

From the March 4, 2008 Issue

What Happens in Vegas

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:9-11 NIV)

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (John 12:32 NIV)

Rural Upstate New York can be a lot of fun in the winter. Before snowmobiles came into the neighborhood, our outdoor fun involved skating, sledding, igloo-building, and of course snowball fights with siblings and neighbors.

When my little sister was all of seven and her brothers were 9 and 12, we decided to put an early version of the current nationwide ad to the test. Was it true that "What happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas"? Young inquiring minds had to know!

One evening after supper under the cover of darkness all three of us strayed from clearly laid out family values. I'm not sure who threw the first snowball, (and as the oldest I don't really want to remember *all* those details), but 'we' decided to hurl snowballs at passing cars from the neighbors elevated yard across the road from our home

Hearing a well packed projectile go thump on a passing windshield, roof, or quarter panel was something we just couldn't get enough of! With each resounding 'thud' we all giggled and did whatever the equivalent of a high five was in the late '60's. Gravity and trajectory made up for muscle, and practice made perfect.

One unfortunate soul was bombarded on his trek both to and from the nearby country store and decided to do something about it. Our hearts sank as he turned into our driveway instead of the one closest to the crime scene. Evidence of our marksmanship was still plastered on his windshield.

He stepped out of his car quickly, knocked on the door, and had a short but meaningful conversation with my father. We observed both gesture and body language from across the road, and as the victim drove away our summons came.

At the risk of sounding politically incorrect as well as having my parents misunderstood or misjudged, we received individual, timely, well placed, corporal punishment. In two other words- *It stung!*

My sister started to cry while her brothers were still in therapy, so when her turn came both of us spoke in her defense. "She can't really even pack a snow ball Dad", we submitted to the high court of appeals. "Most of hers' fell a few feet down the hill in the snow." But alas, her intent was the same, and like all children she could get better at being bad if left to practice. Her sentence was diminished, but a total pardon was not in her best interest.

The notion that we can do as we please and not experience separation and pain from those we

love has been around for a long time. An old lie is still a lie – and believing it still yields the same results. Distance from home only adds inertial weight to the mistake which finds its’ destructive mark. As children of our heavenly father we have believed lies about him that keep us running back across the road into the far country. Missing His mark in life means attempting to make our own in all the wrong places.

But He has reached farther than we can run. While we hope that the stupid things we’ve done won’t come back to haunt us, we have each experienced enough of life to know that we reap what we sow. What goes up must come back down.

But we are put here to grow up into children of God weren’t we? Surely we all won’t become a permanent version of every stupid thing we’ve done! We’re meant to see where we’re headed and aim for plan and action which does our neighbor good instead of harm.

The one who entered our life on this planet once for every season and every man did so out of love for His creation and we are lifted to a higher calling and higher reward in Him. The one who came down for us was lifted back up with us in his arms. His discipline is always filled with hope and not hatred, diligence and not damnation. He knows the limits of our frame and counts the very hairs on our head.

Thanks Dad and Mom for helping us realize that what happens in Vegas doesn’t really stay there. Thank you also for teaching us that what happened in our savior’s life, death, and resurrection eclipses anything we could mess up across the road, or at home. Real Dads love forever.

~ Steve Schantz