

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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LIMITING ANXIOUS FEELINGS

CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM (GOD) BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU (1 PETER 5:7). LET'S ASSUME YOU HAVE SOUGHT GOD'S WILL FOR A CERTAIN DIRECTION, AND YOU BELIEVE THAT HE HAS LED YOU TO MAKE SPECIFIC PLANS. THE PROBLEM IS YOU ARE STILL WORRIED ABOUT WHETHER YOUR PLANS WILL COME ABOUT AS YOU HAVE HOPED. WHEN I'M FACING SUCH SITUATIONS, I TRY TO FOLLOW THE SIX STEPS DESCRIBED BELOW TO LIMIT MY ANXIOUS FEELINGS. **FIRST**, STATE THE PROBLEM. A PROBLEM WELL STATED IS HALF SOLVED. IN ANXIOUS STATES OF MIND, PEOPLE CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES. PUT THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE. WILL IT MATTER FOR ETERNITY? THE DANGER AT THIS JUNCTURE IS TO SEEK UNGODLY COUNSEL. THE WORLD IS GLUTTED WITH MAGICIANS AND SORCERERS WHO WILL PROMISE INCREDIBLE RESULTS. THEIR APPEARANCE MAY BE STRIKING. THEIR PERSONALITY MAY BE CHARMING. BUT THEY ARE BANKRUPT OF CHARACTER. AVOID THEM (PSALM 1:1).

SECOND, SEPARATE THE FACTS FROM THE ASSUMPTIONS. SINCE WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW, WE MAKE ASSUMPTIONS, AND WE USUALLY ASSUME THE WORST. IF THE ASSUMPTION IS ACCEPTED AS TRUTH, IT WILL DRIVE YOUR MIND TO ITS ANXIETY LIMITS. THEREFORE, YOU MUST SEPARATE ASSUMPTIONS FROM FACTS. **THIRD**, DETERMINE WHAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT OR ABILITY TO CONTROL. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT WHICH YOU CAN CONTROL, AND YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT WHICH YOU CAN'T. DON'T TRY TO CAST YOUR RESPONSIBILITY UNTO CHRIST; HE WILL THROW IT BACK.

FOURTH, LIST EVERYTHING YOU CAN DO WHICH IS RELATED TO THE SITUATION THAT IS UNDER YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. WHEN PEOPLE DON'T ASSUME THEIR RESPONSIBILITY, THEY TURN TO TEMPORARY CURES FOR THEIR ANXIETY, LIKE EATING, TV, SEX OR DRUGS. **FIFTH**, ONCE YOU ARE SURE YOU HAVE FULFILLED YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, SEE IF THERE IS ANY WAY YOU CAN HELP OTHERS. TURNING YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM YOUR OWN SELF-ABSORPTION AND UNTO HELPING PEOPLE AROUND YOU IS NOT ONLY THE LOVING THING TO DO, BUT IT ALSO BRINGS A SPECIAL INNER PEACE. **SIXTH**, THE REST IS GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY, EXCEPT FOR YOUR PRAYER, ACCORDING TO PH. 4:6-8. SO ASSUME YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, BUT CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON CHRIST.

IDOLS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

TO ABRAHAM'S NATURAL MIND, THE DIRECTIVE FROM GOD MADE NO SENSE: SACRIFICE YOUR SON. HOWEVER, ABRAHAM KNEW HE HAD TO BE OBEDIENT. THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO GAIN GOD'S BLESSING. LIFE'S IDOLS ARE MORE THAN JUST A SMALL STATUE USED IN PAGAN WORSHIP YEARS AGO AND IN SOME PLACES STILL TODAY. IDOLS ARE ANYTHING WE VALUE MORE THAN GOD. AND FOR ABRAHAM, ISAAC WAS AN IDOL. ABRAHAM HAD BEEN PROMISED THAT HE WOULD BE THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS THROUGH HIS SON, WHO WASN'T BORN UNTIL ABRAHAM WAS 100 YEARS OLD. SO, WHEN GOD COMMANDED HIM TO LAY HIS SON ON THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR, ABRAHAM SQUIRMED. NOTHING WAS MAKING SENSE TO HIM.

GOD WILL NEVER ASK US TO SACRIFICE SOMETHING WITHOUT GIVING US A GREATER BLESSING IN RETURN. THROUGH HIS OBEEDIENCE, NOT ONLY DID ABRAHAM NOT HAVE TO SACRIFICE HIS SON, BUT HE GREW CLOSER TO THE LORD THROUGH THIS INTENSE TIME OF TRUSTING IN HIM. ABRAHAM BELIEVED WHAT GOD SAID AND ABRAHAM BECAME GOD'S FRIEND. JAMES WRITES, "AND THE SCRIPTURE WAS FULFILLED WHICH SAYS, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,' AND HE WAS CALLED THE FRIEND OF GOD" (JAMES 2:23). LET US DESIRE TO PUT AWAY ALL IDOLS AND LIFT UP TO THE THRONE OF OUR LIVES THE ONLY ONE DESERVING OF OUR PRAISE.

