



Food For Thought: The Truth Revealed – 10 Years After

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

~John 12:26 NKJ

The other day, I was shuffling through my files, and I ran across an article that I wrote eight years ago, entitled, “The Kind of Man I Want to Be.” In that article, I wrote that one of the best management practices to improve organizational or individual excellence was to seek out individuals and businesses that were excelling and identify their core competencies that you wanted to emulate them and copy them. I took that principal and tried to apply it to my walk with God because I had just talked myself into running for Pastor’s Council. I needed to find out how to be a good Christian leader and quick. I needed some Christian role models to copy if I was going to make this work. So, my plan was to find other Christians that I admired to try to be like them. Simple right? Here it is years later and I’m wondering what I have learned since then.

When I took that position, deep down I knew that this was to be one of the next steps in my Walk. I was going to be stretched and I was pretty sure that I would be uncomfortable doing it. I knew that God does not call the equipped but equips the called. So, I would be OK. But still, I felt woefully inadequate despite encouragement from our then Pastor, Greg Copley. I doubted whether I had enough grace and knowledge to hold that position, I guess that God didn’t have any doubts because He had spoken to me and planted the seed. I rationalized that if my faith was strong enough to step out on that ledge, He would be faithful and give me what I needed to accomplish the task. And I was right! Sort of. But I never expected what I would find along that journey or where it would lead me.

Now when I look back over these past ten years, I can see the Spiritual Growth. The new things I discovered especially the ‘how to be like Jesus OJT (On the Job Training)’ sessions that I went through, were the building blocks of who I am now. In talking to others, I learned that periods of Spiritual growth can at best be described as confusing and scary. Ask any Pastor, or Elder. Even the Apostles had the same problems. Peter left his life as a fisherman to follow Jesus and soon found himself confused by Jesus’ parables. He constantly had to ask what they meant. How much faith it must have taken him to get out of the boat and walk on water when Jesus asked him to. Undoubtedly, he must have felt that his growth spurts were challenging. But I am sure that they played an important part in his development as a spiritual leader. I know that it did with mine.

The Apostles had Christ to model being a Christian for them. I only had my Christian friends The Pastor, and other Christians in our Church to guide me. But there are very few men in our church that I look to as “Mature Christians” enough to try and model their behavior. And, try as I might, I couldn’t find anything like the “7 Habits of Highly Effective Christians” in any bookstore, so the models were few. Sure, there are a lot of books written about being a Christian, but none of them described the habits, attitudes, or practices of the people who had rich, thriving spiritual lives. They all took different paths to get where they were so that made it impossible to find any common characteristics much less figure out what they each did individually to grow their faith. It seemed that they just had it or that it just came to them.

Recently, I discovered a lot of truth in the book of Isaiah. Which is strange because I always thought that it was one of the hardest books in the Bible to grasp. If ever there was a verse that gets right to the heart of faith, it is Isaiah 43, verses 1 through 7.

For whatever reason or because God shined a great big spotlight on it for me, that part of his book has started making sense and speaking to me. In it, God made several promises to Israel that are the real foundation of faith – something strong enough that you can build a spiritual house upon. After reading it for the umpteenth time, you suddenly realize that the passage is not just about Israel, it is about you. Then you understand that God is really speaking to your soul through the words. Only then does it seem your eyes open in wonder and your heart know that the words you are reading speak the truth the way that God intended it to be. That’s when everything changes, and you begin to understand, really understand, for the first time what the words in the Bible mean.

Let me show you:

Isaiah 43: 1-7 NIV

“But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

³For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.

⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.

⁶I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

God promised in these verses to redeem His people and be with them through every trial that they might face. He said that He would go through floods and fire for us. And, like a great shepherd, He will gather us when we scatter no matter how far we roam. He would make enormous sacrifices for us. Why? Because He not only created us and calls us by name, but because we are, indeed, His children.

You hear stories about the unheralded and remarkable things that parents do for their children. They travel to the ends of the earth to find them; go to extraordinary lengths to save/rescue them; even give up their lives for them, all in the name of love. You would do the same for your child, so God doing that for His children makes a ton of sense. After all, He is a Good, Good Father.

From that one passage, we learn that:

God is our Creator,

He made us.

He knows our name.

He redeemed us.

He is our Protector.

He is our Provider.

He sees us as precious to Him.

