Finishing Strong  Bill Newton

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Overview

**Biblical Suggestions**

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 | In this booklet is a short list of suggestions for “Finishing Strong!” This list is not exhaustive, but hopefully will be helpful. |

**Warnings**

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 | In addition to suggestions, there is an even shorter list of biblical warnings for the diligent pilgrim wanting to “Finish Strong.” |

**Introduction/overview.**

Here are a few biblical suggestions and warnings, designed to help us think about what it means to finish strong. The suggestions and warnings are not in any priority order except for numbers 1 and 2; and this list is not exhaustive.

**Biblical suggestions for finishing strong.**

These first two suggestions are non-negotiable, if you want to finish strong. The rest are either gleaned from foolish mistakes made by me or others, or from solid teaching that God has provided.

**1. You must be born again.**

John 3:7. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.”

We begin with the most obvious. You must be born again. Faith is absolutely necessary to finish strong. The Hebrew writer reminds us, “…. Without faith, it is impossible to please him (God)….” Without faith, it is impossible to have a godly hope. Peter reminds us that our faith has been given to us by God and that it “…… has caused (us) to be born again to a living hope….”1Pe 1:3 Without hope, very little is possible, except existence.

If you are here today and you feel a tug from God that you want to finish strong, and you have never been born again, God did not bring you here by accident. Talk to the man who brought you or Tom or any of those on the panel or myself. To finish strong, you must be born again!

**2. You must know the goal of a strong finish**.

 Phil. 3:8 “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord………...”

You cannot finish strong unless you know what the finish is. In business we say, “It is not just doing things well that determines a successful business; it is doing the right things well!” In simple terms, you cannot hit “The Target” if you do not know what it is! Alice, in *“Alice in Wonderland,”* found this out from the Cheshire cat.

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
Alice: I don't much care where.
The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.
Alice: ...So long as I get somewhere.
The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough.”

We can do the same thing – strive for the wrong things while never really discovering what the “One” “Right” thing is! Many of you probably have seen the movie “City Slickers.” In it Mitch, the unhappy city slicker, played by Billy Crystal, is looking for meaning in his life. He encounters Curly, a real-life cowboy who knows just what he wants and how to get it. Here’s the advice Curley gives to Mitch:

[**Curly**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001588/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)**:** Do you know what the secret of life is? [holds up one finger] This.

[**Mitch**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000345/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)**:** Your finger?

[**Curly**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001588/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)**:** One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and the rest don’t mean \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

[**Mitch**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000345/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)**:** But, what is the “one thing?”

[**Curly**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001588/?ref_=tt_trv_qu)**:** [smiles a smile only Jack Palance can smile] That’s what you have to find out.

John Piper states the goal very clearly, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” I hope you got that! My objective, my goal in finishing biblically strong , is to, in business terms, maximize the glory that I can generate for God with my life by the time I die.” How do I do that? I do that by becoming a person who is satisfied in Jesus, and Him alone! I don’t strive to be liked and admired by everybody, a church, a pastor, even our wives. I don’t try to give more than anybody else. I don’t work myself to the bone.

I pray and strive to become a man who could be fulfilled if the only friend I had in the world was Jesus, and it was He and I against the world. "God will be most glorified in me (Bill Newton) when I have learned to be most satisfied in Him.”

You may have any number of objections to that goal. What about works -giving, working, helping others, etc.? Those are good things, aren’t they? Answer, “Yes.” Let me explain how works fit in here. What do tadpoles do when they are transformed into frogs? They cease swimming and become world class jumpers with entirely new appetites. What do caterpillars do when they become butterflies? They are transformed into world class fliers, with entirely new horizons for their hungers. Why do they jump and fly and have new appetites? Because they have become new creations!

The same should be true of genuine Christians when we become satisfied in God and Him alone; we have become new creations with new identities, new appetites, and new powers granted us by our Transformer – God! Works are not the goal; however, they should be the natural outgrowth. Think about this with me: what did NT converts do? They changed the world! How did they give? They gave sacrificially! How did they help each other? They shared all they had! How did they live? They lived changed lives. How did Saul’s appetites change when he became Paul the apostle? They were diverted 180 degrees. The same should be true of us!

**3. Run your race, not someone else’s.**

Heb. 12:1 “…let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, …….”

