

JUSTIFICATIONS

Twelve years ago, I had a great dog. He was a big, but gentle German Shepherd. His name was Louie. He was very intelligent and very confident—I never worried when Jessica went out at night, as long as she took Louie with her. Yet, he was also very tender with children. He was a great dog. In 1998, I killed him.

Before you jump to conclusions, you need to know that my action was justified. His severe hip dysplasia caused his back to break, and I had the vet put him down. And, please recognize that even though it was the vet doing the action, it was I who made the decision to empower the vet to take the action.

Justifications come in many shapes and forms: some are good reasons / explanations based on sound logic; some are irrational that are deprived from feelings and needs; and some,.... are rationalizations.

Rationalizations are “constructed” justifications / fabricated justifications made to “over-ride” / replace the original reasons for a particular action.

Beware of Rationalizations! They can be as simple as a child lying about stealing a cookie, to false reasons why we bought something,..... to excuses for an affair..... to “justifications for war.”

Justifications that are rationalizations are lies!

The Rich fool, in the parable that Jesus told, presents his rationalized / fabricated justification. And note, all the “I”s in his explanation.

A fact—the rich man’s land produced abundantly.

His rationalization for his response follows:

“I” have no place to store my crops.

“I” said to “myself”, “I” will destroy my barns and build bigger ones, and there “I” will store my bounty.

And, “I” will say to my soul, “Soul you have enough to not only feel safe and secure, but to also relax, eat, drink and be merry.”

Why did he come up with those excuses?

What in the world was he thinking?

Where was his faith and trust?

And, why didn’t he consult others or think of helping others?

God said to him, “YOU FOOL”..... you can’t control tomorrow. You can not buy your destiny or your joy.

The man's reasons were rationalized justifications for his actions.

Jesus presented the real reasons for his actions, which were:

Greed,..... the illusion that the abundance of possessions improves a person..... and that his trust and faith was NOT in God.

This parable cuts deep.

Just like the person in the crowd that prompted the parable, we often present to God and each other our conflicts that arise over greed and wealth.

No doubt, we tend to quickly formulate "rationalizations" on how to swallow this parable, such as "we live in culture".... or..... "I'm not rich"..... or "who could really live as Jesus? I'm no St. Francis."

Arising from this story, as we struggle with our affluence, **is where is our trust? are we trying to control tomorrow? do we think there is joy in having treasures?.... are we influenced by fear and greed?..... . is our trust in God?**

These are big and constant questions for "rich" Christians, and compared to most of the world....., we are very rich.

Rich Christians have had the dilemma of what to do with our wealth for a long time.

The rationalized justification, used to be:

"It is good that we are rich so that we can feed the poor."

That "patronizing" excuse was common for a long time, and in some circles is still used. It is the master over the slave justification.

We keep hearing that it is good that Saskatchewan is getting richer.... because we can have more money to do things.

Yet, the reality is that only a few people are getting wealthier, as social services are being cut and the anguish of the poor increases.

Trickle down doesn't work, and it is a pompous and arrogant rationalization to believe the rich can adequately **care** for the poor.

Back in the 1980's, Ron Sider exposed that lie, and he demonstrated that riches among the few IS the PROBLEM and not the solution.

For example, as people go hungry, one third of all tuna caught goes into cat food for the wealthy nations.

There are other injustices that come with this unbalanced model, too, such as extravagant consumption of resources, pollution and exploitation.

Besides the need to change systems and national policies, we Christians feel the weight of guilt as we struggle to reconcile our bounty with the challenge to be true followers of Jesus.

We feel uncomfortable when we consider how the rest of the world exists, yet we have so much and we live in a culture that glorifies accumulation of wealth, consumption and consumerism.
How do we define our lives?
How do we justify our actions?

We Mennonites do value simple living and we try to be frugal, which is good; however, that pursuit must not be used to judge or belittle others.

We are all on a journey, and we may be at different places and we take our steps in different ways. In other words, we engage in the choices of consumption in various ways.

For example: I have my lofty “rationalizations” for owning a late model truck, but much of the real justification is that I dread having a vehicle that may break down. I’ve had many bad experiences in the past, andthis is my own insecurity and fear to reconcile.

Even so, there are other areas that simple living are easier for me.

Nothing is gained when we compare ourselves to each other.

I could say that a lot of people have way too much hair!

I don’t hoard hair on the top of my head.

And, nearly all of you have two kidneys.

I’ve cut down to one. I call it simple living.....

See what I mean about comparing ourselves to others?

Besides, the concern / the core issue is **the why**.

