

Prestonwood Connection 2004

#5 YOU ARE SHAPED BY EXPERIENCE

Romans 12:17-21

Wednesday, October 6, 2004 • Dr. David McKinley

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Still I will trust you in all the experiences of life. You know life really is nothing more and nothing less than a series of experiences? Each day we walk through a variety of events that when they are strung together create the experience of that day and when strung together between the experience of birth and the experience of death, creates the entirety of the experience of life. In fact, in life, the experiences that we face are many in form. Some of those experiences stretch us. Some of those experiences grow us. Others of those experiences try us and certainly there are the experiences of life that overwhelm us. But life is made up of experience. Some of my experiences are very good ones, they're experiences for which I am deeply grateful, they're enjoyable, they're positive, they're encouraging; but in my life, just as in your life there are also experiences that are trying and hard, painful, difficult, experiences that frustrate us and experiences that take us to the wall.

This past Monday morning I woke up at 4:30 AM Eastern Time Zone. I was in Lynchburg, Virginia. Over the weekend Connie and my daughter Lizzie and I had the opportunity to go and to spend a few days with our son Joseph who is a... now a student at Liberty University. It was great to see him, it's been about 6 weeks and that was about all we could stand and we were ready to see him again and so it was great to go over and to be with him. But we got up at 4:30 in the morning to catch a 6:15 AM flight, make a quick connection in Atlanta and then come to Dallas. Well, we got in to Atlanta at about a..., 7:30 in the morning and a..., without any glitch or hitch whatsoever made the connection through several terminals and over to our gate and promptly on to our flight at 8:30 for an 8:40 departure. The plane taxied away from the gate and out on the runway, we were told that we number 15 for takeoff; not so bad at that hour of the morning in Atlanta. Until we pulled off to the side and were told that they had suddenly been given a ground hold because of weather in Dallas. Do you remember Monday morning? [slight congregation laughter] Well, I remember it very well, because I spent 55 minutes on that plane in that spot, while we waited on that ground hold only to be told that we did not have adequate fuel to, at that point, wait any longer and make the flight, so we taxied back to the terminal once again, pulled up to within about a..., 100 yards of the gate and sat there for the next 2 hours. [more slight laughter] Then we taxied back out on the runway to make the 2 hour flight from Atlanta to Dallas and finally arrived on a flight a little after 2 o'clock in the afternoon that was scheduled to have originally been here by 10 o'clock in the morning and all of that was one of those experiences

of life that found me a..., well, fidgeting, gritting my teeth, being frustrated, but I have to admit that in all of my own a..., agitation I was impressed with the wonderful flight attendants on that Delta flight that we made coming back. They never seemed to get frazzled, they kept being nice and very a..., helpful to all of those who were on board and one of the flight attendants, just as we landed in Dallas said, "Ladies and gentlemen I want to welcome you to Dallas and I also wanna point out to you today that there are a number of uniformed personnel who are on this flight. You will notice that these men and women are on their way to a 6 month tour of duty in Iraq and we just hope that you'll take a moment to express appreciation to them for their service." Well, of course, you know what happened, the entire airplane e...erupted in applause and affirmation and I of course sat there, especially after last Wednesday night thinking about Captain a..., Les Walton, who had been here and shared testimony with us and then suddenly I realized that whatever my experience had been in delay that day couldn't begin to compare with the experiences of those men and women who were on their way in dispatch to Iraq. You know it's amazing how sometimes in life when we have an experience that it can be quickly put into perspective by the prospect of the experiences of others. Sometimes when we get out of just our experience and our life and our world and see the experiences of others it can begin to change the way that we view life and life's experience and it's true and important because there are so many experiences in life that come a..., that are difficult for us and frankly that are just beyond our control a..., many of us spend a majority of our days and even sometimes of our lives trying to adjust to experiences that we didn't plan and we didn't prepare for. I've tried to adopt, over the last few years, a wonderful little motto, a beatitude that goes like this:

"Blessed are the flexible, for they rarely get bent out of shape."

