

My wife and I take every opportunity to visit the Munsinger Gardens in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Against the setting of the Mississippi River, the park spreads out across acres of beautifully planned chaos. Thankfully, scattered throughout the colorful confusion are strategically placed benches. At any one of them a visitor can rest and let his thoughts catch up with his eyes. When the pause ends, the guest's memory may carry away a soul-load of nostalgia. And he may even promise to return and revisit that very same bench.

There is an art to being a good bench. It involves location, position, stability, silence, and follow-through. And, if you think about it, these are the same factors which let a Christian be a kind of bench—a refreshing pause in someone else's journey.

1. Location

“For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul” (Jeremiah 31:25).

Sometimes in our walk with Christ we enjoy a park setting. At those times many believers gather in an atmosphere of joy, and tables are loaded with rich truth from the Word of God. Here the art of being a bench is seen in not spoiling the moment with the trivial or the critical. There is a talent in helping a friend see timely truths about Jesus tucked in a garden of wisdom. However, life is unlike a walk in the park in many ways and at many times.


*I'd stay in the Garden in peace
But the fast lane of life will not let me.
I must rise and go, with a heart of woe.
The park has no power to keep me.*


Often life is a tedious crawl up a mountainside or the slogging monotony of a branch-entangled gully. In these cases, a good bench needs to be available when the trudging believer needs someone who can help her rest and anoint her eyes.

2. Position

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

Where a bench stands dictates what panorama (or brush) will be directly in view. This is where, in life, one Christian must be able to say enough—just enough—to raise his friend's eyebrows





with personal discovery. A simple, “Look there,” and the pointing of a finger can reveal a previously hidden picture to those who are willing to pause to look. Free from staring at his feet on the trail, the traveler’s eyes can find “an apple of gold in a picture of silver” among the rocks, vines, and roots just inches from where he sits. Or, free to think about something other than one-foot-in-front-of-the-other, he may remember with a smile something beautiful that happened a mile back.

3. Stability


“Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it” (Isaiah 36:6).

A broken walking stick and a broken bench are somber sights which inspire photographers, disappoint hikers, and do considerable damage if they don’t *look* broken. A Christian who would serve as a bench in the life of a weary friend or passerby must be able to speak truth simply and clearly. Truth does not change, but it can grow stale and feeble in our thinking as familiar words lose their vibrant content. The rote expression of truth can be a harbinger of a bankrupt vocabulary. (The origin of the word “bankruptcy” means “a broken bench or counter.” In Italian, it described a moneylender who, through incompetence or dishonesty, no longer had funds with which to do business.) I am convinced that Jesus was not talking about new revelation when He said, “Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52). He challenged us to learn to express established truth with fresh applications which create aha moments. Rather than using words found while rummaging through the attic of our minds, we are to draw out expressions and illustrations that are functioning parts of our soul.

4. Silence

“A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself” (Proverbs 18:2).

A good bench is unobtrusive. It is stable but silent. In fact, it may be forgotten. So, when we play the role of a friend’s bench, we are wise to apply Jesus’ counsel with regard to “much speaking” in prayer (Matthew 6:7). If we would contribute to refreshing and



energizing “bench work,” we must be alert to silence just as we give attention to spaces between words in writing. The interest which can be kindled by a few well-chosen words can be doused with a flood of verbiage. We should be careful of offering advice only for the sake of hearing our own voices.

5. Follow-through

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1, 2).

*I'd stay in the garden with Him
Tho' the night around me be falling;
But He bids me go; thro' the voice of woe,
His voice to me is calling.*

C. Austin Miles recognized that life is not a walk in the park. He also recognized that we have bench moments with Jesus on our journey. So, after describing the ambience of fellowship with the Savior in his hymn “In the Garden,” Miles put woe in Jesus’ voice as He bids us go away for the night.

Here, however, we must part with the poem. In the Gospel of John, Jesus stresses an abiding relationship. Then in Romans 5:2 and Revelation 3:20, Jesus offers to come in for supper. Paul describes justification by faith as putting us in an ongoing atmosphere of grace. I understand, therefore, that a good bench ministry involves helping the weary traveler discover the promise that Jesus is with us always, right up to the end. This means—to break from our bench analogy—we have a garden or park which goes with us wherever our earthly trail may lead.

*I'd stay in the
Garden with Him.*

Take some time to sit on a bench in a park or along a path. Reflect on what you see as you scan the panorama in front of you. Imagine yourself to be a weary traveler. What could a friend beside you point out that might help to refresh your spirit? ■

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