

October 29, 2009  
Spoken Words

"If the vessel of our soul is still battered by winds or by storm, let us call on our Lord who rests therein. He will soon calm the sea." - Bro. Lawrence of the Resurrection (1691)

Have you ever stepped into a situation only to find that it was more than what you bargained for? I remember crossing an old bridge that had tattered lines and rickety boards. My memory does not serve me well as to why I had to cross this bridge; but there I was, insane to find myself in this position. I remember approaching the middle of this relic overpass and was stunned by fear. Looking down to the river and rocks below, I found my self paralyzed and unable to move. The fear of falling between the cracks was all I heard in my mind. Soon I baby-stepped my way and crossed over. I'm not a tree hugger, but when I landed on the banks of safety, I kissed the ground like a long lost friend. Fear can do amazing things to a person, but in that fear, we also have the opportunity to listen.

In Mark 4:35-41, the disciples followed Jesus into a boat, as they were to cross over to the other side. At first sight, the disciples did not see anything on the horizon, but soon had to deal with the inevitable. We read here in verse 37:

"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

The word of command that Christ gave is two-fold. He says: "Quiet! Be Still!" A spoken word to the storm, let not any wind roar, nor the sea rage. He speaks to us, let not our anxiousness roar nor our fear rage. When our hearts are like the troubled sea that cannot rest, we are to listen to His voice over the waters. Jesus speaks words of comfort and graciously guides us to shore. Like the disciples, we maybe fearful, but we are not without faith. In the moment, our faith may be weakened, but the power of His voice and words will bring us a strong peace.

Reflection:

No matter the storm, no matter the event, may we recognize the Lord's voice. Can you hear the same Voice, who spoke into creation is also speaking into your soul? As He

speaks are you obeying Him to be at peace and to be still? When you listen, how does this change your worship of Him?

October 29, 2009  
Unbreakable Friendship

"The glory of friendship is...the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Friends are the most important impacts in life. Our time is short on earth. With whom do you spend life with? This seems to be a very decisive question. If we truly believe that God loves us with an unlimited, unconditional love, then we can trust Him that he sends people into our lives to demonstrate that kind of love.

I have a very close friend who constantly and sometimes unknowingly, teaches me the compassion of Christ. For the past 16 years, this person is a blessing of joy to our family. He is someone who is completely selfless and seeks no esteem. He seeks to help you find the person who God has created you to be. I remember in dark times of trouble, I could call on my friend at 2 in the morning. He would answer the phone as if it were 2 in the afternoon and made you feel just as bright. Besides my wife, he is someone that knows me better than I know myself, yet helps me see more of who I am in Christ. From his example, I have learned to be that kind of same best friend to others and more importantly, my dear wife.

It is good for two to travel together. If one falls, the other is ready to pick him up. If an enemy were to find him alone, he would prevail; but when found with a friend, the two can withstand him. Having a third, makes an unbreakable cord. In our spiritual battles, we are helpful to one another as well as in our spiritual work - being the Church.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

9 Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their work:

10 If one falls down,  
his friend can help him up.  
But pity the man who falls  
and has no one to help him up!

God became human for us to make divine love tangible, reachable and teachable. In the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we find the kind of love that lifts us up when we fall, that walks besides us when we feel alone, and to dwell in the salvation of the One who laid down his life for his friends.

When two friends are together, in God's love, they are closely joined in the fellowship of Christ. The Holy Spirit comes and joins himself to the two, just as we have seen on the road to Emmaus. May we always have the burning of friendship in our hearts, to life up one another, as we walk our roads together.

Reflection: In your time of need, how did it feel to have a friend lift you up? What were the most memorable moments you experienced the love of Christ through a friend? Which person is God bringing into your life to help become that threefolded cord?

October 28, 2009

Hide And Seek

"The Father is looking for worshipers. So if you are looking for God and just can't seem to find him, then stop what you are doing and worship Him - and He will come and find you." - Joseph Garlington

Remember the game "Hide and Seek"? A mentor and friend of mine Buddy Owens, would often use this analogy in describing God's pursuit of man and man's response to God. As a boy, I loved to run and hide. I was filled with the excitement and anticipation of being caught, only if they could find me first. It's amazing of all the places you can find that make perfect hiding places. I would locate a great spot and was assured that no one could find me. Unfortunately, my giggling would often give myself away.

