

Archived Blogs June-September 2009

September 28, 2009
Over You With Singing

Does the Lord sing to you in the quiet? Can you hear him over the noise and distractions of life? Yes, I have a hard time too. Sometimes life can cover us like a dark cloak, leaving us blind and deaf. We are also distracted by many things that compete for our attention. Stress, fear and anxiety have a way of paralyzing our most simple movements. Our senses become numb to the clamoring of constant non-stop activity. Sound familiar? So when was the last time that you heard God sing?

I was recently reminded by a story from friend/mentor Buddy Owens. He recalled an event from a Promise Keepers men's conference. He was backstage in preparing to approach the platform to speak. Suddenly, he noticed in the front row, a young man in a wheel chair and his father standing to his side. It was apparent that this young man was paralyzed, blind and deaf. All 16,000 men stood to sing "All Hail The Power of Jesus Name." The father of this young man, took up his son and held him in his arms. The two were bear hugging each other. They were just inches apart from each other's faces. The father began to sing to his son. The boy could not see or hear him, but he can feel his father's breath as he mouthed the words. He could feel the tears as they streamed down his face. The young man had a smile as big as Texas as his father sang over him. The father was holding him as if there was no tomorrow. These two were locked in a moment. Everything else around them did not matter. Just a boy and his proud father.

I believe our heavenly Father sings over us. Either when we are awake or a sleep, he is with us moment by moment. His arms are wrapped around us as he holds us to his face. Warm as an winter evening fire, we are wrapped in the blanket of his embrace. We can feel the pulse of his eternal heart. We can hear every nuance and syllable spoken in his breath. Hear the song of your Father. Listen to the sweet melody that calms every fear. Know the words of compassion he speaks into your soul. Feel the dancing rhythms as he moves your feet to joy. He is here. Right where you are in the here and now. Stop what you are doing. Let him find you right where you are. Let Sing over you to quiet you with his love. Let him rejoice over you with singing.

The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing." - Zep. 3:17

September 26, 2009
"Take courage! It is I."

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." - Mark 6.50

The disciples were frightened because they thought they saw a ghost. Not knowing it was the Lord, they feared for their lives. The disciples could only see fear in a complicated mess. Jesus had another perspective. He saw man in need of a courage and was willing to restore comfort.

Have you ever felt like you were thrown out to sea? Alone, tossed by the wind and afraid? I was 10 years old when I was swept into a rip current at Daytona beach. I grabbed my raft and headed for the surf. The water was so beautiful, yet I did not see the danger of the tides. Before I knew it, I was heading faster away from the beach and into uncharted waters. There I was flailing my arms in fear of my life. But I was not alone. In an instant, a young man dived in, swam beside me and brought me to the beach. A warm smile greeted me and asked why I was so afraid. I was embarrassed, but needless to say, I was thankful.

Reality is that we face dangerous tides daily, but we are never alone. The Lord Jesus is always with us. Whether He sends people into our lives or is standing in our very presence, he is there. Like the disciples, we are so quick to say we will follow Jesus and will go to extremes to prove our good faith. Once we fixate our eyes on our human fears, we see the grandeur of a mess instead of the grandeur of the Lord. Our resolve is found in the words of Jesus where he says: "Take courage! It is I." (v.50b). Notice, He did not ask us a question. He gave us a command. His words are true. When He says "take courage," where else is our resort? When He says, "It is I," really, who else are we to fear? Like David proclaimed in Ps. 56, "what can mere man do to me?"

Dear Lord, every time we enter the waters, may we take courage and not our own supplies. Help us to rest in the comfort of faith and be strengthened by your presence. Thank you for always being with us. No matter what storms may rage, we can take comfort in your words which say "Take courage, It is I."

September 25, 2009
Cast Your Blessings

Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.

Give portions to seven, yes to eight,
for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain upon the earth.
Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where it falls, there will it lie.

Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed [a] in a mother's womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.

Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let not your hands be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that,
or whether both will do equally well.

- Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastics, presses upon us to give freely to the Lord and to others. To give is to let go, without reservation and without obligation. Like giving to a person in need, whether in food, clothing, assistance or even in the emotional needs of acceptance, mercy and forgiveness. We are to give liberally. Because we have much, God expects much from us (Luke 12:48). God is rich in mercy to all of us, even thou we are sinful and unworthy. He delights to give to his children. So we can delight in giving to others. Give in a way where you do not expect a return. We do not know what each day brings, nor do we know our ending days. So give as God gave to you. Give to bless others and you will experience how God will work through you in the moment. This is how we are to be a spiritual blessing. In prayer and in spirit, the Lord works through us to be a blessing to people.

We live in a world where we are so quick to take, but not to give. Why is this? Is it our human nature to have and to hold? Is it our sinful nature that compels us to always want more? I like to think about an analogy of bird seed. Last year my wife Heather, fell in love with feeding the birds on weekend mornings. She bought a large bag at the grocery store and was excited in sharing the bounty with the our cute feathery friends. All the while, we had a few tragedies that had challenged our livelihood.

You too may have experienced similar situations. There are times when we wonder how God will pull us through. The beauty of this story, is found in the lesson of bird seed. As God freely gives to the birds who neither work nor toil, so he gives freely to us. I remember very clearly, that when times were down, we never went without. And why

are we never without? Because His presence and provision is always with us and goes beyond our human capacities. God delights in making all things possible as He has the power to do so.

A few months later we were hit with a hurricane. It was a very tough season. Knowing that God was sustaining us through this time, we choose to give to another family that was in need. I remember very clearly, when Heather and I were packing some goods, she also packed along the rest of the bird seed left in the bag with a feeder. The lesson of bird seed taught us much about the liberty of God and how we too are to give liberally. There is always enough left to give and to give freely. After many days we will find it again. This is what it means to cast your bread upon the waters.

Question/Reflection

What is God calling you to give right now? To whom are you to give this to? How can your giving be translated into an act of worship to God?

Encouragement

"Accustom yourself to the wonderful thought that God loves you with a tenderness, a generosity, and an intimacy which surpasses all your dreams. Give yourself up with joy to a loving confidence in God and have courage to believe firmly that God's actions towards you is a masterpiece of partiality and love. Rest tranquility in this abiding conviction."

- Abbe Henri de Tourville (1903)

September 11, 2009

We Remember

We remember and pray for the families, friends and heroes on this anniversary of 9/11. May God continue to lift up and comfort our nation.

"I pray God may open your eyes and let you see what hidden treasures he bestows on us in the trials from which the world thinks only to flee." - John of Avila (1569)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-a0fsmF1rk&feature=player_embedded

August 31, 2009
My Traveling Companion

"When I was a son to my father,
a tender only child before my mother,
he taught me, and he said to me:
Let your heart lay hold of my words;
keep my commands so that you will live.
Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding;
do not forget and do not turn aside from the words I speak
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will guard you." - Proverbs. 4.3-12

Solomon, the writer of Proverbs, encourages us to not only heed wise words, but to also seek what is wise. We are told from the author's experience and rewards for listening to his parents. Words of reassurance and security seem to anchor Solomon. You can say, that Solomon was reflecting over his life and recalled events. Maybe he was in a time of questioning, seeking direction. Maybe he was in need of encouragement. What ever additional thoughts that crossed his mind, you can sense his thankfulness and appreciation.

Just recently, I took a road trip with my dad to Tennessee. This was our third annual travel to Chattanooga to visit our family. My dad just turned 70 over the weekend and still is just as spry yet gentle as he was young. We have a great time together. He is not a man of many words, but his wisdom of silence is deep as the Tennessee River. I love him. Being with him reminds me of all the years of past. Times of laughter, sorrow, joy and pain. My dad loves to re-tell funny stories of my brother, sister and I. You can tell that our foolish and innocent ways both brought laughter and frustration to our mom and dad. I enjoy recalling those defining moments in our family. They help me remember what my father was really teaching me. At times when I did not listen, I encountered consequence. No matter if I got back on track, or needed help, he was always there to meet me where I was to love and to guide me. No matter if we are together or not, he is always with me in spirit. I smile at all our memories and times of laughter and tears. Even these emotional cues are instructions that help anchor me in my journey. I am never alone.

