



GOD WANTS TO USE THE 'YUCKY STUFF' IN OUR LIVES

I had cereal, bacon, eggs, even oatmeal on hand that day. But Drew and Zoë decided that what they really wanted for breakfast was pancakes. Now, normally I would have had a pancake mix, or at least some Bisquick, ready for such emergency demands, but a thorough search of the pantry came up empty.

Not wanting to disappoint my grandchildren, I grabbed the stained, dog-eared Betty Crocker Cook-book my mom had given me as a wedding gift, and rifled through it for a recipe. Sure enough, there on page 57 was the one I had used during the early days of our marriage (when I was still trying to impress my new husband). And I knew I had all the ingredients!

Five-year-old Drew and six-year-old Zoë wanted to help. So, we pulled the little stool up to the counter and took turns with the tasks. We cracked the eggs, poured in the buttermilk, dumped in the flour, stirred in the sugar, then the salt, and the baking . . .

Somehow Drew managed to slip her finger into the batter just as Zoë added the baking powder.

"Ewwww! That tastes YUCKY!!" she exclaimed with a shudder and a scowl on her face. "I don't want that in my pancakes! Take it out!!"

I tried to explain that we needed the baking powder if we wanted the pancakes to be fluffy, but she wasn't buying it. When I insisted that the baking powder had to stay, she announced that she really wanted eggs anyway.

Sometimes the 'yucky stuff' in a recipe is important. And sometimes it's what we need in our lives to accomplish what God has planned.

Lately the world seems to be filled with 'yucky stuff'. Not only have there been a huge number of natural disasters, but the devastation caused by humans with evil intents seems to be multiplying:

- We still have piles of debris left over from Hurricane Irma lining our street. And Ben and MattE still have a lot of damage to their homes. But our damage and pain is nothing compared to what others are suffering in Houston and Puerto Rico – or even in our own city.

- There have been at least 175 earthquakes with magnitudes of 6.0 or greater in 2017. We all heard about the one in Italy and the two in Mexico, but people in New Guinea and Russia and the Philippines are still struggling as well.
- So far there have been 1020 known terror attacks with 5,888 fatalities just this year! They have taken place all over the globe.
- North Korean citizens are struggling more than we can imagine, and the whole world is threatened by their powerful megalomaniac leader.
- And then there was the mass shooting in Las Vegas that I find so difficult to understand, and almost too painful to even write about!

Yet, in Romans 8:28 Paul says, *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

How can that be? How can any of these things turn out for good?

Let me give you one small example: Ben and Lydia have an 80+ year-old neighbor who is a retired Navy vet and claims to be an atheist. The very first day they met, he commented that Ben and Lydia had bought themselves a nice house. Ben's reply included the fact that it was "a real answer to prayer."

"Don't bring up religious stuff around me," he snorted. "I'm not into that."

So for more than two years, Ben and Lydia haven't. But they have looked for ways to serve him. Hurricane Irma provided a great opportunity. Another neighbor's tree fell across his driveway completely blocking any exit. Ben, who owns a chainsaw, spent the better part of a day sawing him out, clearing several driveways, and hauling off debris. Lydia and the girls helped.

At the end of the day, the 80-year-old neighbor took Ben aside and said, "I've been watching you work and help everyone all day! I can't figure you out! I've never seen anything like it."

Ben replied, "Well, I'm not sure you'll like me saying this, but I do it because I know and love God. And He tells me in the Bible that I should love my neighbor. You're my neighbor, so I'm loving you."

From his reaction, that crusty old vet was touched. We are praying for more opportunities for Ben to share God's love physically and verbally.

On their own, difficult circumstances and tragic events can leave bitter tastes in our hearts. But God promises that when they are mixed in properly with all the other ingredients He has placed in our lives, the results will be good!

Other than the sugar, nothing in that Betty Crocker recipe for pancakes tastes very good on its own. But when everything is stirred together (including the 'yucky stuff') and allowed to do what it is supposed to do, the pancakes turn out great – just ask Zoë!



THINGS I HAVE LEARNED and WANT TO PASS ON

by Ed Diaz (with a little help from Gwen)

#2 - Ministry is Never 'Ours.' It Belongs To God!

God is capable of achieving anything He desires with or without our involvement. He certainly could have chosen a more effective way to accomplish His plans, but has elected to include fallen people in the process. He wants us to experience the joy of participating with Him. Unfortunately, much too often we try to claim some of the credit.

At the end of my senior year in seminary (1976), I was recruited to move to Oregon to help create a new ministry that would include teaching seminars all over the U.S. (and later internationally). So, in October of that year, Gwen and I finished up our summer obligations at a Middle School Camp in East Texas and headed to Portland, OR. We stacked all our worldly possessions (including a huge Buick LeSabre) in the back bay of a U-Haul truck and climbed in the front seat with our 3-month-old son. (That epic journey is worthy of its own newsletter article someday.)

On the first day of work it became clear that I (along with two other new graduates) had not been hired to work *with* the founder of the ministry, as we had been led to believe. We were definitely there to work *for* him. He made it clear that this was *his* ministry, and he was very quick to grab any credit that came along – even if it belonged to someone else. As a matter of fact, his name was printed on the bottom of every single page of every single notebook that we ever produced. As a result of our success, he became very well known.

After two years, the ministry moved its headquarters to Atlanta, Georgia, and things grew even worse. While our President worked in a glorious office and lived in a palatial house, the rest of us struggled to make ends meet. It was frustrating to say the least – especially when we realized that he had no one in his life to hold him accountable.

Along the way, Gwen and I participated in some staff training meetings with friends who were launching a new ministry. It was clear from the beginning that the founder of this ministry, did not want to “own” it. He wanted God to be the one in charge. The role of the workers was simply to be faithful, to give God all the credit, and to hold each other accountable.

This approach eventually led us to become a part of Search Ministries for many years. And when we needed to branch out on our own to start 71:17 Ministries due to logistical reasons, this was the model we chose to follow. It is same one that Paul used in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, he says: *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.* [ESV]

Unfortunately (and I say this with great sorrow), the role of the President of the first ministry we entered did not end well. God had to remove him from leadership in order to allow the seeds that had been planted to grow.

We have learned a lot of things from the juxtaposition of these two ministries that God led us into early in our walk with Him. Here are a few:

1. No one can claim ownership of God’s work. We are just stewards of the time and space and gifts that He has given us. In Acts 20:24 Paul says: *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* [ESV]

71:17 Ministries is God’s work – a ministry gifted to us from Him. For that we are grateful, humbled, and eager to bring Him glory.

God will reward us when the time is right. We must never use the platforms He gives us to seek earthly fame or prosperity. In Colossians 3:23-24 Paul declares: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* [ESV]

Since this is God’s work, we can share whatever He gives us with you. That is why so many of Ed’s teachings and Gwen’s books are freely available to you. [See our website address below.]

We must allow ourselves to be accountable so we don’t lose track of why we are here. Have you noticed that the scriptures never speak of elders and those in charge of ministry in the singular form? There is always a plurality. They are to be accountable to and for each other. In Acts 20:28 Paul addresses elders: *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* [ESV]

For this reason 71:17 Ministries has a Ministry Board to keep us on track and encourage us as we minister to you! We are grateful for them and for you!