THE DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, AND BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS YOU ALSO ARE DOING (1 THESS. 5:11). JESUS' PRIMARY CALL TO HIS DISCIPLES IS SEEN IN HIS WORDS "COME TO ME" (MATTHEW 11:28) AND "FOLLOW ME" (MATTHEW 4:19). MARK RECORDS: "HE APPOINTED TWELVE, THAT THEY MIGHT BE WITH HIM, AND THAT HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH AND TO HAVE AUTHORITY TO CAST OUT THE DEMONS" (MARK 3:14-15). NOTICE THAT JESUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS DISCIPLES PRECEDED HIS ASSIGNMENT TO THEM. DISCIPLESHIP IS THE INTENSELY PERSONAL ACTIVITY OF TWO OR MORE PERSONS HELPING EACH OTHER EXPERIENCE A GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. DISCIPLESHIP IS BEING BEFORE DOING. MATURITY BEFORE MINISTRY. CHARACTER BEFORE CAREER.

EVERY CHRISTIAN, INCLUDING YOU, IS BOTH A DISCIPLE AND A DISCIPLER IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS. YOU HAVE THE AWESOME PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY BOTH TO BE A TEACHER AND A LEARNER OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN CHRIST, WALK IN THE SPIRIT AND LIVE BY FAITH. YOU MAY HAVE A ROLE IN YOUR FAMILY, CHURCH OR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHICH GIVES YOU SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLINE OTHER, SUCH AS HUSBAND/FATHER, PASTOR, SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER, CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY GROUP LEADER, ETC.

BUT EVEN AS AN APPOINTED DISCIPLER, YOU ARE NEVER NOT A DISCIPLE WHO IS LEARNING AND GROWING IN CHRIST THROUGH YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. CONVERSELY, YOU MAY NOT HAVE AN "OFFICIAL" RESPONSIBILITY TO DISCIPLE ANYONE, BUT YOU ARE NEVER NOT A DISCIPLER. YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR FRIEND, AND OTHER BELIEVERS GROW IN CHRIST THROUGH YOUR CARING AND COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM. BUT THERE WILL STILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU NEED TO SEEK OR RECEIVE THE COUNSEL OF OTHER CHRISTIANS. THERE WILL NEVER BE A DAY WHEN WE DON'T NEED EACH OTHER. FATHER HELP ME TO REMEMBER THAT I WILL NEVER BE SO MATURE THAT I NEED NOT RECEIVE GODLY COUNSEL FROM MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST.

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT NOT ALL THINGS ARE PROFITABLE. ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT I WILL NOT BE MASTERED BY ANYTHING (1 COR. 6:12). MOST OF US WONT OFTEN BE TEMPTED TO COMMIT OBVIOUS SINS SUCH AS OF THE WILL OF GOD UNTIL IT BECOMES SIN. HE TREATS US LIKE THE PROVERBIAL FROG IN THE POT OF WATER: GRADUALLY TURNING UP THE HEAT OF TEMPTATION, HOPING WE DONT NOTICE THAT WE ARE APPROACHING THE BOUNDARY OF GOD'S WILL AND JUMP OUT BEFORE SOMETHING GOOD BECOMES SIN. EVERYTHING IS GOOD AND LAWFUL FOR US BECAUSE WE ARE FREE FROM SIN AND NO LONGER UNDER THE CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW. BUT THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REVEAL HOW WE CAN WRONGLY TAKE GOOD THINGS BEYOND THE BOUNDARY OF GOD'S WILL:

PHYSICAL REST BECOMES LAZINESS; ABILITY TO PROFIT BECOMES AVARICE AND GREED; ENJOYMENT OF LIFE BECOMES INTEMPERANCE; ENJOYMENT OF FOOD BECOMES GLUTTONY; SELF-CARE BECOMES SELFISHNESS; SELF-RESPECT BECOMES CONCEIT; COMMUNICATION BECOMES GOSSIP; CAUTIOUSNESS BECOMES UNBELIEF; ANGER BECOMES RAGE AND BAD TEMPER; LOVING-KINDNESS BECOMES OVERPROTECTION; JUDGEMENT BECOMES CRITICISM; SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIP BECOMES HOMOSEXUALITY; SEXUAL FREEDOM BECOMES IMMORALITY; CONSCIENTIOUSNESS BECOMES PERFECTIONISM; GENEROSITY BECOMES WASTEFULNESS; SELF-PROTECTION BECOMES DISHONESTY; CAREFULNESS BECOMES FEAR LORD. LET US PRAY AND SEEK GOD'S BALANCE IN OUR LIFE TODAY TO DO WHAT IS PROFITABLE WITHOUT BEING MASTERED BY ANYTHING, EVEN GOOD THINGS.

