

## Preface

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### It Is a Matter of Life and Death!

I received the following anonymous article over the internet—probably from my mother or a friend. It contained these words and a poem:

When an old man died in the geriatric ward of a small hospital near Tampa, Florida, it was believed that he had nothing left of any value. Later, when the nurses were going through his meager possessions, they found this poem. Its quality and content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital. One nurse took her copy to Missouri. The old man's sole bequest to posterity has since appeared in the Christmas edition of the News Magazine of the St. Louis Association for Mental Health. . . . And this little old man, with nothing left to give to the world, is now the author of this "anonymous" poem winging across the Internet. Now, here is the poem entitled "Crabby Old Man":

What do you see nurses?.....What do you see?  
 What are you thinking.....when you're looking at me?  
 A crabby old man,.....not very wise,  
 Uncertain of habit.....with faraway eyes?

Who dribbles his food.....and makes no reply.  
 When you say in a loud voice....."I do wish you'd try!"  
 Who seems not to notice.....the things that you do.  
 And forever is losing.....A sock or shoe?

Who, resisting or not.....lets you do as you will,  
 With bathing and feeding.....The long day to fill?  
 Is that what you're thinking?.....Is that what you see?  
 Then open your eyes, nurse.....you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am.....As I sit here so still,  
 As I do at your bidding,.....as I eat at your will.  
 I'm a small child of Ten.....with a father and mother,  
 Brothers and sisters.....who love one another

A young boy of Sixteen.....with wings on his feet  
 Dreaming that soon now.....a lover he'll meet.  
 A groom soon at Twenty.....my heart gives a leap.  
 Remembering, the vows.....that I promised to keep.

At Twenty-Five, now.....I have young of my own.  
 Who need me to guide.....And a secure happy home.  
 A man of Thirty.....My young now grown fast,  
 Bound to each other.....With ties that should last.

At Forty, my young sons.....have grown and are gone,  
 But my woman's beside me.....to see I don't mourn.  
 At Fifty, once more,.....Babies play 'round my knee,  
 Again, we know children.....My loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me.....My wife is now dead.  
 I look at the future.....I shudder with dread.  
 For my young are all rearing.....young of their own.  
 And I think of the years.....And the love that I've known.

I'm now an old man.....and nature is cruel.  
 Tis jest to make old age.....look like a fool.  
 The body, it crumbles.....grace and vigor, depart.  
 There is now a stone.....where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass.....A young guy still dwells,  
 And now and again.....my battered heart swells  
 I remember the joys.....I remember the pain.  
 And I'm loving and living.....life over again.

I think of the years.....all too few.....gone too fast.  
 And accept the stark fact.....that nothing can last.  
 So open your eyes, people.....open and see.  
 Not a crabby old man. Look closer.....see.....ME!!

This poem is a stark description of one old man who details the experience of life and death in such a way that the readers can see what life is all about and how quickly it passes. No matter what culture one lives in, one can feel the passing of time, the passing of influence, and the shrinking of boundaries. That is what life does to us as we get older. For this old, man life had shrunk to a hospital room, filled only with loneliness. Yet, the memories of life filled the emptiness; and he wanted his nurses to see and know that he was a person who had singular value, that he was not “just another old person on the way to the grave.”

Each of us will go through many of the experiences described in this short poem. We, too, will experience the joys and sadness that come from living in this world. We, too, will know the presence and the absence of loved ones. We, too, may need a stranger's care and pray that they will see us as a person, not just as another “crabby old man.”

Life is about living. That truth should be so elementary that we should not have to say it. However, many people do not seem to grasp

this truth. They think that life is about playing, about working, about making money, about gaining power, about this or that. However, life is, in its simplest reality, about living. The sooner we understand this truth, the better we will live. Life is not about accomplishment; rather, it is about relationship. This emphasis upon relationship began with our absolute dependency upon relationship as a helpless infant.

### **Our Limited Awareness and Perspective**

Life begins with the limited awareness of about one meter and includes only relationship with those who are close to you (literally). Then, as one matures, the perceptual world becomes larger along with our development of perspective. Still, we must learn that life is not about largeness but about persons who impact our lives: First, parents! Then, relatives and close friends of the family, followed by church members, school personnel, classmates! All of these persons begin to influence who and what we become. However, we must never forget that what truly matters about life is relational, not educational. True, we must learn (education) to be functional in society. However, if we are to be successful in life, we must learn to be relational. We must learn that it is through our relationships with others that life takes on liveliness. Mr. “Crabby Old Man” reminds us of the importance of personhood and relationships. If we are to minister successfully in the twenty-first century, we must learn this truth anew. It has never changed, but we seem to have lost it along the way in our desire for success and accomplishment. It seems to me to be the one great gift of post-modernity—that we return to relational significance as opposed to status and position. When we come to the end of our days, our status will not come to encourage us, nor will our position in life, but only our friends.

