"Woulda, coulda, shoulda"

By Chaplain Barry A. Metzger

Recently, I had someone compliment me on a job well done. Instead of simply accepting the praise and basking in a few moments of satisfaction, my reply via e-mail went something along the lines of actually apologizing for aspects of the event I thought could having been better executed and not being as punctual with deadlines as "I" thought I should be.

How many simple pleasures and moments of satisfaction do we let slip by because we can't escape a torturous life of constant regret and even perfectionist tendencies? It seems, if we are not careful, we can constantly be looking back at the "if onlys, yes-buts and woulda, coulda, shoulda" thinking?

Cognitive therapists Arthur Freeman and Rose DeWolf, have examined the power behind these frustrated feelings in their recent book "*Woulda, Coulda, Shoulda: Overcoming Regrets, Mistakes and Missed Opportunities*" (New York: Morrow, 1989). Freeman and DeWolf do a good job of looking at the questions raised above. How do we deal with those woulda, coulda, shoulda feelings of guilt and despair, those woulda, coulda, shoulda moments in our lives?

Naturally, some good is gleaned from "lessons learned." No one wants to make the same mistakes over and over. If we can learn ways to work smarter or take care of our families better this is a positive. The danger comes when it is taken to an unhealthy and even harmful extreme. Freeman and DeWolf tell us that, "Although it is no doubt a good idea to look back and reflect on our mistakes from time to time, it is not a good idea to continue to review those mistakes over and over again."

Coulda, woulda, shoulda thinking, whether in our relationship with God or day to day activities, can cause us to lean toward hypercritical and impossible perfectionist standards; standards no one can reasonably measure up to. We can even become approval addicts. If we are not careful, this mindset can lead us to view those around us as problem free and successful in everyway that we are not and this can leave us bitter. Coulda, woulda, shoulda thinkers of which admittedly, far too often I am one, remind me of the church bulletin board sign: "Make peace with one's neighbors; make quarrels with one's faults."

This perfectionist tendency is characterized by an unwillingness to fail. The problem is that carried to an extreme, it suffocates joy and sometimes creativity. Have you ever met someone who simply doesn't know what to do with a compliment? For instance, when you tell them how amazing it is that they are able to juggle school and work or so many things at home, they just look at their feet or begin to talk about ways they could do better. Wouldn't it be healthy to simply enjoy the moment, genuinely looking the person in the eye while smiling and accepting the kind remarks? Instead, I am afraid we have apropensity to focus our attention on the one area we feel we may have failed in rather than relishing all those in which we did well. We tend to move on as quickly as possible to the next event or task.

Areas we tend to be perfectionists include work, housekeeping, appearance and even hobbies. Really, it could be practically anything and it can leave us miserable if we are not careful because any failure can be viewed as a threat to our self esteem. This is very shaky ground as none of us are perfect.

We would do well not to equate our self worth with performance and others' opinions. These things can keep us in a performance trap that never ends because the end goal is impossible to achieve. I can be thankful and free because my God provides forgiveness for past faults, sufficient grace when I fail miserably and acceptance regardless of my shortcomings. Imagine that; I can be pleasing to God my creator and sustainer in spite of all my failures. I've found that when God is pleased, generally I'm a better husband, father and employee. The real basis for my self worth is not success or failure but the freedom, joy, forgiveness and purpose I have in God.

Boy Scouts celebrate anniversary

By Far East Council of the Boy Scouts of America

The Far East Council (FEC) of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of the scouting movement in the United States, at the New Sanno Hotel in Tokyo, Oct. 2.

More than 150 people attended the event which included representatives from both the BSA National Office and the National Scouting Association of Japan. The majority of attendees were leaders of American scouting units throughout the Far East. This encompasses most American military bases and embassies in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, Thailand, Taiwan and Malaysia.

During the event, the entire FEC was recognized for achieving "Quality Council" for the third straight year. Historically, less than half of all councils achieve this annually. Individual adult council leaders were also recognized with awards.

Michael Hardebeck of Yokosuka was awarded the Silver Antelope – a regional award which was previously presented in Dallas earlier this year at the National Annual Meeting of the BSA. Three Silver Beaver Awards – for council level achievement, were awarded to Michael Brenyo, FEC president, Robin Keister, council treasurer and Justin Wentworth, FEC board member from Okinawa. Others honored during the event were Kanto Plain eagle scouts who returned to the Tokyo area after completing college studies in the United States, and recent parents of eagle scouts. Also, two longtime FEC scouting leaders Jim Farmer and Yoshitugu Kinjo from Okinawa received the Vigil honor in the Order of the Arrow-the fraternity of Scout Honor Campers.

BSA Assistant Chief Scout Executive and Chief Financial Officer Jim Terry, who was the keynote speaker at the event, spoke to the spirit of giving to other children the lessons which are instilled for a lifetime. He also spoke of the service given by scouts past and present and how that touched others lives and is reflected in the great accomplishments of American society.

The Boy Scouts of America is the nation's foremost youth program of character development and values-based leadership training. The scouting organization is composed of 2.7 million youth members between the ages of seven through 20, 1.1 million volunteers and nearly 300 local councils throughout the United States and its territories.

Jim Terry, assistant chief scouting executive for the Boy Scouts of America delivers the keynote address to the Far East Council during their 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts gala dinner at the New Sanno Hotel Oct. 2.

Photo by Andrew Brenyo