In Genesis chapter three, we find one of the most striking passages of Scripture. After man had sinned and hid himself, God called out to Adam: "Where are you?" In this situation, man was hiding, God was seeking. If the Lord had not sought him, they would have been abandoned and left to die in their sin. As God walked through the Garden, he could have passed by without a word. Even more so, he could have not even stepped foot in Eden. Because God's character is love, He choose to pursue mankind. He calls us each by name.

Another hide and seek scenario happened in John 4.23, when Jesus met a woman at the well. The woman was more concerned about the location of worship (this is how we hide behind lesser important matters). Jesus was more concerned about the person being found by God in worship. He says: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." Here again, God is the seeker. We are the ones that hide; He is the one that seeks and calls us out of dark places.

In church, in worship and in daily life, it's amazing to find many perfect places that make great hide-outs. We hide behind our jobs, titles and social positions, we also hide behind appearances, conversations and email. It is easy to think that no one else will ever find us, but we know we can't out-hide God. His vision is too great, his mercies run too deep and His compassion seeks us relentlessly. He hears our words, thoughts and

pains. Our Father comes and finds us in our gardens, so He can clothe us in robes of grace and forgiveness.

As Buddy Owens said in his book, "The Way of a Worshiper," God calls us out of our hiding places, not to condemn us, but to redeem us. As we have seen in both the Old and New Testaments, we see the consistency of God's compassion for mankind.

What an astounding revelation, the Heavenly Father, Creator of all existence is seeking people to worship Him. God has no need to augment His glory, but it is right that he is to be glorified. We are created for worship, not for hiding. When we worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, we find our rightful place in life. May we be the kind of people He is looking for - people to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Reflection: What are your hiding places? Are you able to give yourself up to be found in His presence? Are you willing to be enamored by His mercy as he clothes you in forgiveness - all to worship Him?

October 27, 2009  
3 Degrees of a Smile

"We never know what ripples of healing we set in motion by simply smiling on one another." - Henry Drummond

Happiness is contagious. When someone smiles they light up the room. When a person smiles at you, they light up your heart. According to a 2007 study published in the British Medical Journal, the power of a smile goes beyond the person. In addition, James Fowler, political scientist at University of California, San Diego, explains how happiness spreads through social networks as well as on the street where you live.

Fowler found that when a person becomes happy, a friend living close by has a 25 percent higher chance of becoming happy themselves, including their spouse. From their smiles, another next-door neighbors' chances increase to a 34 percent rate of becoming happy. If you think about it, your one smile has the potential of spreading to 3 degrees - friends reaching friends.

Even in the midst of pain, Job understood the power of a smile. In fact, it could be said that Job served others by smiling. In his own words, Job says:

23 They waited for me as for showers  
and drank in my words as the spring rain.

24 When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it;  
the light of my face was precious to them. [a]

25 I chose the way for them and sat as their chief;  
I dwelt as a king among his troops;  
I was like one who comforts mourners.

Job had the hearts and affections of his neighbors. People were happy as he spoke to them. His speech dropped upon them, and the people waited for it as the rain. He smiled upon them, and it was precious as the sun. It was not the flexing of his facial muscles that was important, nor was it the case that he had many friends. This was a man who had everything ripped away from him such as his home, family and possessions. He grew boils over his whole body, even on his very face, yet he managed to smile because he knew the origin of his Peace. As a byproduct, his smile was a ministry to others.

No matter if our days are filled with joy or grief, the power of a smile can change everything. At the close of a worship service, it's no wonder why we receive the encouraging benediction spoken from Numbers which says: "the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 25 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." - Num. 6.24-25

Reflection: In what way has God smiled upon you that changed your emotion, perspective or condition? How does this affect your worship? How can God's peace cause you to smile that also would encourage someone else - even at 3 degrees away

October 26, 2009  
At The End Of the Day

"Every day should be passed as if it were to be our last." - Publilius Syrus

The choices you make stem from the root of your values. Each day presents itself with the opportunity to determine decisions that reflect your character. Each night echos your selections of words, actions and thoughts. At the end of it all, are you happy with your choices?

Each night I think about the passing of events and consider to myself what was good, not so good or still needs improvement. More importantly, it is wonderful to close your eyes each night, knowing that somewhere along the lines you have done your best. However, failure and brokenness can leave rough edges as if our beds were made of sandpaper. It seems as if past events and history clings to us, as we seek for its resolve. I do not believe that we are to snap out of this kind of thinking. Nor are we to snuff-out our issues to ignore them. Time is needed to heal. It does get better.

