

The Set Apart Life



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Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural references are from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Giving everything

Mark 12:38-44 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

The Pharisee loved to be noticed and to be prominent among men. His attire and his seating at events communicated that he was a notable personage. He craved the attention that his seemingly superior spiritual life attracted. He was so educated, a brilliant man, and everywhere he went he heard the greetings "rabbi, rabbi" and he secretly glanced around to see if others heard it as well. His attainments in life gave him great advantage, so that he was a man of some means. He was the epitome of a holy man, respected by all...except God.

His eye was drawn elsewhere. He saw the little lady who had escaped the attention of everyone else. She was nothing special. Plain. Uneducated. Poor. But she loved God. Unknown and unnoticed by the Pharisees around her who so casually tipped God from the excess of their wealth, she left the temple having given everything to God. It was such a pitifully small amount, yet it was the most extravagant offering given. And it attracted the notice of God.

Many give some, but few give all. Which one will you be?

A certain part

Acts 5:1-2 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

As far as we know from Scripture, this is the first episode of corruption within the church. It didn't take long for it to happen. But when it did happen it would have been imperceptible to the natural eye. If the Holy Spirit hadn't given Peter supernatural insight into what was going on, he would have received what Ananias gave as the whole, and the assembly of believers would have celebrated his generosity. Ananias and Sapphira would have rejoiced in the praise of men and very possibly have gone on with the church, cutting corners with God at every opportunity. But God was having none of it and sent a message loud and clear that day- He was nobody's fool and those who only give a certain part are not worthy of the honor due those who give the whole.

I believe Ananias and Sapphira would have survived that day if they had only admitted it was a certain part. And I believe many of us in churches across the land are in danger of making the same deceptive offering to God...acting like we are giving Him all but really only surrendering a certain part to Him.

A certain part. Not just a random part, but a chosen, a particular part. What we are comfortable giving. Maybe we feel good about fully giving God the spiritual parts of our life, but not the finances. Not the future plans. Those need to be kept back.

Whatever it might be, God isn't unaware. Those around us may believe that we are totally sold out to Jesus, but God knows the truth about us. He won't strike us dead for it, but we suffer loss in every area of life that we greedily cling to. Some may disagree, saying that those areas of their life are actually going pretty well. However you have no idea the

tremendous things God may desire to do in those very areas if they were yielded to Him. We don't need to be afraid of full surrender. He doesn't desire it so He can hurt us, but in order to bless us.

So it's up to you. Do you want a certain part of your life blessed or your full life blessed? Go ahead and give it all to Him.

The faithful blessing of God

Ezekiel 29:18-20 "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to labor strenuously against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for the labor which they expended on it. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Surely I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry off her spoil, and remove her pillage; and that will be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor, because they worked for Me,' says the Lord GOD.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was a pagan man and an ambitious ruler. He laid siege to Tyre out of his covetous desire to possess their land and their wealth. Just read through Ezekiel 28 to see how wealthy and influential the city of Tyre was. So, for 13 years Nebuchadnezzar labored to overtake the city of Tyre, and when the city finally surrendered to him, he received little benefit from it. Commentators speculate that the wealth of Tyre was relocated during the lengthy siege. Because this overthrow of Tyre was the fulfillment of the will of God against this proud city, and Nebuchadnezzar was His unknowing servant, the Lord granted Egypt and all its wealth to Nebuchadnezzar as payment for his service.

Needless to say, it was a little shocking to read that. If this is what God does for His enemies, imagine what He will do for His friends. If He will not fail to reward a pagan king who doesn't even acknowledge Him, then how much more will He delight to reward His sons!

But here is the thing that was most helpful to me - Nebuchadnezzar expected to get the wealth of Tyre for his labors. Instead he received the wealth of Egypt. And maybe, just maybe, when God chooses to send some reward or some blessing to us it may come from a totally different direction than where we've been laboring.

What grace!!! What amazing grace!! Maybe you have been discouraged as you've served the Lord in a particular way (or ways), laboring faithfully, knowing you are in the will of God but seeing little fruit and receiving little blessing. But remember this:

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

The blessing of the Lord may be ready to overtake you at any moment from a direction you never expected.

Ten times better

Daniel 1:20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

A consecrated life increases your ability to receive what God desires to give and multiplies your effectiveness in the kingdom.

Not only were Daniel and his friends superior to the other captives who had received the same training as them, they were superior to the wisemen of Babylon who had spent their entire lives being immersed in and studying Babylonian history, literature, wisdom, etc.

Daniel and his friends had three years of training in these things. And in three years their level of wisdom and understanding was not equal to the Babylonian wise men, but was 10 times greater. The difference is consecration. It doesn't just make you a little better. It brings an anointing that results in multiples of exceeding greatness of God through your life.

If we consider how this practically plays out in our life, think about the times that we have set the word of God before us yet within arm's reach is a cell phone, and YouTube, and Facebook. We haven't really consecrated that time for the Lord because as soon as that notification sound goes off, we reach for the phone. For many this has become a habitual way of life. So it isn't merely that these certain times aren't consecrated — the life isn't consecrated. How can this possibly continue to be acceptable?? There are things He wants to speak to us and impart into our lives, but our refusal to crucify a flesh that cries to be entertained has kept us among the multitudes of the unknown and ineffective instead of ascending with the few who push every distraction away.

Regarding Daniel and his friends, God moved mightily in them during this season of preparation, but things may have turned out very differently for them if they also had indulged in the king's delicacies. Their decision to live in such a way as to honor God rather than satisfy themselves swung open the door wide for the power of God to work in their lives.

Let me see His face

2 Samuel 14:32 And Absalom answered Joab, "Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still." ' Now therefore, let me see the king's face; but if there is iniquity in me, let him execute me."

Church is wonderful
Ministry is wonderful
Fellowship is wonderful

There are many things in the kingdom that are wonderful. But unless I encounter the King's face in all these things, then the kingdom becomes just another way to live. The life of the kingdom is the King. The glory of the kingdom is the King. And it is the inheritance of the sons to enjoy the benefit of His face.

In a monarchy there are times that a king comes before the people. He is dressed in all His royal finery. He looks noble. He looks kingly. His subjects look upon Him with wonder. He may wave the royal hand at the crowd but no particular person can say that He waves at them. The King's appearance is an impersonal thing for them. It is awe inspiring for a moment, and then life goes on as normal. They are excited when they happen to catch a glimpse of Him, but know they have no right to expect it. The subjects are under His rule, but the King remains an enigma to them.

The sons know the King and are known by Him. He knows them by name and every detail about them. The sons share intimate time with the King and they know Him in a way that subjects never will. His eye lights upon them individually, particularly and purposefully. And they know it! For those who are sons, the kingdom isn't a place-it's a person. It isn't merely an eternal future-it is a glorious now. And all the joy of being a son of the King isn't in the power of the kingdom or the wealth of the kingdom...it is in the face of the King.

Oil in abundance in the secret place

2 Kings 4:3-4 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors--empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels and set aside the full ones."

My attention was arrested by these words - "shut your door". It reminded me of this New Testament verse:

Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

This woman had a bit of oil, but it wasn't enough to sustain life. She needed more in order for it to be useful to herself and others. She didn't just sit in her house lamenting her lack, she went to someone that could help her. The answer came in as much abundance as she had the faith to receive and she was able to trade with the oil to meet her needs. The flow of oil was only limited by the lack of an empty vessel for it to be poured into.

I am reminded of how we can often be - stagnant, the life of God shut up in our earthen vessels. We have some bit of oil, but we sense our lack. We are receiving nothing of heaven into our life adding to that meager supply of oil and thus we have nothing to give out and share with those in need. Would to God that we would see this as a problem and call out for help. If Elisha was willing to help the poor widow, how much more will our Father be willing to help His own children that cry to Him?

But we must bring emptiness to Him-not lives crammed full of other things that we've used as a substitute for the life of God. Discard all of that...let yourself feel the ache of your empty life...and then come to Him and receive the oil. Shut the door behind you because this is a holy moment, it is an intimate moment, this is the secret place. Let Him fill you with as much

as you can contain. Then when you are full, bring what you have to those who need it.

There has never been a shortage of oil - just of empty vessels willing to receive it.

The fragrant life

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

He leads us in triumph. That word means an acclamatory procession. (Acclamatory - expressing strong and enthusiastic praise or approval; a noisy or enthusiastic expression of approval for someone or something.) Imagine the loudest parade you've ever been too. And now imagine your life being that parade for Jesus everywhere you go. This triumphant parade through life is sending out a fragrance into the earth.

A smell is a sensory representation of a thing. For instance, the smell of a hamburger isn't an actual hamburger. But the smell of it reminds you of its taste and while the smell may be pleasant, it isn't satisfying. It leaves you longing for something more tangible-an actual hamburger that you can eat and enjoy. So it is with us. The fragrance of Christ through our lives isn't meant to satisfy others, but to make them hungry for Him.

There may be some followers of Christ who feel themselves to be always swallowed up by some trouble or temptation or fear. They watch the parade going by but feel too weighed down to join in. But there is grace to be fragrant here too - even in our most difficult times.

Who is sufficient for these things? Certainly not us. But in all things the grace of God is sufficient to manifest the fragrance of Christ through His people.

The satisfied man

Psalms 65:4 Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.

Many of us can look back on our lives as believers and remember the early days of our salvation when we lived in the joy of being forgiven. But far too many of us have let the blood of Jesus mean nothing more than the forgiveness of sins. I thank God that my sins are forgiven, for they have been many. But I believe there is far more that is offered to us than we have even begun to walk in.

