

DEDICATION

To Daddy—
Who makes me laugh and helps me live,
and remembers it all when she said so.



ENDORSEMENTS

You are sure to laugh, you might even cry a little, when you read what “Mama said” in Celine Sparks’ new book *Because I Said So*. Celine presents the Lord’s way to live in a firm but humorous way. Be prepared; you won’t be able to lay it down until you have finished reading it.

—**Mack Lyon**, *In Search of the Lord’s Way* Television Program

As you fly through this easy read you’ll laugh out loud, you’ll shed a tear, and you’ll probably agree and nod passionately! You might even disagree a few times. But you’re bound to hear the voice of a teacher who has a heart of compassion. Celine was obviously taught by a master teacher, her mom, who through simple godly wisdom gave her, and now gives us, a degree worth much more than one you’d hang on your wall. You will love this book! It is on my top ten list! You’ll want to share this book with someone else . . . but . . . “Let Margie get her some first!” And Celine, good luck on that skydiving thing! Did I mention that you’ll laugh?

—**Dale Jenkins**, *A Minister’s Heart*

Because I Said So is overflowing with marvelous applications of God’s word seasoned with “down home” humor. Thank God for Celine’s mama and for any mama who fearlessly stands on the Truth, lives the Truth, and teaches the Truth. As we say in the South, “Keep on a-writin’, Celine, and tellin’ it like it is!”

—**Becky Blackmon**, *The Begging Place*

I love this book! A tribute to my mama and wise mamas everywhere, but most of all, an exposé of real wisdom that comes from the Good Book! It’s a read I just couldn’t rush, but then I found it difficult to put down. As I turned the pages, I reflected, repented, and resolved to be more the woman my great mother would want me to be. This book is a perfect solo study for women who want Christ to be real throughout their days. But dig deep into the scriptures presented and you have a practical ladies’ class study book. Get your Bible when you read it, because you don’t want to “go hunting without your gun!”

—**Cindy Colley**, *Women of Troubled Times*, and other books

BECAUSE I SAID SO

In today's society of gloom, doom, and discouragement, it is very encouraging to study ageless Bible principles in such a humorous and straight-forward way.

—**Lois Duncan Lyon**, Ladies' Lecturer

Having spent six years in medical school I never found "the funny bone" in my medical training. But I found it quickly within the pages of *Because I Said So*. However, my anatomy lesson did not end there. Celine Sparks points out the importance of possessing a sincere Christian backbone and actually doing something. With each new page you will find wit and wisdom, as she examines the Christian heart, the stomach (we can't have our cake and eat it too!), and our tongues. Never before in any study of anatomy did I laugh so hard—but those anatomy books never echoed the familiar phrases I had heard from my own mother! I found myself constantly pulling my wife over to read yet another delightful nugget of truth. Thanks Celine, for helping round out my medical education and dissecting my funny bone!

—**Brad Harrub, Ph.D.**, Executive Director, Focus Press, Inc

Celine never ceases to amaze me with her ability to make us laugh. Few are so gifted. In *Because I Said So*, Celine's charming wit grabs you and her Bible teaching convicts you. Without reservation, I recommend it for ladies' classes as well as personal use.

—**Jane McWhorter**, *Roses in December* and other books

Celine Sparks writes with a unique talent; she uses humor to teach. In this, her first book, Celine has produced a rich study that is easy to read.

—**Janie Craun**, *Heirlooms*, Editor *Christian Woman* magazine

Because I Said So is a book for women of all ages. It reminds us of what is most important in this life.

