

An Ounce Of Prevention

Joe Slater

To encourage sales, a certain aftermarket filter maker ran TV ads of a mechanic repairing a vehicle that hadn't had regular oil and filter changes. "Pay me now, or pay me later," he quipped. A few dollars now for oil and a filter might save thousands of dollars for rebuilding a worn-out engine.

Your doctor encourages you to eat a healthy diet, get adequate rest, and exercise in order to maintain health and prevent disease. Just as with automobiles, prevention is always better and easier than treatment.

That principle applies to spiritual things too! Learning and obeying God's word today will prevent untold debacles later. No wonder the wise King Solomon exhorted, "*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Waiting until the mess is made and then cleaning it up might well prove to be difficult and painful.

How many marriages have been ruined and families destroyed because those involved didn't know God's word (or knew it but didn't heed it)? A bit of maintenance might have prevented serious issues, but now the damage is done. "If only someone had taught me!" "If only I had listened!"

Eli, Israel's high priest, neglected to use that ounce of prevention by failing to restrain his ungodly sons (1 Samuel 3:14). They corrupted the worship of God and committed fornication with the woman who served at the Tabernacle. By the time he finally objected to their vile behavior, they simply ignored him (2:23-25). Their sin resulted their own deaths, Israel's defeat and capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, and Eli's own death.

Trust and obey God's word now! Teach everyone you can to do the same. That ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure!

God Of The Second Mile

"Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matthew 5:41 NAU).

Jesus exhorts those who might be conscripted to serve the military for one mile to offer to go farther, even two miles. The purpose for conscripting a Jew might be to carry a load, or provide water, or lead a horse, or carry a cross for a condemned criminal as Simon did for Jesus. Jesus realizes the impact the second mile mentality would have on others. Going beyond the call of duty has always been a mark of greatness. But to do that to the glory of the Lord is even more impactful for good.

I titled this "God of the Second Mile" because Jesus never asked anyone to do anything He would not do Himself. Did He need to be baptized because He had sinned? No, of course not. He never sinned, but He did it because God commanded it, regardless of its purpose. Was He morally obligated to die for us on the cross? No, He voluntarily gave Himself up for us.

Jesus said the blessings of heaven will be like a master blessing his faithful servant. *"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master'"* (Matthew 25:21). When Jesus stalled His trip to Bethany when Lazarus was ill, Lazarus died, and when Jesus arrived, Martha, in a disappointing tone, said that had Jesus been there her brother would not have died (John 11:21). She believed He could heal him. But Jesus wanted her to see He was willing to do far more than that for which she had hoped. He raised him from the dead.

Paul burst forth in exaltation of God and said, *"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us"* (Ephesians 3:20). Our God is a God of the second mile. Someone said, "Grace is getting what we don't deserve, and mercy is not getting what we deserve." Someone added, "Blessings is when He is generous with both." Praise be to our Lord for His grace and mercy!

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

Listen Before You Pray

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Suppose a person loves to pray but neglects to read or hear God's word. His prayers will soon become flat, stale, and unprofitable. Why? Because no conversation can be very lively if it's all one-sided.

Have you ever spoken to God in prayer, but you didn't let God speak to you first? You failed to read His word regularly or hear the Scriptures. You gave without taking in, and then you ran dry.

Any conversation that is one-sided will become boring. Suppose you invite a friend to your house, but they you do all the talking. You may ask a question, but you never wait for your friend to answer. You never let your friend suggest a new topic or even get a word in edgewise.

Let's consider something else. Suppose your friend is actually smarter and wiser than you are. Wouldn't you want your friend to speak and even offer guidance?

God has condescended to speak to us; we ought to listen eagerly to what He has to say. It is generally best for us to begin with hearing God's voice, to let Bible reading come before praying. However, this is not a rule without exceptions. There may be times when it would be better to speak to our heavenly Father at once. We are all children in the eyes of God. If a child has done wrong, it may be wise to run immediately to the Father, even before He has said anything to us, and say, "Father, I have sinned." That's what the prodigal son did when he had repented.

Generally, listening to God first makes our prayer life better and more profitable.

--Danny Tunnell (Miami, OK) via *Old Paths*