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HALFWAY UP THE MOUNTAIN

I have returned to the depths of word origins and discovered another word worthy of consideration: mediocre. In our English language, the word is defined in this way: Of only ordinary or moderate quality; barely adequate. [Webster's American Family Dictionary] It also may mean neither good nor bad; average; ordinary. [Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary] Whatever dictionary you find, the word does not mean — or even imply — any level of greatness whatsoever.

But the word's origins are even more telling. Mediocre comes from a combination of the Old French and Latin words *medius* [middle, or halfway] and *ocris* [jagged mountain]. The combination literally means halfway up the mountain. It was used to describe something [or someone] who was neither at the top of the mountain nor in the bottom of the valley. Whatever the application, it described something or someone who was somewhere firmly in the middle.

And that is mediocrity. It is neither high nor low, good nor bad, hard nor soft, hard-working nor lazy. It is neither. It is also how many in the current religious environment may be described. It is exactly the word that may be used of many in religious circles who are

unwilling to take a stand on any subject lest they offend even one person within their number and — GASP! — cause them to leave. So mediocre have churches and religious leaders become that one would be hard-pressed to know exactly what some churches teach or what their members believe due to the fact the message has been so "softened" as it would offend no one — not even the devil himself. If you doubt this, just listen to a prominent religious figure being interviewed on television; you will hear one of the finest examples of mediocrity that could be found. [If "fine" and "mediocrity" could be used together!]

But mediocrity, in the life of a Christian, is a dangerous thing. Mediocrity is the habit of far too many but is admitted by none. Mediocrity, by definition, is somewhere in the middle, and, therefore, whenever someone is chastised for not doing enough for the work of the Lord, they can always find someone doing less than they, thus justifying their behavior. What is missed in this is the reality that when we are mediocre, OF COURSE someone will always be

doing less than we — but there will always be just as many who are doing MORE. Somehow, those doing more are never noticed, or at least mentioned, in the course of a defense for their own mediocrity.

Mediocrity is not so much that we are somewhere in the middle, but whether or not we are satisfied being there. The babe in Christ who has committed himself or herself to growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord will, at some point, be in the middle, knowledge-wise — but they do not desire to remain there! The committed Christian will be in the middle only because it is on the path to something greater! The committed disciple of Jesus Christ travels through mediocrity and on to the pattern of his or her Master — Jesus Christ — for that is the peak of the Christian's life to which they all seek to attain. The committed Christian seeks to reach the top of the mountain and will not rest in the valley, or at the base camp.

In the Bible, we find the mediocre ones described as "lukewarm." The church at Laodicea was described by Jesus using that very term: "lukewarm"! [Is it proper for me to use an exclamation point after the word 'lukewarm'?] Jesus said to them, *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with*

eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." (Rev. 3:15-19)

There are a couple of things we should note from this short rebuke by Jesus. First, their lukewarm life was repulsive to Jesus, the head of the very church to which they claimed to be a part [though, because they were lukewarm, they may have denied it if they thought others might be offended]. Lukewarm is just not pleasing to Jesus, to the point He warns that He would "spew them out." I'll try not to get too graphic on this, but exactly why is it that we "vomit"? Isn't it usually because something does not agree with our body, and our body reacts in such a way as to rid itself of the offending item? That is what "lukewarmness" does to the body of Christ. As the head, He will not tolerate such behavior and He will spew us out if not corrected.

Which brings us to the second point: The solution was zeal! [I'm confident it is proper to put an exclamation point after the word "zeal"!] When Jesus rebuked the Laodiceans, he counselled them to "be zealous and repent." They needed to get off the fence, light a fire, climb the rest of the way up the mountain, choose sides — however you want to say it — and change their ways. They needed to stand for truth and stay there, or be rejected as a part of the body of Christ. A continued pattern of lukewarm behavior would result in the loss of their souls, for one cannot be saved outside the church — especially when it is the head of the Church who throws us out!