What are the justifications? Are our lives / our choices based on our Trust in God,..... or in other things?

There is another aspect to wealth that the Psalm passage alludes to, and that iswhat to do with the wealth / the bounty / the overflowing harvest that the rich man had.

We can either share it / give the excess away or we can keep it, and keeping it always demands the need to secure and defend it.

As a nation, we are choosing to defend our wealth, and so we buy new military ships to “secure” the arctic “backdoor.”

We just chose to spend way over 9 billion dollars on 65 F-35 attack fighters. Those planes are designed for air to ground assault. They are not for surveillance or search and rescue.

Moreover, when we choose to defend our wealth, then....things get ugly and lies – the rationalizations become the norm.

And, those rationalizations can alter our perceptions and belief systems.

When we are told we need to defend ourselves, then we become more afraid, and that fear is usually without merit.

Rationalizations, of course, as they are intended to do, change our understanding of past events. They reshape / remove the truth. No place else does this happen more than with war.

The spark of God in us demands good justifications for killing people and having people killed. So, we are prone to embrace the rationalizations / the fabrications and lies we are given, and bury the real reasons because we know killing is wrong, yet we accepted lies that kill. For example: We did not send combat troops to Afghanistan because we care about the education of women. We didn't care. We didn't even think about it until after the killing started. That excuse is a rationalization, and so the killing goes on.

August 6 marks the 65th anniversary of the dropping of the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima, officially ushering in the nuclear age.

Miraculously, we survived the Cold War; at one time there were over 31,000 nuclear warheads aimed and ready. Today, the number has been reduced to slightly less than 20,000, yet we should not get too relaxed about the reductions. One thousand would totally destroy the United States, and one bomb is one too many.

It is said that the most dangerous time for addicts is when they feel they have licked the problem; that is when they become lax and arrogant. We are now in the post "tip toe" era of the Cold War. Fancy new weapons are now dangling restlessly from the hips of macho cowboys, and nuclear devices may be accessible to terrorists.

The issue is the sacredness of human life, God's creation..... and....our trust in God.

We need to clean up / remove the rationalization—the false justifications, and..... repent for our involvement, too.

Remember that I said "I killed my dog", when it was the vet who physically did it? ????

We, our nation, provided the uranium for the bombs that fell on Japan and for the thousands more waiting on missiles.

We helped kill the innocent in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To be sure, we embraced the rationalizations, such as it saved millions of Allied soldiers' lives, and subsequently, since we believed it was a good thing, we kept supplying uranium,... just in case.

As the World War Two generation dies off, so too is much of the demand to sustain the myths/ the rationalizations.

The public is now learning that the Americans leaders **rushed** to drop the bombs because they feared the war would end before they could. Japan had already started negotiations for surrender.

Hiroshima was obliterated to show the Soviets that Americans had the bomb. Nagasaki was incinerated out of revenge and to make the Soviets think the US has many more.

We did that.

In addition, many other fabricated justifications about the so called “Just War” are being exposed, too.

WWII was not justified. It was just an horrendous war, and we won so we got to make up the glorious rationalizations.
Millions upon millions died for NO good reason.

Connecting back to our abundance of possessions:

We are fortunate to live in a rich land. Our wealth provides us with wonderful opportunities, yet we must not be fooled to believe that we earned it or that God rewarded us with affluence.

Consider this: If God blesses with money, consumer goods and the easy life, then God sure didn't like Jesus very much.

With our treasures we could help bring restoration, healing, empowerment, equality peace and justice to the world.....

Or, we can fight to keep it so that we can store it and consume it ourselves, and perhaps share a little to satisfy a rationalization.

Let us consider Psalm 49: 7 which clearly states: NO Ransom / no price can be paid / no reasons are good enough justify a selfish life.

Our lives / our sins can NOT be covered or paid for in order to erase the past and to appease God.
Nothing can remove the truth.

Even so, Thank God, we are not without hope.

By the love and grace of God, God invites us to own the truth of our life– in church talk we call that confession.

We can start a new life by believing Jesus and committing ourselves to follow him – that is called repentance in church language.

When we do that, God declares “I'm with you. I like where your heading; I'll be with you.”, but that is just the beginning of salvation.

Jesus was very clear that how we live is an integral part of our salvation process.
Following Jesus is striving to have our life's justifications based on our love and faith in God.
We can live in truth / with sound justifications.

We can put our trust in money and brute force..... or we can put our trust in God.

The world, our community, our church and our own destiny waits for our response. Will our lives be justified.... or full of rationalizations?