

## Mel Smith lecture

### *Introduction*

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this evening. It is a great privilege.

I'm always a little nervous speaking at an event like this. I mean, I've given hundreds of political speeches in my day, but when the material isn't focused on politics, I think to myself, "this is different. This actually matters". So I'm a little nervous.

I do like the agricultural stories and metaphors. For instance, some folks say that politics can be described as a horse race, and to be an effective politician sometimes you need the characteristics of several kinds of horses:

1. You need the strength of a Clydesdale
2. You need the speed of a thoroughbred
3. You need the herding instincts of a mustang
4. And you need the thick hide of a donkey

In my opinion, the donkey hide is particularly important.

Fortunately for us all, I'm not here this evening to talk federal Agriculture policy, but to discuss why it's important where you stand, whether it's in logging, politics, or life.

What would Mel Smith say about the title of this presentation? Well, I don't claim to have known Mel Smith well, so I can't say for certain. I am certain that he had a big influence on my entry into the political realm, and I wasn't the only one. And whether you were seeking elected office, or simply a casual observer, Mel Smith helped to shape the public opinion and reaction of many people in the 80s and 90s, and that influence continues to this day through his writings and through this foundation.

Mel Smith also had something special in common with Preston Manning, (high praise in my books) in that both of them could (and in Preston's case, still can) take a complex, difficult subject like Constitutional law, distill it down to it's salient points, explain it and make it interesting to non-experts like me, all while inspiring a passionate and tangible response. No small feat.

I fear that while "rendering the complex simple" is the art of great men, making the simple complex is the folly of too many politicians. So my guess is that Mel would have been okay with the title of "logging, politics, and life", with a caveat that I tread carefully and explain thoroughly.

## Logging.

There was a time in our history when explaining the details of logging was unnecessary for a BC audience. Even 30-40 years ago many, many people had a connection to the industry, and my connection-My dad was a logger, both my brothers were loggers, - wasn't atypical. I was a logger too, although I suppose that admitting that I was a tree-killer in this politically correct world could affect my job prospects for the future. But we were still logging the great Sahara forest in those days, and nobody thought less of you for it.

In fact, throughout our province were dozens and dozens of towns founded almost exclusively on harvesting timber and sawing logs. Most people knew something about logging, and if they knew anything at all, they knew it was a dangerous occupation. By far, more men were killed and injured logging than in any other profession. So in our company, whenever we got a raw rookie into the woods we spent his initiation period drumming one thing into his head: if you want to survive in this industry, be careful where you stand.

There are so many ways to get hurt logging that it defies regulation. To a logger, the expression, "it's as easy as falling of a log" is not really amusing; it's just another way to get hurt. The men who fall the trees are all too often killed or injured by falling limbs, trees that kick back, or dead snags that crumble without warning. Road builders face some of the same dangers, with the added problems of trying to build a ridiculously steep and narrow road in everything from solid rock to unstable clay.

The men who actually yard the timber are continuously trying to coax 30,000 pound logs to wind their way around stumps and rock bluffs, always hoping a cable or a shackle doesn't break at the wrong time. If it does, where you're standing makes the difference between simply an exciting moment and a serious or fatal injury. It's not a job for wimps.

One of the newbies we hired to go logging with us was my brother-in-law Bob. He was a farm boy, green as grass, and not used to the rugged coastal mountains at all. He also wasn't used to working with the hard-driving, hard-drinking, tough-talking, somewhat crude loggers who were typical of the industry. Their expressions were vulgar; the average guy lived paycheque to paycheque, and let's just say that most of them were not choirboys. Okay, let's be honest. Most of them didn't know what a choir even did!

So into this mix we tossed brother in law Bob. He must have needed the work badly, because Bob wasn't a stereotypical logger at all. Sure he was used to hard physical work, but the crew dynamics were something else, and the mountains and big coastal timber were a long way from the green fields of the valley and the Holsteins that went with them. And Bob DID know what a choir was, because he was a church-goer. Worse yet, (as far as the loggers were concerned), he was a quiet Christian.

Now Bob and I do not have exactly the same personality. He claims that when I walk into a room, people will know my opinion on any given subject within 5 minutes. "Facts" are optional, but opinions, opinions are always at the ready. Bob, on the other hand, is quiet, thoughtful, less opinionated. For sure, Bob is not preachy. But he does know when to take a stand, and when he was logging, that quickly earned him the nickname, Preacher Bob.