Zeal is a wonderful thing! The word itself, in the original Greek, is based on one whose root is found in boiling liquids. Have you ever

watched water boiling? Or lava? That is the picture of zeal — a boiling and bubbling that is hard to contain and which, if not contained, will literally spill over and affect everything around it. Zeal is what motivates the Christian to literally "bubble over" with enthusiasm because he or she knows the joy of salvation and the reward that awaits, and cannot contain himself or herself, telling everyone around them. Just like the lava that rolls down the mountainside, everything within the path of the zealous Christian will be affected. [But positively, in this case.] The zealous disciple will "be on fire" for the Lord and His work and, like those displays of volcanic eruptions, others will come to watch with fascination as to how he can have such strong convictions and zeal. Maybe some will even seek to find out how they, too, can have that joy and zeal and the church will grow.

Imagine a few circumstances that would have changed dramatically had the participants been merely mediocre...

1) What if Jesus decided that it was "good enough" to have simply taught, and declined to die on the cross for our sins?

2) What if Noah decided that building that ark was not really necessary?

3) What if God thought creating man was enough, and never came up with a plan for our salvation?

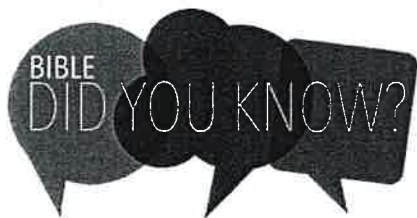
4) What if someone in your past decided to leave the teaching to "someone else"?

5) What if you decided the same?

Let us resolve to never be described as mediocre, especially when it comes to our faith. Let us have zeal for the Lord, for others, and for good works. Instead of mediocrity, let us be brightly shining lights in this world of

darkness that others might see the way and escape the snare of sin (Phlp. 2:15). Instead of mediocrity, let us strive to enter into the narrow way, knowing many will strive and not be able (Luke 13:24). Instead of mediocrity, let us "press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," setting our minds "on the things above, not on things of the earth." Let's not stop halfway up the mountain, but keep climbing until we reach the pinnacle. We have not succeeded until we look like the Master.

- Steven Harper

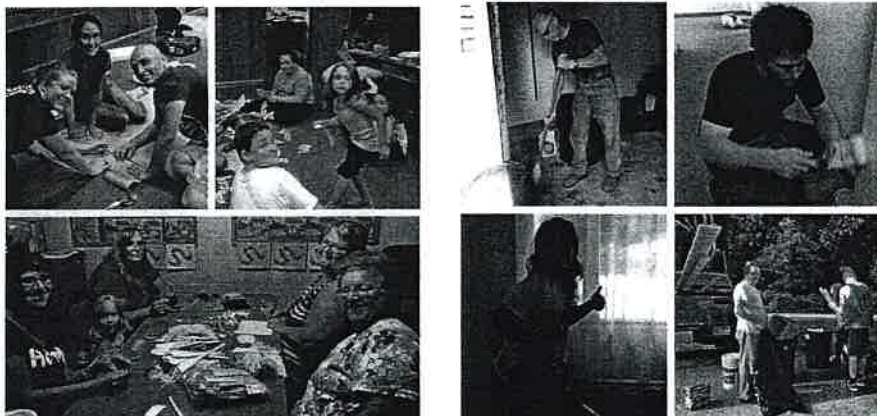


While there were at least 40 different people who wrote parts of the Bible, some were more prolific than others. The Apostle Paul wrote at least 13 books of the Bible. He may have also been the author of the book of Hebrews. Moses wrote the first 5 books.

The Bible attributes more than 3,000 proverbs to King Solomon. These are not all written in the book of Proverbs. However, most of that book is said to be the proverbs of Solomon.

FIFTH SUNDAY PHOTOS

Every fifth Sunday of the month, we try to highlight some of great things happening around our congregation that were captured through photography. If you happen to get a good picture of one of those great things, please feel free to post it on our Facebook page, tag us on Instagram (@wellsburgchurch), tweet us at @wellsburgchurch, or e-mail us at minister@wellsburgchurchofchrist.com with a little description of what is happening in the picture.



Our Vacation Bible School was this month, and, thanks to some very awesome people and an even awesome-r God, it was a great success!

We worked hard over the last two months to make the building and the preacher's house look great, but the greatest thing was through all the work, we grew closer and closer!



Brother Dan and Sister Beth Ruegg and their family safely moved to Wellsburg this month, and we are all so very excited!



We are getting new road signs to mark where the church is located! This was a MUCH needed update, and we are thankful that we had the money to do so!