



2016 Decisions . . . Decisions . . . Decisions

I'm almost on the verge of replacing my 1991 Saturn four-door. Hate to, I'm rather sentimentally attached to it. Bought it new in Kansas City 14 years ago. Runs like a top. Truthfully, though, I've had to make a trip or two out Goldie Road to ask Taz what's making the funny noise under the front hood (driver's side). He tells me not to worry about it, "Old guys always make funny noises. It's probably a strut," (whatever that is.)

In defense of old guys with antique cars, there's never been a time (knock on wood) when I turned the key in the ignition that my just-broken-in four-door (with 75,000 miles under its fan belt) didn't start. So I'm weighing the issues—car payments or car repairs? I've gotta make a tough decision.

Have you seen the current new car commercial that says something like, "At this time in the history of the world, take time for Sunday—Monday's coming"? I'm positive it isn't a pitch to get regular in church attendance. None the less, our church attendance and involvement is another one of life's decision. Maybe not quite like the options in car-buying, but the contract we sign when deciding to live a life in Christ most certainly calls for decision making that involves my stewardship, my spiritual upkeep, and my commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ.

The other morning as I scraped the weather off my totally iced-over car windows, I found myself thinking about that car commercial quoted above. Most of us here at OHNaz have taken time for Sunday Worship, and in fewer cases, Sunday school. In other

days, for many of us, the Day of Rest meant Sunday school at 9:45, morning worship at 11:00, Nazarene Young People's Society (now NYI) at 6:30, and the evening evangelistic service at 7:30 p.m. That was more than four hours in church on Sunday alone.

When the roll is called up yonder, I'm not sure that much of a good thing was necessary to get us through the golden gates up there. At the same time, maybe the Lord's Day has become a day of rest and leisure, recreation and entertainment, chore-doing and shopping to the neglect of Exodus 20:8-11. I'm not ready to petition P.B. for more Sunday church services, but I am praying about my use of Sunday for better spiritual growth. Pmm



Overheard in the Foyer

"Happy New Year!"

"Thanks, and same to you."

"Decided to make any resolutions?"

"Yeah, I've decided to be more decisive in 2016."

"About what?"

"About applying Pastor Ben's sermons to myself"

"What do you do now?"

"I think, 'Boy, my brother-in-law ought to hear this.'"

"And if you're being more decisive...?"

"I'll think, 'My brother-in-law's brother-in-law ought to apply this to his own life.'"

PB's

Current



The Essence of God's Presence

God loves you! He always has and He always will. Right now, he wants to bless you. "May the all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-present Lord be with you; may He go before you to show you the way, behind you to protect you, beside you to befriend you, above you to watch over you, and with-in you to give you peace."

1. The Lord goes Before you to show you the way.

We don't need to be afraid of tomorrow. The Lord is already there. Isaiah affirmed this awesome assurance. And when he said, "The Lord will go before you," (Isaiah 52:13). You and I can move forward under the Lord's guidance, expectantly anticipating his direction for our lives. The Lord know us better than we know ourselves. The Psalmist realized this, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. . .you understand my thoughts afar off." (Ps. 139:1-2) Listen: The Lord whispers in our souls, " I have plans for you. I'll not allow anything to happen to you that will not bring you closer to me. Trust me. Don't be afraid of the future. I'm already there."

2. The Lord goes Behind you to be your rear guard to protect you.

Again, Isaiah helps us with a momentous promise. "The God of Israel will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 52:12) Often we hear the warning, "Watch your back!" It is at our backs that the enemies of life attack us by surprise. I find that there are three enemies that sneak up behind us: hurting memories, trouble people, and Satan himself. We need the Lord, our rear guard to step in and proclaim, "That's enough! This is my beloved person. You'll not get by me in your harassing attacks!"