—**Rosemary McKnight**, *Those Who Wait* and other books

CONTENTS

Endorsements 5

Foreword 9

Introduction 11

Chapter 1: Do Something, If You Have to Repent of It! 15
Christianity Undone

Chapter 2: ... And Well Worth It!. 29
The Hidden Cost of Sin

Chapter 3: You Can't Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too 39
Instant Gratification

Chapter 4: If All Your Friends Jumped Off a Building 53
Chameleons

Chapter 5: Please Let Me Tell Just One Lie 63
A Meek and Quiet Spirit

Chapter 6: Let Margie Get Her Some First 79
Selflessness

Chapter 7: Pray for Gettin' Somewhere and Sittin' Down 91
Peace Amid Chaos

Chapter 8: More Money than Sense. 101
Materialism

Chapter 9: Can't Never Could Do Anything 115
Empowerment



BECAUSE I SAID SO

Chapter 10: You Didn't Mean Not To	.125
Preventive Maintenance	
Chapter 11: You Can Look All Day Where It's Not	.135
Looking for Love and Happiness in All the Wrong Places	
Chapter 12: Because I Said So	.149
Accepting God's Authority	
Chapter 13: Don't Go Hunting without Your Gun!	.163
Consistent Bible Study	
A Life Filled with Christ and Common Sense	.175
Johnnia Duncan Holder, 1929—1992	

FOREWORD

Did Jesus ever laugh? We know He was compassionate—He wept at a friend’s funeral. But who can imagine the wedding feast at Cana without thinking that laughter was a part of that day’s event? Or who pictures Him sharing time with close friends where no one ever said anything hilariously funny? It is hard to imagine that Jesus didn’t have a sense of humor. His parables reveal him as a man of dry wit who often gained people’s attention with an amusing remark before driving home some serious point to be remembered. It is a technique others have used with success, though none as skillfully as our Lord.

Celine Sparks writes with a unique talent; she uses humor to teach. I became a fan of Celine’s several years ago when we began running many of her columns in *Christian Woman* magazine. Finding one of her submissions in the mail always made my day, and her articles never failed to give me a lift. With every chuckle was a nugget of solid instruction.

In this, her first book, Celine has produced a rich study that is easy to read. Those of my generation probably remember lots of “old sayings” our moms recited to us as we were growing up. You may recognize some of them here. Little did we realize then how instructive these gems of wisdom really can be!

I appreciate, especially, the straightforward manner in which the book addresses issues that we once discussed and debated, but too often we are neglecting to talk about today. The book is meaty, and hopefully it will lead us to re-think some behaviors that are becoming too commonplace in the Lord’s body.

Elton Trueblood once observed that the Christian’s well-known humor is not a way of denying the tears, but rather a way of affirming something deeper than tears. So Solomon was absolutely right when he observed that “there is a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). This book may cause you to do both. Read and enjoy.

—Janie Craun



INTRODUCTION

Words that Stick

All mamas are ordinary, and yet not one of them is. They can say things that don't make a bit of sense, and yet somehow send a message that bypasses the entire nervous system and penetrates the core of your soul. It's a gift, a benefit that comes with the position.

There are hundreds of these little sayings in an unwritten manual, and no matter how much you determine that when you get to be a mother you're not going to use them, you'll find that it's as hard to separate motherhood from these phrases as Kool-Aid from a couch.

I imagine Eve herself must have strolled through the garden listing what she wanted done "this very minute" or else she was going to "tan some hides." I imagine even the camel got tired of hearing "Don't make me pull this thing over." When frustrated, she was probably very gifted at spitting the things they had just said back at the boys, such as when Abel said, "I'm just going over here to sharpen this arrow," she said, "I'll sharpen *your* arrow!" And I picture after sin made havoc of her home in a way that only sin can, she hung her head as Cain headed out of the tent door for Nod, and as teardrops splashed on her leopard skin, she quietly said, "Call me when you get there."

These little things mamas say stick with us for a lifetime, maybe because of the importance of who said them, maybe because of our keen memory at the time they were first spoken to us – whatever the reason, the words live forever.

That's why I needed the help of Mama's words to write this book. I have no words that live forever. Mamas don't really have them either I guess. There is only one Source for words that live forever (Matthew 24:35).

Echoes from *The Book*

It's just that those "mama" expressions are but echoes of harder, firmer and more valuable truths, and I think that's the reason they stick. "Can't never could" is just a maternal twist on Philippians 4:13, and "Pretty is, as pretty does" is a mama's translation of Proverbs 31:30, only easier to memorize.