How did he earn this moniker? By quoting scripture to his co-workers? Lecturing on morality? Handing out gospel tracts? Not hardly. Bob became Preacher Bob only because he wouldn't join in the ribald humour, refused to ogle the ever-present pornography, didn't talk about other women, never joined them for the Friday night bar-hopping that was typical of the logging fraternity.

So while he didn't preach at the men he worked with, though he simply went about his work and did his share, the reaction of the rest of the crew was visceral. He was mocked, ridiculed, and belittled. They questioned his manhood. They pushed him whenever they could in whatever mean and nasty way possible, hoping I'm sure that he would simply go away. It was a rough, rough ride for Preacher Bob.

I'm not thinking of anyone in particular, now, but a louder, more aggressive guy might have lashed out and evened the score a little bit. You know, give as good as you get. But Bob and my sister Carole handled it differently than I might have. Carole started baking cookies for the crew and sent them to work with Bob. Bob invited them over to his house for the occasional coffee on the weekend. He never lashed out, he continued to work hard, and he treated everyone- even those who were picking on him- with kindness. But he never changed his standards either.

The results that summer were remarkable. Guys who had run him down behind his back (and often to his face) began first to back down, and eventually became Bob boosters. Men who had mocked him earlier in the year slowly changed their attitude, and while by summer's end they still called Preacher Bob from time to time, it was no longer a nasty term.

If they said it at all it was a respectful thing, reflective of the fact that Bob was perhaps the first openly Christian person they had ever met, that they had watched him carefully under the pressure-cooker of the workplace, and had come to appreciate that he had taken a principled stand.

When you're logging, if you want to be safe, it matters where you stand. That summer, preacher Bob showed me that it matters where, why and how you stand as a person.

Let's face it. Most people will happily go through life, and the thought of running for public office will never cross their mind. They may not go to public meetings or even write a letter to the editor. It's just not going to happen, and I accept that. Yet every person has an opportunity to influence those around them, to have an impact on their co-workers or family, and to take a stand for what is right.

My conclusion is that it matters where you stand because people watch and listen, and draw conclusions based on how you live your life. For Christians who worry about what sort of witness they have on others, the answer is often "never stop witnessing. If necessary, occasionally use words". It's why Trinity Western has it figured out. They are churning out graduates in many disciplines, all of whom focus on being excellent in what they do. These people go on to be salt and light in a world that's always watching, always attentive, always eager to know if Christians can live out what they say they believe.

Preacher Bob understood that truth, and lived it.

Politics.

So what about politics? Can you take a stand in public life and still be standing when it's over?

The short answer is yes. Admittedly, for Christian politicians like myself - who are asked to take very public positions on every imaginable subject- taking a stand can easily be- dare I say, on occasion deliberately be- misinterpreted as forcing your religious beliefs down someone else's throat. Sometimes, like Preacher Bob, I like to think it's because most people simply don't know me well enough to judge differently, and that as time goes on they'll hear me out because I've earned the right to be heard.

Unfortunately, there are some examples-if you haven't seen enough Canadian examples you can surely add some from other countries- of politicians who have used their positions as a bully pulpit. As a result, Christian politicians start off with a double-whammy against them: they're politicians (the least trustworthy of all occupations), and they're Christians (and you know what they're like!). And any flaw- and heaven knows we all have plenty of those- is all the proof necessary to justify a very cynical reaction. "Why should we listen to these guys", is a common reaction from both the general public and the media. Especially if the subject matter has even a hint of morality in it.

People observing the interaction between faith and politics summarize the dilemma facing Christians in politics this way:

"There is much to lose and not much to gain by MPs declaring their religious beliefs", says John Stackhouse of Regent College, "Until the electorate decides that religious identity and religious observance matters, why would politicians mark themselves off from potential voters?"

Carleton professor Jonathan Malloy says, "Politicians only see a downside in talking about religious faith. They're worried that too much might be made of it".

That may be true, but since you're paying me the big bucks tonight, I'm willing to make a few observations about why a Christian politician can and should make a stand from time to time. If I get it wrong, you may read some of these comments tomorrow under a newspaper column entitled, Political obituaries.

First of all, there is no biblical sanction against political involvement. I realize that politics has a scrappy, winner-takes-all reputation, but so does the business world, the arts, the media, and sometimes even the Church itself. There is no reason to abandon the political realm to others, especially when a Christian is skilled or gifted- or both- in politics.

