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# The Opportunity of Choice

C. William Pollard

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THE OPPORTUNITY OF CHOICE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS

WEST SUBURBAN BRANCH

PRAYER BREAKFAST

JANUARY 10, 1995

C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN  
THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY  
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

It has been good to be here with you this morning to participate in prayer and to listen to the words of inspiration and music. Here we are at the beginning of another new year, 1995. We are just five years away from the turn of the century, that magic year 2000. We are reminded as we look back over the last five years of all the things that can occur in this world around us in such a short period of time. The collapse of communism world wide, a new wave of freedom, the emergence of democracy in Eastern Europe, the renewal of age-old cultural and religious hatreds, the election of a new President with promises of a better life, and in just two years later the opposing party the first time in 40 years gains control of both the House and the Senate. It is a world of accelerated change and choice. I am thankful for our country and for the great freedoms we have to choose, to worship to pray. I am also thankful for a God who loves and cares for me and who is my source of resource and who provides a standard of direction as I seek to serve Him in the marketplace.

The freedoms we have as citizens in this country are truly remarkable. Never before in history have citizens of any one country been given the liberties that we have today.

Our time of prayer together today is a statement that there is a God and that He

### 3

provides an ultimate moral standard for testing the legitimacy and limits of government action and the freedom and responsibility of any one individual. Since the choice is ours - how are we going to make it? Who are we? And what do we want?

Several months ago I called a friend of mine and got the following response from his answering machine: "Hello. This is not an answering machine. It is a questioning machine. There are really only two questions in life that are relevant: who are you and what do you want? Please give your answer at the tone."

How would you answer these questions? Where is your hope for the future?

I suggest that we are all prisoners of our hope. It is our hope that sustains us and our vision for what could be that inspires us.

But where is our hope? We use the term in many different ways. Some of us may be hoping to make that sale this afternoon. To grow our business by 25% next year. To pay back that bank loan by year end. Or, to hire that smart performer. Some may describe their hopes in terms of relationships. The hope of being accepted although I am different. The hope of being forgiven although I have made a mistake. The hope of being loved although I am unlovely at times. It can also be used in the context of feelings or understandings. The hope of feeling secure. The hope of feeling safe. The hope of knowing joy. The hope of knowing. however we use it, it always carries with it an expectation and an expectation of something more that will occur in the future.

Hope is a continuing theme in the Bible. We are reminded that Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. Our faith is described as the substance of things we hope for and the uncertainty of things we do not see. It is this hope of our redemption that anticipates more to come in our life with our Lord and Savior

## 4

that is at the heart of our Christian faith. This hope that is described as being stored within us, a fountain of life, if you will, that confirms God's promise to us and provides the anchor for our soul to firm and secure.

The opposite of hope is despair, hopelessness, depression, discouragement, dejection. Despair implies the utter absence of hope to the point of giving up. There is much in the world around us that is in despair. Armand Nicholi the noted psychiatrist from Harvard, concludes that we are experiencing an explosive increase in all forms of depression with some 11 million people now needing treatment. Each year over a quarter-million people decide to take their lives, and some 30,000 succeed. We also are experiencing an unprecedented epidemic in suicide among children and adolescents.

Freud wrote that life as we find it is too hard for us. It brings us too many pains, disappointments, and impossible tasks. It doesn't take long for a person to realize that life here on earth has an ending, that the hero of our personal story always dies.

We have all had times of despair. Most causes of depression appear to be associated with loss--the loss of friendship, the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, a broken engagement or marriage. Loss usually results in grief or mourning. The normal type of depressive reaction is relatively short-lived, self-limited, not usually requiring medical help.

But many suffer depression without having incurred a loss. They are depressed because of the disparity between what they think they ought to be and what they fear they are. The fear of inadequacy often runs deep in highly competitive situations, including the market place. These feelings can progress to the point of hopelessness, a feeling that there is no way out.

## 5

I rest my hope on nothing less than Jesus Christ and His righteousness. Is this just a familiar hymn, a phrase we repeat, or does it represent reality, a reality of meaning in our life that touches who we are and what we are becoming?

But wait just a moment. What gives you, Bill Pollard, the right to speak about hope and despair? You are not a psychologist or a psychiatrist. You are a business person who has spent most of his life in the marketplace earning money. How can we learn from you on this subject of hope?

Simply put, my friend, my life has been filled with hope and some despair. The trappings of success, whether they be title, recognition, or wealth, do not mean lack of despair or the ultimate in hope. The answer for me keeps coming back to fixing my eyes upon Jesus, the perfecter of my faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning and shame and sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus--a human and tempted in all ways like me; yet God. Jesus the servant, who became like me so that I may know Him and in so doing He set an example of a servant who acted upon what He knew. Jesus who stated boldly to the world around Him that, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me."

