

32963 Faith Column for 12-1-11
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Parachute Packers

Have you heard of Charles Plum? He is now a popular motivational speaker who tells his listeners about insights he gained from his experiences during the Vietnam War. The internet is awash with references to one of his more amazing experiences. It seems Plum was a jet fighter pilot who flew from the aircraft carrier, Kitty Hawk. After flying 75 successful missions, Plum was shot from the sky, but managed to eject from the damaged plane and parachute to the ground. He was captured and placed in a Communist prison where he spent six long years as a POW.

After the war, Plum and his wife were sitting together one evening in a restaurant when a man seated at a neighboring table got up and came to Plum's table. The man greeted Plum by name and told him that he knew he had been a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War who had been shot down. Plum was shocked to be recognized by this apparent stranger, and asked how in the world the man had known these facts about his past. The man replied that he had been aboard the Kitty Hawk all those years ago, and he had been the sailor assigned to pack Plum's parachute the morning of his last flight. The man smiled and shook Plum's hand and said, "I guess it worked!"

When Plum tells this story to listeners, he remarks that not only did that sailor's careful but generally unrecognized work save his physical life – but he had also been "saved" during his years as a POW by other people who had helped to provide him, throughout his life, with mental, emotional, and spiritual parachutes that opened during that period of stressful captivity.

The concept of anonymous parachute provision is an intriguing one, isn't it? Each of us would surely have to admit that we, too, have had countless unknown individuals who have packed life-saving and supporting parachutes for us.

Do you need to travel somewhere this week? Engineers and mechanics designed and maintain the intricate safety features in the cars, trains, busses, and planes we depend upon to transport us. We'll probably never meet them – but they packed a parachute for us.

Do you need a question about some specialized subject answered? Researchers, writers, and teachers have worked to amass and convey information, ideas, techniques that we draw upon innumerable times over the course of our lives in fields of medicine, finance, law. We may only rarely encounter these parachute packers, but the effort they expended allows our easy access to life-sustaining and enhancing knowledge.

Do you find your hunger needs to be satisfied? Consider that someone bought a field, sowed the seeds, watered it, weeded, and harvested a crop. Someone else brought the grain and milled it. Another baked the bread and packaged it. Someone transported it, displayed it, and sold it. You are able to eat this bread, the fruit of so much coordinated effort, without necessarily acknowledging that its very existence is the result of the labors of countless parachute packers.

Have you ever been lost, afraid, grieving, or lonely? Perhaps at those times you drew upon the promises of faith that were offered lovingly to you across the years. The names and faces of those who first shared their messages of faith and hope with you, and instilled them deeply and lastingly within your heart, may have been but distant memories by the time you needed to draw upon their teaching, but they gave you parachutes that opened when you needed them.

Imagine, even now, you may be packing parachutes for others. Every generous gift you give, every kind word, each thoughtful act or gesture may be just what someone else needs in their moment of distress. We hope that though you may never know the outcome of all your efforts, that you'll keep packing those 'chutes!