

The man I am

When I found out that I wasn't in the best of health last month, I carved some time out for myself and took out a sheet of paper and began writing. I thought that If I survive this,, then I can shove this into the safety deposit box for later, or, make a good Men's Breakfast talk out of it. Here I am. Some of this has been compiled over the years comes from talks with my father, my Grand-father, my Great-Great Grandfather, and my friends, pastors, and mentors I have met throughout my life. Throw in some things I have read, heard, and pulled from my heart, and you have the well-spring for this talk.

I really don't want this to come across in the form of Jim's rules for Life or anything like that. And don't read into it as my last testimony, but I will admit that I have been pressed by my inner self to write something for my kids and my grandchildren just in case. I think that anyone in my position would do the same.

One of the most interesting things that came out this exercise was that I learned a lot about myself and again confirmed the obvious: I am more like my father that I have ever wanted to admit. I guess that is good thing because he was a good man.

One of the first things that came to mind was what has my life amounted to. Years back, I wrote a Food for Thought entitled the "Man I Want to Be." In that article I talked about how I felt inadequate around other, more seasoned, Christians – like Pete, Carol, John. I couldn't believe that I had what it takes to lead and be part of Pastor's council. But that was then.

The world has changed dramatically over the last twenty-five years. Those once-dependable Christian values that I knew from the 60's and 70's seemed to have melted faster than the polar ice caps. We bar our doors. Almost half, probably more, of us own guns. Today, nearly half of our population would rather live together than marry. And almost three quarters of our children are not living with their biological fathers. PG-13 means that foul language, nudity, violence, death and the like are suitable for sixth-grader. This isn't how I grew up, nor is it what I think God intended life to be like.

Maybe that sounds a little June Cleaver-ish, but nonetheless, my parents' generation, and my generation, I think, were people of integrity – with morals and values all built around God and the Bible. That's not to say that you are not, but I am talking about society in general

They saw to it that I grew up fine – we had curfews, rules, chores, and church on Sunday. Our first loyalty was to the family and God and with that came integrity and values.

But this generation has begun to feel the effects of exposure and domination of twenty-five years connected to digital revolution. Although cable TV and the internet have only been with us for less than 40 years, I think that they are a big part of the down-fall of values in America. Without filters or permissions, people of all ages have access to a host of non-uplifting material and unhealthy content on the telephones, internet and from their cable tv. Television shows today have no real redeeming qualities and our cable boxes give us access to a 100 times as many channels exposing various parts of the body or filling our ears with non-Christian examples of how “real people” talk and act. Go on the internet and do a search on the word “sex” and you can find over 873 million entries. But search for the word Christian, you only find 310 million entries. How did we get to a place where we have more access to sins of the flesh than food for the soul –there are only three Christian channels on my cable network which has over 400 channels? We are soo out of balance!

How did that happen? How did it happen that we now take body searches for granted and welcome metal detectors into our schools? We shake our heads at hearing kids bringing weapons

to school, but freely drive our cars 15-20 miles over the speed limit in total disregard for the speed limit signs. We now have recessions every week, Wall Street corruption, political gridlock, unhealthy social media, shifting demographics, terrorism and a Department of Homeland Security that can't secure anything. What happened to the world we grew up in?

Our world has been rocked during these last few years. We are so busy, so overcommitted, so up to our ears in duties and debts that we have lost sight of what is important in life. We have so many problems of our own, that there is not much time for anything else or dealing with anyone else's problems.

Every morning now, I spend a bit more time staring at the mirror. Mirror, mirror on the wall. who is this man I see after all? My wife call this zoning our – or my staring into space look. It's the same look you see on the faces of people who have been in combat. Looking, but not seeing. Is this man in the mirror me? Is he the man I wanted to become when I started this journey twenty-five years ago? A lot runs through your mind.

Most of you know that I am going to have a heart bypass in a couple of weeks. That very thought has changed the way I look and think about things. I stood by my father as he went through this twice and I remember how it changed him. He went from a hyper driven type A person to someone who was so laid back that I thought that some UFO had replaced him with another person –

I didn't recognize him, his ways, or his new attitude, but I liked him almost immediately. Mom didn't know what to make of him at first.

Knowing what is in front of me has altered what things I am concerned about nowadays because the difference between being here the day after surgery, and not, is just going to be literally a heartbeat. None of this is in my hands. He controls all of this now.

If ever there was a verse that I have taken to heart, it is Isaiah 43, verses 1 through 7. In it, God made several promises that I have come to realize are the real foundation of my faith – and something strong enough to build a spiritual house upon.

