

# THE COST OF NEGLECT (1)

*Mike McDaniel*

I read about a Detroit man who couldn't find his house. He had gone to the right address, but all he found was an empty lot. Completely baffled, he asked the *Detroit Free Press* to help him figure out what was going on. A newspaper reporter learned that not only was the house gone, but the deed to the empty lot was in someone else's name. What had happened? For one thing, a few years had passed since the homeowner had left the city without providing a forwarding address. In addition, he had failed to make arrangements for someone to keep the property in repair. So the house was torn down because a city ordinance called for the removal of neighborhood eyesores.

The homeowner's neglect illustrates the practical truth of Proverbs 24:30-34, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man." Neglect leads to loss. This principle also applies to our daily walk with God. If we neglect our times of prayer and fellowship with the Lord, our relationship with Him will deteriorate, and we will no longer experience His favor. We would never want that to happen, but we allow it when we become preoccupied with anything that comes between us and Christ. The same thing occurs in our other relationships.

## **(1) WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT OUR FRIENDSHIPS.**

No one has too many friends, and true friendship is of great value. Probably every day, there are opportunities for making and strengthening relationships with others. A stranger today could be a brother tomorrow. Deuteronomy 13:6 speaks of the friend "which is as thine own soul." Friendship means confidence, trusting, sharing, respecting, helping, and loving. A true friend loves me in spite of my shortcomings. As Solomon wrote in Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." If you are waiting until I am perfect before becoming my friend, you'll have to wait a long time because we all have faults; but a friend accepts and loves me in spite of them.

A true friend will not forsake another during a crisis. The prodigal son likely had many so-called friends until his money ran out; but, when his money was gone, so were his friends. Solomon speaks of "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). A fair-weather friend is by our side as long as there's smooth sailing, but when the going gets rough, he departs. A true friend respects my convictions; he may not agree with them, but he respects them.

Out of the horrors of war come many true stories of sacrificial friendship. One such story tells of two friends in World War I, who were inseparable. They had enlisted together, trained together, were shipped overseas together, and fought side by side in the trenches. During an attack, one of the men was critically wounded in a field filled with barbed wire obstacles, and he was unable to crawl back to his foxhole. The entire area was under a withering enemy crossfire, and it was suicidal to try to reach him. Yet his friend decided to try. Before he could get out of his own trench, his sergeant yanked him back inside and ordered him not to go. "It's too late. You can't do him any good, and you'll only get yourself killed." When the officer turned his back, instantly the man was

gone after his friend. A few minutes later, he staggered back, mortally wounded, with his friend, now dead in his arms. The sergeant was both angry, and deeply moved. "What a waste," he blurted out. "He's dead and you're dying. It just wasn't worth it." With almost his last breath, the dying man replied, "Oh, yes, it was, Sarge. When I got to him, the only thing he said was, "I knew you'd come, Jim!" He knew he would not neglect him. One of the true marks of a friend is that he is there when there is every reason for him not to be, when to be there involves a cost of great sacrifice. We should not neglect our friendships.

## ***(2) WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRISTIAN FRIENDS.***

The public and private occasions when we can be together to share interests, to share laughter, and to show affection are blessings from God. I realize that even the most fun-loving person you know needs some time to be alone. But we also realize that opportunities will soon be gone. Faces we remember from past times are not seen among us any more. Their cherished voices and pleasant laughter are absent now. We can deprive ourselves of so much by refusing to be a part.

Fellowship is that which draws the body of Christ together in beautiful harmony and love. Peter commands that "we love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). Jesus says that love for each other is the way others will know that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). There is no other bond so strong as the bond Christians have through Jesus Christ our Lord. We can have that bond only through fellowship with one another. But there are those who will arrive at services long after they have started, sit uncomfortably through the services, and then are gone immediately with the last amen. Some may not ever know others who are members of the same congregation. What the prophet Haggai said in Haggai 1:7 is appropriate. He chastised the people of his time for their lax attitude and challenged them with the authority of God. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:7). Life is too short to neglect fellowship with Christian friends.

# **THE COST OF NEGLECT (2)**

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## ***(3) WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT TO FORGIVE OTHERS.***

Sometimes it happens that someone will get upset about something and let a grudge fester within them for months and even years. A grudge is a feeling of deep-seated resentment or ill will. If one holds a grudge he will be reluctant to practice forgiveness as he should. Without being willing to forgive, we cannot expect to be forgiven by God. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt. 6:14-15). If I am prone to hold grudges, I cannot walk in the steps of Jesus who prayed for His enemies even while on the cross. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Lk. 23:34). The Bible teaches that problems between brethren are to be taken care of quickly. "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26-27). "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt. 5:23-24).

