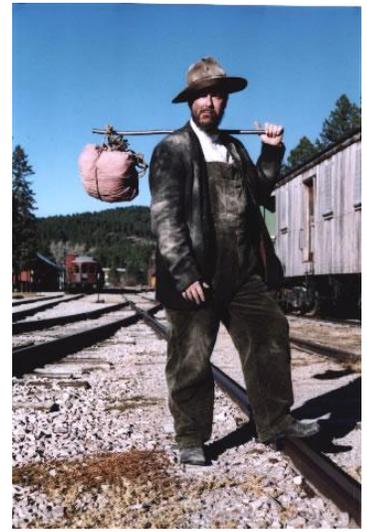


From Riches To Ruin

One family's story...

Will this be the end of the Echlessy's?



Let me tell you the story of the Echlessy family. They are a large family who have a supply business. Their father had started the business years ago and they have a wonderful family heritage. Historically, they have been a very close-knit bunch and the reason is obvious. They live together, play together, share everything, and are really each other's best friends. Add to this their common vocation and they really are connected to each other in every way.

However, the Echlessy family has been having their share of troubles lately. I think it all started when the original zeal they had over their business started to wane. The Echlessy's really believe that their product is unique and invaluable. When they took over the business they were SO excited to introduce the world to their product. They would talk about it to their friends, neighbors, other family members, even total strangers! They never experienced any inhibitions regarding this product because they KNEW there was nothing like it available ANYWHERE at ANY COST. They actually had the mindset that they were doing you a favor by telling you about this wonderful product. As they had children and those kids became aware of this remarkable product, they too would talk it up. Quite a success story!

Over time though, the family members began to feel content with their past success. They had worked hard and it had paid big dividends. They could look around and see how the business had grown and it caused them to feel a sense of pride in their father's company. Slowly, subconsciously, one by one, they began to relax their efforts of new sales, content in the knowledge that they had worked hard to get to this point. ***"Time for the young pups to start pulling the line now"*** was their thought process. Though they had the knowledge and experience to make the business explode, they would rather relax and bask in the glow of what they already accomplished. Little did they know, this would turn out to be their ruin.

Lack of zeal regarding their product was just the start of the family's problems. Pretty soon people started calling in sick for work. Still others simply didn't show up for work. No phone call, no excuse, just didn't show up. Their job either wasn't accomplished or someone else had to do it, increasing their work load and frustration. Everyone imagined that the business would still run fine without them. After all, there are plenty of old-timers who will be there (they have nothing better to do, right?).

Also, the problems affected family life. Historically, the family had ALWAYS eaten a meal together and this provided part of the stability and closeness they had experienced. But now, people began doing other things at mealtime. At first they made excuses, but eventually they just expected you to accept the fact that they would attend or not attend at their own discretion. The ladies still had to make the same amount of food, just hoping that all the family would be there, but much of it would go to waste when people chose to go elsewhere instead of being with their family at supper time.

Slowly, the family members that were still getting together realized there was a BIG problem. The cause(s) of the decline were identified: *apathy, lack of impressing new family members with their obligations, allowing other things to take precedence over the family and its business, etc.* But, more importantly, they began to ask themselves, ***“What can we do to get back where we used to be—where we NEED to be? Oh, what would our father say if he saw our family situation right now? He worked so hard to give us the opportunity to be great and we are squandering it!”***

Well...

The *Echlessy* family, as far as I know, does not exist. However, I chose this name based on the original Greek word “ekklesia” which is translated “church” in our English Bibles. So this story is really a parable about the church, and specifically, our congregation. It is amazing that we can sometimes understand a parable with no problem when we don't see the reality in our own lives (cf. David and Nathan in 2 Sam. 12—“thou art the man!”).

The Christians that meet in Steele have been blessed with a rich heritage. Not only do we have the apostles and prophets, we have a recent history of men and women who worked hard all their lives to make this congregation thrive in glorifying the One who died for us. In the time I have been here I have both seen and heard about men like The Whitfield Brothers, W.M. Barnes, and other brothers and sisters in Christ who are now in glory. Many have put great effort into making this group grow and give glory to God. Folks, what has happened???

The reason for the existence of this congregation is that men and women believed in the gospel. They not only obeyed it, they shared their faith with others. They were excited to tell the good news of salvation. They knew and appreciated the fact that someone loved them enough to share the message of salvation with them and they were determined to do the same for others.

However, we have slowly lulled ourselves into thinking that "going to church" equals being a Christian—IT DOES NOT! Ask the lukewarm church in Laodicea how that's working for them (Rev. 3:14-22). Besides, this attitude has now reached the point that people aren't even "going to church." You see what happens when you start backsliding? You won't stop until you hit the bottom. THUD!!!

Being bound by the blood of Christ makes us family (Eph. 2:19). Would we fail to show up for meals with our fleshly family and just expect everyone to accept it? Would we absent ourselves from family gatherings and be surprised when someone asks the reason? Would we choose to be with people from work, school, ball teams, civic organizations, etc. over our family? When we feel more comfortable with those of the world than with our "blood" brothers and sisters in Christ, do we really even understand what being a Christian is all about? Listen, there is no time to lose. It's up to you. Will this group glorify God? Brethren, it's not too late. Stop the process. We need to repent now. We have to. Start **today**. Love your brethren. Love God's word. Tell others. "**Oh, what does Father think...?**"

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