God is so wise! He is the author of diversity, even though we think we just discovered it in 21st Century America. He created us all differently. I have been a jock, an aviator, a businessman, a Fortune 1000 executive, a business owner, a board member, a trustee, a seminary professor, a pastor, a husband, a father, and from my enemies any number of other titles and epithets. That has been my race, set before me. That is not your race. Don’t try to copy it!

God has created you uniquely, with a specific set of gifts, talents, skills, and passions. The race set before you, is unique to you and no one else. I love the fact that God uses the word race to describe our life’s journey. It is not a nap, a sojourn, a hobby, a sideline, or a vacation. It is a race. Races are meant to be run competitively and seriously. The objective is to give your best, and hopefully your best wins. Since the race is yours, it is still serious and important, but it is not to be compared or set beside anyone else’s! It is yours!

Some of you will stay working until God takes you. Others will be retired by the system you work under. The concept of retiring and stopping work entirely does not exist in the biblical record. So, the idea of quitting work and entering an existence of self-indulgence and constant seeking of pleasure through leisure is antithetical to any biblical principle I see. The concept of slowing down, changing directions, and seeking God’s glory in a different venue is very real. The race may be new and frightening, but the reward will be worth it. If you want to finish strong run your race and no one else’s.

**4. Be satisfied with progress and don’t expect perfection.**

Phil. 3:12. “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on…….”

Progress not perfection is all that we can expect this side of heaven. To expect perfection is to misunderstand the depth of the sin that indwells each of us. My own journey continues to reveal that the deeper I get into the word and the more serious my walk; the more I have become aware of the deep seated hidden sins within me. When I do well, what is my motive? When I study and teach, have I learned the lesson first? When I learned the lesson did I apply it? If I did, did I expect something from it? Is there anything in me that is pure?

Some of you are perfectionist. I am married to one! Perfectionism is a most fertile ground for the attacks of the evil one. He comes at you in your imperfection and says, “If you were really a good Christian, finishing well, you wouldn’t struggle with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank). Perfectionism is also a fertile ground for discouragement. If we are honest, when was the last time you had a perfect day? We all know the answer. What does that answer mean to a perfectionist? It means a lot of self-flagellation. I remember an old Bill Cosby tape about disciplining his children, and Bill’s line went something like this, “The beatings will begin at 6!” As a perfectionist, you are familiar with beatings. If you cannot overcome your perfectionism on your own, get help, a friend, a counselor, a fellow rehabilitated perfectionist.

If you want to finish strong, learn how to be satisfied with progress, not perfection.

**5. Focus on what you can become, not on what you have done.**

Phil. 3:13. “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Guilt from past sins can be like a parasite. Parasites can cause disease and death. They may sap the life out of the host. Guilt from past sin can be like that, if faulty beliefs have sway. Paul considered himself “a blasphemer, persecutor, ….. insolent opponent,” and the foremost sinner of all. Yet, his solid belief that Jesus had forgiven “all” his past sins, set him free to minister. Don’t let past sins keep you from finishing well.

**6. Become more dependent on God and less independent.**

Ro 4:20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

The key words I want you to focus on are, “was strengthened in his faith.” Paul is speaking of Abraham. Abraham understood that he and Sarah were beyond child bearing age; and he struggled with the irrationality of God’s promise, but he did not waver. Why? Because he had learned to let God strengthen his faith. Notice Paul says “he was strengthened!” If you want to finish strong, you must learn how to depend on God to do those things which you cannot do yourself.

Here’s an illustration. The Bible says that we are to speak the truth with love and gentleness. I can speak the truth naturally and easily. The “love and gentleness” parts are beyond my human capabilities. The first time I realized I could not pick and choose truth over love and gentleness, and be obedient, I was almost paralyzed. I had to pray, “God, I know you want me to speak the truth with love and gentleness. I’m OK with the truth part, but the love and gentleness parts are a different matter. If you want me to do that, you are going to have to help me and put words in my mouth, and compassion in my voice, because I don’t have either! To be honest with you God, I am petrified to take on this task, but I will! Help me!” That is what Abraham did.

If you want to finish strong you must learn to be dependent; and this suggestion is not easy to follow! It goes against almost everything we have been taught as men, it is counter cultural, and it is frightening! Let me assure you it is not also mystical or mushy. It is as real and necessary as knowledge is to faith. However, to finish strong will require doing things that you are not capable of doing alone. You must lean on God!

