

SOME MAINTENANCE REQUIRED

N. T. Lesson: I Corinthians 6:12-20 (Glorify God in Body and Spirit)

Key Lesson: Romans 4:13-25 (God's Promise Realized Through Faith)

Repetition is a fact of life from which there is no escape. Many things have to be done over and over, again and again.

When we purchase a car from the dealership, we are given “**a maintenance schedule.**” They want us to pay special attention to the upkeep and care of our car. This schedule could include regular tune-ups, changing or adding fluids, rotating the tires and having a front end alignment. **Failure** to heed these instructions may **cancel** our warranty or reduce our car's performance.

Another thing that never ends is household chores. With those many assigned duties around the house, someone has to find the time to complete them. Chores like washing clothes, cleaning house, preparing meals are daily tasks. These all require dedication and skill. Most things in life require **some maintenance**, upkeep or work.

Likewise, the Scriptures remind us that our spiritual work is never done. Paul wanted the Philippians to “keep on working with fear and trembling to complete (their) salvation” (Phil. 2:12). He helped them to see how God was at work in them enabling them both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil 1:12-13). The Jews started persecuting Jesus because he did good works and healed on the Sabbath. Jesus explained to them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (John 5:17).

In the course of their conversation at a dinner party, Albert Einstein's young table guest asked the white-haired scientist, “What kind of work do you do?” “I devote myself to the study of physics,” Einstein replied. The girl looked at him in astonishment. “You mean to say you **study** physics at your age,” she exclaimed. “I finished mine a year ago.” Einstein never stopped working at what he did.

In today's message, I want to share with you three essential areas of Christian life that should be maintained. These are: **(1) Maintaining our body, (2) Maintaining our faith, and (3) Maintaining our Church.**

I. MAINTAINING OUR BODY. Baseball pitcher Dizzy Dean, on being enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1953 said, "I want to thank the good Lord for giving me a strong right arm, a strong back and a weak mind." No matter what you've been given, it still comes from God! Use those attributes for God's glory.

The human body is a wonderful creation of God. We should **maintain** it the best we can. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Regardless of the condition of our health, we must glorify God in our body.

The human heart is the most wonderful pump in the world. It keeps the blood moving through our bodies continuously during life. It is no larger than a man's fist, yet it pumps more than four quarts of blood to the body a minute. It beats from two to three billion times in an average life. It is automatic and can repair itself. This pumping goes on without stopping day or night, as long as we live. It must go on, because the body tissues cannot live without a constant supply of fresh blood. The heart, like other muscles, works because it receives impulses from nerves. The impulses that make it beat come from nerve cells and fibers which are complete in the heart, with no outside connection. Thus our heart is truly automatic. Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia, 1964, Volume 6, p. 357.

With such a magnificent muscle pumping in our chest, doesn't it make sense to take care of it along with the rest of our body? Our best wisdom would have to agree. We must try to **maintain our health** with the proper diet, exercise, rest and lots of laughter. We read in Proverbs: "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). More than that, we need to take care of our bodies in order to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

II. MAINTAINING OUR FAITH. From Hebrews 11, we learn that **“to have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of things we cannot see”** (Hebrews 11:1). In Romans, we read about Abraham’s faith. He believed what God said when God told him that he would become the father of many nations. (Romans 4:18). No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised. “Therefore his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.”(Romans 4:22). Paul further explains that we will also be accepted because of **our faith** in God “when we **believe** in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Romans 4:24-25).

The promise that all families of the earth would be blessed in his descendants was given to Abraham when he was an old man. His wife, Sarah, had always been childless; and now, when Abraham was one hundred years old, and when Sarah was ninety years old (Genesis 17:17), there came the promise that a son would be born to them. It seemed a promise that was beyond any hope of fulfillment, for Abraham was long past the age of begetting, and Sarah long past the age of bearing a son. But Abraham took God at his word. It was this **faith** that was accounted to Abraham as righteousness and put him into a right relationship with God. (Romans 4:22).