When you plant seeds in one season, you do not see their effects until the next, or then after. You may not see any activity on the surface, but below there is vitality and growth. Isaiah 43.18-19

18 "Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.

19 See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert  
and streams in the wasteland.

The Father is the one to help open our eyes to see the new things He is planting, growing and doing. He also has the power to help close our eyes from the old and former things. Like a plant in need of growth, he provides the soil and stability to help us stand - not on our strength but through Christ. He makes a way through the desolate places and carries us through the day. At night, we find sweet rest in the palm of his hands. He gives us a cool drink from the fountain of the Spirit filling our hearts with praise. Each day he provides new mercy, new vision and new growth. May we live each day in Christ, allowing Him to do the best within us. In the process, may our worship bloom of sweet fragrances to God.

Reflection:

What are you harboring at night that hinders your worship in the day? Are you able to remove your hands that cling so desperately to the past, and rather cling to Him? As each day renews, God will cause His way to spring up, are you ready to perceive it?

October 23, 2009  
Are You In Tune?

"We are all strings in the concert of God's joy." - Jakob Bohme

From the 6th Century, a mathematician named Pythagoras heard the hammering of an anvil. He observed that the blacksmith used several hammers in varying sizes and weights. In applying his mathematics skills, he discovered that each pitch from the strikes of different hammers produced simple ratios of each other. Pythagoras was able to divide the pitches accordingly: 1 whole ratio,  $1/2$ ,  $1/4$  and so forth. He later applied this theory to the length of two strings and discovered that a musical tone can be governed by a number as it also creates an interval. When playing two strings of the same length together, they produce the same pitch. As you shorten one string, leaving the other untouched, they produce two different pitches. The Greeks, divided the string into four parts which gave pitch variations of  $1/1$  (whole),  $3/4$ ,  $2/3$  and  $1/2$ . Through out the ages, these four pitches were further divided into octaves and 8 more notes creating a full scale - just as you see on the keys of a piano: 1 (Octave), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (Octave). Pythagoras was the inventor of harmony. He understood that tuning and pitch relation from note to note produced consonant (pure) sounds and dissonant (impure) sounds.

Psalms 150 says:

3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,  
praise him with the harp and lyre,

4 praise him with tambourine and dancing,  
praise him with the strings and flute,

Various instruments are used in praising God. They resound in perfect union and harmony; they do not hinder, but help each other. Much like a symphony, one instrument voice is interdependent to another as they produce colors, shades and variations of harmony. The Lord himself is a constant, pure and perfect tone. When are hearts and minds are not in tune with the Lord, we can produce sounds of dissonance. Only the Concert Master can keep our hearts in one accord to His love. Like the hymn writer of "Come Thou Fount" says: "tune my heart to sing Thy grace." The Lord knows our tonal quality, yet He seeks to conduct us in his mercy. In concert with one another, God desires our attitudes to also be in tune.

1 Peter 3:8 tells us: "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." May the voices from our fellowship with another and our devotion of the Lord be a pleasing sound to His ear. We truly are the strings of His symphony of joy.

Reflection:

What are the notes in your life that only the Concert Master can tune? Is your love a clanging cymbal or an instrument of His praise?

October 22, 2009

The One True Vine

"The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine...Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus." - Hudson Taylor

In John 15, Jesus spoke to his disciples in saying: 1. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Jesus Christ is the true Vine; God is the true Gardner. It is a wonder that Christ could have referred to himself as anything else in the vineyard: a tree, a worker or even the owner of the field. He choose the term and likeness of a vine. When you stop and think about it, Jesus takes the lowly place, yet takes a position of a servant. Jesus is

consistent with the rest of Scripture, in the Triune union he is equal to God, yet makes himself of no reputation. A vine is low and humble to the ground; it then grows upward and reaches the heavens. He is planted in the vineyard, in the earth; He is the Word that became flesh, taking root into our hearts. He gives salvation to those who are dying. He provides nourishment to those who are weak. He grows fruit within a person that cheers the heart. He also covers us with a canopy of grace and clothes of forgiveness. What is not grown, he carefully prunes in order to gracefully bear new life again.