It's also important that in a democratic, pluralistic society, a Christian perspective gets a hearing. Why did Trinity Western University fight back when they were accused of homophobic activities in the court case launched against them by the teachers union? It certainly wasn't because they loved to go to court, or spend money on lawyers. They simply used a democratic tool available to them to make a point; that Christian universities- and by extension, Christians generally- can have and hold standards different than the rest of society without contravening the Charter, and without weakening the rights of others.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of this court ruling, and generations of Christians-and people of other faiths for that matter- will have Trinity Western to thank for making what should have been obvious a precedent for us all. Knowing when, where and how to stand on important issues makes a big difference to society, and in our democratic system we have an obligation to make that society as good as possible.

Finally, for Christian MPs, their faith perspective can give direction day by day, and moment by moment.

I'll be the first to admit that Christians haven't cornered the market on honesty, candor, insight or discernment. We could all wish it were different, but that's the way it is.

Yet it is possible that a mature Christian- one who has been taught well, who is well-read, who has a track record of "being in the world but not of it", may actually have something extra to add to the public discussion. People with an active faith usually don't need remedial training in basic ethics, something that a major US university instituted a few years ago when it became apparent that their business grads were rudderless when it came to ethical judgment. It's because a mature Christian has had to wrestle with the right and wrong of many issues, and come to grips with how they respond in a secular world, that they can offer a unique contribution.

In an odd way, most people will accept that your faith influences your decisions if you're upfront about it, and judge not. In other words, don't try to be too cute about it, and it goes without saying that you should never, ever be mean-spirited.

Several years ago, the government introduced a Bill on reproductive technology. It was a complex Bill that in the end didn't pass, but at the time it was my duty to speak to it in the House Of Commons, and people were watching to see if the religious zealots would get tripped up by the subject matter. Of course I dealt with the technical aspects of the Bill, but I also chose to be upfront about my faith, and said that, "I come at this from a faith perspective that says that life is precious, and therefore this Bill- dealing with reproductive technology and the basics of life- is important to me, because I believe that all life is important".

I didn't quote scripture at length or call down condemnation, because I just don't think that's effective in that setting. It's true that I didn't give anybody a religious tract on the four spiritual laws, but I was able to talk about faith, how it guided my thinking, and why life is precious. Sometimes that's all you can do, and by being measured and calm about it, people will usually listen respectfully.

Another example was the recent motion on the redefinition of marriage. The media and much of the secular world would be quick to react if someone used the debate to condemn homosexuality, or worse yet, condemn homosexuals. But those who simply said, "I'm a Christian, and my faith and the scriptures I follow lead me to conclude that while other relationships are important to those involved, and the government may want to find a way to recognize them, it is not necessary or wise to redefine marriage to accomplish this. I believe marriage should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. "

Again, someone may disagree with that interpretation of scripture, or feel even that it's just plain wrong. But no one in the recent debate was raked over the coals for taking a stand based on faith. It was important, I believe, that that argument was made and heard. Even when it proves impossible to carry the day, it's important to take a stand.

For Christmas I received a book about Abraham Lincoln. I was struck anew how so many of the great society changing issues were championed by Christians. The abolition of slavery was one. The creation of many of our public universities and hospitals have their origins in the Christian faith. Our Constitution and that of our American neighbours has faith in God as its founding premise. Almost always, the Christians who are motivated and guided by love and compassion- and this is always key- it's this group who can take a public stand, debate public policy, and use their personal life example to change the world for the better.

Two final points before I beat this issue to death:

First, I've learned over the years that not all Christians will have the same priorities when it comes to public policy. This may cause the media to have a fit, cause they want to put all Christians in one box. But there's nothing to worry about, really. Some people of faith will focus on the social gospel, where they reach out to the needy in specific ways. This is a good thing. Others will make strengthening the family their goal, and this too is good. Some will go to work on Reproductive technology and its impact on us all. Many Christians are worried about our stewardship of the environment, and take seriously the instruction to look after things here on earth. Wonderful. Others may be more libertarian, and take the principle of individual accountability and apply it generally to public policy matters. The fact that Christians have different priorities is merely a reflection of different giftedness or sensitivities or calling, and the differences should be encouraged, not condemned.

Finally, when we see someone in public arena who does something we appreciate, we should let them know.

You would not believe the impact that your comments can have on someone who is out on the edge, taking a stand on a tough issue. In fact, your comments might just make the difference as to whether or not a politician continues to stand and be counted.

I remember several years ago when the debate on the definition of marriage was in the provincial realm, and a local MLA had taken a stand- against his own party- defending the traditional definition of marriage. I'm almost reluctant to use this as an example, because (you have to believe me) I do not get up every morning focusing on the definition of marriage, but it's perhaps the best example I have so I'm going to use it.