**7.** **Take responsibility for your life and recognize God is the only real judge.**

Ro 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

There is a saying often used by pastors in the south, and maybe up here in Cleveland as well, “If Momma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!” Every time I hear it I cringe! We all understand what the little adage is on about, but the untruth in it and the poor theology it subtly encourages is detrimental to mature growth, to family life, and children. It is especially harmful for men! Is Momma really the chief judge of what should be and what should not be? Is she the chief arbiter of right and wrong in the family?

I love how John Piper puts it in his book, “*This Momentary Marriage.”* He says that when God knocks on the door of your home and your wife answers the door, He is going to say, “Is the man of the house here?” Piper states clearly what the maxim gets wrong, “You are responsible!” And God is the only judge to be reckoned with. We need get that theology straight if we are to finish strong.

**8. To finish strong we must think biblically.**

Ro 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Thinking biblically implies knowledge. Paul praises God for “the riches of (his) wisdom and knowledge” in Romans 11. Therefore, if we are to think biblically we must know our Bibles. We ought to know more than “Jesus loves me,” and the 15 other most-common verses. We should immerse ourselves in the rich-treasury of human-history that the Old Testament gives us, we should savor the deep teachings of Paul’s church letters, and we must pray and ask God to imprint the truths that Jesus taught so ably about the practicalities of life. It is a tragic lie to tell ourselves we are thinking biblically, if we have never read all the Bible, and attempted to apply its teaching to our everyday hearts and lives.

Thinking biblically means more than just, we are in our Bibles; the Bible must be in us, and exude out the pores of our everyday existence into the waiting arms of a pagan culture. Our ethics flow from our beliefs, and to finish strong means solid beliefs based on solid knowledge.

Are you willing to study your Bible? I am not talking about a 15-minute devotional in the morning with a dandy sounding little ditty, but committed, serious thought and study with the hope that God will transform your heart and thinking. Paul tells the Roman Church that their spiritual act of worship is to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. How does that happen? It happens by asking God for a biblical hunger, biblical thinking and a biblical mind! There are not three easy steps to accomplish this, or any contemporary short cuts – just the glorious, gold-filled pages of wisdom that await the soul who pledges to this life’s journey – a journey to a strong finish.

**9. Be willing to die to self, and act on that willingness.**

Phil. 3:4-10 “…. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also……… But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ…… For his sake I ……. Count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ …… becoming like him in his death.”

Dying to self is giving up what means the most to you apart from God - the hopes and dreams that drive us, satisfy us, shelter us, and sometimes protect us. This dying never ends, it simply begins and then bores deeper and deeper into who we are in the flesh.

What I remember about the day I had to die to self is this. “You can’t fire David!” he said as he leaned over the small round table. I’ll never forget those words.

I was responsible for 900 employees (90% women) at four locations. One of my division presidents had an affair with one of his employees. Word was that they had met and consummated at the office.

After getting all the facts and talking with the offending president, I decided that he had to go. How could you have husbands sending their wives to work, worried that the boss might be hitting on them, I reasoned? It seemed like a no-brainer to me!

Off I went to the top floor CEO’s office to get the final okay, expecting the conversation to be short. How wrong you can be!

I presented the evidence. The case was solid – open and shut. There was no debate about the facts. When I finished, I heard, “You can’t fire David!” It took me a few seconds to recover my equilibrium. I hadn’t expected a debate.

“Why?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “I look at every female employee who walks in the door as a possible bed partner, and we can’t fire someone for doing what I do regularly.” The CEO said.

I won’t bore you with the whole debate. Bible – boot that out, no relevance here. Polluted culture – well David had hundreds of wives, didn’t he? What about husbands – that’s their problem! It’s just not right – says who? Sexual harassment – never even came up.

After about forty-five minutes of heated discussion I was spent and stunned.

Eyeball to eyeball, I said, “You’re the boss. I must do what you say. However, I’m not sure I can manage this way, and I’m not sure I want to learn how?”

I left with a dilemma. Security or do business God’s way? Die to my most treasured hopes and dreams. Remember, that’s what dying to self means among other things.

