

## One Day at a Time

by Banning Cantarini | May 23, 2014

### One Day At A Time.

There is a pastor at our church who works with the senior citizens. He is an educated and very experienced pastor. Also, he loves limericks. Yes, the type of poetry that most people have to study only one time in poetry class, and then soon after forget about. The spirit about him is like that of a younger class clown who always has something witty and humorous to say. Needless to say, I love this man very much. There are few whose encouragement after a sermon are more appreciated and treasured than this man's. Similarly there are few whose criticism, as rare as it is, is taken to heart and thought about.

Over the past few years I've watched from a distance as his wife has deteriorated. I guess in my youth I feel that it is insensitive to discuss such a thing, but the more I'm around elderly people the more I realize that the decline of life isn't an elephant in the room, it's the walls of the room itself closing in. She's been diagnosed with some form of cancer, and physical just become more and more frail. We get updates in our staff meetings about her condition, and I would be lying if I said that update wasn't one that was more difficult to hear than others. I guess it is the irony of the situation that keeps me perplexed. A man who has really given his life in service of humanity preaching and teaching Jesus is now focusing his time on working with those who are edging closer and closer to death. The irony is that in the midst of this, his own wife is experiencing the same circumstance. To your group, maybe you're a smart wise man. Maybe your advice is sought after, and maybe you are looked at as someone of some esteem. But I imagine that to someone you've shared the same bed with for decades, you're far less impressive. You've passed gas in your sleep, you've probably weeped like a little baby, and you've had your most extreme moments of weakness. This person knows you best. No gimmicks, no masks.

Which is why I imagine that it would be all the more difficult to watch this one person who knows you better than any other physical person does, slip away slowly over time. I once sat down with a wonderful man who was an admiral in the Navy. "Moose," as was his nickname in the military, is suffering from Alzheimer's. When we were sitting down to lunch, I listened to his overly impressive stories of battle and combat. I asked him questions about leadership and how he managed an aircraft carrier the size that he did. I remember thinking to myself, "Who am I to sit down with this stud of a person?" After the war talk, his condition came up and I was able to ask him a few honest questions. "How is life for you dealing with your condition?" All of this life experience sitting in front of me in the form of Moose the "Mans man." His reality is that his mind should, by all medical indications, start slowly fading away. And at some point this accomplished and wonderful human may not even be able to recognize himself anymore. Yet not one part of him seemed to feel like it was anything more than just a

setback. He was optimistic, positive, encouraging, and HOPEFUL. "I'm just taking it one day at a time."

For me, difficulty often presents itself in the medial things. How am I going to pay for this bill? Or this "necessity?" I fret about not having fast enough wi-fi, or get upset when my text messages appear in green instead of blue. I've been caught up in the fast paced demand of life in America. I wake myself up in the middle of the night trying to reinvent the wheel, or attempting to come up with bigger and better dreams for myself. And yet, when I talk to people like Moose or the limerick pastor I can't help but feel like those are the last things on their minds. I feel like at the end of your life is when you will remember the things that matter the most. The accomplishments that really mattered.

I have an adopted grandfather who shares the same title for a lot of my friends. "Papa," as we call him, was asking me about my grandparents one day, and I shared with him how much I loved them but didn't get to see them as much as I would have liked. I never had grandparents in the same town as me growing up, and there is actually a large part of me that wishes I had because of how much I enjoy the time I get to see them. He looked at me and said, "Well Banning, I'm your grandpa now." I smiled widely because this is a man that you could not hate even if you tried. He then looked directly at my wrist and said, "You don't have a watch? Didn't your grandfather ever tell you that you have to keep time?" I responded by telling him that I never really got the "You need to be on time" talk from my grandparents. He walked me right down to his watch box, and told me to take whichever one I wanted. Knowing nothing about watches I gravitated towards one that he then gave to me. Turns out it was a Citizen EcoDrive watch, and quite a nice one. He never told me the value of it, or made a fuss that I chose a very expensive watch. He just gave it to me. I wear that watch every time I preach at the service he is at. And for the record, I now have my own watch box along with a tan line from the daily watch I wear. He breathed into me a life that I had always longed for. Tradition, trust, legacy. Those words are the ones that come to mind when I think of this man's role in my life.