That's why I employ these idioms—they're easy to memorize. In fact, for the most part, we already have. We had no choice about it. Now let's apply them. That's where the book comes in.

Some of the chapter titles you'll recognize immediately, and will probably take you back to all the scents and décor of an avocado den or a dinged up

station wagon—wherever it is that your mother hovered over you or cradled you close. Others of them are unique to my mama, because while mothers share universal concerns like making sure your underwear has no holes in it because if you have a serious wreck, you would not want to be embarrassed in front of the emergency room staff, each also has her own repertoire of verbal standbys, which only make sense within the family, and which are handed down like china and Confederate coins.

I could write a second volume inspired by my mother-in-law containing chapter titles like “Quit Acting Like an Afegucius,” “Tell It, Ellen” and “The Maid Didn’t Come,” but I simply entered the picture too late, and so I sometimes have a glazed look at the family gatherings.

But even in those made-from-scratch sayings (which compose eight of the thirteen chapter titles), we can pull out a code for living. That’s what mamas do—they give us a code for living, or at least they should.

Unfolding Truth in a Spoonful of Sugar

Within each chapter, I have tried to focus on the scriptural unfolding of a biblical truth. I have treated this study as carefully as measuring medicine into a dropper, but as Mary Poppins always told us, it goes down a lot easier with a spoonful of sugar.

And so, after each chapter, you will find a section called *Spark Plugs*. It is there for no other reason than to help the medicine go down. You can skip over it if you like. It will not give you spiritual insight or practical wisdom, but I suspect if you’re striving for either of those, it might give you something you need along the way.

These are just humor columns, so don’t try to get anything out of them. They will not fill your bucket; they will just make it more fun to carry.

I once went to church with a man who thought it was a sin to laugh during Bible class. He must have some distant relatives all over the United States who occasionally write or email me about my published humor columns to let me know that they don’t get it, they don’t appreciate that most other people do get it, and that their funny bone has been broken since the third grade or has been surgically removed.

I wouldn’t want to be around when their commode stops up or they brown the casserole too long. Sometimes it’s good to laugh; I’d even say it’s vital. It won’t get us to heaven, but it will help us over some of the hurdles which, otherwise, can keep us from trying.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes someone will say to me, “I always read your column first.” I’m amazed, that in a magazine chockfull of excellent treatises on critical issues surrounding us, our families, and the church, that they can’t flip over to the frivolous fast enough. It speaks volumes.

We spend the month immersed in the important which is usually upstaged by the urgent. How is it that we cope? Scripture, prayers, and occasionally a long row of Z’s. But there’s another built in mechanism, sometimes involuntary, that our Designer put there to release tension, to refresh our spirit and to help us with perspective and perseverance. We are the only created beings with the ability to laugh. What a shame if we disregard such a blessing! So go ahead, read it first when that month’s magazine comes, snort out loud and fall over in your salad if you want to. It’s not that I’m particularly funnier than the next person; it’s just that you may already be overdue for a good case of the giggles, or else you’re going to need it before you round life’s next corner.

After you bray a little, you can get past the appetizers to the real sustenance. I hope each of us can find some within these pages. This book was written with you in mind and in prayers, my Christian sisters who remind me of the cast of *The Muppet Show*. We come in all shapes and shades, and have but one thread that binds us all together. It is the only thread that matters.

