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The word mediocre comes from the Latin word *mediocris* which literally means "halfway up a mountain." Now if life is compared to climbing up a mountain, then middle age is *mediocris*. But mediocrity has come to describe things of moderate or low quality and a person's content with moderate or low achievements. Genuine disciples of Christ should not be content with moderate or low achievement as they seek to grow in the high ideals that the Scripture sets for the children of God.

Youth is a time of establishing goals and ideals. High ideals are an integral part of success in the life of aspiring young Christians. But the realities of life have a way of causing us to replace some of that idealism with realism. That is not all bad if we retain our basic vision while we adjust to a more mature version of carrying out our goals. However, by the time of middle age, becoming mediocre both in goals and in practice is all too common. How can we overcome middle-aged mediocrity?

Maintain a vibrant communion with the Lord. The demands of midlife put a squeeze on the schedule, but we should not allow the press of duty to squeeze out time for daily communion with the Lord. The ideal of an uninterrupted half hour may not be realistic, but fathers learn to have some quiet time with God by rising twenty minutes before the demands of the work schedule. Mothers learn to value those precious minutes with the Lord while the children take naps. Daily devotional time brings valuable inspiration from the Word. Our determination to meet daily with the Lord also affirms our commitment to Him.

Keep church life at the center of the family schedule. The demands of providing for the needs of the family can make it difficult to attend prayer meeting and cottage meeting and to help with other weekday church activities. The ideal of never missing a service has likely escaped all of us, but when our enterprises begin to take priority over the church schedule, a spiritual mediocrity steals in that takes a toll on us and on our families. We need something bigger than ourselves, something bigger than our family and our enterprises to bring true meaning and purpose to our lives.

Be open to correction and direction. By the time we have reached middle age, we have learned many things by experience and have a degree of self-confidence. This self-confidence can easily develop into a resistance to direction or correction. We can become easily offended by those who give

some help. We readily admit that we have much to learn, but the Lord has a way of teaching us some things in the areas where we may have been developing a smug self-confidence. If we are going to reach the top of the mountain, we must be open to correction and direction. Neither can we afford to hide our failures. The One who inhabits eternity dwells only with those of a humble and contrite spirit.

Cultivate an interest in learning. Parents should view helping children with schoolwork as an opportunity to review their own academic learning and even to learn new things about God's world and the history of its inhabitants. In today's regulated world, many of us face the need to have training and obtain licenses for some aspects of our work. While we cringe somewhat at the encroaching regulations, the opportunity to continue to learn and to become more efficient in our work is good for us. But most of all, we should willingly accept exercises of spiritual learning, such as teaching Sunday school and having topics. As we fill our place, we not only teach others but also grow in our own understanding of the Lord and His Word.

The apostle Paul gave his testimony on overcoming middle-aged mediocrity—"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Brother Galen



Relating to Marriage Disorders of Our Day

The institutions of marriage and the home are gifts from God to mankind for the continuance and nourishment of the human race (Genesis 2). This unfathomable blessing is a beautiful example of God's goodness toward us. When God gives gifts for the good of mankind, Satan seeks to distort them, making them catalysts for the corruption and destruction of man. This is true of marriage and the home. Society's concepts concerning marriage and the home have become severely distorted caricatures of God's purposes regarding this relationship. The Bible reveals that God established marriage as the union of one man and one woman for as long as they both live. Society currently violates nearly every aspect of this Scriptural definition.

To maintain the Scriptural position regarding marriage, we need to continually nurture our understanding of these truths—both in thought and in

practice. How startling to realize how soon a Scriptural position on marriage can degenerate into an unscriptural one! For example, some years ago a Mennonite periodical promoted a congregation that was conducting "divorce ceremonies" to help smooth the emotional trauma that accompanies divorce. Today, Mennonite groups (who until a few generations ago were Scriptural on the issue of divorce and remarriage) are struggling over even the Biblical definition of marriage itself.

