

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/9/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, January 10, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, continue to pray for those who are affected by the difficult weather conditions throughout our country and world. Pray that they might be protected from harsh weather and that the resources need for survival are provide. Offer prayers also for those who give of their time and energy to help those who are in need.*

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I like acronyms that help us remember and think about our lives as Christians. My favorite is GRACE, which stands for GOD'S Riches At CHRISt'S Expense. FAITH encourages us to Forward All Issues To Heaven. SIN stands for a Soul In Need. The BIBLE contains Best Instructions Before Leaving Earth. And FROG reminds us to Fully Rely On GOD.

This week, I learned a new one and it came up in two different circumstances, so perhaps it is something we would do well to consider. The word is JOY and it stands for JESUS, Others, You. It invites us to find joy in our lives by setting our priorities in this way, JESUS first, others second, and ourselves third.

In Matthew 22:36-40, an expert in Jewish religious law asked JESUS what the greatest commandment was. JESUS replied, "Love the LORD your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And then HE adds that the second greatest commandment is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The acronym "JOY" really captures this message. We are to put GOD first in our lives and not let anything else take priority over loving and serving GOD and seeking to do GOD'S will. Then we are to always consider the needs of others, even before we consider our own needs. Though the explanation give says, "love your neighbor as yourself," suggesting that we consider ourselves before others, the intent of the command was that the needs of others should come before even our own. In Luke's gospel, JESUS, when asked, uses the story of the good Samaritan to explain who it is that is truly our neighbor. In that parable, JESUS says that our neighbor is anyone who is in need, and that we should address the needs of others before looking after our own. Doing so, by the way, is how we put GOD first, because it is in serving those who are in lesser positions that we show our love for GOD.

Gale Sayers, the great running back of the Chicago Bears, wrote his autobiography in the 1970's and titled it "I Am Third." Sayers sought to make this his life philosophy. When he became a professional player, he made a medallion with those words on it and wore it around his neck his whole career.

At an initial read, "GOD first, others second, ourselves third," doesn't seem like something many of us will be happy about. Taking time out of our schedule and giving up our resources for others doesn't seem like actions that we are going to be pleased to do. But surprisingly, when we put GOD and others second, we will find joy in our lives, the joy that comes from serving, from seeing others helped, and knowing that we do it because of GOD'S love and mercy in our lives. That joy will grow as the commitment to putting GOD first and others second is lived out in our words and our actions. There truly is JOY when we are able to regularly say, "I am third."

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey