

LIVING A CRUCIFIED LIFE- PART 2

You have heard it said that if we want to have more of God, we have got to become less. If we want God to fill us, then we must be emptied. So, this blog will address stripping the soul of its control and walking in crucifixion, so that ultimately we can have more of God. It will be the basic subtraction before addition teaching. Part two will deal with the "boot camp" of character development as part of living a crucified life, and some of God's sacred methods to accomplish these things.

BOOT CAMP OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:

"God is at work to enlarge the capacity of the soul (His temple)...creating this Holy place little by little. For in our poor and weakened state, we couldn't stand to be enlarged by the coming of His presence all at once...our soul couldn't stand the explosive might of His glory." ~ St John of the Cross

God wants to fill us with His presence, and He will go to great extremes in order to bring us to a place of integrity, holiness, and purity so this can happen. Nothing is wasted with God! He uses every circumstance in our life to root out the deeply embedded flaws that keep Him from filling us with His explosive Glory! He lovingly permits pressures and hardship, yes, even letting the bottom fall out from time to time, so that our wrong reactions will come to the surface. It exposes the cracks in our foundation for when the bottom does fall out, I believe that the true colors of our character is revealed.

INDEPENDENCE:

Independence is the first thing that needs to go! We were created for dependence; dependence first on God, and then interdependence on one another (God said it is NOT GOOD for man to be alone.) Adam and Eve were created to walk in intimate relationship with God, dependent upon their Creator. The serpent in an attempt to destroy that relationship deceived them into operating separately from God. Instead of trusting God's word to them, they trusted their own senses and interpretation of the facts. They broke communion with God to exert their own free will and choose for themselves what was best. Ever since, humankind has become radically self-reliant and independent. Independence says, "I don't need you, all I need is myself!"

Jer. 17:5-8~ Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength...

Hosea 10: 13~...You have eaten the fruit of deception because you have depended on your own strength...

The Israelites had to learn this lesson of dependence on God as well. In their exodus, God intentionally led them right up to the impossible crossing of the Red Sea, in order to reveal Himself and His power. **Deuteronomy 8:2** even states their wandering in the desert for 40 years was to test them to know what was in their hearts. It was also to teach them that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (v 3). God was trying to teach the Israelites total dependence on Him. While the Israelites were in the desert, God not only supplied their food (manna), but he also made sure their clothes did not wear out, and didn't allow their feet to swell. Looking ahead, God was equipping them for the Promised Land by teaching them not to rely on their own strength, but His. He was teaching them dependence, so that when they were living in a land of abundance, not lacking anything, they would not accredit it to themselves, nor rely upon their own abilities. **Deut. 8:17-*****"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms His covenant."***

God intentionally places us in situations that are beyond our ability to handle, purposely drawing us away from our strength to His, so that we will completely trust and depend on Him. I believe this is one of the reasons why Jesus said we have to become like little children (**Matt. 18:3.**) Children are totally dependent upon their parents for everything. They have complete trust that their parents will take care of them, protect them, comfort and guide them.

Independence is all about "SELF" and its abilities. Therefore, when we move from independence to dependence on God, we have to also move into the arena of "self-denial". Self-denial takes "self" off the throne and crowns God as King.

GOD'S SACRED METHODS:

God uses several tools to strip the soul of its control, thereby enlarging its capacity to inhabit more of Him.

- 1. Brokenness**
- 2. Suffering**
- 3. Wilderness**
- 4. Waiting**

BROKENNESS:

"To raise up a crop of righteousness in us, God sometimes uses His tool of trying circumstances to crack open the hard ground." ~ St John of the Cross

If you think about it, all of life is some form of brokenness. The earth has to be broken up by plowing and tilling before a seed is planted. The seed itself must break open before the plant can emerge. The earth once again is broken for that plant to grow. In the birth of a newborn baby, a mother's water bag has to be broken before the labor contractions can begin in order to bring about its birth. Brokenness is a life birthing process that must

precede growth in our lives. Christ's body was broken for us to have life, and in the same manner, our flesh must be broken to give way to the spiritual life that is in Jesus.

"When you are crushed by your circumstances, challenges and perplexity of life, the only thing that will ooze out is Jesus!" ~ Smith Wigglesworth

SUFFERING:

Every person will encounter some form of suffering in his or her lifetime, but for the Christian, suffering will result in sharing God's glory (**Rom. 8:17**). According to scripture (**Phil. 3:10**), we can know the power of His resurrection also by sharing in His suffering. We are called to suffer because Jesus has suffered for us first (**1 Pet. 2:20-21**). Suffering is yet another one of God's agents to build godly character and to refine our faith. (**1 Pet. 1:6-7**)

- ***Ps. 119: 67 & 71- "Before I was afflicted I went astray...it was good for me to be afflicted that I might learn your decrees."***
- ***Is. 48:10- Affliction becomes our testing ground***
- ***Romans 12:12...we are told to be patient in our affliction***

Suffering equips us for endurance and perseverance. We cannot learn to be an "overcomer" unless we have something to overcome. God's promise to us is this, ***"After you have suffered a little while, I will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."*** **1 Pet. 5:12**. And, according to **Rev. 3:21**, ***"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne..."***

WILDERNESS:

"God sometimes brings the dryness- the desert times, the empty and silent times in order to kill the deadly roots of sin and independence that separate us from God." ~ St John of the Cross

Sometimes God chooses the wilderness to strip us of everything else we lean or depend upon for strength and security. It removes the crutches in our life and replaces them with an assurance of God Himself. It is also part of our training before promotion. Moses spent 40 years in the Midian desert as training for the call upon his life. Little did he realize at the time how much being a shepherd to a bunch of sheep would teach him about leading a rebellious people to their Promised Land. Moses may have received a lot of training in skills and discipline in the palace of Egypt, but his graduate school happened in the wilderness!

WAITING:

One of God's favorite methods of preparing us for something great is through waiting. Waiting is part of the seasoning that He must do to temper and test us. Waiting is a required course in God's curriculum for He will not waste the gift, nor will He waste the call upon our lives. David, having already been anointed King over Israel, waited 13 years before it actually became a reality. Not only did he have to wait, but also while he waited, he was hunted like a fugitive throughout the Judean wilderness. Waiting is opposite from the world's system. The world is quick to promote the star athlete or the

talented singer too young and too fast. God takes His time. Nothing can take the place of the value of time-forged character. Exceptional work is always preceded by extended periods of waiting. It cultivates patience, hones our skills, breaks our will and shapes our character—all resulting in deepening our relationship with God. And remember, patience isn't just the ability to wait, but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting.

In closing, Paul tells us to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead, to press on toward the goal to win the prize! What is this prize? It is not salvation for salvation is a gift; we can't *win* salvation! It is not the Holy Spirit for the Holy Spirit is free for He comes with the package. The prize is the manifested presence of God in our life and intimacy in that relationship! This is the prize. Just like an athlete has to train and deny himself anything that would hinder him from becoming a disciplined athlete, we as Christians have to walk in self-denial, allowing God to break us, mold us, train us and equip us. And in living a crucified life, we sacrifice ourselves and run the race to win the prize of God's presence!

SELF EVALUATION QUESTIONS TO HELP PUT INTO PRACTICE:

1. What is your normal reaction to hardship?
2. Has God revealed some cracks in your foundation through trials?
3. Write about a lesson learned through difficulty that has made you a better person by improving your character.
4. List one area you are willing to work on in order to walk in self-denial.

1 Corinthians 9:24~ Run [your race] in such a way that you may seize the prize and make it yours!

We're cheering loudly for you and celebrating your victory lap,

Debbie Milligan