THE PULPIT Series — Print, Read and Pass it on to others (2 Pages)

DEAD TO SIN

EVEN SO CONSIDER YOURSELVES TO BE DEAD TO SIN, BUT ALIVE TO GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. THEREFORE, DO NOT LET SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY THAT YOU SHOULD OBEY ITS LUSTS (ROMANS 6:11-12). SIN IS THE CONDITION INTO WHICH ALL DESCENDANTS OF FALLEN ADAM ARE BORN (ROMANS 5:12). SIN IS LIVING OUR LIVES INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. IT'S THE RESULT OF BEING DECEIVED BY SATAN TO BELIEVE THAT MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE MAY BE ACHIEVED APART FROM A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH, AND OBEDIENCE TO, THE CREATOR OF LIFE (DEUT. 30:19-20; 1 JOHN 5:12).

IN THE NON-CHRISTIANS, SIN PERMEATES THE OLD NATURE, DOMINATES THE OLD SELF, AND PERPETUATES THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH. SATAN IS AT THE HEART OF ALL SIN (1 JOHN 3:8). HE DECEIVES PEOPLE INTO BELIEVING A LIE AND COUNSELS THEM TO REBEL AGAINST GOD. WHEN YOU RECEIVED CHRIST YOU DIED TO SIN AND ITS POWER TO DOMINATE YOU WAS BROKEN.

SATAN AND SIN HAVE NOT DIED; THEY ARE STILL STRONG AND APPEALING. BUT YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO SIN BECAUSE YOU DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD IN CHRIST (ROMANS 6:11). YOU ARE NOT DEAD TO SIN BECAUSE YOU CONSIDER IT SO; YOU CONSIDER IT SO BECAUSE IT IS SO. IN CHRIST YOU HAVE ALREADY DIED TO SIN. PAUL GOES ON TO SAY THAT WE ARE NOT TO USE OUR BODIES AS INSTRUMENTS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (V. 13). IF WE DO, WE ALLOW SIN TO RULE IN OUR MORTAL BODIES. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR SOMEONE TO COMMIT A SEXUAL SIN AND NOT USE HIS BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, ALLOWING SIN TO RULE. ASK THE LORD TO REVEAL TO YOUR MIND HOW YOU HAVE WRONGLY USED YOUR BODY, ESPECIALLY SEXUALLY. RENOUNCE THAT WRONG USE AND THEN SUBMIT YOUR BODY TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY NOT TO LET "SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY THAT YOU SHOULD OBEY ITS LUSTS" (ROMANS 6:12). REMEMBER THAT SINS ARE CONTAGIOUS.

GETTING GOD'S VIEWPOINT

WHEN SITUATIONS DON'T TURN OUT EXACTLY LIKE YOU PLANNED, WHAT IS YOUR REACTION? WHEN YOU BEGIN WALKING THROUGH THE FIERY TRIALS OF LIFE – WHETHER IT BE INTENSE REFINING OR MAJOR DISAPPOINTMENTS – WHAT DO YOU DO? MANY TIMES IT IS AS THOUGH WE HAVE BLINDERS ON OUR EYES AND, THEREFORE, MISS GOD'S GOODNESS.

HOWEVER, WHEN WE FOCUS OUR HEARTS ON CHRIST, WE GAIN AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE AND BEGIN SEEING OUR LIVES FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE. PAUL SAW THROUGH HIS TRIALS AND GAINED A PERSPECTIVE OF HOPE. HE WRITES, "WE ARE AFFLICTED IN EVERY WAY, BUT NOT CRUSHED; PERPLEXED, BUT NOT DESPAIRING; PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN; STRUCK DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED" (2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9).

WHILE OUR PHYSICAL BODIES ARE DECAYING AT A STEADY PACE, OUR SPIRITUAL BODIES ARE GROWING STRONGER AND STRONGER. EACH DAY WHEN WE EMERGE OUT OF A TRIAL OR A DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCE, OUR SPIRITS RISE. AS EACH HARDSHIP, HEARTACHE, PERSECUTION, REJECTION OR CRITICISM COMES OUR WAY, WE TURN TO THE LORD FOR HELP ON HOW TO HANDLE IT.

TO THINK BEYOND TODAY AND TOMORROW IS OFTEN DIFFICULT. HOWEVER, IF WE DON'T, WE WILL STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING. AND WE STILL MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHY WE HAVE TO ENDURE SUCH HARDSHIPS, BUT WE WALK THROUGH THEM WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS ALLOWING SUCH TRIALS SO THAT ONE DAY WE MAY BECOME ALL THAT HE HAS CREATED US TO BE.