I had joined this company to make a lot of money and advance quickly, and I had. I had restricted stock grants coming to me for several millions of dollars. All I had to do was stay! I had grown up poor, had always wanted to be financially secure, and this job was giving me that assurance.

But God had other ideas. Eight years earlier, I had become a Christian and God was now feeding me biblical truth with a fire hose at our local church. I took that truth to heart! Could you honor God and mange in an environment that was not just secular and pagan but hostile to biblical principles?

I studied Daniel who worked for a pagan. He managed to maintain his integrity and flourish. Nehemiah did the same. I asked for advice from Godly men. But, I couldn’t figure-out how to walk the tight rope upon which God had placed me.

With tears in my eyes and no idea what was next, I decided I had to leave. Maybe someone else could’ve managed the ambiguity, but I couldn’t. I wasn’t as mature as Daniel or Nehemiah! I walked away from the millions and the security I had always sought. My boss never understood why I left! At the time, I didn’t either.

That was thirty-two years ago. I can see now what I couldn’t see then. God wanted me to grow-up, to trust Him for security and not the company. I had to begin the process of dying to self and to finish strong you must die to self. What a great temptation it is to see our companies, our bosses, or our retirement plans as our security.

**10. Commit to “finishing strong!”**

 Josh. 24:15 “…..But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

This may sound a bit simplistic, but sometimes it’s the simple things that give us the most trouble and not the complex ones we don’t understand.

Isn’t committing what Abram did (Gen. 12:1) when he left his country, his people, his family, and his position in society to go to a land he knew nothing about.

Isn’t committing what Jacob did (Gen. 35:2) when he returned from exile and removed all the foreign gods in his entourage and recommitted to the covenant.

Isn’t committing what Joshua did (Josh. 24:14-15) after the conquest when he publicly stated, “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Isn’t committing what Ruth did (Ruth 1:16) when she told Naomi, “Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Isn’t committing what Elijah asks (1 Kg. 18:21 the people to do when confronted by the prophets of Baal, “…if the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is god follow him.”

Isn’t committing what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did when they replied to Nebuchadnezzar, “we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. Da 3:17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. Da 3:18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Isn’t committing what Peter and the other apostles did when they followed Jesus, every one of them to their deaths or to exile.

Isn’t committing what we all ought to do? What I am saying plainly is this. There ought to be a time in every genuine believer’s development as a disciple, that we promise:

“God I am yours. I am all in. Above everything else in life, I want you to know that I want to be all yours, live well, and finish strong! God help me want this, help me grow into this, help me see what this means, and help me complete it.”

**11. Develop a mind for the things of God.**

Mt 16:23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

We live in a day of images: television, movies, videos, You Tube, dominate the contemporary scene. Even in church, videos, dance, slides, power point, have invaded and in many circumstances, dominate the current methods of teaching and communicating. In and of themselves none of these things are evil; they are simply unable to communicate complex ideas and concepts as well as the written word. If you want to finish strong you must develop an exercise regimen for your mind, that will be able to process complex and nuanced arguments; and translate those into practical applications. The mind is not a muscle, but it needs to be exercised, developed and strengthened like a muscle if is to grow and mature.

**12. Develop God-pleasing appetites and passions.**

1Pe 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Developing appetites and passions is closely related to developing one’s mind; but differs in the methods used to achieve it. Passions and appetites are more related unto emotions, feelings and enthusiasms. Luke says in 12:29 “And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.” The implication is clearly that we can and ought to set our hearts (the seat of our affections and passions) on God-pleasing appetites. This thought is counter cultural today, as we as a society want to infer that each of is a slave to our passions and appetites. God has a different idea. One of the things that separates us from the animal kingdom is that we are made in the image of God, and as such we are able and expected as we mature to keep our un-healthy passions in check and develop healthy appetites. To finish strong, healthy appetites and passions are acquired assets, while unhealthy ones are meant to be discarded liabilities.

**Warnings to heed.**

**1. Never stop renewing your mind.**

Ro 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

To finish strong means nurturing an attitude of constant learning, repenting, revising, and growing. Doctor Luke tells us that: Lk 2:52 “…. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” The Hebrew writer again tells us that: Heb 5:8 “Although he (Jesus) was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” Learning ought to be a life long pursuit.

