

The “Thumbs-Up” Man

The “Thumbs-Up” Man

... And 30 Other Bible-Based Meditations

Roger Ellsworth and his family

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Purpose

My Coffee Cup Meditations are short, easy-to-read, engagingly presented devotions based on the Bible, the Word of God. Each reading takes a single idea or theme and develops it in a thought-provoking way so that you are inspired to consider the greatness of God, the relevance of the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and coming-again of Jesus, and are better equipped for life in this world and well prepared for the world to come.

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Dedication

Dedicated to the dear saints at
First Baptist Church, Greenfield, Tennessee

About This Book

This book is a combined effort, the result of the labors of the family of Roger and Sylvia Ellsworth. You may read more about them on page 141.

Each reading reflects the character of its author, so you will be able to enjoy a range of writing styles and tastes.

Under the title of each chapter, there is a note to tell you who the writer is.

We hope you will enjoy these Bible-based meditations. We would love to hear from you, so please send us a note to tell us what you think—which ones you liked most, and how they made a difference in your life or in the life of a family member, friend, or work associate. To reach us online, go to www.mycoffeecupmeditations.com/contact



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From God's Word, the Bible...

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



The “Thumbs-Up” Man

(A Reading from Roger)

It was a long time ago, but it is still firmly etched in my mind. What’s that? The image of meeting Lester Auten very early each weekday morning! He would be driving to his work in his old pickup truck and I would be driving to my study. I used to tease him about that truck. It had so many holes in it that I dubbed it a “see-through” truck.

The thing I most remember about those Monday-through-Friday meetings is not the sight of his beat-up pickup. It is rather what Pete—that’s what we called him—would do when he spotted me. He would smile and give me the thumbs-up sign. I never asked him about it. I never felt like I needed an explanation. I took his thumbs-up sign to mean: “Be encouraged! Everything is going to be okay!”

I know God is in control and that He makes no mistakes, but in my little, limited perspective, Pete left us much too soon. He died at age fifty-six on March 1, 1996. It was a crushing loss.

Pete was a good and godly man. He was a churchman.

He loved his church and was very concerned to protect her from apathy, heresy, and division. He had little patience with those who spoke ill of her or of her pastor.

Pete had no say over the date of his birth or the date of his death. But he sure had a lot to say about that dash between the two, and he said it very well.

I'm sure Pete had his critics and detractors, but I never heard anyone speak disparagingly of him. The men of his Bible class thought so highly of him that they re-named their class after his death. What did they call it? The Thumbs-Up Class!

Ask me today about Pete Auten, and I will say "Faithful friend and a joy forever."

It was the gospel of Christ that made Pete the man he was. He loved the gospel. In his younger years, he came to see the reality and the depth of his sins and that he was not in himself prepared to stand in the presence of the holy God. He also came to see that the Lord Jesus went to the cross of Calvary to receive the wrath of God in the place of sinners. Because Jesus received it, no wrath remains for all who repent of their sins and trust in Him and the work He did on that cross. Pete could joyfully sing John Newton's words:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

It fell to me to preach at Pete's funeral. I've had to do lots

of hard things in my years as a pastor, but that, I think, has to rank as the hardest of them all. In the sermon, I made mention of meeting Pete each weekday and of him smiling and giving me the thumbs-up sign. In my closing words, I expressed my firm conviction that I will, because of the glorious grace of Christ, see Pete again. I fully expect when I encounter him in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) to see him flash that familiar thumbs-up sign once again. And there everything will finally be okay. I will not be there because of anything good I have done, and he will not be there because of anything good he did. We will both be there because of the good Jesus did for us by His perfect life and atoning death.

-2-

From God's Word, the Bible...

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:19-20



The Terrible, Terrific Moment

(A Reading from Roger)

As a teenager, William R. Newell was so rebellious that he brought continual heartache to his parents. His father, a pastor, pleaded with R.A. Torrey, President of Moody Bible College, to accept his son as a student. Torrey refused. The father continued to plead, and Torrey finally agreed.

While he was at Moody, Newell encountered the Word of God in a new and powerful way and became a Christian. What did God's Word do for him? He gives us the answer in his well-known hymn *At Calvary*:

*By God's Word at last my sin I learned
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned.*

It was for Newell both a terrible and terrific moment. Terrible? Absolutely! It is a terrible thing to learn the truth about ourselves. And the truth is that we are all sinners, and

sin is an awesomely horrible thing. What is sin? It is refusing to conform to what God requires. It is refusing to live according to God's laws. It is thumbing our noses in the face of our Creator and saying, "We will not live they way You want us to live. We will live the way we want to live."

God is not only our Creator. He is also our Judge. We must all give account of ourselves to Him (Rom. 14:12; Heb. 9:27). If we stand before Him in our sins, He will most surely drive us from His presence.

For several years Newell had lived without regard to his sins or to the God that he was destined to meet. He had lived in "vanity and pride." But in that terrible moment when he was confronted by God's Word, he "trembled" at the law, God's law, that he had "spurned." To spurn something is to reject it with an attitude of contempt or disdain.

Imagine it! Going through life without knowing anything about God's laws or knowing about them and not caring! Then it hits you one day that this God is real, that you have to meet Him, and all your life you have been a "spurner." You go through the Ten Commandments, and you realize that you have broken each one again and again. You are a law-breaker who must stand before the law-giver. It's no wonder that Newell said he "trembled at the law" he had "spurned." How could he, a law-breaker, ever stand acceptably in the presence of the holy law-giver?

But Newell's terrible moment was also his terrific moment. When people realize that they are sinners and begin to tremble over their sins and the judgment to come, they are in a position to receive God's remedy for law-breakers. That remedy? It is Calvary, the place where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified.

By the grace of God, Newell came to understand that Jesus was not on that cross to pay for His own law-breaking because He, Jesus, never broke any of God's laws (1 John

3:5). He was there to receive the penalty for our law-breaking—eternal separation from God—so all who received Him would never have to pay that same penalty. What an astounding thing! On the cross, the law-giver took the penalty of law-breakers! And because Jesus took it, there is now no penalty for those who do as Newell did and turn to Christ.

In his hymn, Newell looks back over his life and expresses double amazement. He is amazed at how he had lived and amazed that there could be pardon for one who had lived as he had. Try to imagine the joy he felt when he penned these lines:

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary.*

In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the major character, Christian, came to the cross, gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing...

*Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss!*

The greatest of all knowledge is to know ourselves to be sinners. It will be terrible when we come to know that, but that knowledge will lead us on to that which is terrific indeed—salvation through Christ.

-3-

From God's Word, the Bible...

*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the
Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be
testified in due time...*

1 Timothy 2:5-6