When you read it for the 20th time or so, you suddenly realize that the passage is not just about Israel, it is about you. He is speaking directly to your soul. Only then does it seem like your eyes are seeing things for the first time, and you know that the words on those pages are truth. Then, everything changes, and you begin to understand, really understand, for the first time what the words in the Bible mean.

Isaiah 43: 1-7 NIV

“But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

³ For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I give Egypt for your ransom,

Cush^[a] and Seba in your stead.

⁴ Since you are precious and honored in my sight,

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’

and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”

God promised in this verse to redeem me and be with me through every trial that I might face. He said that He would go through floods and fire for me and I know he will be there with me during the surgery and, like a great shepherd, he will come after me if I wander. He would make enormous sacrifices for me. Why? Because He not only created me but calls me by name and calls us by His name – I am a Child of the Most High.

It is hard to believe that someone, who would do this for you. You hear stories about the unheralded and remarkable things that parents do for their children to find them, save them, rescue them – even give their lives for – all in the name of love. If you can grasp that, then know that your Heavenly Father would do the same, and more for you.

From that one passage, I learned that:

God is my Creator, He made me.

He knows my name.

He redeemed me.

He is my Protector.

He is my Provider.

He sees me as precious to Him.

He honors me and loves me.

He watches over my children and will bring them to safety.

He created me to bring glory to Him.

He is always with me.

He tells me that I belong to Him, and that I am His.

Although I sort of knew all of this or at least have heard this multiple time, it never really sank in until now. These truths have become foundational in my life since I got saved. They are like a rudder that gives me the confidence to walk through life with the peace and hope that regardless of any circumstance, He has me in His hands and will never let me go.

Some of the other things I learned along my journey with God:

The right road always leads to the right place; therefore, get on the right road and go as far as you can. There are no shortcuts in life.

My father totally persuaded me that several wrongs never lead to something right. Or, more

positively, he was persuaded me that living in the right way—that is, doing the right things—are means that inevitably lead to where God wants me to be. This is why he told me, when I asked about God’s leading in my life, “Son, keep your room clean where you are, and in God’s time, the door to the next room will open.” My Grandfather added Work hard, and people will notice, pray hard, and people will notice, do the right thing and everyone will notice.

There is only one thing to do about anything; that is the right thing. Do right.

This is what one might say to a person perplexed by a difficult situation whose outcome is unknown. The person might say, “I just don’t know what to do about this.” It is not useless to be told: Do the right thing. That may not tell you exactly which good thing to do, but it does clear the air and rule out a few dozen bad ideas.

Happiness is not found by looking for it. You stumble over happiness on the road through life and you won’t really find it until you find God.

The Bible commands us to pursue our joy repeatedly. “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice.” “Delight

yourself in the Lord." I think what he meant was: 1) Joy is always *in something*. Joy itself is not the *something*. So when it says to seek joy *in Christ* it is not just joy in general. 2) When something is hard and we do not feel joy in doing it, we should still do it, and pray that in the doing it for the joy is in the completion of the task.

The door to success often swings on the hinges of opposition.

This implies that opposition is not just a natural accompaniment or antecedent of success, but it is usually a means by which another door opens unexpectedly. I never thought that one day I would be standing in front of Christian men that I admire telling them things about how God had changed me and taught me things about life.

There are many examples in the Bible. Joseph's brothers opened the door to his leadership in Egypt. The Roman empire's method of taking opened the door to the Messiah being born in Bethlehem, and not Nazareth, and thus fulfilling an earlier prophecy. The betrayal of Judas opened the door to salvation for the world.

God in the right place in your life can fix every other relationships in your life ([Matthew 6:33](#)). But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

I know that that sounds like one of those things that a born-again Christian would say, and I am that and a whole lot more. But think about it. If God is the blazing center of the solar system of our lives, then all the planets will be held in their proper orbit and exist because of one and only thing – God. But if not, everything goes awry. Gravity changes, orbits changes, rotations change, atmospheres change. The list is endless.

It is never right to get the right thing the wrong way—there are no short cut to good grades, wealth, power, position. You can't buy or cheat your way through life. If you do, then no one will respect you. Above all, don't sacrifice your integrity.

Be a principled, not a pragmatic, person. I am going to get up on my soap box for a minute. I think that Churches need to be principled also, and not endlessly adapting to today's culture and the latest trends. People need to do what they say they will do and honor any promise they make no matter how much it hurts. Ok, off the soap box.

I think that It is a sin to do less than your best. It is wrong to do [merely] well.

