

Word of Encouragement: Can You Pass The Pallbearer Test? Who Will Carry You Out?

In these Words of Encouragement we typically feature stories that are either uplifting, inspire hope, or display the fact that, as noted in Romans 8:28, “all things work together for good.”

This week though is going to be a bit different because there is no story per se. Instead, I’d like to share an experience this week that got me to thinking about the value and importance of friendships.

I have been involved in a ministry, Pinnacle Forum, for several years. Each week they release a podcast that chronicles the story of one of its members. This week it was my turn to be in the barrel.

Won’t bore you with all the details, but during the podcast the moderator, Chuck Bryant and I talked about the importance of investing in building personal relationships and friendships.

I told Chuck that over the years, I’ve given a number of presentations on this topic. When Chuck asked if there was anything that stood out from these presentations, I shared a story about a presentation at an annual industry conference several years ago where I challenged the audience with this question: Can you pass the Pallbearer Test?

The Pallbearer Test came from a story a friend of mine, Bill, told about when he attended a funeral to support a friend who knew the deceased. While there, the funeral director asked Bill to be a pallbearer. Bill politely declined citing the fact that he didn’t know the deceased individual. The funeral director told Bill it didn’t matter; they needed six people to carry the casket out. Bill told me he was stunned: “After all those years of living, that man didn’t have six people who could carry his casket out!”

When I shared this story with a friend of mine who owned a funeral home, he told me:

"Mike, I am not surprised. More often than you’d like to think, there are not six friends to carry the deceased out." So during my talk I asked: Do you know the six people that will be carrying you out? This came to be known as the Pallbearer Test.

One year later at this same annual association conference, a woman came running up to me after a different presentation. She introduced herself and then proclaimed: "I can now pass the Pallbearer Test!"

Apparently that question from the prior year, coupled with her being diagnosed with cancer one month after the presentation, caused her to re-examine her life. She decided to be more intentional in strengthening her friendships and relationships with people that were already in her life. These renewed friendships reinvigorated her life and helped her beat back her cancer.

How about you? Can you pass the Pallbearer Test? Do you know who will be carrying you out?

As you contemplate that sobering question, I mentioned to Chuck that periodically I will get calls or emails from someone who is looking for a new position or some encouragement. Figuratively speaking, when I get that call or email, the requests go into one of three stacks on my desk.

One stack represents those individuals that have returned phone calls or emails, or have been nice, professional, and respectful when we have interacted. I will do whatever I can to help them out.

The second, or middle stack, represents individuals that I have met through personal or professional circumstances. While I may not know them that well, if possible, I would like to help them out.

The third stack represents individuals who apparently have not recognized that building relationships is a two-way street. They are either too busy to return calls or emails or they just don’t believe that cultivating relationships is a priority. Candidly, it’s difficult to help these people because I really don’t know them.

After hearing that, Chuck said, “there’s a fourth stack as well.” This is the stack of people that would proudly and joyfully serve as your pallbearers. They are true friends who would move mountains to help you out. Chuck mentioned that we could all work on being a “fourth stack” person who prioritizes cultivating friendships and relationships.

A famous verse from the Gospel of John starts out: “I have called you friends.” In the later years of his life, my father would sign off his letters with the two words “En Amistad” which translated from Spanish meant “In Friendship”.

En Amistad,
Mike