How should we relate to those involved in unscriptural marital relationships? What steps must be taken to avoid giving our approval regarding such relationships and to maintain a clear Biblical witness regarding the issue?

We must maintain solid teaching against marriage disorders and redefinitions of marriage. We need to emphasize that the Bible is the final authority on the subject of marriage. "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.... Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:6-12). "So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress" (Romans 7:3).

We need to regularly hear solid Bible indoctrination regarding marriage. Scriptural marriage is the union of one man and one woman for "as long as [they] both shall live." Any marriage in which one of the individuals has another living marriage partner violates this Scriptural principle. The word committeth (present tense) clearly emphasizes that a divorced and remarried couple is living in continual sin. These truths need to be emphasized at our weddings; indeed, we may not sidestep these truths when some are present who have violated these principles.

These truths also need to be taught and applied in our evangelistic outreach. Tracts such as *Divorce, Is It Lawful?* should be included in our tract display racks in our churches. When we realize that a couple we are seeking to help spiritually is entangled in an unscriptural marriage relationship, we should graciously but unapologetically present the Biblical truths about divorce and remarriage and the Bible solution of celibate living for those who are in violation of this principle. Our emotions may influence us to wish there were another way, but we need to stand steadfastly on the Word. The Scriptural way is the only acceptable way, and God's way is best.

We must maintain a social line that withholds approval of unscriptural marriage relationships. Attending marriage ceremonies legalizing the relationship when one of the partners has a living companion is condoning what the Bible condemns. Welcoming such a couple to lodge with us overnight also suggests our approval of the relationship. To knowingly invite a divorced and remarried couple into our home as a couple for a meal presents a snare that blurs our position both in our own minds and in theirs. Neither should we recognize as marriage the immoral relationships currently being redefined as "marriage."

Even though divorce and remarriage have become norms in society, they are as unscriptural as ever. The unnatural "unions" that are being legalized in many states have an additional threat of making divorce and remarriage seem less serious to us. The repulsiveness of unnatural "unions" can somehow cause us to think of divorce and remarriage as less objectionable.

We must avoid business involvements that sanction unscriptural relationships. Careful consideration needs to be given as we encounter violations of these truths. Should we rent a residence to individuals who are involved in unscriptural relationships? How should we relate to a divorced and remarried "couple," or even a perverted "couple" who asks to meet with us to discuss or review building plans for their house?

Our homes must be strong, loving, and nurturing. Little is more protective of the Scriptural position regarding marriage than strong, loving homes. Little on earth is more beautiful than a happy home where father and mother love each other and love their children! Little does more to convey to the world the Bible principles concerning the sanctity, definition, and permanence of marriage than does a happy, stable home. This is likely the strongest testimony that we can give to the world and to our children that we believe the Bible and its teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

The effects of the prevalence of divorce and remarriage over the last several generations are evident in society today. Many of the ills of society stem from violations of these Scriptural truths. The effects of the increasing number of marriage disorders are not possible for us to fathom. As society becomes worse and worse, may God's light in us shine brighter and brighter "until the perfect day" when we will be with Him eternally.

Brother Glenn



Profitable Congregational Business Meetings

We should thank the Lord often for the blessing to meet collectively for worship. As congregations, we meet—not one time a year, but perhaps one hundred times a year—unhindered. Church life also includes the unique privilege to organize and to work out details within the church family. Business meetings are a part of the maintenance of this privilege.

The annual business meeting may seem routine, but the profitable sort do not just happen. The date for the meeting usually falls between the end of the fiscal year and prior to the beginning of the Sunday school year (often in August or September). The ministry announces the date. The entire congregation is invited to attend. If Father attends alone, the children may ask, "What did you talk about?" when he returns. Perhaps Father should consider taking the whole family next year. Doing so could leave pleasant, instructive memories. The sisters' quiet presence is also appreciated and helps them to sense the pulse of and interest within the congregation. Each member's contribution is valued.