Hard to imagine sometimes and yet it still takes us by surprise, that our Heavenly Father is even greater than our earthly parents. We can trust that our Father knows and does what is best. He guides us in times when we need direction or when we need to correct a bad turn. He never forgets us and always knows where we are. As we are in Christ, His Spirit never leaves us nor forsakes us. The Father speaks into the depths of our

souls through the channels of our hearts. His words serve as the bedrock of our understanding. He is our Rock in whom we find strength and victory. Solomon tells us "Let your heart lay hold of my words; keep my commands so that you will live." The chapter includes an exhortation to acquire wisdom (1-4a), a list of the benefits of wisdom (4b-9), a call to pursue a righteous lifestyle (10-13), further on this passage a warning against a wicked lifestyle (14-19), and an exhortation to righteousness (20-27). To live simply means to be nourished by the good things God provides. We are to grow in the way of His understanding and to pursue the goodness and holiness of the Lord. He truly satisfies our every need and desire along every highway.

Reflection

Where are you in your roads of travel? Who are you listening to? If the Lord were to speak to you, would you know His voice? Would you sense the wonder of his comfort and treasures of his wisdom? Finally, what is He saying to you now in the very walk of your life?

Today, right where you sit, you can know His voice and know His wisdom. Pray to the Father and ask him to open your heart. Seek Him to open the eyes of your understanding. Ask Him to help you hear his voice. Become familiar with the sound of his voice. Be refreshed by the currents of his wisdom and strengthened by the Rock of your salvation. He knows you like no one else and desires for you to know Him just as deep. He is the Word of life. He is your guide along every road. He is your traveling companion.

August 29, 2009

An image of Scripture

Photo taken recently at a gristmill on the Tennessee and Georgia border (8.29.09).



"As they make music they will sing, "All my springs are in you." - Ps. 87.7

August 28, 2009
a temporary place

"Father! Replenish with thy grace this longing heart of mine;
Make it thy quiet dwelling place, the sacred inmost shrine!"
- Angelus Silesius (1677)

Back in the days of the Exodus, God instructed the Israelites to make him a dwelling place. God was very specific in his design and instructions. The people were to carry the tabernacle everywhere they journeyed. God was with them. He was among them, even in the times when the people fell off the road. When you think about it, He was very gracious in allowing the hands of men to hold the holiness of God. He was merciful to provide for his people with his presence as they traveled through the wilderness. He designed this portable meeting place for worship. As God formed man from the ground with such perfect design, so he fashioned places of worship for himself. More importantly, He created his Bride - the Church to be his people - his residence.

Today, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit as we carry the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Another thought, we are a transitional meeting place of God with man. All of this is prior to our heavenly home. To be the people of God is to live as his dwelling place. We may be veiled in flesh, but we are uniquely created as God's design. In this life, our bodies are temporary, yet we are tabernacles for his dwelling - for his worship. Praise be to God that one Day, we will soon be in our permanent meeting place with the Lord. And forever will be with Him.

August 27, 2009
Why Confess?

I did not grow up in a liturgical church. My background is more on the non-denominational side. Later in life, I did attend and serve in Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and back again to the Baptist/Christian/Bible churches. You can say that I am a church mutt, only to please and follow Him - not man. I believe that there is much to learn from other faiths, provided that they are Scriptural. One thing I truly appreciated from some of these churches was their focus on confession. Every church has their own way of doing things. Some churches anchor in their heritages, while others have stepped away to embrace new and fresh encounters with God. I believe that we are to sing a new song unto the Lord. I also believe that we are to learn from the heritage of our faith. I sense that in most churches, our time of worship is reduced to singing. Our time of prayer is reduced to announcements. Our time in the Word is reduced to presentational speaking. Our time of confession is reduced to the offering.

Now when I say the word confession, I do not mean the wooden walls of a booth, where a priest is veiled on the other side. I am meaning confession as an act and breath of worship. Prayer has a beautiful way of guiding our emotions to God. Confession is no different, we acknowledge and unpack our emotions, hurts and failures before God. It is also where (not limited to) we experience His manifold of grace and mercy. Confession is where God meets us just "as" and "where" we are. In fact, confession is a worshipful response. It is where we respond to God according to his mercy, giving thanks for providing the Christ as our atoning sacrifice.

Confession and consecration for the priests in Exodus was never easy. The priests laid their hands on the head of an animal as a sin offering. This identified themselves with the atoning work of the sacrifice. They acknowledged that the animal was suffering the punishment they deserved. From this act, they praised and thanked God for providing the sacrifice that covered their sins in making them acceptable and clean before the Lord.