And I would suggest that if you have not learned that beatitude that that might be a good one for you, because in the experiences of life, learning to be flexible and learning how to bend is a very important one. But as we go through life we're often defined by the impact and the influence of the collective chemistry of experiences of life, our family experiences, our educational experiences, our vocational experiences, our spiritual experiences, our relational experiences; all of these weave and work in us to make us the people that we are and that we become. But one of the great problems in all of that, while all of that chemistry can be very good, is that there are those dissonant chords and those darkened experiences that come into life and really make it hard for us to value, to appreciate and to approve of life as it is given to us and I don't think that we can escape a discussion on this subject because in this series of messages that we're calling li...*The Life You Were Born To Give*. We're really talking about stewardship, that all of life is a stewardship, it's taking what is given to you and provided for you and what is worked into and worked through your life by God and learning to be a good and a faithful steward of all of the experiences of life and so what we have tonight in the passage of Scripture that we're going to look at is a sense of God's marching orders as to how **WE'RE TO DEAL WITH SOME OF THOSE EXPERIENCES**

that come in life that are distasteful, that are painful and that are difficult. If you and I indeed are shaped by our experiences it would be an easy thing to adopt and adjust to experiences in life if they were good, but because so many of the experiences that we have are bad and beyond our control it's very easy to let all of life be ruined by a bad experience. And so in Romans chapter 12 beginning in verse 17 the Word of God outlines for us God's intention as to **HOW WE ARE TO RESPOND** to the injury, to the accidents and to the issues that are beyond our control in life. Let's read together beginning in Romans chapter 12 and verse 17, the Word of God says:

¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written. Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore "If your enemy is hungry feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Word of God that begins in Romans 12:1 with a challenge to lay our lives down as living sacrifices on the altar before ~~the life...be...~~ before God reminds us that the God to whom we surrender our lives cares for us and ultimately has promised to care for all of our concerns in life; not only the good things in life, but the bad things in life; not only the things that we find acceptable, but the things that we find unacceptable; not only the things that we can explain, but the things that we can't explain and the things that we can't reconcile, because God is working His will in a way that is good and acceptable and perfect even in those things in life that to me are difficult and challenging and trying in life. What we have here is a picture of an all-encompassing view of total surrender to Christ and especially we are challenged to this surrender and to this step of faith when we walk into an experience of life that hurts. Can I say it very simply tonight? Life hurts! Life hurts, walking through life, living in life, loving in life, giving in life, doing all the right things in life, you're still going to find that life hurts and evil and the impact of evil and iniquity and injury is a part of the reality show of life. No one escapes it, every one of us has to face it and we deal with the difficulties of the injuries that come and then the intentions and responses of our heart to it and of course the most natural of all human responses is a response to find justice, is a response to settle the score, is a response to get revenge, is a response to make it right. I would venture to say that even in this room tonight there's some people sitting here who have written and stored in the pockets of your mind IOU's for things that people have done and people have said and people have effected in your life because of their attitudes, their behaviors and their actions and to a large degree life is not what you want it to be and is tainted because of the injuries and the iniquities of others and we struggle to deal with the hurt that life brings to us and we struggle to handle the resolution of these things in life and may I just remind you again that when you are hurt and when you are injured and when you are offended, it is impossible to be neutral.

Pain brings hurt and with that hurt comes **ANGER**. If I hold my hand here tonight and I take a hammer and I hit my thumb, I can tell you right now what I'm gonna say is not, praise the Lord! [pause for congregation laughter] Now I hope I won't say something I'd regret, but what I'm saying is that that pain, pain sends a...a...an impulse of...of anger and anguish. You don't feel good, you feel bad, you feel mad and just as it happens to the body it happens to the soul, to the heart, to the spirit, as though it were, that when I'm hurt and injured I begin to deal with those injuries in a significant way and if I'm not careful I will let my life give way to the deadly and toxic poison of anger. Am I gonna get angry? Yes, I'm going to get angry, it's a part of my response, but the Word of God tells me in the book of Ephesians: [4:26]

"Be angry, and yet do not sin."...

Heh, Yes, I'm going to get angry. But even quickly the Bible gives me a warning:

"...do not sin."...

And then listen to this again, Ephesians 4 and verse 26 and 7:

²⁶*"Be angry, and sin not." Do not let the sun go down on your wrath,* ²⁷*nor give place to the devil.*

In your life and my life when we allow anger and anguish to find pockets in our hearts and in our minds it's not long until the experiences of life have all been tainted by the poison of anger and the result of it is that we are embittered and we are in bondage in life. It's a warning light and so what God gives us here is a way to respond to the anger, to the anguish and to the injuries of life. I want us to look tonight and I want us to define tonight **4 BASIC PRINCIPLES THAT WE ARE TO EMBRACE IN THE HARD AND PAINFUL EXPERIENCES OF LIFE**. How are we, if we're going to be shaped by experience, to see to it that the experiences of life don't destroy us, but that they help us to be the kind of men and women that God wants us to be. Let's look again at our text tonight, chapter 12, verse 17:

Repay no one evil for evil...