For My Heroes

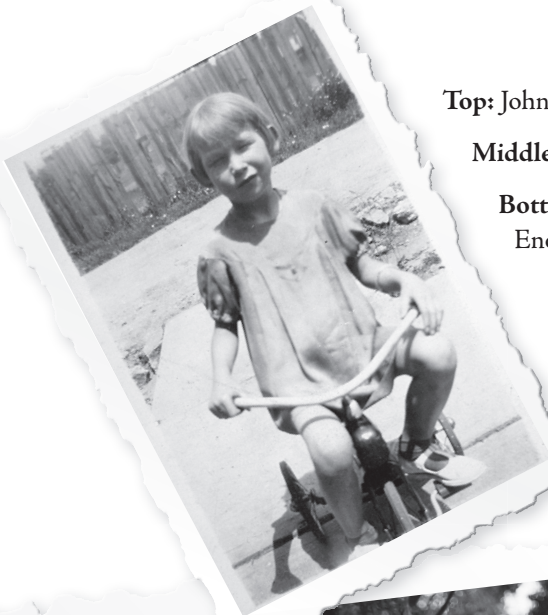
At times, this book may seem to speak more directly to one strain of us than the others. Sometimes it is the married, or the older, or those with children at home. Please bear with me if any one chapter is not sensitive to your unique circumstances. You are all my heroes – the divorced, the single, and those hitting golden anniversaries, those in the third world and those in my back yard, those with vans cluttered up with tennis balls, hula hoops and transformers, and those staring at four walls of framed memories – this book is for you.

I don’t pretend to understand your individual struggles or strengths, but when I was working on *Because I said So*, I made it a point to stay in touch with Someone who does. When the publisher first approached me about this project, I thought, *Why me? I’m nothing but a sinner bought with blood*. I guess those last three words made me reconsider, and in the words of Mama in the first chapter, I guess I decided to . . .

Do *something* if I have to repent of it.

You decide.

BECAUSE **I** SAID SO



Top: Johnnia Duncan, age 8.

Middle: Johnnia holding Celine, 1965.

Bottom: Celine and her fourth child Enoch, 2003.



CHAPTER I



DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

Christianity Undone

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

—John 13:17 KJV



My cousin Deana was sitting on the step to the washhouse. (I never knew it was a utility room until I went to college.) I was on the toy box whose lid was barely shut because things like jumper cables and souvenir sunglasses were trying to emerge from it.

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?” It was a dangerous question to ask the cousin who once used concrete and a socket wrench to see if CorningWare really was unbreakable. The bike

tires were flat, the swimming pool had become a test lab for tadpoles, and I didn't dare suggest hide-n-seek. Deana didn't like to count, and when she hid, she was really, really good. I knew I wouldn't see her again until Christmas.

We kept our voices low because if Mama found out we were looking for something to do, she would accommodate us, and it might include vinegar, Murphy soap, and baseboards. One of our nicknames for Mama, though, was "Bionic Ears." It's amazing that she could hear the minutest detail of a phone conversation—both ends!—with a boyfriend, from another room of the house when the vacuum was running and a train was passing.

True to her nickname, she cracked the screen door, looked at Deana and me, and said, "Well, do something if you have to repent of it."

.....

That was neither the first nor the last time Mother used the phrase, and it stuck hard not only to me but my brother and sisters as well. We say it to our kids, and occasionally it will come out of my mouth at a ladies' meeting or a teen planning session.

But do I really want my kids or any Christian to do something they will have to repent of? Absolutely not! Did Jesus really want the church at Laodicea to be cold? (Revelation 3:15). Should we really continue in sin that grace may abound? (Romans 6:1). Is it really a great thing to have a millstone tied around your neck, and be thrown in the ocean? (Mark 9:42). Of course not! Read the whole verse. Hear the whole idiom. The emphasis in Mama's statement lies in the first half: *Do something*. What follows her "if" only emphasizes it all the more.

Perhaps she didn't phrase it quite as eloquently as Edmund Burke in his famous quotation, "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing," but she was right on the money.

The Easiest Choice

The choice to do nothing is popular because it is frankly the easiest choice to make. In fact, we're unaware that we've even made a decision at all. It wins by default. If we "sit on the step of our washhouse" long enough, the devil can have a hey-day destroying every life in his path, and it will be no one's fault in

DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

particular. It's like a bill sitting on the President's desk. Doing nothing is the same as signing it into law.

What if a medical doctor worked that way? What if he merely wondered if he should do something about a malignant tumor but was unsure of the best route and merely delayed any course of action until, until . . . well he's really not sure, but at least until later? What if firefighters worked that way? Or soldiers? What if the best plan of strategy in a war seemed to be simply to do nothing?