The Lord keeps at bay the spears of hurting memories with he shield of his power. Unresolved hurts from the past try to sneak up behind us and

attack us with stabbing memories of what we have done that causes us remorse, or what others have done to us that makes us long on retaliation. Only the Lord, our rear guard, the healing power of the world, can heal the pain of the past. He can expunge from our minds our disturbing memories.

We also need protection from troublesome people. Our rear guard give us discernment , x-ray vision in order to be able to see what is causing their desire to undermine us--sometimes jealousy, competition, envy, anger. He holds our enemies at bay until we can receive his strength to love and forgive them in spite of their undermining strategies.

But our rear guard's most crucial defense is against the insidious influence of Satan, the force of evil in the world. The Lord has all power. Evil cannot resist the power of His name. He forms an impenetrable membrane between our souls and Satan's influence. "I am your rear guard. Do not be afraid, " he commands us.

3. The Lord comes Beside you to befriend you in life's struggles.

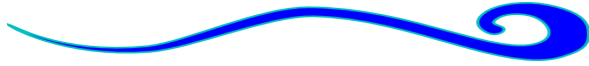
He takes us by the hand and reminds us that He will never forsake us. That's a good thing! Struggles are the stuff of life for most of us. Few of us ever consistently feel good about ourselves. . . .we have times of insecurity and self-doubt, times when we lack self-esteem. Anxiety is a stranger to none of us. Fears and frustrations track us like angry dogs. But not all of our struggles are internal. We face difficult situations in our families, at work, and in the community. Progress is slow, conflict seems inevitable. But here's the good news; the Lord can turn our struggles into stepping stones. Be sure of this; when you least expect it, the Lord will break through with help---perfectly timed, magnificently suited to your need.

4. The Lord goes Above you to watch over you.

Perhaps this is the most familiar image of the Lord's omnipresence. From His perspective he knows the past and the future, and can see what we need in every moment. With watchful care, he arranges circumstances, deploys people who will be able to help us, he opens doors, and does what might seem impossible to us. Isn't that wonderful? He has you and me as the focus of his faithfulness!

(continued on page 4)

JUST BLEW IN . . .



News from the pews

As much as we love all the ornaments and socializing of Christmas, it's a bit of a relief when the tree comes down and you've heard your last rendition of, "I Saw Grandma Kissing Santa Claus."

Here at OHNaz we had an unusually meaningful Christmas Eve service; didn't the testimonies from **Kendra Richter, Patrick Higbee, Steve Walden, Marian Smith,** and **JoAnne Sherrod** touch your heart? . . . It was good to have an encore performance from worship director **Paul Kuzina's** Christmas Choir. They have never sounded so good. . . . And the Sunday morning kid's musical, "A Lamb's Tale," directed by **Jacque Hildreth** and her crew, pleased us all. Seems like those energetic pre-schoolers are ready for their own production. . . . The Christmas Post Office came off without a hitch. Thank you **Kay Paterson** for your help, and **Ivan & Virginia Lathrop's** post Christmas hand-deliveries. . . . And a huge thank-you to those who assisted in the final put-away-Christmas on January 4th: **Deena & Charlie Janssen, Lisa & Ben Norris, Brad Pryce,** and **Patty & Danny Horton.**

NNU Scholarship Recipient. For a number of years, OHNaz has sponsored a ministerial scholarship for a student entering some form of Christian ministry. The 2015-16 recipient of the Oak Harbor Church of the Nazarene is **Ashley Wetzel** of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Ashley has a Christian Ministry major, and Children's Ministry minor. She will graduate from NNU this spring, and is anticipating Nazarene Theological Seminary in the fall.

When asked how the OHNaz scholarship has made a difference, Ashley writes, "This scholarship makes

it possible for me to attend Northwest Nazarene University. As a ministry student, I am concerned about finances and am attempting to make wise financial decisions. With the generous OHNaz scholarship I am able to live out the calling God has placed on my life, and for that I am thankful."

OHNaz is involved in two NNU scholarship programs, including a matching program. For information, contact **Pastor Ben.** Contributions to our scholarship programs are always appreciated. Let us all be prayerful that more young people from this congregation will consider Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.

