

Stefan's Sermon

These past couple of weeks have been a real bummer, huh? I finally have everything back on - cell phone service is a little unpredictable - but other than that, I'm good. But I wasn't when things first started to shut down at 1733 Jefferson Street...

There was a woman by the name of Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross who worked with terminally ill patients and did a lot of research on how we respond to death. She identified five stages of grief. Now I don't mean to compare the electricity shutting down with death - although we did have some fatalities connected to the ice storm - but I think that her five stages of grief can be seen in how we respond to many other types of tragedies, small and great. You may have heard of them: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

They are pretty self-explanatory, I think. Whenever something bad happens to us, we want to downplay its significance if we possibly can. "It's no big deal - I'll be OK". Which is not a bad attitude to have, so long as it doesn't hinder us from actually dealing with the matter at hand. Then we get mad about it. "How could this happen to me? I'll get whoever's responsible for this!" Bargaining is our attempt to negotiate an end to the trouble, then we get depressed about it, and finally we go, "OK, I give up."

Now there are many variations of this depending on whether we're dealing with the death of a friend or your favorite TV show getting canceled mid-season. But you get the idea. When it comes to this power outage, the one thing I remember best is ANGER. That's right, it ticked me off. Let me explain it for you...

"The power won't be out for long", I told myself. They'll get those crews right out there and on top of this before it gets too bad.

Perhaps there should be another stage: ignorance. I had no idea of the severity of this ice storm. And when I finally realized that, of course I went into denial. That is until it got dark and all I had was

those little tea lights. And I hate cold. And while no TV makes me grumpy, no Internet makes me insane. It was then that I turned green and ripped off my shirt.

Well, not quite, but I *was* angry. I mean, look at the advances in technology that have been made just in the last fifty years or so - computers that NASA used to run the Apollo space missions were the size of china cabinets but about as powerful as a calculator you can buy at Wal-Mart these days. You can store hundreds of songs on a device that will fit in your shirt pocket, while a good album of my high school years had ten or twelve tracks at best and was the size of a small tire. We can talk to people around the world with a short delay - a few seconds, maybe - and the Kindle - have you heard about this thing? It just may well replace books as we know them, and can store hundreds of times the information. *Everything* has gone wireless these days. I looked at buying a wireless printer for my office yesterday, but decided on the old-fashioned USB cable instead.

But the stuff that powers it all? Is *it* wireless? NOOOOOOOOOO.....it is still strung from wooden pole to wooden pole like kids playing on those tin-can telephones in their tree-houses. And let some water - simple H₂O - not a fancy acid that eats through the protective coating - just some plain old water can freeze and pull these things off of those man-made tree-poles and entire cities - nay, counties, or to some degree, states, have to close their doors and cease their operations. Those powerful hand-held computer/cell phone/camera/mp3 player/back scratcher are rendered inoperable because you can't plug them into the wall which connects with those big black strings outside which have all fallen down like so many London bridges, or even if you can get the thing to power on, you can't talk to anyone because the tower that relays the invisible, WIRELESS message has had its strings cut by a few falling oak trees, and we're all cold, and hungry and the gas pumps that provide fuel to our huge SUVs with the butt-warming seats and the nice On-Star lady who tells you when you've had a wreck and where, also powered by the giant black spiderweb of electricity, don't pump gas!!!! ARGHHHHHH!!!! I thought we were better than this!!! I thought we were capable of more!!!! We are no match for

the.....ICE!!!!!!! ARRGGGGGG!!!!

Deep breath. I'm OK, really. Hang on, I'm gonna get some tea. I'll be right back.....

OK, that's better. Now where was I? I think I was rambling about how our technology is wonderful - it makes the basics of life so efficient and comfortable, and frees up our time to do the more important things like...like.....

Hmmmm....

OK, so here's the practical exam. Here's what I want you to do. When you finish reading this, I want you to turn off the computer. Which means you'll have to remember everything I'm saying now so pay attention.

I want you to turn off the computer; put down the IPOD; turn off the ringer on the phone; turn off the television. Take off your watch. Close the door to your room. Turn off the lights. Run your little sister or brother out first. Close the blinds or draw the shades. If someone calls your name, just say you're busy right now and ignore them. Unless they said something about fire or freshly baked cookies.

Listen to your heart. Not in a romantic novel sort of way, I mean actually *listen* to it, and feel every beat. Think about every lub and dub. It isn't plugged in to anything, and you don't have a battery compartment behind your ear. You can't make it stop, and if it does you can't will it to start again.

Pretend for just a moment that you have no stuff. There's nothing in your room except for you. There's nothing in the house except for you. There's nothing on this Earth right now, except for you. Who are you now?

OK, you know what to do? OK, shut it all down. Just don't forget to turn it back on and finish reading this.

Hey, you're back. Cool. How was it? Don't forget to reset the alarm clock. I don't want you blaming me for making you late for school.

*We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves. - **Psalm 100:3***

*Without him was not anything made that was made. - **John 1:3***

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights. - **James 1:17***

Just know, right now, that while we as human beings have made phenomenal technological strides over the centuries and particularly here in the western world and in the last 50 to 100 years, and we should be proud of what we have discovered and accomplished, that we are still subject to a higher power. Some call it God, some call it Allah, some call it Intelligent Design - but there is something greater than ourselves in this realm, and it is the something that has created us to become as great as we are.

Just know who you are when the lights are out.

In a few weeks, we will attend a service on a Wednesday night in which we'll hear Libby say, *Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return* - as she forms a dirty-looking cross on our foreheads with ashes. It's not as creepy as it sounds, really. It's just a reminder that although we have all this stuff - some of it pretty frickin' cool stuff too - we are still very mortal, and must make sure to take as much care of our souls and our spiritual lives as we do everything else about us - because part of us - the part others can't see or touch or make fun of or hurt - will live on forever, in the presence of God.

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. -

Revelation 21:23

*How come everything I think I need always comes with batteries? - **John Mayer***

Peaceout.

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