In our services today, much has changed, thankfully to Christ from Calvary. What has not changed is the human need to connect to Christ as our Forgiver and Priest of Mercy to God the Father. May we take time in our services (and private times) to honor, confess and acknowledge His atoning work.

Let us now come to Him and lay our hands of faith on the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. May we become aware of our insufficiencies only to lean fully on His all-sufficiency. Let us confess that we are sinners in need of a Savior. Our lives are hidden in His, for we can run to Christ and be fully embraced as the prodigals into the arms of a merciful Father. Through Him alone we find forgiveness of sins, and to Him alone we glory in the cross of His everlasting work, everlasting love and everlasting covenant. (Jn. 1.29, Gal. 2.20, Col. 3.3).

August 25, 2009

Who Is This For Anyway?

Hello WTT friends. It's been some time since the last blog entry. My wife and I have taken a huge break(s) for the summer and now we are back. Somewhat, yes, very refreshed and being reminded of the essentials in the Christian life of what truly remains to be important. God, the Word and our growth.

It never ceases to amaze me that battles of preferential styles continue in the Church. I am convinced that as long as Satan is battling (losing) against Heaven's gates, how we respond to this battle is our responsibility.

This past Sunday, a church member had asked me just before the worship service, "Why are we doing _____ in worship? And why aren't we doing _____" This individual was pointing to a particular song and style that is expressed in our services. My response was basic to include that all our songs, prayers and messages are to encourage people to worship, as they serve God in worship. Each of us are different, but with one voice, we worship our Lord. The service is for/to Him. I received quite a frown. They repeated the same question. My response, was the same. Suddenly, I became aware that a "Service to God" was not a focus in this person's mind. I asked this individual, who is the worship service for. The response included everyone else but God. Amazed where I stood, I was baffled that there seem to be more of a focus in how we worship rather than the One we worship. So, do we conclude that our purpose is to worship - worship?

Who is this service for anyway? Well, I believe our service is for God himself, as Scripture resonates. He is the Author and Creator of all. Gen. 1 declares the first four beloved words of the Bible, "In the beginning God." Worship begins with God, not with us. That so, our services belong to Him, our worship belongs to Him. He is the beginning and the end - we are not.

Sometimes I attribute our service to God in worship, as Mary had approached Jesus at dinner. As you recall, she broke a flask of perfume to anoint His feet and afterwards, wiped His feet with her hair. This act of submission was not one out of self-indulgence. If so, she could have used cheaper perfume, a towel instead of her own hair, and possibly used another person to do the wiping for her. I believe that Jesus was not interested in the way in which she worshiped, but that she chose the better part. She worshipped Him alone. Where do you see yourself in this picture?

May our worship take on the humility of Christ as we humble ourselves before His holiness in true reverence and desperate adoration.

July 22, 2009

Chick-fil-a (Tim Hawkins)

I just came across this video and laughed. Reason? We are able to see ourselves in every moment in what others experience. This Chick-fil-a story through song is one example. It is a wonderful truth to know that we are loved by a God who has a sense of humor. Often we take ourselves too seriously. Speaking from honesty, the same can happen in the leading of worship. We can get so wrapped up into the logistics that we can lose our true focus. I believe that the leading of worship needs to have life, breath and space. Planned spontaneity at its finest is when we have a prepared place for God to speak. Our services need to be filled with the fullness of life that God provides in order to respond back to him in authentic praise. Thanks Tim for encouraging us to laugh and to lighten up.

<http://www.youtube.com/v/NsJHqstPuNo&hl=en&fs=1&>

July 16, 2009

What Does Our Daily Life/Work Say About Our Worship?

Recently, I found this video by Eugene Peterson regarding the last post. Time and time again, I am often reminded that our daily living says a lot of what we believe/think of God and how we worship Him. It's one thing to worship on Sunday or even have a great quiet time on a particular day. It's another thing when we don't live out the lessons we are taught in those great worship/Bible moments. How often do we let those fleeting moments pass by? We can fool ourselves, but God is always watching, yet He is so patient. Walk in His grace and love throughout your day as you offer your work and daily to-do's as a living sacrifice of worship (Rom. 12:1-2).