There is a passage in Ecclesiastes that say "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" ([Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)). But be careful. Sometimes the "best" is a B+ and spending time with your child instead of taking that overtime. In other words, "best" always involves more decisions than the one you are making at the moment it is called for. Life is always and that means many other things are going to be left undone. So, when someone says always do your "best" it is always the whole thing, not just one of your actions.

It is wrong to be yoked to one who refuses the yoke of Christ.

Don't marry an unbeliever ([1 Corinthians 7:39](#)). Not all relationships with unbelievers are ruled out. Otherwise we could not obey Jesus' command to love them and bless them. But "yoke" implies a connectedness that either governs where we go or constrains where they go. You should not constrain your faith in Jesus nor can you serve two masters.

Be encouraged by every evidence of God's grace in your life.

Use your gifts and graces for his glory. But you will become smug and vain if you do not keep your deficiencies before you and work on them.

Don't quit. Finish the job. God can't use a quitter.

Warning: "He who endures to the end will be saved" ([Mark 13:13](#)). Promise: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" ([Philippians 1:6](#)).

Anything you do that hinders your progress for God is wrong.

O how thankful I am that he believed in God. He did not mainly impose lists of do's and don'ts on me, though I had them. And they were clear. Mainly he said: Know and serve God. It is as simple as that. Nothing else matters. That ruled out a hundred of my foolish behaviors that I had done and planned to do.

The last thing I want to pass on is to Watch out who you hang out with.

Galatians tells us that "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Everything you touch, hear or

say with others will have an impact on you. 1st
Corinthians 15:33 offers a similar warning about this
kind of behavior - "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company
can ruin any good moral.'"

Mirror, mirror on the wall. who is this man I see after all? What
should I see?

What do I see, or what do I want to see That's the real question.
Only You can answer those questions.

I. The Man you see should be a Man with Convictions and not be
affected by pressure from other people. He should base his
decisions upon the truth of God's word.

II. The Man you see should be a Man of Character who is
consistent. He should be of good character and know what he has
to give up for what he wants and be known for taking up things
that help him in his pursuit of God.

III. The Man staring back at you should exhibit a Christ-like
Example. I tried to make an impact on others to honor God and
bring glory to Him.

But many of us want to argue with that man in the mirror. To justify who we are. We don't like to see the truth about who we are. But silence is the beginning of salvation. God's design in showing us our sin is to shut us up long enough to hear what that image has to say.

Have you stopped arguing with God? Whenever you stop arguing and rationalizing, you can be saved. I believe that Hell is filled with people who simply would not stop talking. And because they wouldn't listen, they never heard the truth about themselves. Since they never knew the whole truth about their condition, they never understood what God had done to save them.

When you finally stop talking and start listening, the truth of the gospel will come crashing through to you. As long as you continue to defend yourself and your actions, you cannot be saved. So, stop talking.

Did you know that you can save a fortune by using rechargeable batteries. But if you don't recharge them on schedule, they won't do the job. In the same way that batteries need recharging, if you don't recharge your spiritual batteries every day, the image that stares back at you in the mirror will begin to fade.

Without recharging, we start with 100% the first day, but the next we will slip to about 85% - after that there is a constant drain and before long, we won't even have enough strength to

plug ourselves back in our source of power. The man in the mirror will be gone.

Your Christian pilgrimage is a moment-by-moment, daily journey. It requires daily effort, without which we will stray. "Stop listening to instructions my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge (Proverbs 19:27).

Jesus told of a parable in Matthew: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ "An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Your first and foremost every day is to prepare for life among the weeds in life.

Each year most of the major league ball teams go to Florida for spring training. Over the course of several weeks, what do you think that these million-dollar thoroughbred athletes do? Do they come to Florida to learn about obscure, rarely used baseball strategies? No! They focus on conditioning their bodies and practice fielding, running, and batting. In short, they focus on the basics of the game. In the same way, we Christians need to return to spiritual basics every day – so we can separate the wheat from the weeds.

Life is a struggle.

Each day is part of a pilgrimage that prepares us for our eternal destiny.

Each day we should set apart Christ in our hearts as Lord.

Focus on the good you see and hear.

Testify, about the changes occurring in your own life.

Encourage those around you and meet together regularly for friendship, accountability, Bible study, and prayer.

Encourage someone to have courage because God is with them.

For me, I am going to spend some more time in prayer every day to prepare for this ordeal so I can turn all my fears and concerns over to Him. I know that He has some special plans for me and will be doing some s some amazing things in and through me. Who knows, he may just turn me into the man I want to be after all.