Two brothers who lived on adjoining farms got into a major conflict. It was the first serious problem they had had in 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch. Then their relationship fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference. It finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence. One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days to work," he said. "Perhaps you have a few small jobs here and there." "Yes," said the older brother, "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor; in fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and now there is a creek between us. Well he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence — an eight-foot fence — so I won't have to see his place anymore. That ought to cool him down!" The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you." The carpenter worked hard all that day, measuring, sawing, nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished the job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge — a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all, and the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming across, his hand outstretched. "You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done!" The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. "No wait! Stay a few days. I've got a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but, I have many more bridges to build." Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Let us build bridges, not fences. Time is too short and life too precious to be ruined by unchristian attitudes. We should not neglect to forgive others.

#### ***(4) WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT OUR FAITHFUL SPOUSE.***

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Thomas Carlyle lived from 1795 until 1881. He was a Scot essayist and historian. During his lifetime, he became one of the world's greatest writers. But he was a human and humans make mistakes. On October 17, 1826, Carlyle married his secretary, Jane Welsh. She was an intelligent, attractive, and somewhat temperamental daughter of a well-to-do doctor. They had their quarrels and misunderstandings, but still loved each other dearly. After their marriage, Jane continued to serve as his secretary. Being a hard worker, Carlyle became so absorbed in his writings that he let Jane continue working for several weeks after she became ill. She had cancer, and it was one of the slow growing kind. Finally, she became confined her bed. Although Carlyle loved her dearly, he seldom found time to stay with her long. He was very busy at his work. When Jane died. They carried her to the cemetery for the service. The day was miserable, it was raining hard and the mud was deep. Following the funeral, Carlyle went back to his home. He went up the stairs to Jane's room and sat down in the chair next to her bed. He sat there thinking about how little time he had spent with her and wishing so much he had a chance to do it differently. Noticing her diary on a table beside the bed, he picked it up and began to read. Suddenly, he seemed shocked. There on one page she had written a single line. "Yesterday he spent an hour with me, and it was like heaven; I love him so." Then Carlyle turned the page in the diary. There he noticed some written words that broke his heart. "I've listened all day to hear his steps in the hall, but now it's late so I guess he won't come today." Carlyle read a little more in the book, then he threw it down and

ran out of the house. Some of his friends found him at the grave, his face buried in the mud. His eyes red from weeping. Tears continued to roll down his cheeks. He repeated over and over again, "If I had only known, if I had only known." But it was too late. She was dead. After Jane's death, Carlyle made little attempt to write again. His historian said he lived another fifteen years, "weary, bored, and a partial recluse." We must not wait until it's too late. Give our loved ones the times and love we can give now. One day it will be too late.

#### ***(5) WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.***

James 4:8, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you..." The farther we are from the Devil, the closer we are to God. At the same time you are resisting the Devil, you should be moving closer to God. We draw nigh to God by first obeying the gospel and then by a life of study and prayer, by faithfulness in worship, by seeking to tell others about Jesus and by a continuous growth in godliness. What a great blessing it is for Christians to draw close to Him. This is possible because all Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:5). "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22). It is clear that God desires to be near his children. We must not neglect Him. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (Ps. 145:18).

Is there such a thing as a superstar Christian who is so close to God or so godly that he can take time off in his relationship with God? The idea sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? It's absurd to think that our walk with God is anything but continual, everyday, all-the-time. But in reality, don't we sometimes go our own way and neglect our fellowship with Him? This principle has a parallel in the world of sports. Grant Hill, a superstar professional basketball player, made this comment about his off-season practice schedule: "I just didn't feel that I could take a week off. When I take one day off, I feel like I'm lacking a bit." If we as Christians "take time off" from our relationship with God, we too will be "lacking a bit." We will miss the guidance of His Word and the fellowship we experience in prayer. We will be more likely to forget our priorities and drift into forbidden areas that could lead to our downfall.

No matter how long you've been a child of God through faith in Christ, you need to guard your relationship with Him. Whether we are speaking of weekly worship or daily devotions, it's a continual relationship. Above all, we must not neglect our Heavenly Father. The cost of neglect is just too great!