<http://www.youtube.com/v/wroPePp5Vew&hl=en&fs=1&>

What is your reflection from the words of Rev. Peterson?

July 7, 2009

Our Work As Art - Thought and Question

Wendell Berry says "everybody is an artist - either good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. Any life, by working or not working, by working well or poorly, inescapably changes other lives and so changes the world." In reflecting the love of Christ, in what way can our work and art speak of the words "Thy will be done,"? What will be the impact of our art if our work is done well?

June 16, 2009

Fast Food Church

<http://www.youtube.com/v/n4QFKS4LzS4&hl=en&fs=1&>

You know, it never ceases to amaze me of how a little preference can go a long way. We are now 20+ years in the drive-thru-life-society. There has been much change in the way of upgrades and innovation. Yet, our need to calm our impatient nerves remains unchanged. In fact, our impulses have increased beyond our ability to control. When you look at a movie theater or a fast food drive-in you see an endless line of orders and demands. The difference seen here involves food. In the Church, we list our own demands over the sermon, music, children's ministry as well as the overall look, feel and smell in our worship spaces. Questions: who are we trying to satisfy? Do our attempts really satisfy our needs? Are we looking to the One who truly satisfies? Are we truly seeking Almighty God in what is holy and pleasing to Him?

When we meet together for worship our eyes need to be focused on the One who is worthy of our praise and entire being. How can this be, when our attention is so distracted by other temporary things that hold no eternal value? I love the words of Paul that remind us of our place in the Church and in worship: "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." - Rom. 12:1.

6.30.09 Post: Pr. Richard

"For some expansion on that Romans 12:1."

6.24.09 Post: Pr. Barry

"That's so sad it's funny. I almost felt guilty for laughing at that. What a stark commentary on how some view the church today. Thanks for posting it."

June 12, 2009

I Can Drive 55

It really happened. I got a speeding ticket this past Tuesday. There I was flying down the road unknowingly into a speed trap. An officer who was 1 mile away, gunned me with his laser light patrol beam. He stepped out of his vehicle and waved me down. I hadn't even approached him with in a half mile. Before I knew it, he flagged me down and directed me to park in front of his patrol car. What a bummer. My fault exactly. I was on the way to meet my wife for a Doctor's visit. Really. Without hesitation, I retrieved my license, rolled down the window and greeted the police man. Is there a problem Mr. Officer? Actually, I did not say this. He approached the window; I handed my license over along with an apology for speeding. I did tell him that we were on the way to the Doctor's. He did not respond. Bummer #2!

The officer took my registration and proceeded to his vehicle to write my fateful sentence. I'm glad he didn't find a rap sheet. I called my wife to explain. She laughed and said sorry. I was not laughing. I was praying. Then I stopped. I deserved the ticket. In my mind I began to rationalize my actions. It did not matter. I wasn't sorry that I got caught. I was sorry that I was in too big of a hurry. I needed to slow down, regardless of my situation. My emergency was not his problem - it was mine.

The next day I got sick. Bummer #3! Not from the ticket, but from an unwelcoming allergy infection. All of Wednesday I had a migraine that rocked my brain. Behind my eyes without end, the pain surged like a hurricane (here's the sucking noise). Again, I needed to slow down. Went to bed and four hours later, I tried to revive myself. Still, the

pain went on as well as yesterday's memory of that ticket. The next day, my migraine went away. My pain receded like a bad fading hairline. I returned to normal. I developed a renewed appreciation of both health and speed.

Something funny occurred to me. God whispered a bit of wisdom, asking me if I was becoming too busy. Yes, I replied. He helped me realize that I needed to slow down emotionally, spiritually and physically. The reality I was going too fast. Flying in every direction. Daily tasks, projects, ministry items and the kitchen sink.

God engineered my circumstances to slow me down and rest. I needed Him the most and it was good for me. No, he did not send me a policeman or illness. The traffic violation was my doing, the illness was beyond my control. What I had control over was my response to these incidents. I am glad to have slowed down. Spiritually, I have a different angle on my daily to-do's and life. If I had not slowed down, I would have missed the opportunity to learn, the moment to feel and the space to rest and regain perspective. Unlike the old 80's rock tune, you really can learn how to drive 55.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." - Jesus, Luke 10.41-42