Very quickly and very succinctly the Word of God gives us in a single statement the first principle as to how we are to deal with the hard experiences of life and the response is to be this, we are to:

CHALLENGE THE PRINCIPLE OF PAY BACK. We are to challenge the principle of pay back, now we live in a world that makes much of pay back. I've just said that to you and we think a lot about settling the score and...and getting even, and while tonight I don't want to lowball, as though it were, the hurts and the heartaches of life, death, divorce, accident, loses; I do want to try to, very clearly, state that the Word of God challenges that natural tendency and that very human impulse that says, I

will get even! Now I know immediately, some of you, who've studied the Bible, look at this and say the Bible says:

Repay no one evil for evil...

But didn't the Old Testament say: [Exodus 21:24]

"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,..."

And the answer to that is yes! And God gave and God allowed that to be given as a standard of measure for civil law and civil justice. In fact our own justice system is ideally based on the principle of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth as though there is to be some level of reparation and some level of amend that is made in order to accomplish equity and justice when someone has been wronged or when someone has been injured. But it's all given within the structure of government and law and we'll see that next week in Romans 13 as we look together at a very significant passage of Scripture about the Christian's relationship to government and to society. We're called to be an influence. But having said that let me back up and say that what Romans 12 a..., verse 17 is talking about, is talking about our individual responses to the injuries of life, how we are to respond when we are dealing with the pain and the hurt of it and God says you and I do not have the right to take the law into our own hands and to ultimately try to accomplish justice for ourselves. Why? Because we'll never be able to establish a sufficient installment that will balance the injury incurred. I'll never be able to settle it right. Therefore, the Bible warns me not to repay anyone evil for evil. I'm not to live at the level of evil. I'm not to let evil become the impulse of my life. I am to live my life as I talked about last week, lifted by love and so how is love to find it's place if there is hurt and injury in my life? It's by questioning the issue of pay back and understanding that God has a different plan.

It was Booker T. Washington who said:

"I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him."

You see you become a slave, you become stained and imprisoned by your own hate, by your own pain and by your own anger. So principle #1 is that we have to challenge the principle of pay back. Principle #2 is that we are to:

CONCENTRATE ON DOING GOOD AND KEEPING PEACE. God gives us not only the restraint, but He gives us a positive agenda for live. The Bible says here beginning in verse 17 again:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

I'm to focus my eyes on good things in the sight of all men. I'm not to give my energies to the things that are destructive and while I can't

control the things that happen to me, I can do something about how I respond to those things in life and how I treat those people in life and the Bible says that I'd have to have a regard for good in the sight of all men, that I'm to do everything that I can to be right and to do good. I think of all of the challenges given to us in the teachings of Jesus, of the ones that go against the impulse of our own life more than any others, is possibly that is found in the book of Matthew, verses 38 and following when Jesus taught us that we were to turn the other cheek. [chapter 22]

A number of years ago Ruth Graham reported that she came into the room one evening to find her daughter Ann, you know Ann Graham Lotts? Many of you know her, a great Bible teacher, a... written some wonderful books and Bible Study materials. Well, apparently Ann was sitting there on the floor and she had Franklin their son in front of them. Now Franklin, of course, is the...the voice of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association today and is a..., in partners with his father and of course we are a part of Operation Christmas Child, so these are two significant figures in the evangelical Christian world today. But apparently on this given evening Ann was sitting there with her hand slapping Franklin back and forth on the face, back and forth and back and forth and Ruth stopped and said, "Ann what on earth are you doing?" She said, "Mommy, I'm just teaching him to turn the other cheek." Heh, heh! [pause for congregation laughter] Well, Franklin may have deserved it, I don't know, from what I've read of him and his past and I'm sure Ann would say she was just making great biblical application, but the reality of the matter is that it's hard to turn the other cheek. It's hard to do good when someone has done evil to you. But, the Bible says we are to have regard for good in the sight of all men to let our attitude and our response be right and that instead of getting even I'm to focus on getting ahead. But not only am I to concentrate on doing good I'm to concentrate on keeping peace. Go on and read again in verse 18:

If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

As much as it depends on you, you are to be a peacemaker. God's intention for His children is that they're to be peacemakers and not troublemakers and we are to be those who pursue the life and the lifestyle of peace. But please notice that this is a condition. It says:

If it is possible, as much as it depends on you,...

