Sitting in our favorite double-recliner on a chilly winter day in Arizona, I was thinking of the incident I had that same morning when I encountered a friend and neighbor in a local market. We engaged in an interesting conversation comparing Mormonism and Christianity. It was quite the ‘Tug Of War’ and it led me to ponder the game of ‘Tug Of War’ played throughout a lifetime.

Who hasn’t played ‘Tug Of War?’ From the beginning of time people, young and old, have played this game, it comes naturally to the human race.

‘Why,’ you ask, ‘do we play the game?’

I guess it’s because we are all selfish to one degree or another, and we want sole possession of whatever it is we are tugging over. Sometimes we play the game just for the joy of it, like animals tug back and forth on a rag, or a toy. It is fascinating to watch.

Have you ever given a toy to a young baby, and then tried to take the toy away from the child? You understand and you smile.

Later in life you give the same child a pillow and put another child in the same room, and watch. The shrieks and laughter of joy do not end until the fabric of the pillow is torn and tiny feathers fill the room.

The ‘Tug Of War’ is alive and the test is on.

Who is stronger, you or me? The object is mine, all mine and not yours, is the thought coming from each end of the item.

The rope ‘Tug Of War’ game comes much later and is played by the same matching number of people on either end of the rope. The object is to pull until eventually the people on the other end fail to hold you off, and they all fall down. The team still upright and holding the rope is the winner.

We test to see who is strongest. Then that progresses to see who has more discipline, who is
academically smarter, who is most committed, who is most athletic, or who is best looking. On and on we go. We test to see who really loves us in the same way that we love, and our young brains do not even know that these are not effective tests.

We realize that life is right there in front of us and deep down we all want to do well, making a difference in the world. Be it for good, or bad, or even indifference, every choice we make leads us to another opportunity for tugging.

As you approach your teen years, people notice that you are growing taller and they ask questions like, ‘So, what are you going to do when you grow up?’

You may have a good image of yourself and reply, ‘I think I will be a Doctor, a Lawyer, or a film star.’ You, however, may mutter to yourself, thinking, ‘Why do I even have to grow up? What if I want to be a bum?’ You wish the question had not been asked in the first place.

The teenage years are upon you. You are very sensitive and emotional and you try hard to look like you have life by the tail. Your parents, who have stood by you and are trying to guide you through this tough life, now suddenly do not know anything, you are the authority in the room. Of course, you will grow in the years to come to the point of realizing that what you know is not nearly what you thought it was. These are, in fact, ignorant years where your ideas have not been tried, nor tested. This is a time of tremendous tugging.

Somewhere within your teen years you begin to have thoughts of marriage and now you are testing in a different way to see who has your interests at heart, and who’s life is going in a similar direction. You have probably seen the havoc of broken relationships and the divorce of people very close to you. Maybe you carry scars because of this. Still you have the audacity to think that you can change another person once you are married. The truth is you cannot change another person, only yourself. When you do this, the person you plan to change notices and wonderful things begin to happen.

By the law of averages you will struggle through the early years of marriage and come to your early thirties. If you are not saved by the grace of Jesus Christ by this time, hopefully you will be soon. A search for truth usually starts with considering your own mortality, and life after death, probably subjects you have no clue about. People close to you have died and that propels you to consider how short life can be, and you start asking yourself, ‘What have I accomplished with my life, and should I be making some changes?’

You subconsciously continue to play ‘Tug Of War’. ‘I’m doing well the way I am, but what about eternity? Am I okay?’

Jesus was about thirty when he started his earthly ministry. It is interesting that, generally the age of thirty marks the spot where separation between childhood and adulthood begins. Many would say that age is eighteen or twenty, but really, isn’t adulthood generally closer to thirty for most? Mid-life, after all, is half way between three score and ten.

All your reasoning says you need Jesus Christ in your life. You accept that and have a real revelation of God’s saving grace. You decide to follow Jesus. Your puny selfish life becomes clearer than ever and you begin changing and diminishing. You have given your life to the Lord and you know you are saved. You learn that you must give ownership of your life over to Jesus because he purchased you at the ultimate price, his own blood, on the cross. You can see that you are not your own.

You should be baptized by now and are rapidly becoming a new creature, your old self is passing away. You act differently, maybe even look different, you are making different life choices, and you want new friends that are like you. You want your old friends to appreciate who you are in
Christ, hoping they see the new life change.