The man who has his sins forgiven is indeed a blessed man. But the blessing of the Lord has only begun with the forgiveness of sin, for now we have been reconciled to God and brought into a relationship of intimacy with Him. So the blessed man is the man who not only is forgiven but who, through that forgiveness can approach God. I don't mean that we approach Him like we would an earthly monarch who has so many subjects making demands on his time that he must rush through each encounter. But our verse tells us that He causes us to approach so that we can dwell...remain...abide. The only reason we don't dwell in His presence is because we won't. He has already made His mind about it very clear. He wants us to draw near.

But we busy ourselves trying to find fulfillment in jobs, relationships and leisure while true satisfaction will only be found in His Presence. The blessed man, the one who draws near and dwells in His presence, this will be the satisfied man.

The glorious face of Jesus

2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We can know the power of God by the works of His hand. We can know the mind of God by the words of His mouth. But we will only know the glory of God by the gaze into His face.

Just a few verses earlier we read:

2 Corinthians 3:16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Doesn't this bring to mind the moment in a wedding when the groom lifts the veil that covers the bride's face and the two gaze at each other, filled with love?

Jesus has unveiled us. Our sin-clouded eyes have been washed that we might see Him clearly, and in the seeing, know His glory.

Those who only catch a passing glance of Jesus as they go about their life will never see that glory. It requires face to face. Stopping everything to gaze upon Him. To linger...beholding the glorious face of Jesus.

Invited but not welcomed

Luke 7:36-38 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Jesus had already begun to incur the wrath of the Pharisees. Simon, who was a Pharisee, invited Jesus to a meal at his house. We aren't told what his motive was, and perhaps it isn't fair to assume that he had hostile motives, but in a time when hospitality was important, it seemed overwhelmingly unimportant to Simon on this day.

Jesus didn't say anything about the omission, but sat down at the meal He had been invited to. He could have called Simon out for his lack of hospitality, but He didn't. Not until Simon began (in his thoughts) calling out the hospitality of another.

This sinful woman, an uninvited and unwanted guest, humbled herself that He might be honored. Her tears, her hair, her kisses, her perfume...all at His feet. For her to do this for Him she had to go low...something nobody else in the room had been willing to do.

Simon may have invited Jesus, but this woman welcomed Him.

I sat and wept as I thought of Jesus being dishonored by Simon. And then I realized that I am Simon.

Simon. So knowledgeable. So religious. Sitting at the table with Jesus as though an equal. Only one person in the room realized that the only appropriate posture was face down.

There are far too many Simon's among us...inviting Jesus in with no concern to make Him feel welcome.

Serving with the spirit

Romans 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers

Often we serve God with the soul, which is subject to emotional issues, ups and downs. Someone serving with the soul is on fire or lethargic in their service to God in proportion to how happy they are, how encouraged they feel, the nature of circumstances in their life. Those who serve with the spirit take no account of these things but they serve God because He is God in all these things.

We can serve in the flesh by our dedication to a task or a ministry. We are doing a thing and enduring in it by the sheer force of our will power. God may never have called us to that task, or He may have been ready to move us to something else, but we continue on faithfully anyway in the power of a disciplined flesh. Serving God in the flesh is much like any carnal thing we do. We make our plans, schedule our events, recruit our helpers and go about our work. Everything is structured and organized. So organized that there is no room for the Holy Spirit to move, and if He did move it would “mess everything up”.

But we can serve God in the spirit, leaving all of our own plans and agendas and allowing ourselves to be moved by the Spirit of God, even if waiting to know His agenda means sitting and doing nothing for a time. What matters is what HE wants, and personal preferences must take a back seat. Or be thrown out the window entirely. To serve God with the spirit requires a place of surrender that many are unwilling to accept. But He will lead you to this place if you desire it.

Ambitious

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Here's the same verse from the Amplified Bible: *We are constantly ambitious and strive earnestly to be pleasing to Him.*

What does it mean to be ambitious? Here are some dictionary definitions:

- Having a desire to be successful, powerful, or famous.
- Having a desire to achieve a particular goal

There was a time in my life when I was very ambitious in my career. I worked extra hours and acquired new responsibilities. I took on hard projects and learned new things that made me more valuable to the company. I disregarded normal activities that I enjoyed because there wasn't time for them if I was going to be devoted to work responsibilities. I would work until I was physically exhausted.

Many people have had this same experience in some area of their life. But how many of us have had this experience in our spiritual life?

Rarely have I pushed myself this hard in the things of God. It's been more common for me to go to sleep then to stay up late and pray. To indulge my appetite rather than fast. To zoom through my Bible reading rather than digging in and studying to learn something new, to receive some new revelation of the glory of God.

Being ambitious has gotten a bad reputation because we often find ambition in connection with selfish and self-promoting things. But the word of God commends it when it's directly rightly.