As Christians, we are armed soldiers (Ephesians 6:11). The emergency at hand is more critical than even a malignancy or a four-alarm fire. In spiritual matters, the consequences of doing nothing are eternal, as in forever and ever. It isn't that lives are at stake; it's that souls are at stake.

I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.

—John 9:4

The No-Risk Choice

It's a given that there are risks involved when we choose to do something about a situation because we know as Christians we should. Let's look at a couple of real-life examples.

Example One: Neglect of Abuse

When I was a young preacher's wife, I received an upsetting phone call. The lady on the other end was someone I looked up to very much, and yet she was asking advice from me. She had some orphaned children visiting in her home only for the weekend, and she highly suspected from what the children told her that there was abuse in the permanent foster home. I tossed and turned, I weighed and balanced, I prayed and walked the floor, but in the end, I'm so ashamed to say I did nothing. I hope the Lord will forgive me, and while I pray for these now grown children whom I have never seen again, it haunts me to know that my default decision may have impacted their life forever. I regret to say that there were risks involved. I knew who the foster parent was, and I could picture his brawny but burly physique threatening my own secure family if I reported him. I tried to find comfort by telling myself that I had no real evidence and that it was really the decision of the lady who phoned me.

Why couldn't I hear Mama's motto at that crucial time, "Do something if you have to repent of it!"?

Example Two: Poring and Pouring

Steven and Callie looked forward to a class reunion at a Christian school with great anticipation, because one of the highlights of the three-day event was Sunday worship on the school grounds. Another was a family day at a nearby church fellowship hall. It was the event between those two that was troubling. They arrived at the formal dinner to find classmates poring over old annuals and scrapbooks, but that wasn't all they were pouring. Each had a half-empty glass in his or her hand, a glass that held a martini, a margarita, red wine, white wine—the list is exhaustive except for milk and Kool-Aid. Most had been at the church gym earlier, and most would be at worship later.

Steven was convicted that the behavior was displeasing to his God who said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1 KJV). The choice was obvious; they would leave. As

they rounded the corner, they ran into Kevin and Marley, and they began not only reflecting back, but looking forward together to

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brotherhood lectureships and upcoming spiritual events. And Steven and Callie couldn't help but notice, there were no drinks in Kevin or Marley's hand. The couples both opted to stay and be uplifted by one another – the four of them alone at a table for ten.

In the ensuing weeks, the scenario would not go away in Steven's mind—the friends he had swung from the monkey bars with in kindergarten, the girls who broke his heart in junior high, and the chemistry partners who almost blew up the lab together—they had all been at the reunion enticed by one of Satan's favorite lures, and in the words of Solomon, strongly deceived. Steven wondered if he should say or do something, but how could he risk friendships that meant so much to him? And besides, would anybody really listen? What if these people became angry?

The "what ifs" usually intimidate and force people into doing absolutely nothing. But not this time! Maybe Steven would take the wrong course or choose the wrong words, but failed attempts are always better than no attempt.

DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

That's exactly what Mama said, isn't it? Do *something* if you have to repent of it. And that's a pretty big if, I might add.

Steven spent the next days agonizing over an email, making sure he expressed his love, but imploring his classmates to consider the scriptures, their personal influence, and the implications of their actions for their children's lives. In response, some bonds were strengthened, and some were distanced.

Five months later, one of the classmates he emailed was buried. What if Steven had ignored the "do something" plea from within?

Spiritual immobility usually brings regret, but conscience-stirred action rarely does!

Be Strong and Courageous

The risks you and I encounter every day, whether real or imaginary, can paralyze us, but this will not do because there are cities to conquer; there are walls to tear down. Are we really that far removed from our "pedestaled" hero, Joshua? Isn't it significant that when his task was laid out before him, God had to instruct him and remind him six times in one short chapter, "Only be strong and very courageous"? The wording of the phrase was the same all six times. Joshua was obviously an intelligent man, and yet God kept reinforcing this one concept. Not only was he intelligent, but his role was minimal: God was going to do all the conquering for him. The ratio remains the same in our work some thousands of years later. God does the conquering. You cannot fail. Only be strong and very courageous.