Anyway, right after the vote I was speaking at a church, and I was talking about communicating with your politicians. I suggested that for Christians, it was important to not simply get hold of them when you were venting your spleen, but also to encourage them from time to time when they actually do something you agree with. And I asked the question, "how many of you wrote a letter or email to our local MLA, thanking him for standing up for something you believe in". This was a big church, maybe 7-800 people in attendance. I had spoken with the the MLA so I knew the answer. Not one person there had written a note to say thanks for standing up for what we believe. Not one person.

Let me assure you, I hear from MPs all the time who tell me that "such and such is a huge issue- I'm being inundated in my office". Boy that sounds serious, I say, how many people? Coupla thousand? Several hundred? Often the answer is well, maybe a dozen people phoned in. A dozen!

You know what a difference it makes in your work, attitude and life when someone takes the time to tell you that they appreciate what you're doing. Politicians are like anyone else, so please, remember to encourage people along the way when they take a stand that you agree with, whether that's at work, in the home, or in public life.

## Life

Politicians, really, are just like anyone else. Well, that's not completely true. I remember one of Preston Manning's jokes, asking about the difference between a dead politician and a dead skunk laying on the road. The answer, of course, is there's skid marks in front of the skunk. So maybe we're not exactly like everyone else.

But the truth is, people in public life- politicians, pastors, Rick Mercer, General Hillier, Mel Smith and many others- have all the trials and tribulations, hopes and dreams, tears and laughter as anyone else. In fact, politicians even have feelings.

Okay, maybe that's pushing it.

But I know for a fact that many MPs I work with jump at the chance to talk about their family, or their grandchildren for instance. I'm not one of those guys, although it is true that Deb and I have 6 grandchildren. But really, why would I tell you that our grandchildren's names are Morgan, Brennan, Nathan, Maclean, Tyson and Jackson. I'm not that kind of guy. I'm not one to talk about how cute they were in the Christmas concert, or how the little guys like to be rocked just so. I'm not like some grandparents you may know.

Did I mention how cute these kids are?

Anyway, I only mention the grandchildren because we like to read books to them, just the way we read books to our own children. One of those books is called, “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, no good very bad day”. It starts like this.

Excerpts from the book....”It looked like it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad, day!”

18 months ago, some folks would argue that I experienced one of those days myself. In fact, maybe more than one! Cause about a year and a half ago I was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer called mesothelioma. The doctors told me it was caused by exposure to asbestos 25- 30 years earlier, back when I was in the logging business. Unfortunately, once in a while, that asbestos gets lodged in the lining around the lung and irritates it, and a cancer develops that has virtually no treatment, with a very bad prognosis.

Like most people, I hadn't really scheduled an event like this into my life. In fact, just a few weeks earlier, I had run my first marathon, in Ottawa. (this was a real, running marathon, it had nothing to do with going to Question Period every day). Anyway, the marathon went well, but a month or so afterwards I was having trouble maintaining my usual jogging schedule. After a week or so of that, I went to the doctor and an x-ray revealed a collapsed lung.

No one got too excited over the lung. I mean, after all, you have two of them, and in a healthy guy like me, the procedure is to simply stick a tube in between your ribs, ( I recommend you get a doctor to do this, but I suppose you could do it yourself) pull the air out of the chest cavity, the lung expands, and voila- you're back in business. Unfortunately, a week or so later another x-ray revealed it was collapsing again. So, another trip to the hospital, another tube between the ribs, and two or three days later I was home to recover.

Two weeks later it was more of the same. The local doctors had run out of ideas, so this time it meant a trip to Vancouver General Hospital, where the surgeon would not only repeat the procedure, but use a thoroscopic instrument to go in and sew off the leak in the lung itself. While he was in there looking around he saw something he didn't like, took some samples, and sent them off to the pathologist for testing. A few days later, with my whole family gathered around, he broke the news to us- Sure enough, it was cancer, and it's a bad cancer at that.

It had the makings of a terrible, horrible, no good very bad day. And I want to upfront with you- I have had better days.

But for a Christian like me, it merely confirms what the Bible says: "In this life you will have trouble". So let's be clear. Of course the initial news is a shock. Of course it makes the future uncertain. Of course it changes your plans somewhat. But I've never felt for an instant that God is picking on me. He's not judging me, or punishing me, or really, even testing me. Trouble will come our way, but no matter what comes, *even in the valley of the shadow of death*, God is there to bring comfort.