Let's just face it ladies and gentlemen there are some people with whom we cannot have peace. We can't have peace with them because they don't have peace in their hearts. There are people that we may want to attempt to be good in our intentions and peaceful in our demeanor, but the reality is, is that you can't right every wrong, you can't fix every problem, you can't remove every consequence of the actions of...of sin in the lives of other people and you can't get along with everyone and I was a pastor long enough in Florida to learn the lesson that while I couldn't make everybody happy, I could make everybody mad. Heh! [congregation laughter] If you

haven't learned that, you need to learn that lesson in life. You see, you can't make peace for everyone and you can't keep peace with everyone. Now, the Bible tells us as much as you can, as much as it depends on you, let this be your focus. But let's be honest, when a husband runs off with someone other than his wife and leaves his wife and leaves his children and leaves his family, she can attempt and attempt and attempt reconciliation and forgiveness, but if he refuses and rebels and continues to go in that way of sin and immorality and adultery then ultimately there's a consequence, a consequence of law, a consequence of responsibility and a consequence that is ultimately played out in his life, even if she wanted peace. It may be that there's a person in a church who's a member of a church, but that person has a conflict in their life and there's a stubbornness, a resistance, a selfishness, a pride-fullness that they begin to assert against the leadership of that church or against the fellowship that is around them and ultimately if they are unwilling to be brought into the place of peace and reconciliation then the Bible gives us a specific plan of how we're to deal with it. In the book of Titus chapter 3 the Bible... **< turn tape >** [verse 9-11]

⁹But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

Listen to this!

¹⁰Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

If you've just got a person who can't get along with anyone, he can't go along with anything, then ultimately, the Bible says, reject them, because you do all that you can to make peace. But with some people you can't make peace and yet the Bible is saying to you and to me, my attitude is to be one of concentrating on doing good and making peace. Our job is to do our best to guard our heart and to guard our spirit before the Lord. The 3rd principle in the experiences of life is that we are to:

COMFORT OUR HEARTS WITH GOD'S PROMISE. Comfort your heart with God's promise, what is the promise of God in the conflicts and the anguish of life? Look at Romans 12 and verse 19, Romans chapter 12 and verse 19:

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;...

Read it out loud with me, we've got it on the screen.

...“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

I want you to read that one more time out loud.

...“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

That's a promise, for God justice and righteousness is a character issue and God has promised you and God has promised me that even when life

brings injury and inequity that we cannot resolve and explain, even when it hurts, that God has promised that He will bring vengeance. It's not in my hands to bring vengeance. I cannot, I am not just, I get hurt, I get angry, I get frustrated, I don't know how to balance the issue, but God is perfect in His wisdom, His understanding and in the wrath of His justice and the Bible says that when I get in the way and try to avenge myself I stop the movement of God. But when I step back and surrender the pain and the anguish of a life experience to God I open the door and God says I'll come in and I will repay. God is not gonna be shown up and He's not gonna slip up on making things right. God has said, "Do you trust Me?" It's an issue of stewardship. It's an issue of the stewardship of your faith in the suffering of your life that says God I will trust You, though I don't understand, though I'm hurt and though I cannot of my own accord make it right. You see, comfort your heart with God's promise. There's a 4th and final principle tonight and that is that we are to:

CHOOSE THE STEWARDSHIP OF GOOD OVER EVIL. This is the apex of it all. This is what it's all about. We are to choose the stewardship of good over evil. We're not to sit back and wait, but we're to go forward and to walk with God and to work focusing on that which is good and the challenge here is to be a good steward of the hardships of life.

A number of years ago a writer by the name of Paul Billheimer wrote a book. I know we have it in our library. I think it's probably out of print or limited print today, but it had a wonderful title it was called, *Don't Waste Your Sorrows*, and the principle of the book is that the very places where you often are most injured become the very platforms that God uses to minister to your life and through your life to others. Don't waste your sorrows. Be a good steward and when the evil of life and the injuries of life come let your life and your heart focus on the grace of God ministered to you. You see this is the ultimate experience of a transformed mind. I'm to become a living sacrifice and then I'm not to be conformed to this world, but I'm to be transformed by the renewing of my mind and the ultimate expression of a transformed mind is that I begin to take, even that which would be evil and I begin to overcome evil with that which is good. That's the kind of life that we're called to live and that's how experience is shaped into something that is used for the glory of God, a good steward of hardships, of injury and of events.