*... and so I will go to the king, which is against
the law; and if I perish, I perish.*

—Esther 4:16

The Choice That Fits My Circumstances

The "something" in the phrase "do something" leaves us wide open to an array of choices that fit our talents. The "do nothing" mindset often walks in the door when we begin to wonder what we could do. The "I'm just one person," "someone else could do a better job," "that's not my talent" and other negative self-talk phrases that go through our head are straight from Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44).



Betty's Mama

Betty's mama was poor and uneducated. She never got a new do, and never sported the latest fashion, but she knew the truth in my own mama's statement. When a family in her neighborhood was dealing with unexpected death, she didn't have a freezer full of vegetables to prepare or even a pretty card to send, but she showed up with what she did have. Betty's mama entered the grieving home with an old rag and a can of shoe polish. She didn't have eloquent condolences to offer, but went straight to work. Opening the bedroom closets, she began to get each family member's dress shoes out, and with great care, shined each of them to near perfection. It was a chore the family could not even begin to be concerned about at the time, but one that would enable them to show respect to their loved one as the funeral hour approached.



Betty's mama could have listened to many inside voices arguing that her resources were too limited to help when she was needed, but instead, she listened to the one voice that said, "Do something." I'm sure many people offered a wealth of verbal condolences that day. I'm sure many glorious casseroles were arrayed and beautiful flower arrangements were delivered. I'm also sure that every single one of these casseroles, kind words, and flowers has faded from memory with the passing of time. But one act remains in vivid color, and its story is being passed down, all because Betty's mama chose to do something. It kind of reminds me of the lady in Mark 14 whose unique act of kindness was criticized. However, Jesus said it would be told as a memorial wherever the gospel was spread (Mark 14:9).

Our choices are unlimited in doing something. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all." What is your opportunity, and what is your talent? Remember, it can be as humble as operating an old shoe rag.



From Linda's Chair

Linda's sense of humor can vaporize a tear midstream. A tough and loving disciplinarian to her three teens, she remains a pillar of support to her husband Scott, recently diagnosed with advanced cancer. Linda teaches classes, opens her home for service group meals, works late hours decorating for VBS and other activities, and is involved in every line of church work imagined, including secretary. I can get tired just thinking about it, and all of this is done from her wheelchair, though it is better known as a taxi for the toddlers who line up for rides. On at least two occasions, Linda has quickly pushed herself from her chair so that it might be used for another church member in an emergency situation.



Most of us could go on about someone with equal energy in challenging circumstances, but the lesson can be summed up in two words: do something! Yes, your resources might be more limited than someone else's; your talents may pale in comparison. But what about your opportunities? Without even knowing your name or where you live, I'd bet my last dollar—if I were a bettor—that your opportunities abound! It's not hard to find an opportunity to do good; it's hard to find someone to grab hold of the opportunity.

There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?

—John 6:9

Satan's Time—Later!

We've already established that Satan is the father of lies. While we most commonly characterize him as the vicious dictator making men and women commit murder, adultery, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other violent acts, we don't give him enough credit for his "behind-the-scenes" work. He doesn't want any credit. He'd rather sit quietly and whisper to "good" men and women that they are doing enough already. He's quite effective at convincing

BECAUSE I SAID SO

us that the perfect time to get involved is later, the best person for the job is a talented brother or sister, and the best method of evangelism is silence until it “comes up.”

When you or I have an opportunity to do something, which is constantly, and we shift our feet and look around until the opportunity is passed, the feet that are shifting are those in Pilate’s sandals. Pilate had the opportunity to free the innocent. He knew what he should do; there’s no doubt about that, but the wheels began turning in his head. He began to visualize those risks associated with being no friend of Caesar’s. He took his wife’s advice and chose to “have nothing to do with that just man” (Matthew 27:19).