In the weeks that followed my diagnosis, and right to this day, my diagnosis confirms what the Apostle Paul said in the scriptures:

“He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.” I couldn’t feel sorry for myself, because I was comforted by my relationship with God, and in turn, found out I could comfort and encourage others.

What a great thing!

Here’s what I tell people who are considering running for public office. Make sure you know where you stand before you get elected, because there’s no time to figure it out once you are elected. It’s true for policy issues, but it’s often true about the big questions about life. Everyone I know is busier than ever before, and it’s easy to let life slip by without thinking about where we stand. For me, knowing where I stood with God before my cancer troubles hit made all the difference in the world.

So after the trouble hit, and after the comfort followed, what’s to be learned from this new event in my life. There’s really four things I would like to emphasize- things that seem obvious perhaps, but they also seem clearer to me now than they did a couple of years ago.

## **1. Use Time Deliberately**

The Bible says, “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time...”

- Some people argue that time is your life’s blood. For example, you exchange part of your life-your time- for wages at work. You invest in your children- not just your money, but your time. Time is what we have, and we only have a few hours of it before we’re gone, so we need to use the time wisely. One of the reasons I try so hard to be on time for meetings is that when I’m late, I’m wasting someone else’s time .
- Since I was given my medical news I’ve made a change in my daily schedule. I’m still often busy till late at night, but I don’t start my day at the office till 8:30am. Like most of you, I have an endless list of things to do, people to see, projects to start and so on. But if I start early – at 6 or 7 am –like I once did-, then I’ll never have time to exercise, have breakfast, read the morning newspaper. No time for things that will actually give me staying power for the long haul.
- Many of you will be familiar with Stephen Covey’s book on the seven habits of successful people. He has a chapter on time management called ‘Putting first things first’- that always impressed me, and it’s a matrix, really. The matrix has four squares, and in the four squares he labels activities under the following categories.
- - urgent and important.-things like crises, deadline-driven projects, pressing problems.
- Then you have urgent, but unimportant.-interruptions, phonecalls, email, some meetings, popular activities
- Not urgent, but important-. Prevention,(health, exercise, maintenance) relationship-building, planning, recreation. Spiritual renewal.

- Then there's the square I spend too much of my time in, unimportant and not urgent. Trivia, some phone calls, Blackberry messages, ( a sure sign of the endtimes, in my opinion), watching the Canucks during their winning streak-okay, that IS important,
- the secret to redeeming the time, is to spend more time in the important category, and less time in the urgent. Someone called it, the Tyranny of the Urgent: urgent things demand your time, but they're often things that don't help you accomplish important things. I try to remember that time is limited, you only get so much of it, so spend it on important things. Spending time in the important category will often mean you spend less time in the crisis category. You either take the time to be healthy, for example, or you take the time to be sick.
- I'm trying to use my time deliberately. Not reacting to pressing problems, but being proactive in searching for the important things that contribute to my life's goals.

## **2.Work on Relationships**

Relationships are those important things that cannot be rated on the TSX, or bought and sold at the flea market. But we still know that they have tremendous worth. Good relationships are something that everybody – well, most everybody – wants more than anything else. Cicero once said, “Life is nothing without friendship.”

As we all know, some relationships are dysfunctional. My favourite dysfunctional relationship is one you may have heard or read about. It was between Winston Churchill and his archrival, Lady Nancy Astor. I'm not exactly sure what it was that set those two against one another, but their verbal battles are the subject of legend.

Lady Astor once said to Churchill: “Winston, if I were your wife, I would put poison in your coffee. Whereupon Winston said, “Nancy, if I were your husband I'd drink it.”

Another time, Churchill was confronted by a Labour MP Bessie Braddock, who said to the Prime Minister, “Sir, you’re drunk.” And Winston responded: “Yes, madam, I am drunk. But in the morning I will be sober and you will still be ugly.”

These kinds of exchanges are classic signs of a dysfunctional relationship. If any of you are talking to one another like this, counselling sessions will be available right after this evening’s events.

I don’t know if anything could have repaired the relationship between Churchill and Lady Astor, but for me, making time for relationship building has been firmly ensconced in the important category of my life. It’s why my roommate, Monte Solberg and I will sometimes go for a walk and talk together on the rare occasion we’re at the apartment some evening. We don’t have to do it, it’s not a frantic, let’s get it done today or we’re all doomed, sort of thing- it’s not a crisis. It’s just that building relationships is important, it deserves our time and effort, and I consciously work on it.

That’s why I have phoned home to talk to Deb virtually every night I’ve been away during the past 13 years since I’ve been elected.

