

Be a Berean!

The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day. (Acts 17:11)

["Be a Berean" will regularly cover topics that arise during Lockport Alliance Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil—liftedup@lockportalliance.org—with questions or comments.]

"Claymation"

Frankie and Eddy make Claymation movies, then post them to YouTube. Just look under "chipthedip" and you'll be able to view some of their prodigious output! In order to make animate characters, they have to take hundreds of still photographs, each with minute incremental changes. Combined, these form a moving picture.

One day this winter they discovered the reverse gear! Instead of taking all the photographs necessary to show a character falling, then taking all the photographs necessary to show the character ascending--they found that you could take the "falling" photos, rearrange them in reverse order, and the character was jumping to the spot from which he'd just fallen!

When I was a boy, each of us had to endure a rite of passage in order to be fully accepted into 'the fraternity' on our street. Behind Kevin VanDusen's house was a little tree fort. You weren't a man on our street--you weren't anything at all--until you jumped out of the tree fort. From the ground, it looked so easy. But when you got in the tree, the ground looked about a mile away. I spent most of one summer looking down from the fort, frozen there by fear. Peter McDonough told me to just count to three and launch! I counted to three a million times that summer, but never launched. I counted to ten and never launched. I even counted to 7--Mickey Mantle's number--and never launched. The Pride of the Yankees I was not! I spent a miserable winter that year dwelling on my failure, ignominy, and shame.

But come spring, on the first day of Easter vacation, I launched. Soon I was demonstrating my prowess and giving advice to Norman Schueckler, who hadn't made the leap. I must have jumped a hundred times that summer. "Now watch me, Norman. Just count to three and launch, for heaven's sake. Don't be a wuss, Norman!"

Norman the wuss finally jumped. His Dad had a movie camera and one day, there was Mr. Schueckler behind VanDusen's house, taking a movie of Norman leaping out of the fort. We all went over to the Schuecklers' to watch it. Then Mr. Schueckler ran the projector in reverse, and it showed Norman bounding up into the sky, deftly landing in the doorway of the fort. We all thought it was the grandest thing ever! Norman, like Superman, could leap tall buildings in a single bound!

Each of us--the pastors and the people, the teachers and the taught, the leaders and the led--would do well each day to put the projector in reverse, to re-arrange our montage as we approach God. If, in your heart, your standing before God is predicated upon your church membership, or because you've been a good scout, then kick it into reverse, and back out the church door--or even the door of your prayer closet. Then count to three and re-enter as a sinner. We can come to God in no other way.

There was one door to the tabernacle--one way in. Upon entering, the very first thing encountered was the brazen altar. There the lamb was burnt to ashes to atone for sin, prefiguring the price God Himself would pay for my sin, for your sin. There was no progress toward the Presence of God unless and until this step--step one--was taken.

Jesus Christ *spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'*

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

As a Bible teacher, I encourage students to study God's Word; to pray; to serve, using the gifts God bestows to each one; to give--cold, hard cash; and to love, which is the culmination of them all, *for greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friends*. To impress this upon them, I have

them hold up their hands and envision the thumb--the indispensable digit--representing the Bible; and their fingers representing prayer, service, giving, and loving.

The Pharisee, no doubt, could hold up his hand in my class and enumerate his own righteousness: *'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess....'*

Once, while teaching this little checklist--and feeling quite smug because I had been studying my brains out, praying regularly, teaching not one but two classes, putting the envelope in the basket, and generally getting along with others--these words of Jesus Christ reared up in my heart:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...

When He spoke these words, they were in a different context, but He was speaking of sin. It occurred to me, as I stood there in class, hand extended in demonstration, that pride in my religious checklist was standing between me and God.

I shall always exhort students to practice those five essentials. But as I hold up the one hand, off to the other side is a hand to remind me of the first step toward God:

'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

For God's projector works both ways:

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Scripture cited: Luke 18:9-14; John 15:13; Mark 9:43

It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one of these Bible-based classes this week!

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"Approaching God: Lessons from the Inspired Prayers of Scripture" --Sunday at 9:45

"Jesus, the One and Only"--Sunday at 9:45

"Speak God's Word"--Sunday at 9:45