

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
282

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will honor the late Coach Bill Lantz. He was a coach at Tulsa Central High School for 38 years. During that time his cross country teams won 19 state championships. I was privileged to be on Lantz's state championship teams all three years I was there. Coach Lantz was a devout Christian and impacted me and hundreds of others in a positive way during his 82 years of life. One of his oft repeated sayings was "I'm Third". He explained that he wanted to always put God first, the other fellow second, and that meant "I'm Third". In 1934 he purchased a children's camp at Branson, Mo. The camp was originally called "Kugaho" but Lantz renamed it "Kanakuk". Since its' founding in 1926 that camp has ministered to over 450,000 young people. The "I'm Third" principle has been a part of Kanakuk's discipleship program since Coach Lantz purchased it in 1934.

The "I'm third" principle is Biblically sound. The first and most important commandment in the Bible is to **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"** (Mk. 12:30). Satan, as you know, refused to put God first. He wanted to put himself first. He said: **"I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High"** (Is. 14:13,14). Putting yourself first is satanic!

One of the temptations Satan dangled before Eve was that by eating the forbidden fruit **"you will be like God"** (Gen. 3:5). As we have said, self exaltation is satanic! When King Saul returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites he **"set up a monument in his own honor"** (1 Sam. 15:12). Absalom maliciously usurped his father's throne by deliberately exalting himself (2 Sam. 15:1-12). An angel struck down wicked King Herod because he refused to give glory to God (Acts 12:21-23). The point is: **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"** (Matt. 23:12). John the Baptist set a good example for everyone when he compared himself to Jesus and said: **"He must become greater and I must become less"** (Jn. 3:30). You cannot go wrong by putting God first!

Putting the other fellow second is also Biblical. Paul wrote: **"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others"** (Phil. 2:3,4). A key verse in this regard is Hosea 6:6: **"I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings"**. The focus of "sacrifice" is "inward". Nobody offers a sacrifice for someone else. The focus of "mercy" is "outward". The priest and the Levite refused to help a man in need because they were focusing on themselves. The "Good Samaritan" forgot about himself and helped the man in need. Jesus said: **"Go and do likewise"** (Lk. 10:37).

Paul also set a good example by being third. He honored God first and others second and placed himself last. Remember his words to the Romans: **"I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brother, those of my own race . . ."** (Rom. 9:1-3). Remarkably, the people Paul was willing to be cursed for, were the very ones who were persecuting him (2 Cor. 11:24-29).

Johnny Ferrier was a Kanakuk camper who got his "I'm Third" card personally from Coach Lantz. He carried it with him for the rest of his life. Ed Mack Miller tells the story of Johnny's heroic death in the Dec. 3, 1961 Denver Post. It was a little after 9 on the morning of June 7, 1958. Johnny was flying a Sabre jet in the Air National Guard's precision flying team at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. It was a familiar routine that the team had performed for millions of spectators from Spokane, Washington to Jacksonville, Florida – from Burlington, Vermont to Honolulu. They streaked across the green grass far ahead of the sound of their jet engines and went vertical in front of the grandstand. They turned on their smoke and all four planes went in four different directions in the Minute Men's Flower Burst maneuver. Suddenly Johnny's plane went out of control and he was diving toward the small town of Fairborn. The team leader keyed his mike and shouted "Bail out, Johnny, bail out!" Johnny Ferrier chose, however, to give his life, not save it. He chose to not endanger anyone on the ground and guided his stricken plane to an empty lot equidistant from four houses. Johnny was killed instantly, but no one else was hurt.

From the time he was a small boy at Kanakuk camp Johnny had determined to place the welfare of others before his own. In school he was an outstanding athlete in football, softball, and was also an A.A.U. champion in handball. He was known as a family man who didn't smoke, drink, or use profanity. He risked his life in Korea flying through enemy fire over a downed pilot until the rescue helicopter arrived. He limped back to base with a badly damaged plane and was honored for bravery above and beyond the call of duty. The United States government recognized John Ferrier's final act of heroism by awarding him, posthumously, the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Ferrier's widow Tulie, wrote to Coach Lantz: *"Coach, I went through his billfold last night and found the old worn card which he always carried--"I'm Third". He told me once he got it from you; you had stressed it at one of your camp sermons. Anyway, he may have had a few faults--but they were few and minor, but he followed that creed to the "T" and certainly to the very end. God is first, the other fellow second, and 'I'm Third'--not just the day he died but long before that--certainly as long as I've known him. I'm going to carry that same card with me from now on and see if it won't serve me as a reminder. I shouldn't need it, but I'm sure I do as I have many more faults than he."*

I'm third,

Grandpa Boyce.