

*“Well, I guess it’s not what you know. It’s who you know,”* some employees complained. You see, word had just gotten out that the owner’s daughter was about to start work at the hotel. There was a nice, cushy job opening in the banquets department, and folks just figured it was going to her – despite the fact that she had neither the education nor the experience many other applicants had. *“It’s not what you know. It’s who you know,”* they said.

And it’s easy to understand why. It may not be fair that someone has an “in” with the boss...but it happens. It may not be fair that someone gets strings pulled for them...but it happens. It may not be fair that the owner’s kid gets a job they don’t deserve and may not be able to do...but it happens. All too often *“it’s not what you know; it’s who you know.”*

But in this particular case...not so much. Let me tell you the rest of the story. The owner’s daughter did indeed get a job in the banquets department, but not the cushy one. She got a job setting up and tearing down. Minimum wage. No benefits. Last hired, first fired. That was the job she got. And why? Well, her Dad, who had always called her “princess,” had begun to see that she was actually turning into one – and not the good kind! As I understand it, the final straw was when she pitched a fit over not getting a new car – a *new* new car, I should say, since the one she had was barely a year old. Her Dad said she could only have a new car if she worked for it. She said, “Fine!” He told her he would arrange for a job at the hotel. Again, she said, “Fine!” But it seems that she, too, had expected a cushy job. After all, she was the owner’s daughter. She was entitled! So she was just as surprised as anyone when she got the set-up, tear-down job. And boy, was she mad at her Dad! But you know what? It turned out to be a good thing for her – just as her Dad knew it would. In time, she admitted as much – just as her Dad knew she would. She learned some valuable lessons and experienced some personal growth – just as her Dad intended. So the moral of her story? It’s not what you know *or* who you know that matters most. *It’s who knows you!*

That’s true for us as well – especially in our spiritual lives. Often, people think of religion as having an “in” with God, and prayer as “pulling strings,” and faith as entitling them to special treatment. After all, they’re children of God. But God doesn’t quite see it that way! Because He loves us with an infinite love, He wants what is ultimately best for us – but “best” as *He* defines it, not as we might. His goal is to make us more truly *His* – make us into people of faith, hope, and love who are changing and growing into the **“fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.”** This being the case, why would He arrange our lives in a way that makes Him extraneous? Or that makes us too comfortable to change? Or that requires little prayer, little trust, little dependence on His grace? He wouldn’t. And He doesn’t. The abundant life Jesus offers isn’t necessarily a comfortable life. It’s a rich life, a meaningful life, a productive life, but not necessarily a

comfortable one. And this may come as an unwelcome surprise, but there is always a reason for what God allows...and a goal. **“In all things God works together for our good,”** and He alone knows what that is – which is why, especially in our spiritual lives, we need to remember: It’s not what you know or who you know that matters most. It’s trusting the One who knows you!

Case in point, take the rich man in our text. If he were living today, he would be the kind of person any pastor would be proud of. Spiritually earnest. Morally pure. Respectful. Eager to grow. He kneels down and asks so humbly, **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** So Jesus looks at this young man, and what does He feel? Not pride. No, he feels something more. He feels love for this young man – love that wants what is ultimately best for him; love that sees beneath the squeaky clean exterior and spots what’s getting in the way of what’s best for him. So, because of this love, Jesus doesn’t pat this young man on the back, doesn’t let him settle for a comfortable life. He offers him an abundant life – though the form of the offer comes as an unpleasant surprise. Jesus says, **“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow Me.”**

When I’ve taught this story in Bible class, people have sometimes asked, *“Do you think Jesus really meant that? Give away everything? Could it be that Jesus was just testing him to see what he would do?”* And what can we say? We’ll never know, because the rich young man didn’t even think it over. Didn’t even ask Jesus follow-up questions – “Why?” or “How?” Clearly, he didn’t think Jesus was just testing him! **“When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions”** – which, to me, is pretty clear proof that Jesus hit a bull’s eye. Money was this young man’s idol. Money mattered more to him than God. Money...and the security it gave...and the quality of life...and the prestige that went with it. Jesus really did know this young man...and what he needed.

What he needed, of course, was genuine faith. Not just piety, morality, religiosity, but deep down, heartfelt, unconditional faith. I never noticed before how Jesus said, **“You lack one thing,”** but isn’t that interesting? It wasn’t what the man had that was the problem – His wealth. The problem was what he lacked, which was faith – faith enough to trust Jesus knew what He was doing, faith enough to trust Jesus would supply his needs, faith enough to trust Jesus without understanding how all this would work out. He lacked faith. So whatever Jesus was doing, He wasn’t just testing this young man. He was inviting him to come out of a life that, though outwardly religious, lacked faith, and He was offering him an abundant life rooted and grounded in genuine faith. That’s what the young man rejected when **“he went away grieving.”** Whether or not he realized it at the time, what he rejected was faith.

