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REMEMBERING CLARICE

My only sibling, my sister Clarice, died on Friday evening, April 22. She was 89 years old and would have been 90 in one month. It doesn't yet seem real to me that she is gone.

Clarice and I were born in Fort Worth and raised on the North Side, which was like the wrong side of the tracks - a rough, blue-collar neighborhood. Historically, the North Side had the huge Fort Worth Stockyards and was a violent, cowboy part of town.

I was five years older than Clarice, so we weren't very close while growing up. About 22 years ago she moved to Grand Junction to be near me and my family, which was a happy surprise for us. She bought a house just one block away from mine, and we made a promise - a kind of vow - that we would take care of each other for as long as we lived. Because of our age and physical problems, we each had many opportunities to keep that promise. Clarice was a lot of company to me after Doris died, and I told her many times how much I appreciated her moving to be near me.

Clarice had COPD, which is a terrible affliction, and she went through years of suffering. She believed it was caused by a 40-year addiction to smoking. She quit smoking about 30 years ago, but the damage was done.

One time we were talking about why she moved here. She said that nearly all of her close friends and relatives had died or moved away but that wasn't the main reason. She said she realized that the end was approaching and she felt afraid. She was not a bad person, but she had no peace when she thought about standing before God. She said she knew that if she moved near me that I would influence her to get right with God. (Wow! I have failed in so many ways in my life, and to hear her say that was such a blessing.)

And Clarice did get right with God. She accepted Christ as her Savior not long after she moved to Grand Junction and started going to church with Doris and me. But attending church became increasingly difficult because she gradually lost her hearing and it was very hard to communicate with her. Deafness really isolates people as I know because I've lost much of my hearing.

But Clarice attended a ladies' Bible study group led by Susie Vaughn for many years; she watched David Jeremiah, Roxbert Morris, and others (she could turn the volume up and hear their messages). She also started reading and studying the Bible. I'll bet she had a dozen study Bibles that she had ordered from some TV preacher - - - and some of the Bibles were full of notes in the margin and underlining. She also had many notebooks full of Scriptural teachings in her handwriting.....page after page. I had no idea that she spent so much time in the Word, and it touched my heart.

When the ICU nurse called me on Friday at 10:30 PM and told me that Clarice had just passed, I sat in the dark and reflected on her life. To be honest, Clarice was in some ways a very stubborn, selfish person with a lot of character flaws. (It seems to run in the Brown family.) She was really a baby Christian and never worked through a lot of things. Frankly, I was wondering about her eternal destiny. Then I heard a strong, clear inner voice. The Voice said, "She 's with Me!" Wow! Thank you, Lord. And forgive me for being such a judgmental jerk.

None of us work out all of our character flaws. We are a work in progress. But there was One who got it right and then died as if He were a terrible sinner. He did it for Clarice. And for me. And for you. Glory to His name!

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THE LAMB OF GOD

John 1:20 reports about an amazing thing that happened at a certain crossing place of the River

Jordan. Jesus' cousin, John, had established a sort of primitive outpost there by the river for several months, and he had been preaching a message of repentance to the people who came to hear him. Mainly, he had been warning them that the Messiah - the one they had been hearing about all their lives - was soon to come. The little nation of Israel was occupied by legions of soldiers of Rome, a cruel oppressor. Everyone was hopeless and depressed, and they were ripe for something or someone to give them hope.

John's appearance and his preaching took the nation by storm. John was like a wild man. He dressed in a robe made of camel's hair and he subsisted on dried locusts and wild honey. John's preaching was fiery and confrontational and anointed by God in a special way. He reminded people of the Prophet Elijah. Everyone knew that Isaiah had prophesied that Elijah would come again just before the Messiah appeared.

For all these reasons, John drew crowds of people like a giant magnet. People swarmed to him from all over the country - first, dozens; then hundreds; then thousands. Many were so deeply impacted by John's preaching that they allowed him to baptize them in the river. (Some scholars speculate that John and his disciples may have baptized as many as a million people.)

And then came that special day. John was standing on a little cliff, maybe shaking his fist and preaching in his captivating way, when his eyes were drawn to the far side of the crowd. A small band of men was approaching. John's attention was drawn to the man leading the little group, and it was as if John were shocked with electricity. John knew, he immediately knew who was approaching.