He honors us and loves us.

He watches over our children and will bring them to safety.

He created us to bring glory to Him.

He is always with us.

He tells us that we belong to Him, and that we are His.

And because He loves us, he will trade nations for our lives.

Although I knew all of this or have heard it many times, it never really sank in. But something was different this time. Now, these truths have become foundational in my life and my faith. They are like a rudder that keeps me going straight and that gives me the confidence to walk through life with the peace and hope that regardless of any circumstance, He has me in His hands and will never let me go. The words finally sank in and means something more than just idle promises

Sadly, I also learned over these years that not all Christians grow spiritually. Crib death, as Pastor Bowman calls them. Even though many have been Christians for years, you see little change or improvement in their spiritual base. It seems that they are no more, and often less, useful to the Lord than when they first came to Christ. Much like a stagnant pool of water. That is because I think Spiritual Growth is a choice. It doesn't happen automatically like physical growth. You can't just come into a church and expect that you will absorb new knowledge, or new abilities just by being there. Spiritual growth (like emotional maturity) occurs only when we choose to do something about it. Interestingly, I also believe that is why you see the same people at

church all the time trying to be obedient to God and grow their faith. The Bible says, that faith without works is death. Just showing up for church and being obedient to God is not enough. You need to do something with your faith.

Then passages to support this sentiment started oozing out of the Bible so to speak. From Ezekiel:

“So, they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth, they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.” (Ezekiel 33:31, 32)

It is like a song that is heard and quickly forgotten! If you look, you can see that not everyone changes. Outwardly, they don't appear any different for being a Christian and if there are any changes, they are few and far between.

When I was working, I remember a senior officer who was part of our devotional group calling me one day and saying, “I read your devotions, they are very interesting. – I used to write for the Promise Keepers group at NSA –and I love your personal insight and experiences.” That same officer stopped coming to our meetings when we pointed out an area of his life that needed improvement.

I always wondered what would happen if we were able to hold up a spiritual mirror up to ourselves. What would we see? Would the reflection be one of a person seated in heaven or one still shackled by the sins and discouragements of the world? Is the attire you are wearing suitable for a seat in heaven or are you constantly trying to change clothes between the there and now?

Faith is simply taking God at his word. We are told in Romans that we should measure ourselves “...by the faith that God has given us.” We are told that if you have great faith, it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, some may have a greater measure of faith than others but we all still have it. Faith is our assurance that things we cannot see will indeed work out to our benefit. I am convinced that Faith is the action that pleases God the most and I believe that without faith it is impossible to please God. But even though we have all been given a measure of faith, I am not convinced that we all receive the same amount. Some, I think, receive a bowl full, some a cup full, some a teaspoon full, and some the size of a mustard seed. But God tells us that a mustard seed size of faith will move a mountain, so it is not the amount of faith you have, but whether we exercise it or not that matters.

We need to supplement our faith with something I call moral excellence. By definition, a supplement is “something added to complete a thing or supply a deficiency.” It’s like an energy drink. Moral excellence is doing the right thing for the sake of doing the right thing. If you feel like something is missing in your faith; take a swig of moral excellence. If your faith is lacking efficiency; take a swig of moral excellence. Does your faith need to be reinforced; take a swig of moral excellence. Drink until you have enough courage to exercise your faith and do the right thing every time

So, it is with us. When we become spiritually mature, we will bear spiritual fruit that reflects the nature of Christ in everything we do. We will be more productive in spreading the gospel and more useful to our Lord. However, failure to become spiritually mature reflects a growth problem.

2 Peter 1:9 offers up a possible reason: *“But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.”*

John Newton, outspoken English Anglican cleric and author of the Hymn ‘Amazing Grace’, said “I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be. But I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”—John Newton

Maturity, as with humility, is not thinking less or more of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less. We must strive to grow in our walk so we can know Christ better and deeper. This is a difficult task and something that we will never be perfect at, however it should be our goal each day.

Spiritual life has often been compared to walking or swimming upstream. If you are not progressing forward, then you will be going backwards with the current. The waves of the world are too powerful. The ungodly TV shows, the ungodly music, the depraved culture of this world is always seeking to push a believer backwards.

A wise person once told me that if we give up moving forward, it not that big of a slide back to where we started.

I’m sure that none of us want that!

Just some Food for Thought