Now, as you and I reflect on this passage, we have to know that it’s not necessarily about the role of money in our lives. For us, too, it’s about faith. It’s

about trusting the Lord – whatever He asks, wherever He leads – and not letting anything get in the way. When I was a young man, for instance, money was not the issue; I didn't have any. But there were other issues, other challenges, just as tough to deal with. And in every case, the question was: *"Bill Martens, where is your faith?"* As clearly as if Jesus were standing before me, looking me straight in the eye, that was the question: *"Bill Martens, where is your faith?"*

One such time I don't think I've ever told you about happened about two months after I was ordained. The first month, I had organized an ice cream social and we showed a G-rated movie called "Twelve Chairs." From my perspective, it went well. I will never forget an elderly couple, John and Marie Johnson, sitting there laughing and holding hands. But wouldn't you know? One week after Pastor Krueger left on vacation, a woman named Beverly stopped by and unloaded on me. The movie was evil, she said. Disgusting, godless; every one of the Ten Commandments had been broken. And to think she had brought along a friend to this event! She felt utterly humiliated – so humiliated that if I didn't make a public apology to her, she was going to send out letters calling for me to be kicked out of the ministry. She had the letters with her, in fact, all ready to be stamped and mailed. That's how serious she was!

Now, since that time I have met a few more "Beverly's," so I take such threats with a grain of salt. But this first time I was terrified. And who could I talk to? I tried to call the Council President. He was at work. I couldn't get a hold of the Call Committee Chairperson. She wasn't home. So there I sat – fretting, stewing, pondering all the "what ifs" – until it finally dawned on me: *Um, how about talking this through with God?* Which I did. And it wasn't a pretty prayer, let me tell you! Kind of sniveling, panicky, peppered more than a few times with "How could you let this happen?" And I remember as if it were yesterday, those words hitting me where it hurt: *"Bill Martens, where is your faith?" "But Lord, this is so unfair!"* I prayed. *"And Lord, what is going to happen to my ministry? And Lord, think how this could upset the congregation! And Lord, what am I going to do if I get kicked out? Lord, this is hard!"* So it went. And do you think God gave me a single answer to a single one of these questions? No. But that other question sure kept coming back to me: *"Bill Martens, where is your faith?"*

I suspect a lot of us have been in such situations. And if you have, you know that there's no going half way. Either you trust the Lord or you don't. Either you trust Him to get you through or you don't. Either you trust He knows what He's doing or you don't. And what helps most of all is trusting that He knows you – knows what you need, knows how to use this for your good. God doesn't cause such situations, but He does know how to use them, because He knows you. And dare I add, He knows how to use them to draw you closer to Him, draw you to depend on Him, draw you **"to approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that" you "may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** Yes, here most of all it's not what you know or who you know that matters most. It's trusting the one who knows you.

As I worked through this back then, little by little a few things became clear. Was this unfair? Sure. But life is unfair! That's all the more reason to depend on God. What about my ministry? It's not my ministry. It's God's ministry. If necessary, I must be ready to lay it down. As for the congregation, it's not my congregation. It's God's congregation. My job is to serve as faithfully as I can and leave the rest to Him. And as for what would I do, worst case scenario...well, what should I do at any time? Which led right back to that first question, didn't it? "*Bill Martens, where is your faith?*"

As you've probably guessed, things turned out okay. The Council President calmed me down. Once word got out – and I was amazed how fast it did – people came through with tremendous support. In the end, the scars barely showed and the experience proved very helpful. It's nice when you can look back and see that. Very nice! Unfortunately, that's not always possible. But what is possible is to trust that the Lord knows what He's doing, trust that He knows what you truly need, and trust that He can even use this mess for your good, for your growth, because the Lord knows you.

I need to keep reminding myself of this – especially in these days of financial stress and denominational strain. I suspect that's true for all of us. But isn't that the Christian life? Especially when push comes to shove, isn't that when we decide: *Where is your faith?* We cannot control what challenges we will face. But we can control how we will face them. We can control Who we will turn to for help. And honestly, Who could possibly help us better than the one who knows us through and through?

The little poem puts it so well:

*Trust Him when dark doubts torment you.  
Trust Him when your strength is small.  
Trust Him when to simply trust Him  
Seems the hardest thing of all.  
Trust Him! God is ever faithful.  
Trust Him through the hardest test.  
Trust Him, for the Lord who knows you  
Always knows and seeks what's best.*

My friends, it's not what you know or who you know that matters most. It's trusting the One who knows you! Amen