

7/4/1998

A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

No city can change unless there is a dedicated group of people absolutely committed to the common cause of caring for each other. It is as simple as that. But something so simple is far from easy.

The starting point for any successful effort to arrest the forces of disintegration is to motivate ordinary folks like you and me to become *mobilized* into a force for good. This is the imperative behind Shreveport Community Renewal's effort to build an effective cadre of caring people who will follow a plan to build bridges of love among ourselves which transcend all of the differences we have. At SCR we call this primary group, *The Mission Team*. This group has grown to almost a thousand strong over the last three years!

But the truth of the matter must be realized at a deeper level than the principles involved in mobilizing a group dedicated in common cause. *For a city to change the people who live there must change.* We know that no group can be committed to caring for others unless and until the *individuals* who comprise the group are *each dedicated* to the idea that only by intentionally caring for one another can we rebuild our community.

The reality check on the progress of true community renewal can never go beyond the progress of individuals within that community who are willing to work for the good of others in concrete acts of caring. Where in the world do we start for that kind of test? Each of us can start by taking stock of our own lives.

First, ask yourself, "What am I living for?" Be able to answer that question in a single sentence.

Socrates once observed, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I am sure that he was referring to the common tragedy which preys upon generation after generation of human beings. We get so caught up in the rush of life that we face the danger of losing our direction. We concentrate so much on the steps we are taking, how many, how fast, and how good they are, that we often miss the trail. We can all laugh at the joke of the pilot who intones over the plane's loudspeaker, "Ladies and gentlemen, I've got bad news and good news. The bad news is, we're lost. But the good news is, we are making great time!"

To not know where you are or where you are going in life is a tragedy. But there is something even sadder than that. I believe that sorrow becomes almost infinite when you have to look back over a life filled with busy days and there is no answer to "Why." We human beings must have direction, but we need even more than that, we need *significance*. Years ago I cut out a cartoon in *The New Yorker* which showed two geezers on a park bench feeding the squirrels. One reflected, "You know, Ben, I've learned a lot in these past 65 years. Unfortunately, most of it has been about aluminum."

Is there anything sadder than a life misspent? To miss the path which gives your life meaning and purpose and dignity is a very tragic thing. But I think that there is

something *even worse* than the discovery of shallow living. I believe that the ultimate tragedy of our human existence is ***unawareness!***

To miss the road which can lead to fulfillment and true joy and *not to know it, ever*, is a life wasted. And that to me is heartbreaking. To be born and to die without having been ***aware of your life's best***, that is tragedy deeper than any Greek playwright could conjure.

How many times have the great teachers of the human race warned us against the condition of blindness. It is a handicap which is pandemic. We are all vulnerable to its effects. Blindness is so sad.

It isn't so much that we would stumble and fall in our inner darkness. No! *The calamity of blindness lies in not seeing the incredible beauty of the world around us.* So many of us take the good, but miss the very best and we don't even know what we have missed, because we have been unaware of the possibility that there is more.

Pick the greatest truths to live for! Elton Trueblood was fond of saying, "*The greatest heresy is small thinking.*" And remember that we truly find ourselves outside of ourselves! *When your life is other centered, you become the self you were made to be.*

This is why Socrates calls upon us to stop our busy pursuit of the urgent and examine where we are and where we are going and why. We must not wait until the park bench stage of our lives to look ourselves over, he would say. Look at yourself now!

Well, how can a blind man see? We can recover lost sight by asking this second question:

What deeds am I doing daily to fulfill my life's meaning?

James Martineau said that we human beings are the only creatures in the universe capable of ***self-deception***. He said we and we alone will *invent* a lie, tell it to ourselves, and *believe it as if it was God's truth.* ***We can say we are living for others when in reality we are living fully for ourselves and we will never see that truth because we are blind.*** So what we do must match what we say we are doing.

One way is to look at your check stubs!! "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." Dr. Gilbert Davis, Jr. was my pastor when I was becoming a young man at Kings Highway Christian Church here in Shreveport. What he said about our wallets impressed itself on me to the degree that I have made it my own. "I will not leave much to my children," said Dr. Davis, "But one thing I am going to leave them is the boxes of my check stubs because I want them to see what meant something to me."

If your children read your check stubs, what story do they get about your priorities. Our check stubs are a reality check! Does our walk match our talk? If Shreveport is to change, then we must have people ***dedicated*** to caring for each other joining together in common cause. So join with us today to take this city into the new century with the flags of renewal flying mightily!