

Today we continue reading through the letter to the Ephesians which is found in the New Testament. Letters in the Bible are also called Epistles.

The letter to the Ephesians is written by Paul or maybe a close associate of his. He is writing to a diverse Christian community living in a port city alongside the Aegean Sea.

Paul writes this letter to give them instructions about living the Christian faith. This is a letter which is rich in so many ways.

In the text we are about to read, we will hear guidance about what prayer can be like in one's life. We will get an outline of what it means to live fully in Christ.

Letarshia reads Ephesians 3:14-21

Kerry Patterson describes an incident in his life which I think gives a good description of what God's abundance looks like.

Hear Patterson tell it in his own words:

“When I headed off to a junior college in Rexburg, Idaho, I was woefully unprepared. For starters, I had no idea how cold it can be. There are days in Rexburg when your nostrils freeze shut just from breathing.

The light jacket I wore because it was the only jacket I owned put me in danger of frostbite whenever I ventured outdoors. So, I finally broke down and bought a thick coat with all of the food money my parents had given me for the semester. In short, I traded cold for hunger.

Not being one to suffer silently, I wrote my parents and asked for more money. Mom feared that I would waste any additional cash on dating and junk food.

So, she sent me a check for forty dollars and insisted that I purchase a cafeteria punch card that could be used to buy dinner for, hopefully, a couple of months. Students who lived in the dorms and ate in the cafeteria were able to eat all the food they could eat. But I did not live in the dorms.

My puny card granted me entrance to the facility. However, when I arrived at the end of the line, since I didn't live in the dorms, a cafeteria employee would take my paper card and punch out the price of each item I had selected—eventually reducing my card's value to zero.”

According to Patterson, “I quickly learned that if I bought a full dinner each day, the card wouldn't last until the end of the semester. Not even close. This turned dining into a tortuous, lonely affair. I couldn't sit next to the dorm kids. They would look at my solo scoop of mashed potatoes and ask why I didn't take more food.

“It's delicious!” they'd rave as they wolfed down a slab of meatloaf large enough to serve as a flotation device. So, I sat alone and ate crackers to supplement my mashed potatoes. For dessert, I sucked cinnamon from the cafeteria toothpicks.

After a couple of weeks of nursing my food card along, I fell into a routine. It centered on Molly, a farm girl from Rigby, Idaho, who now took classes at the junior college and worked at the cafeteria punching my card.

As Molly took inventory of my tray, she would ask me about my classes, encourage me to buy more food, and tease me about my losing weight.

“You look like your cells are dying,” she once told me. Molly never asked about my financial circumstances, but I could tell from the look in her eyes that we were now playing a game. She was the Red Cross volunteer and I was the refugee who had washed onto the shores of Rexburg, Idaho.

We played this game until my meager diet began to wear on both of us. One day, while serving a thick slice of chocolate pie to a regular dorm patron, Molly looked at me apologetically, as if somehow she was responsible for the inequality of capitalism. Later, when the pie returned with only a couple of bites removed she kicked the garbage can out of frustration at their waste.

Finally, a couple of weeks before the semester came to an end, I started loading more on my tray so I could make it through finals. I piled it on for several days without having the courage to examine my card. And here’s where it gets weird.

With each new food item I added to my tray, Molly seemed happier. In fact, she now tracked my intake with an odd flourish. “Take that!” she would shout as she punched my card.

Eventually, I pulled out my meal card to determine when my life would start turning ugly. To my surprise, a miracle had transpired. Molly had dutifully punched my waning card, but it still had several dollars left on it. How could that be?”

Patterson concludes, “As you’ve probably guessed, the farm girl from Rigby had wrought the miracle. The day I started loading more food on my tray, Molly started punching the air, and not my food ticket. Once I figured out the deception, I was extremely grateful, but said nothing.

The least I could do was to quietly accept Molly’s offering—even if it meant colluding to steal from the college. Eventually the semester ended, we went our separate ways, and Molly vanished from my life.

Years later, I paid back the school (a hundred times over), trying to make up for my criminal ways. Nevertheless, I still have a tender place in my heart for Molly, the selfless guardian angel who had risked expulsion on my behalf.”

Following and trusting in Christ is like coming into that cafeteria without enough money to pay for your food. Events happen in your life and you see no way out. Bad decisions are made, and you fear the pending consequences. Stressful situations arrive in your work or in your family and you fear what your future holds.

But placing trust in Christ means a belief that somehow and some way God through Christ is working something out for the good. It may not be what we want. We may not see the good in our lifetime. But ultimately placing faith in Christ is believing that somehow it will be alright.

So, we go forth in life as people in prayer. We pray for the wisdom to see what God is doing. We pray for the patience to trust for God to work it out in God’s time. We pray for faith to trust that it will be OK.

Trusting in God is like walking into a cafeteria without enough money to pay and somehow the right amount arrives.

May we all have the faith that God works through people like Molly to figure out a way to make it all work out. AMEN.

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-Patterson, Kerry, Vitalsmarts e-newsletter, Vol 16, Issue 30, July 25, 2018

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