THE ESSENCE OF TEMPTATION

FOR WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO CANNOT SYMPATHISE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN (HEBREWS 4:15). I HAVE FOUND THAT MANY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE WITH THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TEMPTATION AND SIN.

BOMBARDED BY TEMPTING THOUGHTS, THEY CONCLUDE THAT THERE MUST BE SOMETHING PRETTY SICK ABOUT THEM. BUT EVEN JESUS WAS "TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE," BUT FINISH THE VERSE: "YET WITHOUT SIN." AS LONG AS WE ARE IN THE WORLD, WE ARE EXPOSED TO TEMPTATION JUST LIKE JESUS WAS. BUT HE DIDN'T SIN, AND WE DON'T HAVE TO SIN EITHER (1 COR. 10:13). THE BASIS FOR TEMPTATION IS LEGITIMATE HUMAN NEEDS. WE WILL EITHER LOOK TO THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL TO HAVE OUR NEEDS MET, OR WE WILL LOOK TO CHRIST WHO PROMISES TO MEET OUR NEEDS (PHIL. 4:19).

THE ESSENCE OF TEMPTATION IS THE INVITATION TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. THE POWER OF TEMPTATION DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF THE STRONGHOLDS WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED IN OUR MINDS AS WE LEARNED TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. IF YOU WERE RAISED IN A CHRISTIAN HOME WHERE MAGAZINES AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMES OF QUESTIONABLE MORAL VALUE WERE NOT ALLOWED, THE POWER OF SEXUAL TEMPTATION IN YOUR LIFE WILL NOT BE AS GREAT AS FOR SOMEONE WHO GREW UP EXPOSED TO PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS. WHY? BECAUSE YOUR LEGITIMATE NEED TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED WAS MET BY PARENTS WHO ALSO PROTECTED YOU FROM EXPOSURE TO ILLEGITIMATE MEANS OF MEETING YOUR NEEDS.

THE PERSON WHO GREW UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF IMMORALITY MAY EXPERIENCE A GREATER STRUGGLE WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATION SIMPLY BECAUSE THAT STRONGHOLD IN THE MIND WAS WELL-ESTABLISHED BEFORE HE WAS BORN AGAIN. JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO MEET HIS OWN PHYSICAL NEEDS BY USING HIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTES INDEPENDENTLY OF THE FATHER TO TURN A ROCK INTO BREAD. BUT INSTEAD HE RESPONDED, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE ...MTT 4:4. WE ALSO MUST RESPOND TO TEMPTATION BY RELYING ON GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS.

GOD'S PROMISES AND OUR CHOICES

THERE IS A QUESTION MANY PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME THROUGH THE YEARS: IF THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO PROTECT US FROM HARM, WHY DO SO MANY TRAGEDIES BEFALL GOD'S PEOPLE? SCRIPTURE DECLARES, "THERE SHALL NO EVIL BEFALL THEE, NEITHER SHALL ANY PLAGUE COME NEAR THY DWELLING" (PSALM 91:10). WHEN WE READ THOSE WORDS IT IS ONLY NATURAL TO ASK WHY SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HARM AND EVIL?

FIRST, WE NEED TO KNOW THAT GOD IS SOVEREIGN. JESUS SAID, "...ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH." (MATTHEW 28:18). THIS MEANS THAT SATAN CAN DO NOTHING WITHOUT GOD'S PERMISSION. WHY THEN DO WE EXPERIENCE MISFORTUNE AND ADVERSITY? IT IS OFTEN BECAUSE OF OUR CHOICES. THE ALMIGHTY CREATED US WITH A FREE WILL – TO CHOOSE TO LOVE HIM OR NOT, SERVE HIM OR NOT. AND IN CERTAIN MATTERS OF LIFE HE DECIDES NOT TO INTERFERE. PSALM 91:1 SAYS, "HE THAT DWELLETH IN THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH SHALL ABIDE." IT IS OUR CHOICE TO DWELL. AND WHEN WE CHOOSE TO DWELL WHERE GOD'S PRESENCE IS, ONLY THEN, WE WILL ABIDE UNDER HIS SHADOW. WHEN WE CHOOSE TO OBEY HIS WORD, ONLY THEN ARE WE SAFE.

YET, THERE ARE TIMES, AS IN JOB'S CASE, WHEN THE LORD WILL ALLOW TRIALS TO COME OUR WAY TO STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. IN THOSE TIMES, WE, AS JOB, MUST CHOOSE TO OBEY THE LORD IN SPITE OF THE TRIALS AND STAY VERY CLOSE TO HIM. WHEN WE DO THAT, HIS BLESSINGS WILL OVERFLOW AND HIS POWER WILL ESTABLISH.

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL
A Church for all Nations and Denominations
Email: acfi@acfinistries.com
Website: www.acfinistries.com