

A Survival Kit for Life

GARDEN SERVICE FLOW

September 10, 2006

2:00 MESSAGE #1: Rubber Band

I. (Rubber band—to remind us to be flexible.

I had a colleague once who had a sign on his desk that read, “I used to get frustrated with interruptions to my ministry, until I realized that interruptions *were* my ministry. Isn’t it tough sometimes to be anything but irritated when something interrupts our plans? Many of us operate with schedules to keep, places to go, and things to do, and we aren’t always very open to anything that changes our direction.

In fact, some of us are not really very flexible about anything. Eric Bienstock, writing in a business publication, says that flexibility is a quality lacking in a good many business leaders today. He writes, “Managers’ obsession with being right brings about rigidity of thinking. That stifles creativity, discourages risk-taking, polarizes people over issues, and leads to the recycling of old ideas.”

That’s not just true in the business world; it’s probably true in many of our lives. When we become so rigid about following our plan to the letter, we may not be able to be very open to other opportunities that are open to us. We’re looking in just one direction, and God may be pointing us the totally opposite way. We’re just so inflexible, and “stuck in our ways,” that we’re not willing to look at other possibilities.

It seems to me that some of this lack of flexibility comes from fear of the unknown, some from lack of trust that God will be there for us, some from an intense desire to “be in control.”

In the Bible passage, it says, “For we know that God works for good in all things with those who love the Creator.” That’s saying to us to let go of our need to control, to cast aside our fears, and to trust that, whatever happens, we will be OK. All things *do* work for good if we just put our trust in God. This rubber band goes in our survival kit, and serves as a reminder to be a little more flexible about life.

Pass out rubber bands

Romans 8:28 “For we know that in all things God works for good with those who love the Creator.” (TEV)

2:00 MESSAGE #2: Chewing Gum

II. (Piece of chewing gum—Perseverance—to remind us to stick with things

Louis Pasteur once said, “Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal. My strength lies solely in my tenacity.” He knew that in his field of endeavor, there were many disappointments and failures, but you can’t give up. You have to ‘keep on keeping on,’ and try again, and again, and yet again. We can’t quit.

In the book, *Make a Life*, author Ron Jensen tells a story about a father who was having a discussion with his son about why the young man should not quit high school as he was proposing to do. “Son, don’t quit,” the father said. “Think of all the great leaders of history who never quit. Abe Lincoln didn’t quit. Thomas Edison didn’t quit. Douglas MacArthur didn’t quit. Elmo McKlinklo.”

“Huh?” the boy said. “Who’s Elmo McKlinklo, Pop?” “See,” his father said, “you don’t remember him. He quit.”

I know there are plenty of times in life when we’re tempted to quit, to give up, to resign, but that isn’t always the best course of action. That’s not to say that there are times when we need to abandon a cause, and go in a different direction, because there are. But many times, it’s a matter of just hanging in there, and we just have to keep on trying. Giving it one shot, and then giving up usually gets us nowhere. We cannot look at anyone we consider great, and miss seeing that they became great in our eyes in part because they persevered when others gave up.

The chewing gum goes in our survival kit as a reminder that sometimes we just have to stick to what we're doing, and hang in there. As the Bible passage says, "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me."

Pass out chewing gum

Philippians 4:13 "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me." (TEV)

Matthew 14:35-36 "They sent for the sick people in all the surrounding country and brought them to Jesus. They begged him to let the sick at least touch the edge of his cloak; and all who touched it were made well." (TEV)

2:00 MESSAGE #3: Band Aid

III. (Band Aids to remind us that everyone hurts sometimes, and we all need healing.)

Do you remember when you were a kid, and you'd "fall down, go boom," and run crying to some adult who seemed to have the power to kiss it and make it well. Well, I've discovered that experiencing pain, and wanting someone to make it well isn't something we outgrow just because we've become adults.

How many times do we find ourselves writhing in pain when someone we love dies? Or when the person to whom we're committed to spend the rest of our lives decides that commitment wasn't really for life? I was never really aware of how much the pain of grief could hurt physically until my Mom died almost 11 years ago. I had worked with a lot of people going through grief caused by any kind of loss, but I really, truly did not understand until I walked that road myself.

We experience all kinds of pain in life—the pain of disappointment, the pain of despair, the pain of physical illness that cannot be medicated away, the pain of loneliness that we can't escape. One of the things I know from doing what I do in life is that—no matter how good we try to look—we are all hurting people, and we all need healing. Every one of us is looking for someone who can "kiss it and make it well." We need that healing touch that's talked about in our Bible passage.