In the vineyard, there are other vines. They compete for our allegiance. Their appearance may be attractive, yet inside they are empty. They make promises that can never deliver. Their way may seem right to a man, but their end is death. "Remain in me, " says your job, "and you will find success." "desire only me" says the world "for you will find pleasure." "care only for me" says self, "for there is none greater." All these other vines are more like weeds. They choke our existence and siphon off life. They bear no fruit, but they breed death. They are withered and dry branches plucked off the tree. Eventually they are burned.

How are union with Christ is maintained is abiding in Him, as his words abide in us. It is in the Word that in which we receive and embrace Him: his spiritual nourishment, true fulfillment and spring of life. If the Word is at home within us, then the word of Christ dwells richly and there Christ dwells.

As the true Gardener, God knows what is best for us. He sent us not a hired hand, but the true Vine to give life and to dwell among us. Abide in His love. Without Him you can do nothing, but in Him, you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength (Phil. 4.13)

Reflection:

In what way is God calling you to abide in him in constant worship? What other vines need clearing, to make Him your one true Source? His supply is sweet, how can you share with others, what the Vine has shared with you?

October 21, 2009  
A Song Of Praise

"Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."  
- Martin Luther

Music truly is one of God's greatest gifts, where we use it to respond back to Him in praise. In the psalms, King David set the example to help us learn how to praise the Master of Music. In worship, we are to give God thanks with a fixedness of heart.

Wandering and straggling thoughts must be quarantined to help us freely give God worth.

Look here in the Psalms as David directs worship unto the Lord: "My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul." (Psalm 108.1) From his mouth, soul and gifting, David praises God with all his being.

James 3.9 tells us "with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father..." Our tongue is a powerful vessel, and never more so than when it is employed in praising God. David's skill was found in music; it was his soul and gifting. His beloved art was consecrated to the worship of God. Whatever our talent, God desires for us to excel in our gifting as a response back to Him.

In our times of solitude or cooperate worship, our praise is to be authentic, affectionate and lively. Even in times of sorrow, our adoration of God is still alive. Psalms 108.2 goes on to say: "Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn." As in creation, David praises the Lord in a lively manner, not in a dull or sleepy tune.

Let our praise be alive unto God, as the earth is filled with his radiance. In proclaiming God publicly, may we not be ashamed in our adoration and obligation to Him. With our tongue, voice, gifting and being let's magnify the mercy and truth of God. Psalm 108.3 says "I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples." As we sing, may our words and notes be sung prayers unto God that also proclaim his love for all mankind. Worship is not our gain, but God's glory.

Reflection:

What causes your tongue to sing the praise of God? How does the Lord use your gifting to be an instrument of praise to Him? What new song is God desiring to hear from you that also reaches the nations?

October 20, 2009  
Faith Beyond Seeing

"Faith is the daring of the soul to go farther than it can see." - Williams N. Clarke (1912)

A seed, a mountain, a fish, a tree. To the ordinary eye, these items are mere elements of matter. Upon appearance, we can associate them to their rightful applications. A seed can be for planting, a mountain can be for climbing, a fish can be for eating and a tree for shading. The observance on the outside is simple; yet, the inward appearance goes beyond our vision.

Hebrews 11.1 says that faith is being sure for the things hoped for and the certainty of what we do not see. Faith can be broken into two parts: faith and hope, yet they go together perfectly. What is the object of our hope, also becomes the object of our faith. The Word gives us the full persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that he has promised to us in Christ Jesus. We place our hope in Christ, therefore we have faith in God. Jesus radiates the glory of God; He is the exact and perfect representative of God's being. In this position, faith is the evidence of things unseen (2Cor. 4.18).

Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind, the reality of those things that cannot be discerned by the eye of the body. Faith is designed to serve the believer instead of sight, and to be the soul over all our other senses. We see by faith (Ac.3.16), hear by faith (Rom. 10.17), taste by faith (Ps. 34.8) and walk by faith (2Cor. 5.7). Our challenges are many, but our faith provides countless ways to navigate through the rough terrain.

Faith begins by seeking God and as we seek, He blesses our diligence. God provides a solid path in which we are to travel (Ps. 119.105). He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Heb. 11.6). God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Eph.1). He has given us the knowledge of the Kingdom (Lk. 8.10), the ability to move mountains of doubt (Mt. 21.21), the belief to know He multiplies our needs (Jn 6.11) as well as, the strength to possess in times of weakness (Lk. 17.6).