Beloved, let's be ambitious in our pursuit of God and our desire to please Him in all things. Admittedly, it can sometimes be very difficult to deny ourselves the things our soul and flesh desire. But once we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, those other things will lose their savor and our ambitious pursuit of Him will be fueled by the expectation that we will taste and see even more.

When the power of God hits YOUR life

Daniel 4:2-3 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.

The entirety of Daniel chapter 4 is a letter written by King Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the world at that time, to “all people’s, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth” (v1)

He isn’t telling the story about the miracle God worked for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now he has a testimony of what God has done for him and he basically was telling the whole world about it.

You may be amazed at the miracle God works for someone, and the testimony of God’s power displayed in someone else’s life, but your human mind will often find a way to reason around it and discount it. But when it happens to you, you can have no argument against it.

Consider Paul. He heard the gospel that Stephen preached because he was standing there as Stephen was stoned. He heard the testimony of Stephen and still continued to be a persecutor of the church. But when he had his own encounter with Jesus, it changed the course of his whole life.

This isn’t a second hand gospel and God doesn’t have step children. He wants each of us to have testimonies of our own (and we need to have them) of His power to save, heal, provide and deliver. And then He wants us to tell the world about it.

Unity, not uniformity

Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

When 1 Corinthians 12 lists the gifts of the Spirit, this verse follows:

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Each one in the body of Christ has giftings given by the Holy Spirit. All these gifts work in a beautiful unity of purpose to glorify Jesus and edify the church. But the gifts differ from person to person, and the operation of the same gift may vary greatly in different people.

We are called to unity, not uniformity. Here's a quick definition of uniformity - freedom from variation or difference; sameness of action, effect, etc., under like conditions.

The only person we are to seek uniformity with is Jesus. When we try to preach like someone else, pray like someone else, or write like someone else, we lose the unique manifestation of the gifts that the Spirit wants to bring through us.

While we should all come together as the body of Christ in unity of purpose, there will be a variety of functions. Yet the function of each contributes to the unified purpose of all.

There is something that the Spirit of God has gifted you to do. There is grace on your life to do that thing. And the body of Christ needs you to do that thing in the way the Holy Spirit moves through you to do that thing.

It's so helpful that Paul used the analogy of the body. We think about people that we might consider the mouth or the eye or the ear. Their usefulness in the body is so noticed and valued by all. They may be appreciated and praised by the body and

their contribution honored while you might feel like the appendix, tucked away in some hidden recess with seemingly no purpose. But just let that appendix get inflamed and the whole body is going to be affected.

Whatever part the Lord is leading you to play in his great mission in this earth (building the kingdom of God by winning souls, making disciples, and edifying the body of Christ), let your life be set on fire with a holy passion to do it. Inflamed by the Spirit of God, even a little appendix can have a big impact



The ability of God

Daniel 4:18 "This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you."

There is an ability that resides in the life of the believer and it is the ability of God. His Spirit takes up residence in us to make the impossible possible and through His activity in our life, to demonstrate the power, wisdom and greatness of God through His people.

We see the working of God in the life of Daniel because he was put in situations that were impossible for him. It was in these moments that God's ability burst onto the scene. And when God was doing through Daniel what others were unable to do, even King Nebuchadnezzar realized Who the source was and what the difference was between Daniel and the other wise men in Babylon.

We may also desire to see such things through our own life - the power and wisdom of God on display, mighty works being done through us. Yet we are unwilling to let ourselves be put into impossible situations. It's scary. It's uncomfortable. And we just don't like to be either scared or uncomfortable. So we continue on in our nice little Christian life and see very little of the power of God working through us.

1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Not the ability you were born with. Not the ability you have acquired. But the ability that God supplies, totally apart from your own efforts - this is what glorifies Him.

Are you willing to step out, beyond your own ability, and into the ability of God? There's no guarantee that it won't feel intimidating. But it will be glorious.

The King's purpose

Daniel 6:3 Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.

It was immediately after the king planned to promote Daniel that the governors and satraps conspired together to bring about his downfall and prevent him being elevated in the kingdom. Unable to find corruption in him, they prepared a trap for him through a decree they suggested to the king:

Daniel 6:7 "All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

They knew Daniel was faithful to his God, so this was the trap they devised for him. And sure enough, he continued to pray and was thrown into the lion's den. The next morning he emerged unharmed, his enemies were destroyed and the last verse of this chapter says:

Daniel 6:28 So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This is my point - though enemies may rise up, the purpose of the King will stand. You may have to pass through some difficult things on the way, but every lion's mouth will be shut by God Himself.

Proverbs 19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD's counsel--that will stand.

Preparation of the life

Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Philippians 2:17

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 2 Corinthians 12:15

These verses characterize not only the Apostle Paul's labors for the Lord, but the essence of his life. Poured out and spent. Doing without, suffering want and personal hardship, enduring rejection and loneliness he lived with reckless abandon for the glory of Jesus only. I wonder how many times this man's heart had been absolutely broken by betrayals, by false accusations, by rejections; and yet still his life was one poured out and spent. Paul could have lived a comfortable life, but the Lord had called him to so much more than that. It cost Paul significantly to follow and serve Jesus, but Oh the reward of it!