One test which shows the congregation's overall attitude is business meeting attendance and participation. A poorly attended business meeting should concern us. It could indicate low interest, short notice, a poorly selected evening, or domineering personalities. Profitable congregational business meetings are the result of sufficient forethought. Decisions can then be made by a "lawful assembly" in an efficient yet unhurried way that translates into brotherhood rest. The bishop moderates the meeting and calls for a hymn, the devotional, and a prayer. This sets a spiritual tone for this occasion.

Minutes of the previous year's meeting are read by the secretary. These minutes are subject to corrections or additions before they are approved. Upon approval, these minutes stand as a written record of that meeting. If the secretary has prepared thorough minutes with sufficient detail, the minutes will be a valuable tool for reference. In contrast, the meeting is off to a poor start if the moderator announces that last year's minutes were lost.

Reports from the deacon and the auditors usually follow. Unless reported at a separate patrons' meeting, the school treasurer also shares a report of the school operating costs. As contributors, the congregation should have written copies of these financial reports. To save time, these copies can be made available on a table to be picked up before the service. Providing figures from the past two years in separate columns is interesting, and also serves as a measuring and accountability tool. These written reports (and a sensible explanation of any discrepancies) go a long way in answer-

ing questions before they are raised. This provides an excellent opportunity for the reporter to express humble appreciation for the contributions of each. A steward's thankful, sensible perspective is not hard to interpret. The trustees or church committees (such as the outreach committee or the midweek planning committee) may also have reports to share.

Appointments and assignments are a necessary part of church life. We need to assume a prayerful attitude from start to finish. Ballots are prepared by the ministry and (in some congregations) distributed the Sunday prior to give the members time to contemplate. The ballot should be planned with the intent that the inexperienced will be harnessed as an assistant to the experienced. This arrangement benefits both workers involved and will be an asset to the congregation in the present and for the future.

One of the ministry leads out by reading over the ballot and explaining any changes. The members vote by filling out the ballots; then the ballots are collected and tallied the results of these appointments should be reported, giving due regard to the importance of the work assignments. Those given responsibilities should carefully follow the example of those who labored with Jehoiada the priest, "for they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 12:15).

Open discussion. The time of can be in itself worth the attending. When there is more than one way of addressing a situation that arises, the issue must be discussed. The ministry should not dominate this time of open discussion, but rather take this opportunity to sense the mind of the congregation. The moderator may ask if the ministry has anything to add. Proper parliamentary procedures (motions, seconds, amendments, and voting) should be followed. For some, this may be the first or one of the few times they witness the exercise of these procedures. The heart of the older is blessed to hear the young man give a second to the motion that indicates his interests.

The percentage required to consider a matter passed should be understood before a vote is taken. In many cases, this may be a simple majority. But matters that are of a more sensitive nature or are of greater consequence should require a higher percentage (75 or 80 percent). The moderator should discern the mind of the group. Is the group ready for a vote? Is this a more sensitive issue? If the congregation is not sufficiently united, the matter needs more discussion—or it may be tabled until another meeting.

Submission has always been a part of congregational life. We must all cultivate the attitude that "the church does not need me as much as I need the church." As the Lord tarries, may the business meetings planned for the

coming weeks bless our congregations with individuals who have "a mind to work." The church today needs not one who can do the work of a hundred, but one who can work with a hundred.

Brother Loren



Church Committee Report Storybook Publication

The Publication Board's goal is to supply sound literature for the needs of our people. Our projects include evangelistic literature, school curriculum, and teaching resources for church and home.

About fourteen years ago the Board decided to also include storybooks with its projects. This came about because authors among us requested the Board to publish their manuscripts. This work has resulted in eighteen books being released since that time. We do not solicit these projects, so the frequency of release is unpredictable. Presently there are five English storybook projects in various stages of development.