God does not give us faith to see the temporary, but he gives us faith to see his invisible and eternal hand of wonders. May our faith not be ordinary as the eye can see. May the ordinary things we see, provide opportunities to grow our faith. As we are transformed daily, may we experience the extravagance of God and the vastness of his plans. May the riches of His glory be made known to the objects of His mercy - we His people (Rom 9.23-24).

Reflection:

How can faith help you see farther beyond yourself? What kind of strength has God given you to earnestly seek Him? In worship, life and in relationships, are you diligently fixing your eyes to seek Him and to be found by Him?

October 19, 2009  
When Words Can't Express

"God seeks from us not nice words, but intimate relationship, even and especially when that relationship is being refined in the fire of adversity." - Buddy Owens

Lamentations chapter 3 declares one of the most memorable Biblical phrases:

22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

These verses wonderfully stand on their own. However, when read in the chapter's context, they take a new meaning with very deep roots. In 586 BC Jerusalem was conquered by Babylon and the nation is in torment as they mourn its destruction. The author laments as he shares the same theological vision of Jeremiah and experience of Judah's devastation.

Lamentations contains bold complaints against God as well as deep cries for mercy. The writer never questions the righteousness of God, but pours out his anguish freely. His unyielding expression of grief gives us the example for believers to seek greater boldness in our prayers. Like David, he constantly told-it-like-it-was before the Lord. Though these are faithful and godly men, they are still men, broken, feeble and in need of God's mercy.

When we fall into deep despair or tragedy, we are only human to feel its affects. We lie to ourselves and to God when we disguise and ignore our emotions. The truth is, God wants all of us: our hurts, tears, pain, annoyances, bitterness and grief, including our arguments and thoughts against Him. As Paul instructs us in 2Cor. 10.5 "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." God hears every cry and confession. He desires to take every infirmity and dispute captive. No adversity can ever separate us from God. No flame will ever scorch us as we are held in His hand. By the Lord's great love, we are not consumed for his compassions never fail. We truly can resound with the author of Lamentations that his mercy is new every morning; as well as the hymnist sings: "great is Thy faithfulness."

Reflection:

In worship, when was the last time that you were utterly honest with God? When He finds you again, will you produce well rehearsed words, or is there an intimacy so deep, that the Spirit himself intercedes for you with groans that words cannot express?

October 16, 2009  
Happy Days

"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live." - Eccl. 3.12

Making the most of every opportunity. These were wise words spoken from my parents. What other quest is there in life but to pursue happiness, while doing good? I loved the old episodes of "Happy Days." My brother, sister and I would crowd around the TV

laughing at the Fonz, Opie Cunningham and Chachi. By the way, I do believe that Henry Winkler was somehow frozen all these years and finally re-emerged.

We make it the best of whatever it is, believe that it is the best for the present, and accommodate ourselves to it. The changing of colors indicates the fall, the cool wind brings the winter, the bloom of flowers usher in the spring and the warmth of the sun brings the summer. There is a wonderful harmony in God's providence. Day turns to night and night to morning. We find the mercies of God a fresh at the break of every dawn.

We experience the happiness God brings, but it's only a glimmer of the true Joy which is to come, His return. Therefore, do good until the end of your days. I think this is what the Hobbits encouraged one another as they said: "and may your beards grow long." Do good to your families, to your neighbors, to the poor, to the public and to civil religious interests.

As believers, we have our reward in heaven, why squander through life with a broken back? Matthew Henry said "every man's life is his opportunity of doing that which will make for him in eternity." May we embrace what Scripture exhorts: rejoice and enjoy this life and our labor as they are God's gifts. In doing so, may we give thanks for the many days ahead.

Reflection: how will you spend this day?

October 15, 2009  
Old Jar and New Man

"God not only wants to break the outer man...He wants our spirit and our soul...our inner man and outer man to be separated from each other." - Watchman Nee.

There are two things necessary in the life of Christ: regeneration and reconciliation. In the above quote, Watchman Nee mentions the outer man and the inner man. This is our fragile exterior, our worldliness as well as our temporary mortal frame. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, Paul talks about how our bodies are like jars of clay, yet the Spirit of Christ inhabits our being.

We are frail, mortal and broken people. God has so ordered it that the weaker the vessels - the stronger his power. The treasure we find in Christ should be valued all the more. Being pressed on every side and not crushed is the working and power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Christian life is also about rescue and redemption. God rescues us from ourselves and sin, and redeems us through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. What other need do we have in the Saviour?

