

Prioritizing the Gift that is our Families

Jeffrey Davis is, among other things, a ham radio operator, and author of the book 1,000 marbles. How the book got its title was from his experience one day listening to another ham radio operator give some insight on his family.

One morning, he was shuffling toward the basement shack with a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and the morning paper in the other. What began as a typical Saturday morning, turned into one of those lessons that life seems to hand you from time to time.

Jeff turned the dial up into the phone portion of the band on his ham radio in order to listen to a Saturday morning swap net. Along the way, he came across an older sounding chap, with a tremendous signal and a golden voice. The kind that made him sound like he should be in the broadcasting business. He was telling whoever he was talking with something about "a thousand marbles."

Jeff was intrigued and stopped to listen to what he had to say. "Well, Tom, it sure sounds like you're busy with your job. I'm sure they pay you well but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. Too bad you missed your daughter's dance recital."

He continued, "Let me tell you something Tom, something that has helped me keep a good perspective on my own priorities." And that's when he began to explain his theory of "a thousand marbles."

"You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years."

"Now then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3900 which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. Now stick with me Tom, I'm getting to the important part."

"It took me until I was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail," he went on, "and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays. I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy."

"So I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up having to visit three toy stores to roundup 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside of a large, clear plastic container right here in the shack next to my gear. Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away."

"I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight."

"Now let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off with you and take my lovely wife out for breakfast. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure if I make it until next Saturday then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time."

"It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I hope to meet you again here on the band. 75 year Old Man, this is K9NZQ, clear and going QRT, good morning!"

Jeff writes you could have heard a pin drop on the band when this fellow signed off. He gave all the other operators a lot to think about. Jeff had planned to work on the antenna that morning, and then he was going to meet up with a few hams to work on the next club newsletter. Instead, he went upstairs and woke his wife up with a kiss.

"C'mon honey, I'm taking you and the kids to breakfast" he said.
"What brought this on?" she asked with a smile.

"Oh, nothing special, it's just been a long time since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. Hey, can we stop at a toy store while we're out? I need to buy some marbles."

The past few weeks leading up to Christmas, priests have been hearing a lot of confessions. And one of the most common things you hear are sometimes are families cause us to lose our marbles. We can drive one another nuts; we can fight with one another whether we are young or old; we can harbor a grudge. And many families had very high stress levels during the height of the pandemic when everything was shut down.

However, also during this time, many families have been spending more time together. Odds are you'll be seeing them today or this week, and it's important to remember what a precious gift our family is.

We know very little of the years of Jesus life that are not recorded, other than Jesus disappearing for a time to be in the Temple when he was about 10. But we do know that He was patient and along with Mary and Joseph the family had many beautiful moments together as they were united in love.

For all of us, the marbles come out of our containers as the years go by. Like many I'd love to go back in time for a day or two. While I can't do that, I can make the most of the time I have left, and I'm so blessed with a great family who has been so supportive over the years. After Christmas Masses I'll be visiting home and bringing a few things for loved ones to open, but truly among the greatest gifts I've been given has been my

family. I cherish the conversations, the card games, the meals, and the many great memories I have, and hopefully the ones yet to be made.

And so as you celebrate with your family this Christmas, and see the smiles as gifts are opened and meals and conversations are shared, never forget what a gift family is, and what a gift you are to your family. Never forget the many little things you do for one another mean so much, and that through your presence to one another, you do so much to reveal Jesus.

With that in mind, continue to work at your family and help one another to grow in faith and love. Make a commitment to work through difficulties and grudges. Make a commitment to spend time with loved ones, not just at Christmas. Know you don't have to do anything other than be present for it to mean so much. Say I love you and show it through actions. Be willing to apologize and know you are human and will make mistakes and let one another down. Find time to laugh and cry and share emotions. Remind each other how important each member of the family is. Visit family members who maybe aren't as mobile as they used to be. In a nutshell: focus on the important stuff that really matters. No one will be worried about the wrong shirt size or color they got for Christmas years from now. Instead they'll look back at the impact you had on their life by being there for them.

Merry Christmas to you and your loved ones. What a great gift we are given in the love of Jesus - let it be something we always pass on, especially to our families.

God bless and Merry Christmas,

Fr. Paul