It was “doing nothing” that crucified my Savior. You don’t have to actively choose to sin in order to crucify him afresh.

“To him who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Even Mama couldn’t make it any plainer than that.

Do something, or you *will* have to repent of it!

*To him who knows to do good,
and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

—James 4:17



Something for YOU to Do . . .

1. Think about your own experiences. What do you view as the most common risks that we associate with jumping into a situation, and doing something about it?
2. In the scenario concerning Christians drinking at a social event, do you think another course of action would have been better? Reflect on times when you have been put in that same situation.

DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

3. What specific lies has Satan used to convince you of your ineffectiveness?
4. Discuss Pilate's predicament. Make a list with two columns, the first with the consequences Pilate considered if he freed Jesus; the second with the consequences Pilate considered if he crucified Jesus.

Pilate's Consequences

Do It

Don't Do It

5. Now use the chart you just made to evaluate your own choices concerning a specific challenging situation you face. Are any of the consequences you perceive the same as those Pilate considered?

My Consequences

Do It

Don't Do It

Spark Plugs

And speaking of high school reunions . . .

I think the last time I got all my children and their father around the actual dinner table at the same exact time was in 2003, and that was because we had received mail from Auburn football coach Tommy Tuberville. Unfortunately, there was no food. Now before you write me up in your church bulletin and declare me an official unfit mother, let me explain that we often do have dinner (or at least Hot Pockets) around a table set for six. I use the term “set” of course loosely because I learned from Mama that the most efficient way to “set” a table is to open the silverware drawer, grab a handful of forks, and place the pile next to the centerpiece (spare bike part). It’s not that we don’t make an effort to have the family gathered around the dinner table; it’s just that one of our chair legs is missing the thingy on the bottom that equalizes it with it’s other three legs and so no one wants to sit in that chair, and so we sit at the other five in turns as a sort of unstructured game of musical chairs without the music (though we do have a strong vocals and percussion section).

It works like this: Person one gets up to get the milk. Person six sits in person one’s chair. Four grabs a towel to clean spilled milk; one sits in four’s chair; three takes the towel to the laundry room; four sits in three’s chair; two realizes milk is still out and believes she’ll have a refill; six hops up to scrape peas in garbage can while two isn’t looking; two grabs six’s chair; six goes to find three who forgot where the laundry room is; one licks four’s fork and has to get him a new one. Three reenters with dirty towel, takes one’s chair; two goes to find six who forgot who he was trying to find. Four runs to bedroom to make it in time for final Jeopardy. Three gets up to answer the phone and says, “Yes, I don’t think we have credit card debt, but I have a kitten.” One realizes he is the only one left to do the dishes, and has acute appendicitis.

So my point is, if I can’t get six people who are confined to one house around a table for three minutes, who can imagine that they can get fifty-six people scattered all over the U.S. and Puerto Rico to one central location for a high school reunion? It’s a preposterous idea, and yet people

DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

keep trying it. There are many common reasons people can't attend their high school reunions. Many simply live too far, many have business trips or vacations scheduled in conflict, some have illnesses, but by far, the number one reason that people miss their high school reunions is that they are too fat.

Some people actually try to overcome this hurdle by fasting for two weeks before the event. For some reason, it is really important to these people to be able to tuck their shirt in and zip their pants. They imagine, I guess, that other people will not be able to zip their pants and will be walking around with an un-tucked, long flowing shirt which everyone will mistake for a maternity top. These people will be pointing and quietly whispering, "Look at Michelle; she can still zip her pants."

The irony in this is that in high school, our teachers told us with a straight face that we would really need to know the abbreviations for all the elements in the periodic table to succeed in life. It turns out twenty years later, all that really matters is if you're able to zip your pants. It's the only revenge we have left. No longer can we buy out the cheap toilet paper company and go rolling after midnight. No putting stink bombs in lockers or tying shoestrings to desk chairs. Those days are gone forever. They were the unmistakable message of disapproval at switching girlfriends mid-choral concert or getting a perfect score on the chemistry exam, thus eliminating all hope for a curve.