The ground beneath our feet is trodden by the curse of sin. As believers, we walk the earth and carry within us the death of Christ so that the life of Christ may also be revealed in our bodies. The Lord wants our spirit and soul set apart from our flesh. No longer shall we be conformed to the world (Rom 12.1), but we are to be transformed - the inner man of Christ. Since we are now reconciled to Christ, may we live a life that loves people by a heart of reconciliation.

In leading people to the throne in worship, we begin by being reconciled to God and to each other. If our inner man has not been reconciled, how then can we lead people in worship, in relationship and in fellowship of God? If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come (5.17). Let us live by the spirit and walk in the spirit, since we have put off the old man and his ways. (Ephesians 4:21-23).

To Consider:

How can worship take on new meaning when your outer-self is broken? Are you ready to let your inner man live, where everything you say, touch and see is completely reconciled and devoted to Christ? What would your worship ministry look like, if it became a ministry of reconciliation?

October 14, 2009  
All That You Can Leave Behind

Scripture Verse:

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."  
- Jer. 33.3

It has familiarity. It has weight and makes us feel full. We squander. We suppress. We become unsatisfied. The things we treasure become like cinder blocks - holding us down.

You can say that I pack too much for trips. I was suppose to be in Chicago this week and had to forfeit my plans due to a medical condition. Had I gone, I most likely would have exceeded the luggage weight, regulated by our FAA and/or TSA friends. Packing up and leaving can bring a sense of new direction, exploration and vocation. We want to be there rather than here.

We load ourselves with things we think we need for the journey. All too often, our belongings stay tucked away and unused. Packing our suitcases only takes up space and weighs us down to slow our pace. When we arrive at our destination, our heavy baggage remains.

Jeremiah was confined in the courtyard of the guard. He was to confront Judah and Israel by proclaiming God's Word. The people turned their backs against God and desecrated Him by loading themselves down with idols and setting up high places to worship Baal. The LORD wanted to bring them back to Himself. No matter where they have been, what they've built and what they carried, they were still His people. God's compassion was relentless and persistent in making His everlasting covenant with them.

You see, we search for things all our lives. Apart from God, we fill ourselves with excess. Things to help bring comfort, newness and identity. When these items no longer work, we either repair them, lose them or save them for a rainy day. Our tendency is to stockpile and compartmentalize. Whether we realize it or not, our emotions stay attached. Even if we throw overboard our unusables, they remain with us like barnacles on the underside of boats.

God, who is rich in mercy, does not ask, but leads us by a loving command: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know," (Jer. 33.3). He is ready to give us the unsearchable provisions on His love, grace and forgiveness. He will bring us back. He will be our God and we will be His people (32.37-38). When we continue to pack and haul our heavy burdens, we scarcely experience the true mercy and rescue of God. We default to our baggage because it appears normal to us. But it is not healthy for us.

He has called us to unpack and unload by the way of Jesus. As said in Matt. 11:28, only those who are in need of rest can find refuge in the Savior. He unpacks our grief and binds our wounds as we take upon His yoke that is easy and light. This is all we need. Not excess. Not material. Not high places. May our only burden be the humility and gentleness of Christ.

To Consider:

What baggage are you carrying that can really be left behind? How can these items be unpacked in a healthy way? How will the lightness of your load benefit you and your ministry?

October 13, 2009  
Wisdom Over Music

"Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."  
- Martin Luther

In my college years, I remember practicing my voice and instrument anywhere from 5 to 8 hours in a practice room everyday. My hours were filled with sight reading, ear

training, exercises and studying music theory. I sunk my teeth into everything I could hold onto: guitar studies, chorale and symphony, percussion ensembles, vocal arias and operas, keyboard classes and composition private studies. Oh well, what other responsibilities are there for a 19 year old college student? It's been said before, you form most of all your skills between the years of 18-25. The growth continuum after this point declines. It takes double the time, strength and discipline to bend back, regain and raise the trajectory. However, our knowledge remains insignificant in comparison to our growth in the knowledge of God.

My thinking was, if I could be a better musician, I could be just as great as a minister (or worship leader). Man is this royally wrong! I may be skilled, but I would be without the mind and heart of Christ. A clanging cymbal too! Colossians 1:9 tells us: "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Our knowledge of the will of God must always be practical. Like music, but even more so, we must know it in order to do it.