Paul called himself a bondservant of Christ. The word here translated bondservant is actually the word slave (doulos). It is a strong word, carrying the following meanings:

- It refers to one born into slavery.
- It refers to one who is in a relation to another which only death can break
- It refers to one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another.
- It refers to one who serves another even to the disregarding of his own interests.

Disregarding our own interests? Losing our will in the will of another? This mentality doesn't just happen to us....it must be cultivated.

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Romans 14:7-8

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6:20

It **MUST** be cultivated. We simply cannot afford to waste these few years we have been given on this earth catering to our own desires to live comfortable lives. There is a world that Jesus died for, and that He yearns for...precious souls that His blood was shed for. Every day we meet them and pass by them in this life. They are at the grocery store, at our jobs, our schools. And they are waiting to hear the words of this life. But an unprepared life will walk through each day absolutely oblivious to the perishing all around.

One day we will stand before the Lord Jesus. The book of Revelation talks about Him wiping away our tears. I believe those will be tears of regret when we see how much Jesus wanted to do through our lives and how little we were prepared and available for His purposes.

No matter who you are, or how insignificant you feel your life is, and how impossible it seems that your life could ever make a real difference for eternity, I encourage you to adopt this prayer as the motto of your life:

Lord, let me make a difference for you that is utterly disproportionate to who I am.

And then watch in amazement as He takes your prepared life and ministers to a world with it.

Today you can purpose to be a vessel set apart and prepared for the Master's use. Devoted to the Word and prayer.....absolutely surrendered to the Beloved....poured out and spent that Jesus might have His testimony through your life. This, dear brother and sister, is our reasonable service and our great privilege. Whatever the sacrifices we may have to make to have a life prepared to serve the Lord Jesus, on that day we see His face we will only wish we had sacrificed more. It's gonna be worth it all!

Zadok priests - the separated life

There were two groups of priests in the temple - those whose compromised lives made them fit only to minister to the people and the faithful Zadok priests who ministered to the Lord. This is a longish passage but it describes the distinction between the two groups.

Ezekiel 44:10-16 And the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore I have raised My hand in an oath against them," says the Lord GOD, "that they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near Me to minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of My holy things, nor into the Most Holy Place; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. Nevertheless, I will make them keep charge of the temple, for all its work, and for all that has to be done in it. But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood," says the Lord GOD. They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge.

You would think that these Zadok priests would have lives so very prosperous and blessed because of their faithfulness to God. Perhaps the very windows of heaven would be open over their lives, pouring out blessings and wealth they couldn't contain. Blessings surely must be chasing them down and overtaking them. Shockingly, this was not the case.

Ezekiel 44:28 It shall be, in regard to their inheritance that I am their inheritance. You shall give them no possession in Israel, for I am their possession.

They had no land of their own, nothing they could say was theirs ...except for God. He was their portion.

The Lord provided their food from what was His:

Ezekiel 44:29-30 They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering; every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs. The best of all first fruits of any kind, and every sacrifice of any kind from all your sacrifices, shall be the priest's; also you shall give to the priest the first of your ground meal, to cause a blessing to rest on your house.

The Lord provided their housing from what was His:

Ezekiel 45:1 Moreover, when you divide the land by lot into inheritance, you shall set apart a district for the LORD, a holy section of the land; its length shall be twenty-five thousand cubits, and the width ten thousand. Ezekiel 45:4 It shall be holy throughout its territory all around. It shall be a holy section of the land, belonging to the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the LORD; it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary.

They ate what was holy. They lived in a holy place. The presence of God and ministry to Him was the center of everything- literally.

I wonder if others thought it was a restrictive life, feeling sorry for these Zadok priests who did not have a possession of their own. Meanwhile, these priests lived near the very presence of God and spent their days serving Him, feeling sorry for those who did not have Him as their only possession.

Consecration to God in the details of life

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

We are told that Daniel continued in his position in Babylon for approximately 60 years, until the first year of Cyrus, which means he was probably a teenager at the beginning of the book of Daniel. Yet even at so early an age, his desire to obey and please God overruled even his desire for a life of ease in Babylon.

This food that the captives were being provided would have been quality food, for it came from the king's own table. But it almost certainly would have been offered to pagan deities and may have been animals considered unclean to an Israelite. It would have been so easy for Daniel to just go along with the other captives and eat what was set before him. There were so many justifications, not the least of which was the fact that he was now basically a prisoner in a foreign land with no ability to direct the course of his own life any longer. What choice did he have?

But he wanted to live a life that was pure and holy before God, even if that meant depriving himself of the flesh pleasing delicacies that others enjoyed. But wouldn't he lack? Wouldn't his health suffer by so restrictive a diet? Did it really even require all that?