John stopped in mid-sentence and pointed. "Look!" he shouted, "There he is - God's Lamb. He will take away the sins of the world!" (TPT) I love the way the old King James Version puts it: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Behold the Lamb!" I can't read those words without having an emotional response. Don't they touch something deep inside when you read them or hear them?

One of the requirements of the Mosaic law was that every Israelite man had to come to the Temple once each year, during the Passover celebration and take care of his sin problem. What each man had to do was to bring a lamb to be killed by a priest, and its blood was sprinkled on the altar before God. This symbolic act "covered" the sins of

the man and his family for the past year. This act had to be repeated every year.

The law said that each lamb had to be perfect physically in order for it to be acceptable to God. So a team of designated priests carefully examined each lamb before it was brought to the place of sacrifice. They looked at its eyes, ears, teeth and feet. They carefully inspected its body, ruffling the wool to examine the skin. They had to make sure there were no blemishes.

Note: They did not examine the man! They did not grill him about what he had done during the past year. Maybe he had led a good life, or maybe he had slipped up and done some bad things. No matter, if he came bringing a lamb without blemish I guess it was assumed that his heart was repentant toward God, and he and his family were pronounced okay with God to move on.

I related to you before that when I grew up in Fort Worth, there were two huge meat-packing plants, Swift's and Armour's, located on a hill just beyond the stockyards. Those two plants were enormous, each seven stories tall, and each employed thousands of men and women. During my high school and college years, during the summer school break I worked at different times for both Swift's and Armour's. One of my jobs at Swift's was on the "Bull-gang," which was just manual labor wherever needed. They only picked very macho guys for the Bull-gang.

I observed that herds of cattle and hogs were driven up a long ramp which led to the seventh floor, which was the kill-floor. Flocks of sheep were not driven, they followed the "Judas-goat" which was trained to lead them. (Forgive me for being graphic at this point. If you are squeamish, you may want to skip down a ways.) The cattle were dispatched by a man who stood up on a platform, leaned over the holding pen and hit each animal on its head with a hammer that had a very long handle.

The hogs were driven into a pen next to a slowly rotating metal wheel about 20 feet high. There were hooks attached to the wheel by a short chain every few feet. A man would stand in the pen, slip a hook onto the back leg of a hog, and as the hog was lifted into the air another man would cut its throat. The hogs would squeal and thrash around throwing blood everywhere.

In the sheep pen, a man walked among the sheep which were standing quietly, held the head of each one and cut its throat. The sheep would

stand still, trembling, until it bled out and fell to the floor.

“And as a sheep before its shearer is dumb,” so the Lamb of God quietly and humbly allowed Himself to be stripped, flogged unmercifully, stood before a heartless judge named Pilate and a howling mob, marched almost fainting down a winding city lane, nailed to a wooden cross, and hoisted up to die. He took the place of a criminal named Barabbas....and of another criminal named Glenn....and also for you.

His blood did not just “cover” our sins for the past year, it removed all of our sins, past, present and future forever.... if we truly repent and trust Him to be our Savior. And the inspecting angels don’t examine you to find all your flaws, they examined the Lamb and found Him to be perfect.

My precious friends, I have a word for each of you right now: “Behold the Lamb!”

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ACT LIKE A MAN!

(Jentezen Franklin has a mega church in Tennessee, is a regular on TBN, and is a courageous preacher. I’ve heard him say things to his young adults, and to all his church, that shocked me. They were honest and not inappropriate, but I’ve never heard another preacher with the chutzpah to say those things. His recent message, “Act Like a Man,” is one of those sermons. And as usual I couldn’t refrain from adding a little editing.)

Paul writes to the church at Corinth and in 1 Cor. 16:13 he speaks directly to the men: “*Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, and let all you do be done in love.*”

Christ is speaking through the Apostle Paul: “Act like men.” Guys have a lot of misguided ideas about what it means to act like a man....so he moderates it, defines it by adding, “and let everything you do be done in love.” So he is not telling guys to act like a mountain man with their mouth open and their knuckles dragging on the ground. Real men don’t have road rage or rage toward their wives or children. In times like these, God certainly needs men to stand up and act like men.

If you look carefully through Scripture, you will note that there are many diverse pictures of the men whom God held up as representatives or models of manhood. Just one example:

Esau and Jacob were twins. Esau was a rough, hairy man, an outdoorsman, and a hunter. Esau

was his father’s favorite. Jacob was of a gentler nature and mostly stayed inside with his mother. He was a momma’s boy. And yet God rejected Esau (because Esau had no interest or respect for God) and chose Jacob.