**2. Never assume that you have arrived.**

1Pe 2:5 “…. you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

 Each one of us should be developing and growing. With our wills we have a rheostat, like a dimmer knob on a dining room light fixture, that we can turn to fully available to “grow and change”, or “out to lunch, unavailable.” If you think you have arrived and are perfected that is a certain sign that you are not.

**3. Never forget who you are.**

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Remembering our identity in Christ is paramount to remaining on a steady path to spiritual maturity. As believers we are chosen people, members of the royal family, endowed with all the benefits of the universe. We have the very Spirit of God within us, we can speak to the world’s Creator, and we will have His ear. With our Creator, nothing is impossible. Being forgiven and having our sin-debt paid is only a small part of the identity that God bestows on us. To finish strong we should remind ourselves of this daily.

**4. Never forget who is in charge.**

1Pe 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

As Americans, we love to think that we are in charge. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are created beings made in the image of God, but He is ultimately in charge. He is sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and wise; we are not.

**5. Never forget there will be a judgment.**

Mt. 25:21. His master said to him, “Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter the joy of your master.”

The most precious words any of can ever hope to hear from God’s lips addressed to us are these, “Well done good and faithful servant!!” Those words tell us we belong to Him, He has purchased us, we have served Him, and our service has been accepted as good, and we have been judged faithful.

**6. Never forget that God objective in this life is not our happiness, but our maturity.**

1Pe 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Hedonism reigns supreme in the contemporary philosophy. It is not only accepted, it is praised. It was also rampant in the first century church. Paul related to Timothy, “2Ti 3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be …… lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.” These words were directed at folks with a “form of godliness” – church members – not pagans. Even within some church circles today, the” Happiness of Man” is the implied objective of God for us. If we suffer from this delusion we will be discouraged by life, disillusioned about God, and pruned short of our objective of finishing strong.

**7. Never forget that pride is stalker of us all.**

 Pr 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

An accountant friend of mine retired, and took a job as a choir director at a small church, at a small salary. He was in his sweet spot! He was a gifted musician, a capable director, and learning and satisfied. He did not need the salary at all to live comfortably. He quit the job over a salary increase that was smaller than he and his wife thought respectful. Pride clouded his judgment! He never recovered another call and he died wishing he had never let so trivial a matter cause him to leave his life’s love of music for the King! Pride is “crouching at the door” of every believer trying to finish strong.

**8. Never fall prey to sloth.**

Pr 26:15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly.

Laziness is never acceptable in God’s house, and yet, every one of us hears the call of a well-deserved rest; and that rest can be extended; then extended; then extended. The first rest is healthy, the extensions are not! One could argue that David was more vulnerable to Bathsheba, because he was slothful in his duties as King. If David was vulnerable, then so are you and me!

My hope is that these thoughts will be helpful and cause a diligent student of the Gospel to want to complete further study on their own. They are designed to change the reader’s thinking.

Thinking is driven by theology, and we all have a theology. The theology or beliefs lead to changed lives.

What we believe (think) is tested by the trials of life; it becomes a conviction; then it becomes an attitude; and finally, it leads to changed behavior.

Belief >> Trials >> Conviction >> Attitude >> Behavior

My objective in this booklet

**Share my mistakes, so you don’t have to make the same ones and you can experience a shorter and less severe list of mistakes.**

**Bill Newton**

Bill was raised in Texas, graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy as President of his class and was a scholastic All-American in football. He flew A-6 Intruders, has five Distinguished Flying Crosses, and flew 250 combat missions in Vietnam.

Earning an MBA from Harvard, he orchestrated two division turnarounds at Boise Cascade, and joined Progressive Corporation, where he advanced to Executive V. P. Bill left Progressive and purchased SATEC Systems, quadrupling sales over 11 years and purchasing 6 other companies. He sold all his interests and became an investor and Board Member.

He was ordained to the Gospel Ministry by Parkside Church in 2003, and was called to ministry in Asheville, NC, where he currently pastors. He taught in Seminary in Uganda, Africa and returned to Asheville to start a small church in a rural county.

Bill ran his companies with Biblical principles, was active in FCCI, and is passionate about seeing men become the biblical leaders they should be. He is on three boards, writes occasionally for “World Magazine” and “The Journey” Newspaper, and is married to his high school sweetheart, Linda. He has two grown children, and three grandchildren.

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