

How Big is Your Rug?

Originally printed in *Power for Living*, February 2, 1992

John's life was tragically ended when a bullet ripped into his brain. He had been going through a period of depression, and one evening he climbed between his box spring and mattress and shot himself with a rifle. The bible affirms, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116.15), but this death seemed a complete denial of a Savior who offers peace and joy.

How is it that a young adult who had once been active in his faith could fall to such a level of despair that he would take his own life?

One day John's brother gave me a cassette tape which contained John's diary. The entries focused on two concerns: his desire for a new job, and his desire for Cindy. At this stage in his life all he wanted was to become an emergency medical technician, and to marry Cindy. John's despair overwhelmed him when he learned he could become an EMT, and that his girlfriend had been seeing one of his friends. He was devastated! He described on the tape how he would take his life, and two days later he carried out his plan.

Over time I began to realize what took place in John's life. He had been standing on a rug and, when it was yanked out from under him, he fell. The rug on which John was standing was a job and his relationship with his girlfriend. His self-esteem, his meaning in life, and his future hope all rested on those two goals. When those dreams died, so did John.

As I thought about this tragedy, I reflected on another individual who experienced many disappointments in life, but still was successful. The Apostle Paul faced misunderstandings, hardships, setbacks, and persecution. Yet he never fatally fell from the rug on which he was standing. What was the difference? I believe it was the size of Paul's rug.

His life goals were so big that individual disappointments never destroyed his stability. In fact, he could make the amazing statement: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:11-13, NIV).

Paul's desire was to make Christ known, so it didn't matter whether he preached Christ in the Areopagus or Agrippa's court, in Jerusalem or in Joppa, in Philemon's home or in prison. Paul's rug was to preach Christ, and no matter how much rug was pulled out from under him, there was infinitely more on which to stand. Even when his adversaries pulled and pulled, there was still more rug remaining.

For some people, the hope of marriage is their rug. They think: If I could just be married, then I'd be happy. Others want to finish school, or complete an advanced degree. Some desire a job change, or are counting on a promotion. For newly marrieds, it might be owning their first home; for others, a larger home or a cabin at the lake. Some people stand on the rug of their friendships. As long as they have their friends, they are happy, but, when they are left by themselves, they are lonely.

While specific goals are not wrong, a Christian's over-all purpose for living must be broadly significant. If the rugs upon which we stand are as limited and conditional as the example above, there is a good change that someday we too will end up flat on our backs in despair. Our rug should be so large that the demons of hell can yank forever, yet still not loosen our stability.

Some of these large rugs include knowing Christ (Phil. 3:10), glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:31), becoming a vessel of praise (1 Thess. 5:18), and conforming to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), to name just a few. Nothing can happen to us, good or bad that can render these goals meaningless. But my favorite rug is the privilege of serving others.

I remember as a child playing musical chairs, and for the first time of my life receiving a prize. It was a record. I was so excited that I could hardly wait to get home to play it. When we finally pulled into the driveway, I realized that I been sitting on the record and, like the disc, I was crushed. Later the record was replaced, and to this day I can remember its lyrics:

If I can help somebody as I pass along;
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song;
If I can show somebody that he's traveling wrong;
Then my living will not be in vain.

Now that's a great rug! Helping others is an over-arching purpose that gives meaning to life's particulars. Inner joy is realized when we adopt the daily practice of Jesus, "For even the Son of Man did not come to

be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NIV). We can stand on the rug of service whether we're single or married, self-employed or working for another, living in an efficiency apartment or a dream home!

How big is your rug? Is it like John's, or is it like Paul's? God has provided an all-sufficient rug on which the believer can stand. The choice is ours. We can stand on rugs that will let us down, or we can stand on the wall-to-wall carpet of Christ's eternal purposes.