When King David was dying, he said to his son Solomon who would succeed him as King, “Be strong and act like a man!” You can be a man, a husband, a father, but not act out the role of man, husband and father.

Let me give you three of my thoughts concerning acting like a man.

First - Don’t act like a woman.

God describes clearly in the Bible the role that men are to have in their family. A man is responsible to lead and protect and provide for his family. If someone in the family is in trouble, he is not to be passive. He is to think and pray and act....and his actions are to be done in love. A husband and father should lead his family in prayer, in studying the Word of God, and in church.

The Disney Corporation has let it be known publicly that they are doing away with gender in their movies, videos and theme parks. They will no longer reference “boys and girls.” Also, 50% of the characters in their stories will identify as LBGQTQ. President Biden announced that March 31st was “Transgender Day,” and on the census people can identify themselves with an X instead of as male or female. They are also endorsing sex change surgery for children without their parents’ approval!

There is a spiritual and social war going on in our land and many men are asleep. Act like a man

I have a newsflash for you from the Bible: There are not three sexes! God made them male and female, not male, female and trans.

Well, some will say, “I was born this way.” That may be true. And I was born inclined to be a fornicator and an angry, selfish man, but Jesus Christ healed me and changed my heart.

And a man has no right to attend a college, call himself a woman, and win all the sports competitions. A lady who identifies herself as a “radical feminist” agrees with me and says this ridiculous practice is a disaster and will utterly ruin women’s sports. (She was on a clip and spoke strongly about this new practice.)

Second - Don’t act like a beast.

The word “beast” is used in the Bible 275 times. Many of the references are to animals, but

some are not. David says to God in Psalm 73, "I was like a beast toward You." We are strongly warned, "Don't act like a beast!"

In the last days, men will act like animals. Animals live from instinct and live for their own desires and appetites. They don't understand the concept of morality and self-restraint.

Male dogs are driven by their hormones and if a female dog is in heat they will mount her anywhere and anytime. Many men live like that all the time. Don't be a beast! Act like a man!

Dogs, horses and other animals don't understand manners regarding bodily functions, they are just animals. And some men have no manners regarding making bodily noises in front of their spouse and children, they laugh as if it is funny. What it is is crude and disrespectful and animal-like. Don't be a beast, act like a man, and let all you do be done in love.

Third - Don't act like a boy.

A lot of men never grow up, they act like children all their lives. They can't stand up to the difficulties of life, they have to escape to their bottle or their drugs or their pornography. They set an example to their sons and daughters, but it is a bad example, one of apathy, escapism and cowardice.

Paul said, "When I became a man I put away childish things." Have you put away childish things? Are you still acting like a boy, or are you acting like a man?

How then are Christian men to live?

- 1) Be watchful in prayer. Be alert. You are a watchman on the wall. Pay attention to your children. Who are their friends? What are they watching on the internet? And watch yourself, watch your character, your integrity.
- 2) Stand firm. It's easy to drift, and it's easy to fall away even for men who have a great record of love and service to God and people. Stand firm against sin. Stand firm on tithing and church attendance. Paul said at the end of his life, "I have kept the faith." I want to be able to say that.
- 3) Let all you do be done in love. Check yourself before you say something in anger to your wife, your son or daughter, to anyone. Words can stab and leave deep wounds.

Let me close by sharing a true story. A professional climber was leading three other men in

climbing a mountain in the Himalayas.. They were tied together. They succeeded in climbing to the summit, but on the descent the professional guide slipped and fell, pulling the others behind him. Three men in the group were killed, including the professional. In falling down the mountain, they fell into three men in another group who were ascending and two of those men were also killed.

Note that this accident didn't happen on the hardest part, on the ascent, but on the descent.

As we get older, it is all too easy to start taking it easy. But if I fall, remember that my family is following behind and they are tied to me. If their leader falls, it can take them out.

You grandfathers, listen to God's admonition: Stand firm! If you relax and grow lazy and fall, it's not just you that will be affected.

Decide today. Bow down to Jesus once again. Ask Him to strengthen you, to help you to be faithful to the end. Ask God to help you to act like a man.

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.
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