

Do you remember the last time you had a bad day? What did you do? How did you get through it?

Someone sent me an e-mail recently brought a smile to my face. It is about Rob who is a commercial diver in Louisiana. He performs underwater repairs on offshore drilling rigs. Below is an E-mail he sent to his sister.

Hi Sue,

Just another note from your bottom-dwelling brother. Last week I had a bad day at the office. I know you've been feeling down lately at work, so I thought I would share my dilemma with you to make you realize your life might not be so bad after all.

Before I can tell you what happened to me, I first must bore you with a few technicalities of my job. As you know, my office lies at the bottom of the sea. I wear a suit to the office. It's a wet suit. This time of year the water is quite cool.

So what we do to keep warm is this: We have a diesel powered industrial water heater. This \$20,000 piece of equipment sucks the water out of the sea. It heats it to a delightful temperature. It then pumps it down to the diver through a garden hose, which is taped to the air hose. Now this sounds like a darn good plan, and I've used it several times with no complaints.

What I do, when I get to the bottom and start working, is take the hose and stuff it down the back of my wet suit. This floods my whole suit with warm water. It's like working in a Jacuzzi.

Everything was going well until all of a sudden, my butt started to itch. So, of course, I scratched it. This only made things worse. Within a few seconds it started to burn. I pulled the hose out from my back, but the damage was done. In agony I realized what had happened. The hot water machine had sucked up a jellyfish and pumped it into my suit. Now, since I don't have any hair on my back, the jellyfish couldn't stick to it. However, the rest of me was not as fortunate. When I scratched what I thought was an itch, I was actually grinding the jellyfish into my bottom. I informed the dive supervisor of my dilemma over the communicator. His instructions were unclear due to the fact that he, along with five other divers, were all laughing hysterically.

Needless to say I aborted the dive. I was instructed to make three agonizing in-water decompression stops totaling thirty-five minutes before I could reach the surface. When I arrived at the surface, I was wearing nothing

but my brass helmet. As I climbed out of the water, the medic, with tears of laughter running down his face, handed me a tube of cream and told me to rub it on the affected area.

The cream put the fire out, but I had other problems for the next two days. So, next time you're having a bad day at work, think about how much worse it would be if you had a jellyfish where it doesn't belong.

This poor guy, he was facing a pretty tough situation. And he acted to deal with. What about you? When you are facing a tough, situation, what do you do? How do you get through it?

Lately many people are having pretty tough days. All you have to do is watch the news to see what is happening in our world and in our economy. I know that as the unemployment is rising in our nation and within our state, many of you are wondering about how tough is this going to get? Many are wondering will I even have a job?

While I can't answer that question specifically for you, I know there is a lot of fear even in the asking of it. Because having a job is a basic way we work to take care of ourselves and our families. Having a job is a basic way of helping to form our identity. For many, having a job adds to our sense of self esteem. So there is a lot of fear around the prospect of not having a job. What can we do, in such a time of fear? How can we respond to the tough economic conditions we are facing?

The story of Jeremiah offers us some clues about how we can respond to tough times. **The first lesson from the story of Jeremiah is to remember to turn to God, when fear and frustration set in.** Jeremiah was a prophet in one of the darkest times in Israel's history. He was charged, initially with giving an unpopular message to the people of Israel. He was saying that the end was near. This King was going to fall. The people were going to be carried away. Jerusalem was not going to make it.

The King and the people got pretty mad at him, as you can imagine. The King had Jeremiah thrown in jail for the message that he was preaching. What is amazing to me is that we are given glimpses of what Jeremiah thought.

He didn't like the message he was preaching. He turned to God, in his frustration and fear and said, "Why? Why is this happening? Why have you given me this message? Why can't I say something more positive?"

We see Jeremiah, honestly wrestling with God over his fears and frustrations.

I think this is a reminder to us that we can wrestle with God over our fears and frustrations too. What I see so often is when people have fear and frustration mount in their life that they turn away from God. The story of Jeremiah reminds me that we can turn to God and bring our fears and frustrations to God.

The second lesson I receive from our scripture for today, is how important it is for us to take the long look in life and not get stuck on the present situation. Jeremiah is told to purchase the land from his cousin. He does. And it makes no sense that he does. Other than the very act of his purchasing the land is a sign and a symbol that God has plans to restore the people and the land. It is God's way of reminding Jeremiah and the people of faith of any age who are facing tough, challenging times, that God sees a future for us, even when we can't see one for ourselves.

If you are here today and you are not sure of what the future holds for your work, it is important for you to hear this message of hope, even in the midst of what looks like scary times. It may end up that our future is different than what we presently envision. Having faith and placing our hope in God, doesn't mean that our present jobs will be saved. *But it does mean that we have a future, because God wants a future for us.*

In these times of fear, it is important for us to practice our faith to help us reconnect with God. It is important for us to do things like continue to worship. It is important for us to find time for prayer and for study, both privately and in groups. It is important for us to find ways to share our faith through regular giving our finances and giving our time in missions. These practices help us remember who we are. They help us to claim our identity as followers of Jesus Christ in times that are so tough that we could easily give up and walk away.

The third lesson for me to remember during challenging times, is to find ways to celebrate the gifts of God that we have been given. Every day that we are alive offers us the chance to find one thing that we are grateful for.

Madeleine L'Engle is a favorite author of mine. She tells of a time when she was growing up. Life was pretty hard in her family. At the time of this incident, her father was out of work, looking for a job. They were a loving family, but they didn't have any money.

One day, she was badgering her mom to go eat ice cream at a favorite place in the village where they lived. Her mom kept saying no. When her father came home from a day of looking for work, she overheard her mother and father arguing about money, and bills, and about her request for ice cream.

Finally her parents emerged from another part of the house where the argument had occurred and told Madeleine to get ready; they were going to leave to eat ice cream together as a family. When she heard this, she questioned it. "Why? How can we afford to do this? I don't think it is a good idea anymore. I don't want to go." By now, she was feeling guilty that she had made the request.

Her father looked at her and said, "Madeleine, get ready. We are going to go. Yes, money is tight. Yes, some might think this is a foolish thing to do. But we are going to go eat ice cream and thank God for the gift of ice cream and family."

Later she said, "I learned an important lesson on that day. I learned that my parents were willing to trust God and live with hearts of gratitude, no matter how bleak life looked."

I love that story. For me, it is a story to remind me to be thankful for the gifts I have today.

As we move through these challenging days, may we learn to turn to God. May we learn to take a long view of our future. May we learn to live with gratitude every day. And when jellyfish bad days arise, may we learn to not get stuck there.

Amen