Editorial Note. Your contributions to this monthly column is requested. Don't concern yourself with writing style or grammar, just get a note to Pmm with your news.



(continued from page 2)

5. **The Lord goes Within you to give you peace .**

One of the greatest promises in the Bible is Isaiah 26:3. "He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him." God's peace is total peace, encompassing all dimensions of our thought, emotion, will and body, as well as our relationships and our responsibilities for justice. It is the knowing we are loved, and forgiven, that we have trusted the Lord with our needs, and have invited him to take up residence in our minds to think his thoughts and in our emotions to express His love. This perfect peace is given to those whose mind is stayed on the Lord. The Lord stays our thinking on His grace and goodness. "The tendency of the mind is riveted on the Lord himself." What a great assurance! You and I can live knowing that the Lord is not going to let us get Him off our minds because we belong to Him. [Adapted]

Well there you have it, the essence of the Lord's Presence. . . .before, behind, beside, above and within you. He want to bless you now! You are loved! Have a great month! **Pastor Ben**

For Your Quiet Time

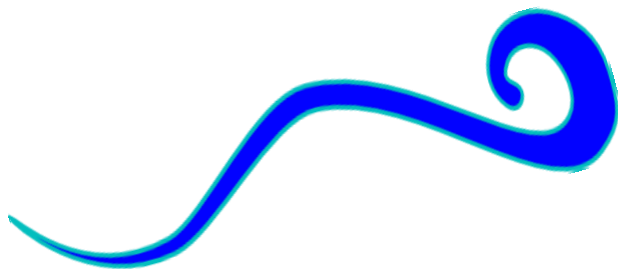
Facing 2016, take to heart these Charles Stanley thoughts submitted by Marian Smith

Serving One Another

First read 1 Corinthians 12:12-25

Believers have two main responsibilities—to love God and to love people (Matt. 22:37-40). This is often done by serving. How and where we serve is based upon our unique talents, skills, and calling, but the one place where we're all expected to give ourselves is the local church. The church is more than a community. It's an interdependent body with individual members created by God to function in communion with one another. We Christians, like the world at large, are a diverse group of people, and we have to strive hard for unity. But our differences are actually something to be celebrated—each person uniquely contributes to God's purpose. A church truly operating as a unit, with all its varied gifts, talents, personalities, and intellects focused toward kingdom goals, must be a beautiful sight to the Lord.

Christianity is not a spectator religion. We all have jobs to do in God's kingdom. The body of Christ functions most beautifully when all members resolve to serve God and each other to the best of their abilities. What are you doing for [our] church?



**Blow in for dinner on Wednesday nights
from 5:30 to 6:30.**

It's a family affair, be part of it.

For Your 2016 Funny Bone

Red letter days at church are excuses to have fun. Pot luck dinners abound. A not-identified pastor actually stood in his pulpit and announced a Shrove Tuesday (a specific day in Holy Week) griddle pancake breakfast with a straight face (while the bulletin declared it a "girdle" meal." And when the Episcopalians advertised an All Saints Day social as, "A Date with a Saint," the older ladies Sunday school class turned out in droves.

—The Baptists recently had a "No Excuse Sunday." Cots were placed in the foyer for those who say "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." Steel helmets were provided for the folks who say "The roof would cave in if I ever came to church."

—Doctors and nurses were in attendance for those who planned to be sick on Sunday.

—The sanctuary was decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for people who have never seen the church without them.

—First United Methodist was celebrating Volunteer Sunday. Later little Tony asked the pastor, "According to the Bible, pastor, the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. Right?"

"Right."

"And the children of Israel clobbered the Philistines, right?"

"Right."

"And the children of Israel built the temple, right?"

"Right, again."

"And the children of Israel fought the 'Egyptians, right?"

"Right you are."

"Well, what I want to know is this, what wuz all the grown-ups doin'?"

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