When a storybook manuscript is submitted for publication, several brethren are assigned to evaluate the material. Some of the questions they need to answer are, "What lessons are being taught?" and "How are the church and the home portrayed?" After the preliminary review, the manuscript is distributed to several families to read and review. They share their comments on readability, overall content, age level, and the amount of interest it would have for their family. This step has been a definite aid in improving the final product.

After the reviews are complete, an editor is chosen. The editor's goal is to polish the manuscript to make the story more reader friendly and to address any weak areas the reviewers have noted. When the editor is finished, the adjustments are shared with the author for final evaluation. Another early step is to decide on the amount of artwork and assign an artist to the project. The final goal is to have a book that is doctrinally sound, attractive, and salable.

The next step is to have a copy editor comb the manuscript. Also at this time the publishing department begins working on cover designs and layout. In an effort to have a competitive selling price, the department solicits quotations from various printers.

Several years ago the need for Spanish storybooks was brought to our at-

tention. Since then "Samantha's Gift" has been translated into Spanish and should be available soon. "Pablo Perseveres" a manuscript written in Spanish, is also being worked on.

Continue to pray that, through the effects of sound literature; we "might by all means save some."

Brother Dwight For the Publication Board



First Things (Part 2)

The Priority of Spiritual Interest

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

"What do you mean? You don't have insurance?" the caller from the insurance company asked incredulously. "What are you going to do if you wreck into a busload of people tomorrow? How are you going to pay for something like that?" Her voice rose to a pitch that fairly tingled in my ear. The world is afraid. They do not recognize the providence of God. Even though God cares for helpless lilies and sparrows, they do not realize that God could provide for them if they also were in such a dependent state.

Worldly men are highly interested in solutions. They pursue high-technology genetic research, hoping to find the key to longer and better life. They install sophisticated home-security systems and spend enormous sums of money for insurance packages that promise security for virtually any calamity. They want to deal with their worries in a manly fashion.

Jesus knew that Christians have those same tendencies. But He calls us to give priority to spiritual life: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Seeking kingdom interests first puts all other cares, however valid, into proper perspective.

Devotions must come first. Here is communication with God. Earthly cares evaporate. The fog of earthly interests is lifted. Here your trajectory is set for the day. Young people do not neglect your devotions!

Families must come first. How can parents expect to make the truth attractive to their children if they do not create quality family time? Parents' priorities are misplaced if they rush the family through worship or talk excessively on the telephone or work overtime to make ends meet while the growing boys go unsupervised. When parents create a secure atmosphere, emotional levels equalize and the cares of the day evaporate in the sense of

belonging fostered around the supper table. If the kingdom is to grow, godly parents must give time and attention to their families.

Collective worship with God's people must come first. Our spiritual focus is sharpened and our own spiritual needs are met as we gather with the brotherhood. Even on a busy Wednesday evening, we attend prayer meeting. God is able to do far more for us simply by answering our supplications than if we stay home and try to fix our problems ourselves.

The needs of others must come first. As we make spiritual interests our priority, we will see spiritual needs. Businessmen and farmers need to make money, but the man of God is more interested in his customer's soul than in his money. Does the scene of the Good Samaritan flash through your mind when you motor past a stranded traveler, or do you stop and lend aid?

Remember Solomon. He asked for an understanding heart, and God added riches and honor. God can add "all these things" if you seek His kingdom first.

Brother John

PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Pray for our Christian day schools. We believe that "the education of our children in a wholesome Christian environment is a Biblical imperative." Pray for the approximately three hundred teachers and three hundred board members directly involved in this work.

Pray for the Curriculum Committee in giving oversight to the production of school textbooks. This work includes assisting Rod and Staff and directing some EMP projects. Pray that the rising generation will have a continuing vision for a Bible-based curriculum.

Pray for those who are serving in foreign mission work. Be specific in your prayers. Select a family and pray for them every day for one week.

Broaden your interest by contacting them by letter or by phone. Thank the Lord for our older faithful brethren and sisters. Their lives are links to the past and worthy examples to follow. May God bless them with courage and endurance to the end.