Don't we ask similar questions of ourselves when the Holy Spirit begins touching on a part of our lives that is defiling us? Other Christians are doing it. Why can't I? It isn't a sinful thing, so what's it hurting? Doesn't it seem a bit fanatical to lay this thing aside?

I have found that the Holy Spirit will have me lay something aside mainly for this one reason - it hinders intimacy with

Jesus. Friend, if you have cried out to the Lord in your desire to draw near to Him, one inevitable outcome of such prayers is that you will become aware of things in your life that you will need to let go of to allow more room for Him.

Daniel didn't know when he was making decisions to live in purity as a teenager that the Lord would elevate and prosper him in the kingdom the way He did. That wasn't Daniel's goal. He just wanted to live pure before God.

Oh that we would have that same heart and desire to cast away everything that defiles our life. We might actually see God do amazing things in our lives if our greatest desire was to be pleasing to Him.

Those who yield their bodies

Daniel 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!"

As background to this verse, King Nebuchadnezzar had erected a gold statue of himself that was about 90 feet tall and commanded his subjects to bow down to it and worship it.... or else.

Daniel 3:6 "and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, as worshippers of God, could do no such thing and it didn't take long for news of this to get back to the king. In his fury he commanded the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal and the three men were thrown in. God miraculously delivered them and our opening verse is King Nebuchadnezzar's response to that deliverance. He called them servants of God who yielded their bodies.

Well, who wouldn't yield their body for such an amazing miracle?? But remember, when these three refused to bow, they knew what the penalty was and although they believed God could deliver them from it, they did not know if He would. And still they yielded their bodies to God, refusing to bow.

Many of us may hope we would respond the same way. But if you haven't yielded your bank account, you won't yield your body. If you haven't yielded your time (allowing the Lord to prune your life of time wasting activities), you won't yield your body. If you can't ever push back the plate, then you probably won't yield your body.

How can we honestly say we would make the greatest sacrifice when we won't make the small ones?

Wave your white flag. Surrender to the Lord. Yield your body.

Trusting HIS plan

Matthew 17:22-23 Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

In their minds it would have seemed better for Jesus to stay among them. So many people were being healed and set free. The truths of the kingdom were being preached to hungry souls. Twenty or thirty more years of this kind of ministry from Jesus would have made such a profound difference in Israel and the surrounding regions. The thought of Him being taken away was exceedingly grievous to them and seemed like the dashing of their hopes and dreams to reign as king of Israel. What they didn't understand was that the plan of God was far more than Jesus reigning over a nation -- He was to reign over ALL the nations and that could only be accomplished through His death and resurrection. The power to preach and bring healing and deliverance was to be an indwelling reality in multitudes who could take this blessing to the farthest corners of the earth, but the Spirit of God couldn't come and abide where the blood had not cleansed. Had they understood at that time the scope of what was about to be accomplished, their sorrow would have been overshadowed by hope.

In the same way, we find ourselves in places of discouragement when our life isn't going as expected. The plans we had for life, family and ministry didn't work out the way we'd planned and we look upon our lives as though all that remains is to sorrowfully endure the remaining years until it's time to go to heaven. But what if your greatest disappointment is just the precursor to your greatest opportunity? What if today's rejection ushers you into a greater walk with God, the fruits of which affect the lives of those around you? What if today's sorrow is about to be swallowed up in tomorrow's overpowering joy?

The plan of God almost inevitably involves suffering. But it doesn't end there. His plan is bigger and better than you have ever imagined. Today, let your sorrow be overwhelmed by hope.

Being led by God

Psalm 32:8-9 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near yet.

The horse and mule are very good workers. They handle heavy burdens and get much done. But when the master wants to direct them in a certain way, he has to pull on the bridle so they know what to do. They cannot be guided by the eye for they are undiscerning and unresponsive to that. And so, the master remains out of their sight, utilizing the only method they will respond to – the pull of the reins from behind them.

This is a picture of the religious man. He is busy with many spiritual looking things. He is such a hard worker, getting so much done. But for the Master to get his attention and change his direction, he must be turned by the bridle. He is much too busy to stop and wait to be guided by the eye.

The spiritual man, however, is busied with this one thing – gazing upon the Master, not moving until he perceives that the Master is directing him. Although this man may seem to be slothful when his activities are set alongside the feverish pace of the religious man, the things he does, having been uniquely directed by the Master's desire, are highly profitable.

The Father's sons

Song of Solomon 1:6 Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept.

These were not the father's sons, but the mother's sons. They aren't the Spirit born, they are sons of this world. They pursue wealth and success, fame and pleasure, and believe everyone else should too. Those who let them have influence over their lives and decisions will find themselves losing the purity of their walk with God and their spiritual life darkened by their pursuit of other things. The mother's sons want you to work hard within their system even at the expense of your own spiritual priorities. Be sure that you will incur their ire if you don't walk in step with their agenda...but you have a vineyard to tend.

