

Column

Reaching up to pull out an item from the top shelf of a closet, a reaction was triggered and a torrent of items came tumbling down around my head. I suspect it has happened to you.

What I have described is called the domino effect, one action triggers another and another. It might involve items on a shelf or a life event such as a mistake or in Christian parlance a sin.

Earlier this year, the Alex Murdaugh case gripped the attention of the nation as no case had since the 1995 trial of O.J. Simpson. Simpson was found not guilty. Mr. Murdaugh was not so fortunate. On March 2, 2023, after only three hours of deliberation, a jury found the Hampton, South Carolina attorney guilty of murdering his wife Maggie and son Paul, along with a related charge.

But the story did not end with the guilty verdict. Mr. Murdaugh's wrongdoing triggered a chain of events still going on. Items continue to fall from that shelf I have just described.

His actions affected not only himself and members of his family but a host of others. His law partners who had been like a band of brothers have had to make whole those who were injured by his malfeasance, and the law firm which included his name has had to be reorganized and renamed.

On Sept. 14, another attorney who became entangled in Mr. Murdaugh's web of deceit and financial crimes was sentenced to 20 years in state prison. He is Cory Flemming of Beauford, S.C., a man previously well-respected in the legal community and active in community and church.

In like manner a local banker by the name of Russell Laffitte was sentenced to seven years in federal prison on multiple financial crimes.

He may have naively followed Mr. Murdaugh's directions, been manipulated, but he is still behind bars. Not only is he suffering but his wife and family.

But the story is not over yet. Allegations of tampering with the jury have been lodged against Rebecca Hill, the clerk of court of the county where the Murdaugh case was tried. As a result, Mr. Murdaugh's legal team is seeking a new trial for their client. If allegations against Mrs. Hill are proven, she could find her life destroyed.

The domino effect is real, as can be attested by King David in the Old Testament. I am thinking about the Bathsheba affair recorded in 2 Samuel 11. David sinned greatly and sought and received God's forgiveness. Nevertheless, consequences remained. These consequences mostly involved members of his own family. In the royal household, there was strife, incest, rape, murder and insurrection. This great king had a very bumpy ride for the rest of his reign.

But the domino effect is not limited to those in high places, whether in Jerusalem or South Carolina. We all have closets with items ready to fall out. All of which to say: Think – or better still, pray – before you do.

Counsel from the writer of Proverbs still holds: "In all thy ways acknowledge him [the LORD], and he shall direct thy paths."

Almighty God, we implore thy grace and protection for the ensuing day. Keep us temperate in all things, and diligent in our several callings. Grant us patience under our afflictions. Give us grace to be just and upright in all our dealings; quiet and peaceable; full of compassion; and ready to do good to all men, according to our abilities and opportunities. Direct us in all our ways. Defend us from all dangers and adversities; and be graciously pleased to take us, and all who are dear to us, under thy fatherly care and protection. These things, and whatever else thou shalt see to be necessary and convenient to us, we humbly beg,

through the merits and mediation of thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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