

March 26, 2006

Dear Chad,

I am honored that your Dad invited me to write you on the occasion of your 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. I just had my 56<sup>th</sup> birthday before Christmas, but one thing I've learned in all those extra years of living is that there's not that much difference between being 13 and being 56. Of course lots of particular details do change as we first grow up and then grow old (good looks and athleticism are sure to go!). But the most basic and important things remain exactly the same. What is always true becomes deeper, and richer, and more necessary, and more joyous as your life continues to unfold.

There are many things I could mention to you, Chad, but let me say only two. They are so important to remember, and so easy to forget.

First, don't ever forget: **God is merciful to you.**

Mercy is who he is. "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

Mercy is what he does. "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Mercy is what you need. "Lord, hear my voice...If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared" (Psalm 130:3-4).

God's mercy is not a theory, a bunch of words, or stories from a long time ago. It is the reality upon which your life depends. Mercy is a reality that anchors you into the life and death of Jesus Christ. He has come for us. He has come for you. You need help from outside yourself. Ask for help.

A small child who is well-loved knows this intuitively: "I trust in my parents' love. I ask for help when I need something. I delight that they take care of me!" That experience gives a picture of your whole life, even as you grow more and more independent of your earthly parents. You'll need help from outside yourself for your entire life – from God himself (and, in a secondary way, from wise people who can be his instruments of good, including your parents). But often in growing up, young adults and full adults forget this. They don't want it to be so. In blind pride they think that they can take care of themselves. It's a tendency in all of us, our most grievous tendency, and a lie. We need God's many mercies. We always need our greater Father to take care of us.

Because he is merciful, you look outside of yourself. Be willing to need help and to ask for help.

Don't ever forget, Chad.

God himself will never forget to be merciful. He cannot forget and deny himself.

Second, don't ever forget: **your whole life will be a work-in-progress.**

This is so freeing. Your successes and graces (and may God give you many ways to shine, Chad) will never mean you've arrived. These are good gifts of mercy, to be received gratefully. Don't take good things for granted, or view them as a basis for identity or self-congratulation. At the same time, your sins, failure and sufferings (and

such things will happen, and may be painfully discouraging) never mean that there is no hope. These are the weaknesses that make you realize your actual need for the wise mercies of Jesus. Your life will shine as you realize that God has given you this life as a lifelong holy experiment in becoming what a human being is meant to become. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). That will be so for your entire life.

Here’s something else about this that is very important. The particular struggles you’ll face are going to change throughout your life. You’ve already seen this. What you face is different, being 13, from when you were 8 or 4. You’ll face still different challenges at 16, or 26, or 56, from what you face right now. That’s exactly where God works.

There will most likely be times – perhaps seasons of your life – when you struggle with where to find your identity, or with feeling anxious, or with pride in your gifts and achievements, or with holding resentment towards someone, or with wayward sexual impulses, or with loneliness, or with grief at losing someone you love, or with comparing yourself to others, or with feeling hurt when someone you trust betrays you. You get the idea! There’s always something going on, because our Father is always working on something in us. *Everything* you will ever face is important to God. *Everything* can become an occasion for you to know him better, and to grow up as a man. Don’t ever think that some part of life is outside his concern. Don’t ever think that because you’ve grown in one area, there won’t be some new areas that your Father sets about working on. He makes human beings (in his image). He saves human beings (from all our sins and sufferings). He works in human beings (to teach us to love Him and others). Jesus entered every part of human life. He will meet you in every part of your life, for your whole life.

Don’t ever forget, Chad.

God himself will never forget to continue the good work he has begun in you.

Remember these things, Chad. Live them your whole life long. You will grow as a man who is becoming what a human being is meant to be, a man after God’s own heart. May our Lord’s face shine upon you. May you know that he is *with* you.

Your friend,

David Powlison