

Tales Told from a Shoebox

I am amazed at the poetry of Scripture. So many things are so neatly said. Yet, I am astounded at the reality—and sometimes the bluntness—of God’s Word. Reading Psalms 90:9-10 whacks me in the head and yells at me, “Your days have passed. You’ve spent your life ‘as a tale that is told.’ What do you have to show for it? Listen up: You have seventy years. If you are blessed, maybe you will reach eighty. That is it. The years are soon gone. We fly away! So, you better start counting your days now.” With my reach-the-world and save-the-lost mindset those statements are hard to digest. Like Bill Bright once said, we have a split second in eternity, to invest our lives in what Jesus came into the world to accomplish. I cannot believe the typo I just made in that sentence. It is now corrected. But, I actually typed, “spilt second in eternity.” Too often, our split second is spilt; pardon the English.

Some of us, including me, are closer to the end of our days than their beginning. I shudder to calculate when I became middle-aged using those biblical calculations, or the number of years to my retirement, or how things will eventually get done; just not in my lifetime. With each passing day eternity yanks at my heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). I cannot escape the thought that my life will be “as a tale that is told.” One day, it will all be stuffed into a box and life will be over. Gone! Bruce A. Howell tosses the accumulated air miles gained on earth aside and takes his final flight. Destination: heaven. What remains will be a few tales told from a shoebox.

I once heard Elias Limones speak about former missionary, Lucille Farmer. Elias was born in Ecuador and his father was a pastor. He remembers going to the airport to meet her. There was no money for a hotel so the Limones family kept Lucille in their home until she could find a place of her own. She stayed in a little room in the back of their house with a concrete floor and slept on a little cot. She used dictionaries and sign language to communicate with the family. Every sacrifice was worth it because it provided the framework for her “tale that is told.”

Years later, after Elias moved to the States, and was pastoring, he went to Oregon to see her. She asked him to pull out a cardboard box of pictures kept in her humble scanty room. It was her shoebox of treasures. They enjoyed looking through the pictures of his family. Lucille was poor and did not have much more than a shoebox of memories. Oh, but what rich treasures she left behind in Ecuador. In one city in Quito, in one church there are more than 2,000 saints. As Lucille placed the pictures back into the shoebox, and closed the lid on a few tales told and treasures sent on ahead, she could sing with gusto, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”

I recently attended the home-going service for a missionary hero. Denzil Richardson went to the African island of Madagascar as a pioneer missionary. He stood on street corners, passing out tracts in English (in a Malagasy and French speaking nation) asking, "Can you read this?" From its humble beginnings, the church in Madagascar is now one of our largest, most productive fields. Investments made in God's kingdom always pay dividends. My dear friends, Jerry and Vickie Richardson, and other members of the family, stayed a couple of weeks to help their mother go through their possessions preparing for her assisted-living apartment. It has been difficult reducing life to bare essentials and a few precious items. After hearing about the death of their beloved pioneer missionary one hundred pastors and wives went to the Chris Richardson home to offer stories of how four generations of the Richardson family have faithfully stored treasures in their field. This includes 75,000 constituents, over six hundred churches and preaching points, and upwards of 10,000 being baptized in Jesus name and receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost each year.

A Middle Eastern Blessing says, "When you were born, you cried, and the world rejoiced. May you live your life so that when you die, the world will cry, and you will rejoice." That puts a new twist on things. My earlier lamenting turns to rejoicing. Life is best spent storing treasures in heaven and contributing tales to be told from one's shoebox.