The good news is that healing touch is right here right now. God loves each and every one of us, and God's healing presence is at work through the person sitting next to you, or through the phone call you'll get tomorrow, or through the little sign of hope that pops its head up when we're least expecting it. This band-aid serves to remind us that each one of us hurts some times, and each one of us can help alleviate the hurts of others.

Scripture: Matthew 6:12 "Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs others have done to us." (TEV)

MESSAGE #4: Eraser

IV. (An eraser reminds us of forgiveness. Erase past hurts. Forgiving and being forgiven are essential for our well being.)

In the Family Circus cartoon (on screen), Billy is on his knees, praying at bedtime, saying, "and give us our trespasses as we give it to those who trespass against us..." I'm not so sure Billy is far off when it comes to the way many of us deal with the wrongs that have been done to us. We want to "give it" to the people who do something that offends us, or angers us in one way or another.

But you know, that just simply doesn't get us anywhere but in a vicious downward spiral. Getting even or trying to get revenge, even getting in our little "zingers" seldom does much to make the situation better. Actually, I think it serves to aggravate and increase the hostility that can exist between us. Being unable or unwilling to forgive really implies a sense of self-righteousness that I'm not at all sure we have a right to possess. It seems to say that YOU have done something hurtful to ME, and doesn't recognize the fact that we are all human beings, and to my knowledge, not a one of us is perfect.

You know, I often talk about that when I officiate at wedding ceremonies. As a couple stands there, ready to make vows of marriage, they often look rather starry-eyed, and I see it as a part of my

responsibility to “break the bubble,” so to speak. I will often note, that regardless of how perfect we think the other person is, it isn’t true. There will be plenty of things each one does wrong; there will be plenty of hurt inflicted by one on the other. To think otherwise is being totally unrealistic.

In that or any other situation, be it business or work-related, personal relationships, crime-related, or whatever, the only way to keep anger and bitterness and hatred and resentment from destroying us is through forgiveness—letting go of the ill will and negative feelings that often accompany a wrong, and working for the best is the situation. You see, we all need to learn to forgive and let go of the pain; and we all need to be forgiven. There’s not a one of us without fault.

This eraser is to remind us of that, and takes the place this morning of the “delete” key on our computer. It’s my favorite key, because it totally wipes out all the foolish errors we make when we’re typing. It’s as though they never ever occurred. Well, you know what? God has the master “delete” key in forgiveness, and if we seek it, God wipes out all the mistakes, and misjudgments, and errors we have made. Forgiveness is a wonderful gift of God’s love, and one we need to both give and receive. We have to have forgiveness in our lives. It’s an essential part of our survival kit.

- 1 John 4:7 “Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God.”

MESSAGE #5: Chocolate Hugs

(Chocolate hugs our need to love one another, and reach out and touch each other.)

There’s an old song that goes, “**What the world needs now is love, sweet love; that’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.**” Well, I don’t really believe there’s too little love. It’s just that we’ve often unwilling to share it very much; in fact, sometimes we get downright stingy with it.

Have you heard the story about the couple who had been married for years, but the husband just had a hard time saying to his wife that he loved her. As you can well imagine, she kept trying to get him to tell her that he loved her. Well, finally he’d had enough. He looked her in the eye, and said, “Honey, I told you when we got married 20 years ago that I love you. If that ever changes, I’ll let you know!”

Sometimes that’s the way you and I function, even without realizing it. I think it’s important that we learn to express our love, and even though it may be hard for some of us, to be a bit more demonstrative about how we feel about one another.

I think I’ve told you this before, but my family wasn’t terribly expressive of how we felt about one another when I was growing up. When my Mom died, I wished we had done it differently. After her death, my Dad and I talked on the phone nearly every night, and from her death until his, we always closed our conversations this way—I’d say, “I love you, Pop.” And he’d say, “I love you, honey.”

You know what? I miss that, but I try hard not to miss any opportunity to tell the people I care about how much I love them. Do a favor for me, will you? Tell your kids, your partner, your co-workers, your friends, how you care about them. Don’t let it go unsaid. Maybe these chocolate hugs will help us remember to love one another, in word and in deed.

1:00 CLOSING: Pencil

There’s one other thing to put in our survival kit, and that’s this little pencil. The pencil is so we can write down every day the things for which we are thankful. It’s a reminder to cultivate a sense of gratitude in our lives. My husband, Mike, has that, and he knows what he wants on his tombstone. It is to read: “**Thank you very much. I had a very nice time.**” I hope we can all feel that way, and take the time to count our blessings.

As you leave here this morning, take along your survival kit for life with its contents: the rubber band for flexibility, the chewing gum for perseverance, the band aid to remind us of the hurts around us, the eraser for forgiveness, the chocolate hug to remind us to love, and the pencil to remember our blessings. Have a great day, and go in peace. Amen.