

In the world of men we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Instead of poverty of spirit we find the rankest kind of pride; instead of mourners we find pleasure seekers; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear men saying, "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing"; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find men quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command.



Of this kind of moral stuff civilized society is composed. The atmosphere is charged with it; we breathe it with every breath, and drink it with our mother's milk.

(A.W. Tozer)

A little over fourteen years ago we purchased our home and 11.68 surrounding acres from the person who built this house. He held and still holds deed to the land to the north, on the opposite side of the road; the land to the west, where he still plants annual crops of corn and soybeans; and the wooded land to the south, beginning just beyond our pond and ending at the tiny creek nestled at the bottom of the hill, about one-half mile away. A barbed-wire fence with gate marks this southern boundary to our property.

Recently this landowner began clearing areas in the timber behind our house. My neighborly questions put to him were met with enigmatic evasion. Was he just cutting firewood? Was he clearing the land to sell for development? He wouldn't say. He just kept cutting down trees.

When he wasn't there, I walked into the timber to see what he had been doing. I discovered that he had been methodically cutting a meandering truck-width trail through the trees. Here and there he

had cleared space off the trail for someone to park a pickup truck, and, up near our fence line at the top of the hill, he had cleared a large turn-around for a truck to circle back downhill. It was all rather mysterious—and troubling to two people who cherish the quietude of their country land.

Soon, however, the mystery was solved, for on my next trek through the woods I discovered several tree stands erected for deer hunters. Here in Iowa, the *shotgun* season for deer hunting is typically limited to two weekends in December, but the *bow* season is considerably longer, spanning several months before and after the shotgun season. Shotgun enthusiasts hunt on foot, and favor the open, just-harvested fields. But bow hunters perch halfway up a tree on a small platform. There they will wait for the deer to happen by. It was obvious now that our neighbor had cleared access for hunters to drive into his woods, and was leasing to them rights to erect their tree stands for bow hunting.

Linda and I are not hunters. Indeed, the idea of killing a living

thing for sport is anathema to us. But we have no say over what people do on their own land. All we can do is post signs to make it clear that hunters are not welcome on *our* land.

So one day last week I set out with hammer and nails and a stack of shiny new metal signs to post them around the perimeter of our land. And most I deployed at the south fence, affixing to the trees on our side glaring red and black declarations that this was “PRIVATE PROPERTY: NO TRESPASSING” and “NO HUNTING.” I wanted to make it crystal clear even to a bloodthirsty deer hunter that the killing would stop at the fence. They could go no further.

No Further

All this brought to mind: Against what else do I post an unequivocal “No” at the border of our land? In the face of gun-wielding hunters straying onto our land I have been known to be unthinkingly fearless. It is not so much bravery as blind primal rage. My own safety doesn’t even occur to me. Years ago I was dressing in my upstairs bathroom when I noticed a car slowing on the road that borders our front field. To my alarm, the driver braked, pointed a shotgun or rifle through his window, and fired at something in our field—and in the direction of our house. This driver not only ignored the NO HUNTING sign posted right in front of him, but by firing from his car was breaking the law. Barely dressed, I ran from the house, crossed the front lawn, and screamed at the gun-toting miscreant who had gotten out of his car to retrieve whatever he had just shot at. I can happily report that he did not turn the gun on me, but returned to his car and drove off.

But against what else do I demonstrate such uncompromising conviction? To what else do I stand at the border of my property and declare, “*You will go no further!*”

Wisdom and Strength

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”

(Matthew 24:35-42)

We may try to change society for the better, and, occasionally, we might succeed. The power of God working through one small believer can accomplish marvelous wonders, so we should never grow weary of being a strong witness to those who do not yet know Him. But the world as a whole is on an unalterable collision course with Christ. Christians will never be more than a subset of the whole. So it falls to us to protect our homes from the world’s ways.

First comes wisdom from above: What do we permit through, and what do we stop at the gate? When do we throw wide the gate, inviting those outside to fellowship with our family, and when do we

close and strengthen the brick bulwark against those who might do us harm?

For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course.
For wisdom will enter your heart
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you,
To deliver you from the way of evil,
From the man who speaks perverse things;
From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
Who delight in doing evil
And rejoice in the perversity of evil;
Whose paths are crooked,
And who are devious in their ways;

(Proverbs 2:6-15)

Then comes fortitude, strength, and determination. Tender love for family must be translated into a fierce will to protect it from harm. Just as we strap on our spiritual armor for personal battle, we must gird ourselves with holiness to stand between evil and those we love.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

(Ephesians 6:10-12)

Standing in the Gap

We live in a homogenized society. Sharp distinctives are frowned upon. Firm convictions are ridiculed. The very idea of standing strong against just about anything, saying “No!” with a firmly set jaw, is fast becoming archaic. But if we are unprepared to take this stand at the point where society ends and our family begins, then where else?

Are we, as wives and mothers, ready to brace ourselves against what our children are being taught in public school? Will we ensure that not everything they hear outside the home will become the accepted template for their thinking? Will we envelop not only our children but our husband with a true and holy love that blots out the more twisted version they observe elsewhere? And will we teach those under our care that God is in His heaven, and that our home belongs to Him?

Are we, as husbands and fathers, ready to stand in the gap, to take our position at the gate of our home to protect those we love? Will we, as did Christ, be ready to sacrifice our well-being, our comfort—our very lives, if necessary—to protect our family from those who would wish it harm? Will we be what God meant us to be: the kind of father to our family that God the Father is to His?

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