Our knowledge is then considered a blessing when we learn from Christ in applying that knowledge to a particular situation. We should endeavor to know more of Christ, His will and to increase in the knowledge of God. This begins by knowing the Word of God. When we know His word, we are learning from the very breath of His lips. We are to be "filled" with His knowledge. When we are filled with the Word, we are strengthened by His knowledge. We are able to produce good works because we are fruitful (v.10). There is also a doing of good with the good that we know. We become like the Dead Sea when we have all the nutrients and knowledge from God, but do nothing in the form of service to Him or to others. A pianist has all the wisdom and skills he or she needs to play. But what good can a musician be without their instrument?

Ephesians 1 describes how we are already blessed with every spiritual blessing - rooted in the knowledge of Christ. He has given us the capacity to learn and to grow. He has blessed us with countless opportunities to serve with our gifts. As we serve with our gifts, we point back to Him the glory and thanks that is due to His name. The result: our effective growth and knowledge in Christ and the pursuit of doing the will of God. In our ministries, skill is one thing, the knowledge and doing of God's will is another. May we live in the prayer of the apostle Paul as he reminds us to be "bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, (Col. 1:10-12)."

October 12, 2009  
Only 10,000 Times

How often have you wondered why it takes so long and so many times for something to work? It could be something you're trying to fix, repair or improve. Whatever it is, there is always some opposition and temptation to quit.

When you are overwhelmed, it's easy and also human, to throw in the towel and give up. Not only was Thomas Edison tempted in this area, but also Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. In Neh. chapter 4, the enemies of the Jews were in opposition of the wall, even more so because they previously destroyed it. Here they were trying to rebuild it again. The enemies viciously attacked the Jews and tried to divide their nation by the sword, by politics and by insulting their God.

The number of the Jews were pressed on every side. Each warrior was accompanied by his entire family to help. Unfinished and vulnerable parts of the wall were laid before the enemy for easy pickings. In a time of war, Nehemiah did something that was familiar with King David. In looking at his situation, He pointed to God.

The Bible says in Neh. 4:14, "After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." It says that he "looked." He looked to God. It is clear that Nehemiah put his cause under God's divine protection. Earlier in verse 9, Nehemiah and the Jews "prayed to God" as they continued to meet the threat. That was the way of Nehemiah. He sets the example for us to follow.

All his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God. To continue the battle, he choose the power of prayer that is found in the Lord. Having prayed, he also set a watch. This is a reminder of how Jesus encouraged us to "watch and pray" as we look to the Lord's coming. Secondly, Nehemiah, gave a historical reminder to the people of God's provision, protection and his "great and awesome" ways. Had Nehemiah trusted in himself, the people would have every reason to fear. He based his response on God: who He is, what he has done, and what he will do by faith. Nehemiah did not base his response on the fear of man nor the fear of the moment. Here is the point, the fear of God is the best antidote against the ensnaring fear of man.

Like Nehemiah, Thomas Edison faced endless oppositions in the creation of his inventions. In fact, it only took him 10,000 times to invent a single working light bulb. Edison once said "If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."

October 9, 2009  
Abandon the Silos

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." - Rom. 12.3

For those of use who lead worship as a leader or a team member, our task is pretty clear cut. It may seem that it's the only way we can serve in the church. Youth have the youth ministries, seniors have the senior ministry and music people have music ministries. It's easy for any ministry to become it's own silo, but God has called us to a bigger role. We share the ministry of the Church as one body, yet many members.

It would be unfavorable to have one ministry be placed over another. It is down right malnourishing for other ministries to not receive the same attention as the one. Music ministry is no different. You may have heard this said before, "those who come to church come for either the music or the preaching." While this may be logistically true, this is not the precedent nor ideal for church worship.

Each member in the worship ministry (as in other church ministries) are gifted according to God's plans for the person. We each have our work cut out for us as God has proportioned. However, as the Body, we are members of one another as we are members of Christ. Like the power between the drummer and the bass player, the guitar player and the pianist, and the worship leader and their vocal team, we each have a interdependent relationship in how we contribute to another. Thus the sum of all our parts equal our contribution to our local church and our service to our Lord. A greater beauty of serving others is seen when individuals support and contribute to other ministries beyond their own. to This of course, is accomplished when we walk and serve in one heart, spirit and mind.

Questions to consider:

In what other ways has God called you to serve that you can do right now? How can your support and time to others better esteem them in their service? How can you sincerely serve other ministries outside your own that bypasses all other intentions than to glorify God and to do good?