But a beginning point with God and a desire to follow standards is not enough. God calls us to have a personal relationship with Him by faith and trust in His Son Jesus Christ. The work of Christ is available to all, but like any offer, it cannot become a completed transaction in the life of an individual unless there is a corresponding choice of acceptance and trust by that individual. When that choice is made, there is a hope not only for this life but for an eternal life with God. It is a decision that goes beyond the temporal and involves the understanding that this life is only a process of becoming all that God wants us to be.

## 6

It is a choice that should affect the way we live. As so in my world--the marketplace--manipulation of people, insider trading, diluting of a service or product are not simply illegal or breaches of an agreement. They violate His standard, which is a far more serious infraction. Involvement with my fellow employees cannot be limited to a transaction of wages paid for work done. Since each person has been created in God's image and has unique value and worth, I must take time to understand, to love, to serve that person with a clear objective of having the work environment become a positive influence in the process of his or her development. In so doing, I confirm my hope.

It must also affect my relationship with my family. It is His standard of doing that I love and cherish my wife. I am not the superior. She is not the subordinate. It is not my checkbook, my house, my way. We have become a partnership that is based upon mutual love and trust. Judy and I are committed to each other and must continue to work at the joining together of our separate and distinct personalities. It requires a constant attention to the smoothing of the rough edges. There is always a hope for something more in our marriage.

The single most important product of this love and hope is the children He has given us. Our role has been to provide a home for their development, spiritual nurture, and admonition. We are learning that this role changes with their growth and maturity. As our oldest daughter Julie and her husband Chris raise their own family, we have learned the joy of grandchildren and sharing as they develop and grow as a separate family unit. As our son Chip and his wife Carey have established their home and are experiencing the tensions of a change of career in leaving his profession of a practice in law to continue graduate school studies, there is a special role of extended love and providing a listening ear. As Brian and his wife Su are both developing their careers in the market, there is a need to counsel and support as they grow and seek balance in their lives. Amy is our youngest; and as she and her husband Mark establish their home and he establishes his own business as a ServiceMaster franchisee, they need our support but not

direction.

Although each child is different and our role has changed with their maturity, we have a continuing responsibility for their development and growth and for the acceptance and love for their choice of a life partner. They are all God's children as well as our children.

For me, there have been those times of doubt and despair and especially through those difficult teenage years and sudden death of my father when I was 18. There followed the challenges of college and law school and seeking to establish a home and support a family and finance an education. There were those feelings of inadequacy and concerns about whether I measured up.

There was the drive for success which allowed my law profession to become a jealous mistress, only to be stopped by God's intervention with a serious health condition. This was followed by a dramatic change in my life. It meant leaving the practice of law and coming to serve as an administrator and faculty member at Wheaton College. It was during this phase of my life that God began to teach lessons of balance and spiritual maturity.

In 1977, my path took another turn as my task at Wheaton was over and I joined the management team at ServiceMaster. There I had the opportunity to work with my colleagues including two close friends and mentors Ken Hansen and Ken Wessner and now my partner Carlos Cantu in seeking to manage and lead a fast-growing business. Today it is more than 20 times larger in revenue and profits than when I joined it, and we are touching over 200,000 people stretched from Karachi, Pakistan to Tokyo, Japan. Yes, I live in one of those pressure cooker environments where earnings and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and where earnings and profits have been up every quarter for



the past 23 years. The shareholders to whom Carlos and I are responsible as leaders vote every day on our leadership. They have the choice to buy, hold, or sell.

But the measure of my success as a leader is not in the value of our shares or in the profit we produce. My hope comes from the reality that this opportunity gives me: to live and implement my faith. The objectives of our company are simply stated: To Honor God In All We Do, To Help People Develop, To Pursue Excellence, and To Grow Profitably. The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. They do not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes. But because of a stated standard and reason for the standard, we can't hide our mistakes. They are fleshed out in the open for correction and in some cases for forgiveness. We are not a "Christian company." Many of our officers are Christian, but we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish, or no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized for mixing God and profit but seldom for our performance. The objectives force those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live our faith. Yes, not only to integrate our faith with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do--with our actions and work with others. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead. To lead by example and service. It has been an environment that for me is a constant reminder of who am I and what do I want.

In a pluralistic society and a world where there is the freedom to choose, not everyone will agree with my starting point or the need for a personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God's Son. But few would disagree about the need for a moral authority and the great potential for good as people recognize the value and worth of others ahead of their own self-interest or self-gratification. Each of us has the freedom to choose. The responsibility is ours. Who are you, and what do you want?

I want to commend the leaders of your association for their consistent recognition

## 9

of the need for prayer, the need for God, and for seeking to do that which is right in their business and in the market place.

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