It’s why I come home on the weekend, and if that means 18 hours of commuting, well at least I get to see my wife and family for a bit each week.

It’s why I arranged with the Party Whip to stay in the riding for the birth of our grandson.

It's why I take the time to phone my good buddy Doug once in a while, because I care for him, and he has a way of keeping me accountable for the important things in life.

Sure this takes time, but I tell people that I had a good family before I went into politics, and I am absolutely determined to have a good family when I get out of politics.

Once upon a time, long, long ago and far, far away, our church rented some films for a summertime replacement for adult Sunday School. Most everything else those films may have said or taught has since been lost to me, except for one rhetorical question asked by Tony Campolo: "Why do we go to all the trouble of loading up our little children, driving for hours and hours until everyone is tired and worn out, just to go and visit with the grandparents? Is it love? Free meals? A sense of duty? It's none of the above. We go to visit the folks because we hope against hope that when our grandchildren come along, our kids will bring them home to see us! In other words, we want those habits and those relationships- and the building of those relationships- to become so important, so compelling, so natural, that our own children will put the same effort into building relationships as we do.

### **3. Use life's peaks and valleys as opportunities to share what's important with others**

1. Evangelist Billy Graham once said, "Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys."
2. Valleys are metaphorically known as the place of struggle and hardship – a place of shadow – "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."
3. So, yes, "valley-like" experiences are painful and uncomfortable at times, and it may be difficult to find the happiness and security we wish was in our lives – but it's also the place where our souls find the nourishment and

proper ingredients to grow. God's grace nurtures us in the valleys of life so that spiritual fruit is born in our own lives and the lives of others.

4. I say the lives of others because the challenges of life, if approached with the right attitude, provide a platform to communicate God's grace to the world that we wouldn't have otherwise.

It's time now for a little honesty. Why am I here, speaking to you tonight? Perhaps I was invited to speak tonight because of our new Agricultural policies, or because you want to hear about my grandchildren. Look, it's no secret why I'm here. People know that my family and I have gone through one of those valley experiences, and they're interested to know how it's going, and how we did it.

And each time I do an interview with the media about the cancer, and how I've dealt with it, I talk about how grateful I am for a mature Christian faith and a supportive loving family. In fact, the time I was most emotional that summer was during a conversation I had with our pastor. At the time I was still recovering from surgery, and the outlook was quite uncertain, and I told my pastor, "I can't believe that God wouldn't allow me to go back to work so He could use me to tell others that His Grace is sufficient for all my troubles". And he did let me go back to work, and it's meant that I could share my story with people like you, and I'm so grateful for that.

### **Finally, Don't wait for a crisis, to develop a relationship with God**

To use the language of the evening, know where you stand with God. If there is only one message I could leave with people, this would be it. Some people practice 'fox hole Christianity', where they wait till the bullets are flying overhead and the end looks near,

and they call out to God, “I don’t know if you’re there, but if you are, please save me from this”. Some times it even works, but let’s face it: a crisis moment like that is a bad time to figure out where you stand on the biggest issue of life.

Here’s how it works for some people:

When you’re little, your parents give you a bike and you say, “this is it!”.

When you’re a teenager, you get a driver’s licence and you say, “This is it”.

You go to university, get a degree, get married, you think to yourself, “this is it”.

Career starts going well, you get a promotion, start making some serious money, you say, “this is it”.

Finally, laying on your death bed, you look around the room and you can really say, “THIS is it!!!”.

Too many people spend their lives trying to find something that really makes life sizzle, and they miss out on a great opportunity to know where they stand with God.

Probably most of you have seen the sandwich boards or signs out in front of churches that say, “the Alpha Course- explore the meaning of life”. What a great program, and it’s offered by all sorts of different churches who simply encourage people to ask themselves the big questions of life- why am I here? Is there a God? What can I do to get to know him? It’s a great time to study the subject, cause you shouldn’t wait for a crisis to develop a relationship with God.

## **Conclusion**

Folks, I wish I could tell you that once you wrestle with those issues, get some answers, if you're a Christian, that life is a bowl of cherries. As Erma Bombeck once said, "If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits!" In my experience, no matter who you are, you will have the occasional, "terrible, horrible, no good very bad day", and whether you personally face some of those tough times right now or you're riding on cloud 9, I hope you know where you stand on the big issues of life. That goes for you loggers, or teachers, students, or even budding politicians- it matters where you stand.

And in life, knowing where you stand with God puts everything else in perspective.