The Jewish Rabbis clearly taught that “What (was) written of Abraham (was) written also of his children.” This meant that **any promise** that God made to Abraham extended to his children. Therefore, if Abraham’s willingness to take God at his word brought him into **a right relationship with God, so it will be with us**. This reminds me of an old hymn we sang in my youth, **“Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory! O glorious victory that overcomes the world.”**

The essence of **Abraham’s faith** was his belief that God could make the impossible possible. So long as we believe that everything depends on our efforts, we are bound to be pessimists. When we realize that it is not our efforts, but God’s grace and power which matter, then we become optimists, because we are bound to believe that with God nothing is impossible. We must do whatever it takes to **maintain our faith** and make it grow.

I can attest to this from own personal experience. After four decades of pastoral ministry in five Episcopal appointments, I must say that God has truly blessed me and my family. Do we have any regrets concerning the road we have traveled? Absolutely not! Would we do it all over again knowing it required complete trust in God? Most assuredly! Experience has taught us that trusting God brings enormous blessings even when things may seem impossible.

III. MAINTAINING OUR CHURCH. Baptismal Covenant III found in the United Methodist hymnal contains a clear and concise description of the Church. It reads: *“The Church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time, for the conduct of worship and the due administration of God’s Word and Sacraments, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world. All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies.”*

There are numerous “means of grace” – channels through which God helps us to develop in our Christian life. These include **corporate worship, Bible study, Holy Communion, personal and community prayer, fasting**, among others. We all need spiritual help, and we find that in Church among experienced Christian friends. Following Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, about three thousand converts were baptized. Then in one short verse from Acts 2:42, we learn that the early Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Practicing these disciplines helped them nurture their faith. They were in one accord in their commitment and devotion to God.

A little girl asked her new neighbor, “Do you go to Church?” “Yes, do you?” the new neighbor responded. “We’re Methodist, and I go with my Mother every Sunday.” Doesn’t your daddy go, too?” “No.” “Isn’t he a Methodist?” “I’m not sure. Mother said he’s a Seventh-Day Absentist.” I don’t know about Seventh-Day Absentists, but I think there are many First-Day Absentists around, meaning a lot of people don’t regularly attend worship.

God wants us to build up the Church. That can be done in two ways: by **bringing** people into the Church and by **encouraging** those who are already here. Have you invited anyone to Church lately? This needs to be done frequently, not just for Christmas, Easter or some children’s program.

I am reminded of a man who asked his neighbor, “Why don’t you come and have a round of golf with me on Sunday morning?” The neighbor replied, “Oh, no, I couldn’t do that. I go to Church every Sunday.” “Well,” said the first neighbor, “I don’t know about your Church, but you can keep it. I have asked you to play golf a half dozen times, but you have never invited me to your Church.” Could it be that some people just might come to Church if we would ask them? We can build up the Church by **inviting** others.

We must also build up the Church by **encouraging** one another in the faith. People need encouragement in some form or fashion. In Acts 4, we read of Joseph, whose surname was **Barnabas** (which means son of encouragement). Barnabas was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, who possessed a field, and he sold it. He brought the proceeds and gave it to the apostles. Those early Christians remembered the needs of others and were always ready to help. **Prayer** was important to them as was **their witness**, but it all culminated in their **love** for each other.

As Christians, we should encourage each other through our words and deeds. We can encourage each other with words like: “**Good to see you! How have you been? I’ve missed you! I know it’s tough. You’re in my prayers. Thanks for the card. You were so thoughtful.**” These comments and others offer encouragement. They promote love and good will. Someone once said, “If you want the Church to go on then go to Church.”

A collector of rare books ran into a friend of his who had just thrown away an old Bible that had been in his family for generations. He happened to mention that some man by the name of **Guten** something had printed it. “**Gutenberg?**” the collector asked. “Yes, that was the guy’s name.” “I believe you’ve made an awful mistake. You possibly threw away one of the first books ever printed. That book was probably worth close to a million dollars.” He replied, “No, it wouldn’t have brought that much because some guy named **Luther** had scribbled all over it.”

Many times we don't realize the worth of something until it's gone. That can be true of a family member or a friend. That is also true of our body, our faith, and our Church. All of these are extremely valuable. They all **require some maintenance**. Let's make sure we **maintain** them well.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we thank you for giving us a chance to serve in your Kingdom. Cause us to realize that it is by your grace and power that things get accomplished. Help us to see that with you nothing is impossible. Enlarge our faith and use us to advance your cause in this present world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn No. 558 "We Are the Church"

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