13 years ago this month in 1991 I had the wonderful joy of officiating in the wedding of a couple who I've had the privilege of reuniting with here at Prestonwood, since returning a couple of years ago, Mike and Susan Barrett. I remember going over to Fort Worth, The Thistle Hill Mansion and standing there with their family and friends and yes that's me with hair in a few of those pictures if you can see there and it was a great evening and a great experience and it was sweet. We kept up with one another through the years, in fact in 1996, on their 5th anniversary they came to visit us in Florida and happened to be in our church on the Sunday morning that my daughter Mary Elizabeth made her profession of faith. It was a sweet thing that they were there that day and a..., through the years they sent Christmas cards and I've been able to keep up with them and a..., this

was their last years picture of their family together. Mike and Susan have been blessed with 4 wonderful children, Austin who's 10, Emily who's 8, Bradon who's 5 and Baily who's 4 and this family's just a...a fabulous family. Mike is a very a..., successful salesman in the technology industry. He's a deacon here at Prestonwood. He's a..., the director of one of our Married Adult III Bible Fellowship Classes and a..., he's involved in a ministry called Reaching America's Youth. Some of you may know Bunny Martin, that this is a...a ministry that goes into the prisons and works with young people and students who are incarcerated, kids who've made major mistakes and who are paying a high fine for their crimes. To know Mike Barrett, is to know one of the most positive and one of the most servant hearted people that I've ever met in my life, but you'd be amazed to know the journey that he's taken to get to where he is today and I asked Mike to come tonight. So Mike I'm gonna ask you to come here and just take a minute and I want you just to come and to join me and to share a little bit about your life story and about some of the experiences that you've had and Mike I just want you to take a minute and want us...you to tell us what nobody would know, but what happened to you as a child.

[MIKE] It's only by God's grace that I'm able to stand before you tonight and tell you a little bit about my life's journey because a..., six days before Christmas in 1971 as I a was a 9 year old boy growing up just outside of Bowling Green, Kentucky a..., my dad was a state trooper and he had just come home from the midnight shift and as he stepped out of his car a..., there was someone there at our home and a..., hiding, that stepped out and...and killed my dad. Just literally right outside of my window and a certainly my life was turned upside down there as a 9 year old boy and leaving my mother who was 27 at the time with a..., with two knucklehead boys to raise.

[DAVID] And so 9 years of age you faced this tragedy and this reality in your life, your dad was gone and a..., you'd actually almost been witness to this experience. What was the impact on your life and the impact on your family?

[MIKE] We grew...grew up in a trailer, a..., 14 x 70 was it's length if I remember correctly and obviously we struggled a little bit financially. A..., there was, certainly anger built up as you go to your Little League games and...and dads were that and I had no dad that could be there so it was tough growing up in the impact of a..., of growing up without your dad.

[DAVID] Were they able to apprehend a..., the suspect or were they able to deal with the problem?

[MIKE] You know they haven't, 33 years this December, a..., apparently the persons still in the free a..., we've never know who killed my dad a..., but ultimately you know that's God's judgment of whether it's this side of heaven or that side of heaven and I'm just come to the realization that, you know, like is a..., God tells us to live it abundantly and I've just chosen over the years to a..., to not let that guide my life, but to live it abundantly and certainly try to do that.

[DAVID] What have you done a..., recently to help you in dealing with this with your dad?

[MIKE] You know we a..., just last year in fact a..., the State Troopers of Kentucky called me back and they dedicated a 5 mile stretch literally outside of our home where a..., my dad was killed, in memory of my dad and that was kind of neat. My brother and I got to go back and...and do that just outside of Bowling Green, so again the...the world tells you that it's evil, but God wants to overcome evil with good and I've just chosen to a..., to not let that guide me in my life as I look back over the last a..., several years, where I could have easily turned left a..., God has guided me to turn right.

[DAVID] What would you say to us about the hurts of life? I mean I can preach a message, I can talk about concepts, but obviously Mike you've lived this out and I've seen that in your life. But what would you say to people here about the hurts they're facing.

[MIKE] You're certainly here tonight, certainly a..., you can overcome evil with good and that's God's plan and a..., again I've just chosen to take that route in life and have been blessed and just humbled almost to the point of being able to be a part of this church and it's service and again thinking back over the last 33 years where there was many chances to go left a..., God chose to take me right and a..., and He has blessed me accordingly and you lay that as His feet and again ultimately it's His judgment and I've gotta live with that.

[DAVID] Well I appreciate you being willing to just come and take a few minutes and share something that would be a..., of such magnitude in your heart and your life and yet to be such a living example today of what it is to be positive and joy filled and servant hearted in your walk with Christ and a..., I'm blessed by that so thank you Mike tonight for sharing that with us. [applause]

It's all summed up in Romans chapter 12, verse 21:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Don't waste your sorrows. Jesus tasted sorrow, the sorrow of sin and of death and of Hell that you and I might know His peace in this life and the hope of the life to come and with it the promise of God.

... "Vengeance is Mine, and I will repay," says the Lord.