Which is why it was all the more difficult to endure the news of the cancer on his kidney. It was the only one he had left. I drove down to the hospital to visit him, and when I saw him there I couldn't help but think these were the last moments I would be with such an important person. After he got out of the hospital, kidney free and dialysis enabled, I went over to visit him for an honest lunch where I was able to ask him a number of questions that I feel I could only ask him. The idea of dying is not one that makes anyone overly joyful when you're 27 years old. Family-less, unmarried, and with a watch tan-line. Not the way anyone wants to go.

"What is it like to be living your life, when it is on the tail end of it's longevity?" Essentially I asked him, "You've lived a long time, how are you coping with that time coming to an end?" Papa's response is one I won't forget. "I've lived a long life. I have a wonderful family who loves me. There just isn't much more for me to accomplish." His description of "wonderful" wasn't just a token one. His family really is wonderful. In the final years of his life, that is what he is most proud of. No fear, no

regret. Just thankfulness for what he has. The reality of dialysis is terrible to watch someone you love endure, and I get the feeling he is doing it more for those of us who just can't let him go yet. But whatever the case, he's taking it one day at a time.

The limerick pastor and I were in near proximity one day in the Associate Pastors office. Casually, when I walked in, Mr. Limerick mentioned he put his wife in hospice care today. I began to weep almost instantly. His wife of decades, his "soul mate," the one who knows his most embarrassing secrets, was now at a point in her health that she needed constant care. I thought about how it must have felt being home alone for the first time in a long time, and the thoughts were not ones that were fun to imagine. In that "This-is-a-joke-but-also-totally-serious" kind of way, he looked at me, smiled his same class clown smile, and said "well, it's inevitable for all of us. Isn't it?" He's never complained, never asked for pity through all of this, and never to my knowledge missed a bible study that he leads for his group of seniors. He's always in good spirits, somehow, and in the midst of what seems to me to be an awful and painful time, is HOPEFUL. He is taking it day by day, living out each day for what it is, not what it isn't.

Humans, let me say that these men make me feel like a punk little kid. They are all three more of what real men should be than I think I could ever become. "Moose" the admiral who has shot down enemy planes, and led thousands of young men telling me about the joy of leading young men through life and encouraging them along the way all while treating me to a lunch filled with nothing but admiration for what I DO in ministry while he deals with a disease that seeks to take his mind from him.. "Papa," my adopted grandfather, who has been filling the void of a local wise grandparent and making sure that I am never late to my commitments. He still cooks the best tri-tip of anyone I know, and to this day will find muster the strength to get up out of his chair to give you a big hug and tell you how much he loves you, the wretch, and appreciates who you are. All of this with no kidneys and hours of dialysis a week. The Limerick Pastor, who is enduring watching his wife deteriorate and suffer the pain of her struggles, and finds a way to meet the needs of those around him who look to him for support. The man who finds it somewhere within him to still bring smile to our faces, and keeps things in proper perspective the whole time. These men make me feel strangely, well, wrong about a lot of things.

Jesus once instructed the humans of his day with the following: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food? Is not the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not reap or sow or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? Can you add a single hour to your life by worrying?" Humans, I cannot. I cannot add a single second to my life by worrying or stressing about anything. In the same thread, there are a million other things that I feel I am doing that now feel like the wrong priorities to focus on. Ask Papa, Moose, or the Limerick Pastor about time. A lot of times I forget how intelligent Jesus is, which sounds silly I know. Living in the reality of His wisdom sounds great in principle, but is very

difficult in practice. A day without worry? A day filled with trust and thankfulness? It sounds like taking life "one day at a time."

He ends His section of teaching by saying "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." Heed those words, humans. I am not yet in my old age, but I know now that the time is coming. Like the Limerick Pastor said, "it's inevitable for all of us." What will you remember at the end of your timeline? How will you cope with the pain of losing friends, loved ones, preparing for, as Captain Hook called it, the "next great adventure?" From what I've gathered, life experience has told me to take it one day at a time. Not to worry, as I so often do, about tomorrow. Live in the midst of God and enjoy the things that you have before you. Family, friends, opportunity. Things that matter. Because when I'm on my way out, I don't think I'll be remembering the pair of shoes that I've been worrying about affording for the past couple of days.

I just can't wait to see Jesus.

Till next time humans. Banning out.