



August 16th, 2007

Do You Know What You Are Worth

One of my favorite ways to release stress and take a brief break from the stress of my job is to play tennis. I usually play tennis 2-3 times each week. I enjoy both singles and doubles, but on the local team to which I belong I almost exclusively play doubles. I have a regular doubles partner with whom I spend much time because of all the tennis we play. We only began playing doubles together this past spring, and it turns out we make a pretty good team. As a matter of fact, we have not lost yet, and we have played a lot of matches against a lot of teams in north Houston from Bentwater/Conroe to the Woodlands to our immediate area. We haven't kept track, but I suppose we have won 60-70 matches in a row. That is until this past Saturday. We were challenged by a doubles team out of Kingwood Country Club who we have never played. I suppose it is fair to say we were feeling pretty confident going into the match. They summarily handled us 6-0, 6-3, in quick fashion. It was a serious shock to the ego to say the least. If you are not familiar with tennis, that is not a close match. That is the equivalent of losing 15-1 in baseball or 56-3 in football. It was simply embarrassing.

As I was driving home from the match, I was reminded of how thankful I am that my value is not in my accomplishments but rather in my standing as a child of God. I play tennis because I really enjoy it and I'm competitive by nature, and tennis provides an avenue for me to compete. But, I don't find my value in tennis nor do I feel that my success or failure at it defines me. Too often, we find our value in our career, our wealth, our toys, and our hobbies. But, when we do that, we are setting ourselves up to be hurt very badly. There will always be someone else who comes along who can beat you. They can outperform you at work. They have more wealth. They have more toys. They are better at your hobby than you are. If you find your worth in those things, when that person comes along, you will feel worthless. But, if you find your value in being a child of God, you have nothing to fear. Nobody can take you away from the Lord. There is nothing you can do to cause the Lord Jesus to kick you to the curb. When our Heavenly Father adopts you into His family, it is permanent. Find your joy this week not in human pursuit, but in your standing as a child of God.

The Lord's Supper

This coming Sunday we are celebrating the Lord's Supper. We have come, in our journey through 1 Corinthians, to a foundational passage on this New Testament ordinance. I encourage you to be in church on Sunday as we learn about and partake in this ceremony of remembering the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Big Church Orientation

One of my favorite Sundays each year is promotion Sunday. I really enjoy this particular Sunday because it is the day that the children in our Bible Study classes for four-year-olds start attending “Big Church”. Big church can be overwhelming and intimidating to a small child, but we want our children in our worship services so that their families can worship the Lord together and so that the four-year-olds’ parents can model worship to them and for them. Sure, four and five-year olds make noises during the sermon and rustle around in their seats, but that is fine. Our worship service is not a museum. It is a place where family units join together with other family units for worship. I definitely think four and five-year-olds can be taught the self-discipline to remain mostly quiet for 60 minutes. Colton, my now three and half year old son, started attending “Big Church” two months shy of his third birthday, when he was two, and he has done just fine. Since I am tied up with the preaching, Nicole is basically a single mother in the worship services. But, with a little effort and work on our part, our three-year-old has adjusted well to “Big Church”.

Here are some things we did to prepare Colton for “Big Church”. We spent a lot of time talking to him during the week about what a privilege it is to attend a public worship service. Many people around the world live in countries where the worship services take place in secret due to government oppression of Christianity. We told him repeatedly how much Nicole and I were looking forward to Colton being in “Big Church” with us. We bought music CDs that have recordings of the types of songs we sing in our services, and he listened to them during the week so that songs in the services would not be unfamiliar to him. We also enlisted Colton’s help to assemble a “Big Church” bag. Inside this bag are coloring books, toy cars, a toy gun, transformer toys, and other similar items. Here are the two rules for the “Big Church” bag: 1. No toy in the bag can be a toy that Colton has access to during the week. 2. Colton has zero access to the bag unless the sermon is being preached. We make Colton participate in the singing/prayer portion of the services. Because he has no other toys like the toys in the “Big Church” bag and because he only gets access to the bag for 30 minutes/week, as soon as the sermon starts, Colton dives into the bag and doesn’t come up for air until Nicole yanks it out of his hands at the end of the sermon. He does everything he can to maximize the 30 minutes of access he has each week to that toy bag because it is the only access he gets to those toys all week. As a result, he is so consumed by the toys, he makes little noise in the service and isn’t disruptive. We allow him to kneel on the floor during the sermon and use the chair as a desk or play surface. As he gets older, he will get less access to the toy bag and be trained to spend more and more time listening to the sermons. With a little bit of effort on a parent’s part, a four-year-old can be trained to participate in our 60 minute services.