Amazingly, you are having thoughts that are much bigger than before, thoughts that include reaching out to a lost world. You study your Bible, hungry for the Word of God to penetrate into your very being. You feel love, peace, joy, and life purpose, as a reality. You really are a new person. You realize an incredible miracle has happened to you and you are passionate to learn more about the renewed life.

Jesus has, in fact, conquered your life, you are no longer wrapped up in yourself. Trivial things don’t seem to matter so much, and your sights for a life well lived are high and lofty. You no longer wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and you see life clearly now. You see it all, the good, the bad, and the ugly. None of it phases you though, you stand your ground as a child of God always choosing the best with joy, peace, and love, all unspeakable, in your heart.

All the confusion about your younger life is fading. Most of your old friends remained where they were somewhere in your past as you have moved forward. You think in the frame of miracles, knowing your new life is a miracle. You have traded your ‘Tug Of Wars’ for the disciplined and soul winning life.

Fleetingly you remember that it’s a long time since you played ‘Tug Of War’. You think you have no need of ‘that’ game anymore. Life is not without problems, but there is the sure knowledge that Jesus is within you, and he promises to never let you go. Together you and he are a majority and nothing will be impossible to you. Fear is gone. Christ in you is the hope of Glory, you will forever be found in Jesus. This is the purpose that you were searching for, to live a holy and peaceable life. All his wonderful attributes are yours, and there is no more successful life than this.

Things couldn’t be better, but then it happens. You tug! You tug again! You have a spouse, kids, mortgage, job, responsibilities, and things aren’t always so perfect. You’re not sure what’s happening. There seems to be friction at every turn. ‘Why am I tugging again?’ You wonder.

You are learning that the ‘Tug Of War’ never really goes away. There is always temptation to pick up that rope and start tugging again. It seems so hopeless, but then you remember how scripture almost always tells you to simply lay the rope down, stop tugging.

You see how the ‘Tug Of War’ simply stops when you lay the rope down. If there is someone tugging on the other end of the rope, they have no resistance when you lay yours down. It is so easy, if you can just remember to ‘lay it down.’

Time goes by fast and the senior years are upon you. You tug less these days, and you have learned the technique well of just dropping the rope quickly when there is the slightest tug from the other end. You notice something too. There are not so many tugs from that other end anymore. You find that rope just lies on the ground most of the time, and when one end gets picked up, there is no resistance to the other end from either of you.

The ‘Tug Of War’ is becoming a distant memory, with only tiny reminders occasionally. The miracle has taken place almost without your notice. Life is mostly without strife and stress, and without condemnation you are free to soar high above the storms of life like the Eagle who plays no ‘Tug Of War’. You simply live upon God’s provision and soar to great heights of touching others around you with love.

The partner of age is ‘failing health’ and it presents another set of, ‘Tug Of War,’ temptations. How do I treat this sickness or pain? Do I let chemicals put me into a different mode of life? Will I die of medication? Will I suffer if I do not address my medical issues? Should I even tell anyone of my health problems? ‘Tug Of War’ ropes are lying all around you and picking them up is a temptation.
The years are few now and you can see the end of the journey. The things of this world are becoming strangely dim. Somehow it is the most peaceful part of the journey. There is no tugging, less struggles, and a lasting peace about the finish line that lies just ahead. The prize for a race well run, eternity in heaven with Christ, is soon to be in your hands.

You are glad that at least half of your life has been lived learning to lay the rope down, but one last ‘Tug Of War’ remains, hanging onto breath itself. It becomes harder by the moment, but you know you will soon have eternity free of tugging. You will be in a place free of ropes. Tugging will never be needed again. You lay that last rope down.

Absolute peace envelopes you and you are with Christ.

Sitting here in my double recliner looking over at the distant mountains, I know that this day will serve up many ropes suitable for tugging. The thought of engaging my neighbor again concerning Christianity and Mormonism floods my mind. ‘Do I pick up that rope, Lord?’

I pray about it because I know that if the Lord instructs me to pick up the rope, he has won the victory already and it isn’t a ‘Tug Of War’ at all. The answer to my prayer comes and I know that I am to leave that rope lie. It is in his hands.

Help me, Lord, to live free of ‘Tug Of Wars’ and pick up the rope only when you instruct me to do so.