deep, but God can make it the very place He heals.

3 FINANCES

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field.”

LEVITICUS 19:9 (ASV)

We had to understand the finances of it all and talk honestly with each other, pooling together so money wouldn’t become one more stressor.

Finances seem like an odd one in this group, but money makes the world go round, and in an emergency, receiving help you didn’t earn is a humbling experience. The Bible teaches us not to harvest the corners of our fields so the traveler always has enough to get by. When an unexpected situation hits and family and friends show up with open hearts and open pocketbooks, it lifts weight off an already crushing time. Blessed are those who are able and willing to give to those in need. I always want to be a person who can not only take care of my own, but who is ready and willing to be there for others.

FROM THE WORD

Ruth was a widow and a foreigner gleaning leftovers in a stranger’s field. Boaz could have followed the minimum the law required. Instead he told his reapers to drop extra handfuls on purpose so she would find more than enough (Ruth 2:15–16). That generosity did more than feed a family; it wrote Ruth into the line of David and of Jesus. Never underestimate what an open hand can set in motion.

4 FITNESS

“Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you?” 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19 (ASV)

We needed physical and mental fitness strong enough to endure the trials that came our way.

Each of us has two temples to tend: the temple of our body and the temple of our mind. Life is unpredictable. You can build in as many failsafes as you want, but if we don't take care of our bodies and minds, then when troubled waters come we may not have the stamina to stand.

When I was a kid, Dad led Royal Rangers, and our slogan was *“Ready! Ready to work, play, serve, and obey!”* If our bodies and minds aren't focused on fitness, we may not be ready. I know this firsthand. In the past year and a half I've lost 138 pounds by eating right and working out, and this last year writing two books and this blog has given my mind an outlet to reflect on who I am and who I want to be. Two years ago I would not have been ready for that trip, not physically and certainly not mentally.

FROM THE WORD

After the fire fell on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran for his life and collapsed under a juniper tree, done. God didn't lecture him. He sent an angel with bread and water and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee” (1 Kings 19:7). Then Elijah went forty days in the strength of that food. God cares about the body He gave you, because some journeys really are too great to take on empty.

5 FUN

“For the joy of Jehovah is your strength.” NEHEMIAH 8:10 (ASV)

In the middle of it all, we had to see things from another side and find the fun and joy that being together gave us.

You might ask, “How do you find fun in the death of your brother?” I grieved my little brother. Honestly, we'd been far apart for the past ten to twenty years. I moved away and built a life in Texas, and for a long time we didn't speak. But I came back to the town where Justin and I had our first apartment together, where he helped me build the very first youth group I ever led. I saw old friends of his from that youth group and looked back on all the joy we had growing up. I had no choice but to have fun and rejoice in the life he built and the life we shared.

FROM THE WORD

When Ezra read the Law to the people, they broke down and wept. Nehemiah told them to stop, go eat the good food, drink something sweet, and send portions to those who had none, “for the joy of Jehovah is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:9–10). There is a time to weep, and Solomon says there is also a time to laugh (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Sometimes both happen at the same table.

6 FRIENDS

“There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” PROVERBS 18:24 (ASV)

We found and reconnected with friends, some we expected to see and some we made along the way.

Friends are an extension of family, and sometimes even stronger. For Justin’s funeral I wrote a song called “*Till the Street Lights Call Us Home*,” and in it I wrote verses for the amazing friends he had cultivated over his years in Washington, all the other brothers he had become. Friends are brothers from another mother, bound by common passions and a life lived together.

FROM THE WORD

One man couldn’t walk, so four friends carried him to Jesus. When the crowd blocked the door, they climbed on the roof, tore it open, and lowered him down. The Bible says Jesus saw *their* faith (Mark 2:1–5). I thought about those four men every time we pushed Mom down that dark Louisiana highway. Real friends carry you when you can’t carry yourself.

7 FELLOWSHIP

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” PROVERBS 27:17 (ASV)

We found a common bond in fellowship with family and friends who came from all over to grieve and to rejoice in the love and life Justin lived.

As most of you know, I love to eat, and there’s always good food at a fellowship meeting. Laughter, tears, and joy come out of the stories we share and the work of doing life together. Life is too short to live alone. God built us to collaborate and to sharpen one another.

The night after Justin’s funeral, I was blessed to sit in on an old-fashioned singing at Grace Place Church. I sat in on keys with eight or ten old guys who have been plucking strings longer than my 54 years on earth. There was so much joy in the music and in their love for the Lord. We all shared songs,

played along, and experienced life in song.

FROM THE WORD

The first church didn't just meet; they did life together. They broke bread from house to house and "did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God" (Acts 2:46–47). And the Lord added to their number daily. Food, worship, and open homes have always been God's way of building His family.

Nobody Ran Out of the Room

It would have been easy to check out that week. A broken van, a sleepless night, a mother in a wheelchair on a dark highway, and a brother gone too soon. But Solomon was right: a threefold cord is not quickly broken, and a sevenfold one holds even tighter.

Faith kept us looking up. Family kept us holding on. Finances, shared openly, kept money from becoming a fight. Fitness kept us standing. Fun reminded us that Justin's life was worth celebrating. Friends carried us the last mile. And fellowship turned a funeral into a family reunion of the soul.

These aren't emergency tools you grab when the storm hits. They're muscles you build every day, so that when the call comes, and it will, you're *ready*.

CHECK YOUR F-WORDS

- Which of the seven F's is strongest in your life right now? Which one is running on empty?
- If an emergency hit tomorrow, who would be in your "15-passenger van"? Have you told them lately what they mean to you?
- Is there a relationship, like mine with Justin, where distance has grown? What one step could you take this week to close it?
- Are you leaving the "corners of your field" for someone else? Where could you give this month?
- What would it take for your body and mind to be *ready*, two years from now, for whatever comes?

A Prayer

Father, thank You that You never leave us alone on the dark stretches of the road. Grow our faith. Heal and strengthen our families. Make us generous with what You've placed in our hands. Keep our bodies and minds ready to work, play, serve, and obey. Fill us with Your joy, surround us with true friends, and knit us together in fellowship. For everyone grieving today, be the Comforter You promised. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Raising tents and building rings so the magic can happen,

Curt "BigTop" Marek

*In loving memory of my little brother, **Justin**.
Till the street lights call us home.*