Each year, the Sunday prior to Promotion Sunday, we have a worship center orientation for the incoming four-year-olds. I invite them onto the stage, and they feel the pulpit and look out at the worship center. Then I talk to the four-year-olds about what happens in a “Big Church” service and why. Then I talk to the parents about preparing a “Big Church” bag for their child. We want to equip parents and our children to have an enjoyable transition into the worship services.

Dirt Work

After all these weeks, it is hard to believe I am actually typing these words, but praise the Lord, the field has been seeded and fertilized! We have been watering the seed since last Friday hoping to get a little bit of root sprout before the next gully washer comes through so that the seed doesn’t get washed away. We planted Bermuda grass because it has such a small germination time and will sprout quickly.

As tempting as it may be, please stay out of the dirt for the time being. Seed and fertilizer has been rolled into the dirt, and walking on top of it will disturb the seeding pattern. I can't wait for the day that we have a nice, grassy field out there for our church family and ministries to enjoy. Many memories are going to be made out on that grass. Sure, many touchdown passes, home runs, and goals will be had out there. Freeze tag, duck-duck-goose, and hide-and-seek will be commonplace. Water balloon fights and scavenger hunts will be out there. But, most importantly, people will be won to Jesus out on that field. Much informal one-on-one discipleship will take place out there. Prayer requests and burdens will be shared out there. People will be baptized out there. The Lord is going to use that field to change the lives of people.

A Word About the Word

Life is hard. In case you missed it, this past Sunday morning I preached from Psalm 40 about God's counsel for dealing with the hard seasons of life. It's funny, if one gets married and the Lord blesses them with babies, one realizes very quickly that life is a lot more complicated after marriage than before and with preschoolers than without. One begins waiting for their preschoolers to be able to dress themselves and fix their own breakfast. Then the day comes when one's children are of elementary school age and guess what? Life is not simpler, it becomes more complicated. Then one starts yearning for their child to be in middle school because then there will be less extracurricular activities and one's children will be in school longer each day and so forth. Then the middle school days arrive and guess what? Life is not simpler, it is only more difficult. So one starts yearning for the high school days when one's children can drive themselves around and fend for themselves more. Then the high school days arrive and guess what? Life is not easier, it is more stressful. So, one starts yearning for their children to finish high school and go on to college or to a trade school or to begin a job because surely then life will be a little less complicated. Then the post high school days arrive and guess what? Life is even more stressful and complicated. One's children start picking a spouse and having children, and there are few things more difficult than being the parent of an adult child. Then, one day the phone rings, and it one's aging parents. They can no longer care for themselves. They need help at doctor's appointments and administering their medications. They need help with the maintenance of their house. Throw in life's financial challenges, medical surprises, and tragedies, and one begins to realize that life is very difficult and there is no season of life that is easy. How are we to handle the difficulties of life? Especially the really hard seasons of life? Psalm 40:1-10 shows us God's plan for dealing with life's hardships. I'd encourage you to grab a cup of coffee and your Bible, set aside 30 minutes, and listen to the sermon from this past Sunday.

Sunday's sermon is available on cd for purchase at the sermon booth in the church lobby. You can also find it in MP3 format on our church website [here](#) or via podcast at www.itunes.com. Simply search for "Nathan Lino" in the search box of the iTunes store.