The Father's sons will always point you to your vineyard - kingdom living. They will encourage you to focus your life, in every way, upon the King. They will run beside you as you run this race, encouraging you when you become weary. "Keep going! The finish line is in sight"

Surround yourself with the Father's sons for you have need of them.

When the fire has no power

Daniel 3:27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

There was nothing shocking about these three men being thrown into the fire. It was just another means of execution. But even the king couldn't help but notice how they walked in that fire and who walked with them.

The fact that the fire had no effect upon them drew the attention of those around them. And when these three men were inspected and their condition considered, God received the glory.

Daniel 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

When we go through life's trials the same way the world does, it draws no attention and brings God no glory.

Some people bear the marks of the fire through the rest of their lives. They spend much time describing its heat and displaying their scars. And it is the fire that gets the glory.

Followers of Jesus are called to a different way. Even in our trials and suffering we are to set our mind on things above. (Colossians 3:2)

The fire may be able to touch our outer man at times, but it can only touch our inner man to the extent we yield ourselves to it.

Shame on who?

Colossians 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

I remember the first time I heard that Jesus was crucified naked. Being a modest person myself, the thought of being so publicly exposed was horrifying. Wasn't it enough that He was beaten beyond recognition and condemned to die as a criminal?

But really, this is standard operating procedure for the enemy. Not content with merely destroying your life, he will attempt to do it with as much humiliation as possible. The more public, the better.

Shame is a very effective weapon in the enemy's arsenal. Many people's entire life purpose has been derailed because they feel like the shame of their failure makes it impossible for them to continue in the things of God.

But if you can just receive the strength of God to continue on, it is the principalities and powers who will be shamed. It's okay to despise the shame. It's not okay to let it triumph over you.

If you've experienced failure, welcome to humanity. It is the common condition of us all. Let the Holy Spirit pick you up, dust you off, and put you back in the game. Your life is now a greater testimony of the grace of God than it has ever been. Remember -in His most shame-filled moments Jesus was thrashing hell.

Who I am

Daniel 6:12-13 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Can you sense the disdain in their words - "that Daniel"? At this point Daniel had been in a position of governmental authority for somewhere around 50 years. Yet they've identified him not by his accomplishments or his position, but as one of the captives from Judah. It's true that's where Daniel came from. But God had worked in this man's life mightily, and he wasn't a teenage boy from a foreign land anymore. He was a man greatly gifted and used by God to help govern the affairs of the most powerful kingdom in the world. But the enemy who was trying to destroy him was also happy to humiliate him in the process.

We've all got a few skeletons in the closet from our old life. Before I became a new creation I was an old wretch. But those old things don't define me. That might be where I came from but it's not who I am. Only one thing defines me - Christ, Who is my life.

We can't control what people think about us or what they say about us. But if we are walking with Jesus the testimony of that life will speak louder than anyone's words.

Arise and fight

2 Kings 18:31-32 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die. But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us."

This is so typical of demonic schemes against the people of God. Although a battle was engaged and the enemy had drawn near, he attempted to lull the people into complacency, convincing them to ignore his attack and to just enjoy the good things of life (or alternatively to settle into the current trouble as an inescapable trial) and all the while his intent was to come and snatch them up and make them his captives. The enemy doesn't want a people to trust God. He doesn't want a people to fight against him. He relies upon our desire for a peaceful existence to keep us settled in the land until his time is ready. This is a picture of the church that has forgotten how to fight, or has become too comfortable to fight. We have our buildings and programs. We have our material things, our homes, cars and iPhones.

For many, complacency is the default mode. But in the kingdom we are called to warfare and a radical trust in a God who defends and preserves us.

Arise warrior, and fight!

The enemy's counterfeits

2 Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Genesis 3:4-5 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die." For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Notice-the very thing that the enemy tempted Eve with in the garden is the thing that God desired to give. He had every intention of there being a people who were partakers of the divine nature. Just as he did with Eve, the devil will offer us things at the wrong time and in the wrong way. Many times the thing he offers us in a time of temptation is actually the thing that the Lord plans to give us more perfectly in His time.

For example: a believing woman wants to get married and allows her heart to be captured by an unbelieving man instead of waiting for the man God has chosen who will be the priest of their home. Once the honeymoon is over, issue after issue unfolds causing trouble and pain that could have been avoided had she waited for the Lord to provide a godly husband.

The enemy would have us receive by disobedience what God desires to give us by grace. There is no long term enjoyment of the things gotten by this means and if we accept the devil's counterfeit, his substitute, we shut ourselves off from receiving the authentic thing from God.

Matthew 4:8-9 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

If Jesus had accepted the devil's offer of the kingdoms while He was on the earth, His mission would have been aborted and He would have forfeited an eternal kingdom reign. The devil offered for a season what the Father offered eternally.