### ***Lessons Learned about Friendship***

The time spent together here at TTGST has been marked by wonderful days of friendship. Yes, it is true that we have had to work diligently to make our school what it has become; for greatness does not come without a price. However, it has been formed in the midst of our working together as friends. It will not be the memory of the greatness of TTGST that I carry with me into my retirement years, but it will be the memory of my friends alongside whom I have labored. When we began, there were eight of us, together with President Sang-Bok David Kim. More were added in the first two years. Several faculty members joined our school following my recommendation to the President as Dean. Naturally, I feel a close bond with them. I wanted faculty members who were

not only theologically conservative but also academically brilliant. It was also important that they be relational, not just knowledge-oriented persons. Otherwise, they would be ineffective as professors.

Going back a “few” years, I remember the days I spent in seminary—first at Midwestern Baptist in Kansas City, then at New Orleans Baptist. I was a ferocious competitor for top grades. I graduated Summa Cum Laude; but, for all of the hard work and sacrifice, I do not remember much that I gained from that accomplishment. However, I do have some precious friendships formed during those days: Frank Fain, Mark Bushor, Rick Harms, and a professor named Ferris Jordan. We still are in contact with one another and try to get together whenever possible. I shall remember seminary because of them, not because of the grades or what I learned. Of course, I do not intend to minimize the valuable tools that I gained from seminary studies—tools that have served me (and my students and parishioners) well through the years. There were other significant persons along the way in both seminary and college. These friendships are what I remember, not the education that I received.

The same thing can be said about every aspect of life—in sports, in work, in church. As a matter of fact, in the most important area of life, it is not what you know but whom you know. It is not how much you know about the Bible or Jesus Christ that makes you a child of God. It is Whom you know—Jesus Christ. Christianity is first and foremost relational. Without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. In the second most important area of life—the family, it is not how much you know about your spouse that is important; rather, it is the quality of relationship that determines the success and stability of your marriage. The same can be said about relationships with parents and children.

Unfortunately, I lived many years thinking of myself as largely a failure before I learned this truth. I finally learned that success was not to be determined by the size of the church, the size of the class, the number of persons who read your book, or the size of your bank account. Rather, it is determined by the lasting relationships formed and continuing to endure over the years of life. From that perspective, I realized I was and am a success because of all of the loved ones and friends. It takes us most of our lives to learn what is important. If we are fortunate, we find out soon enough to enjoy this truth before we alienate those same persons because of our obsession with greatness and success. If not, we may actually lose the most precious part of our life and end up being truly alone when we face those last days of life.

### **Some Final Words of Gratitude**

I want to thank some people for all that they have done to make my wonderful life possible. I thank my father for being such a passionate person, a preacher who taught me to love preaching and to preach powerfully. He was more than a preacher and a father. He was my counselor and my friend. I want to thank my mother who taught me the importance of striving for excellence and the desire to excel in all areas of life. I also want to thank other family members who continued to believe in me and encourage me in spite of my foolishness in childhood.

Then, I must acknowledge the special honor of working with some special presidents here at TTGST. The first president was Dr. Sang-Bok David Kim, whom I believe to be the best example of a Christian gentleman I have ever met. His Christ-like character is impeccable, and his leadership is unquestioned. I served four years as Dean for President Kenneth M. Meyer and found him to be the best decision maker I have ever met. His skill as an administrator is beyond reproach. Then, these past four years, I have had the privilege of working for Rev. Yong-Jo Ha, who is beyond doubt one of the great visionary leaders of our day. He is a minister who works tirelessly and sets an example for all of us to follow. What a fantastic privilege to serve with them!

I also want to thank Dr. Hyung-Ja Lee for giving me a wonderful place to serve God. Her vision, her strength, and her energy in founding the Torch Center for World Mission and TTGST reveal the greatness of her soul and her love for Jesus Christ. Because of her, I have had the privilege of serving in some of the greatest churches in Korea: Chungdong Cheil Church (First Methodist Church), Saemunan Church, Hallelujah Christian Church, Torch Trinity Community Church, Somang Presbyterian Church (Apeujeong), and Kangnam Central Baptist Church. These past twelve years have been the highlight of my life as I have been able to be a part of the lives of persons from all around the world. May God continue to bless and use her as she discovers new and exciting ways to influence the world for Jesus Christ. May God continue to bless and use TTGST to prepare the next generation of Christian leaders.

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