Now we walk by with zipped pants as a subtle way of saying, "You could have asked *me!* I *wanted* to go to the Beta banquet! Now look at me. I'm happily married, have four kids, a big screen TV, and I can zip my pants! Whaddaya say to *that?*"

Of course the conversation goes much more like this:

"So where are you living now?" (Translation: I don't remember you at all.)

"New Hope." (New Hope.)

"Is that the new subdivision up on the mountain?" (Okay, just any indication at all of who you might be?)

No
longer
can we buy
cheap toilet
paper and go
rolling after
midnight.

"Yeah, it popped up about ten years ago." (I used to have hair. You do remember that I used to have hair, right?)

"It's nice. I've got a friend that looked at a lot out there." (Wait a minute! You used to have hair.)

"We enjoy it. It's got a nine-hole golf course." (You're looking at my bald head again. What is it with this class?)

"Really? We'll have to get together sometime." (It's Scott I think. Or James. Oh, which is it?)

"Okay, great! Give me a call sometime when you're in town." (Your mother made Rice Krispy squares for the bake sale. Is she alive?)

The only thing worse than flitting around from conversation to conversation is being the spouse of the flitter. This is when you actually say out loud that you don't remember anyone or have any funny stories to share.

At my husband's reunion recently—this is absolutely true—I listened to an in depth argument for some twenty-three-and-a-half minutes about who was in the red group and who was in the blue group. I'm still uncertain, but one of these groups went on a field trip to the post office wherein the teacher instructed everyone to bring eight cents for a stamp (roars of laughter). And of all things, there were live chickens at the post office that day. I fished in my husband's pocket for the car key and went to a yard sale nearby to kill time. No one missed me.

Wait
a minute!
You used
to have
hair.

"I'm famished," Michelle says with her pants zipped.

"Oh, I can tell," the rest of us murmur inside, "by the way you've picked at your parsley."

It's a tormenting evening because not one woman wants to be the only one to clean her plate. And yet there is this gnawing reminder inside that this one plate cost seventy dollars, this month's payment on the big screen TV. And a truffle is a terrible thing to waste.

Then it's about to happen. The class president stands from her table. It's awards time. Oh please no. Wasn't this embarrassing enough the first time? Didn't I know I was most likely to drop my books on the bus steps without everyone voting?

DO SOMETHING, IF YOU HAVE TO REPENT OF IT!

Everyone is giggling in anticipation as if the half-truffle-left-on-plate thing isn't bothering them anymore. We applaud for the person who drove the farthest, is married the longest, has the most children, and what?—the first grandmother? When did that happen? How old are we?

There are lots of congratulations and pictures, but somehow a blanket of discomfort has fallen over the group. It's as if everyone is secretly consumed with this grandmother thing. Grandmother, as in the person who makes you laugh by taking out her teeth?

My thoughts are interrupted as Michelle squeezes between my husband and me on the way out the door, and says out loud, "That's not a maternity top, is it?" She winks, and is gone.

"You have any cash?" I ask my husband, "I'd like to buy out the cheap toilet paper company on the way home."



Johnnia Duncan,
early teaching
years, 1950s.

BECAUSE **I** SAID SO



Top: Young Johnnia, age 8, with girl dog "Ted."

Middle: Lee Holder with Johnnia Duncan Holder and her mother Mattie "Dunca" Duncan.



Bottom: Johnnia with third child Sami.





... AND WELL WORTH IT!

The Hidden Cost of Sin

*As a bird hastens to the snare,
He did not know it would cost his life.*

—Proverbs 7:23



It seemed that everything in the toy department was too expensive. Plus, I always received the answer, “You don’t need that.” Of course I didn’t need it! Toys do not supply food or shelter, but I wanted it. So I would scrounge around the store until I finally found something I thought was cheap enough.

“Look, Mom, it’s a little pink man with a piece of plastic wrap and a lot of little strings all tangled up.”