The enemy is not worried about us having some temporary enjoyment of the things he gives us, because the reality is that anything he gives is accompanied with trouble. Eve accepted his offer and as a result sin entered the world. Had Jesus accepted the enemy's offer, His reign of the kingdoms would have been fraught with the troubles common to a sin laden world.

The enemy tries to offer us substandard things at a bargain price. Who wouldn't rather gain power and prominence by bending the knee rather than laying the life down? It is so much easier to think that we can gain something in God by eating a piece of fruit rather than devoting our lives to seeking after him in intimacy. However, probably without exception, the truly glorious things that we can experience in this life will be costly. Even though they are gifts of grace, they are given through our humility, brokenness and death to self.

Don't accept the cheap imitations that the enemy offers. Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

Soldiers and civilians – this is warfare!

2 Timothy 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

In this natural world, no one is a soldier and a civilian at the same time. You are either one or the other. You are either serving your country in the military (subject to the requirements and structure of that life) or building your own life according to your own desires.

There is a similar spiritual reality. We cannot be engaged in this spiritual battle and be entwined with the things of this carnal life. Yes, there are things that require our attention-work, grocery shopping, home maintenance, etc.-but these things don't need to disengage us from the battle. In fact, they could all be theaters where the battle is engaged.

How many believers indulge in entertainment that pollutes them or leisure activities that dull their spiritual appetites? We deceive ourselves when we think we are effectively fighting an enemy that we live in agreement with. A soldier that defects to the enemy is called a traitor and is subject to being charged with treason and we would agree that is the right thing to do.

We are much more merciful to ourselves, justifying our daily defections as we romp carelessly in the devil's minefields. Unaware of the danger that lies just beneath the surface, we risk being blown to pieces at any moment.

The true spiritual soldier realizes the importance of being focused in the battle and the danger of compromise, but his primary motivation is the pleasure of his commanding officer. He serves joyfully for the reward of the pleasure upon His countenance. He embraces the discipline required and the sufferings encountered because the battle is a worthy one and the reward is eternal. He is ever on the alert for a command that may be issued and hastens to perform all that his Commander requires, for he is well equipped and victory is

assured. The affairs of this life pale in comparison to the excitement of his journey. He will live and die as a soldier of Jesus Christ.

Raised to be an army

Ezekiel 37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, (the dry bones) and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

In the beginning, there was no life in man until the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). Before this, he looked like a man, he was completely formed and possessed all the organs and tissues necessary to function. But he lacked life. Without this, the breath of God, he was as useless as the dust he was formed from. But once God breathed the breath of life into him, every intricate system within his body began to function. His brain began processing data, his soul began to dream. The purpose of God for this man in the garden had no possibility of fulfillment until he was filled with the breath of God.

Thousands of years later Ezekiel stood before a valley filled with dry bones. At the command of the Lord he prophesied to them and they came together, muscles and flesh covering the bones, forming bodies. But they were useless, just as Adam had been, because there was no life. But once the Lord caused the breath to enter them, they lived and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Nothing was going to happen without the breath of God. But when it came, it wasn't so they could be a social group, but so they could be an army.

The dead who have been made alive in Christ are intended to be an army. The breath of God, the Holy Spirit, has come to awaken us, empower us, teach us how to fight and lead us into warfare.

This is an army and we are soldiers. I'm afraid we may have forgotten this in the midst of our comfortable lives and weekly church attendance. 2020 was a year of chaos and change which many people railed against. But just like an eagle will make its

nest uncomfortable so the young will be forced out of the nest and learn to fly, maybe the same thing is happening with us.

Instead of complaining, it's time to take up the weapons of our warfare. Darkness is making a power play in this hour. Up to this point it has gone largely uncontested. We can't go back and change that, but we can change how we respond now.

The breath of God is in us. We have no excuse. It is time to fight.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Perhaps this book has come into your hands, and you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior. I want to encourage you to do that now. I hope after reading a bit of this devotional, you will find that there is no one so merciful, kind and good as Jesus. He is ready to forgive all who call upon Him. Are you ready to call upon Him today and experience the new life that Jesus offers you? If you are, I'm including a little prayer that might be helpful to you. There is nothing magical about these words, but if you find that they are echoed by the desire of your heart, then let them guide you in a prayer of repentance.

“Father, I acknowledge that I am a sinner and that my life has been lived to satisfy my own desires without any regard for You. I never realized that it was wrong to follow my heart, but now I understand that I need to follow Your ways. I believe that Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God and that He was born into this world to save sinners. When He died on the cross, He paid the penalty for my sin so that I could be holy and blameless in Your sight. So I ask that You would forgive me for my life of sin, wash me in the blood of Jesus, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and transform my life into what You want it to be. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Additional resources can be found at:

www.heismydelight.com

Danielle also has two podcasts of mini Bible teachings titled “Power Snacks” and “School of Intimacy with Christ”. They are available on most podcasting platforms

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