

DISCIPLESHIP

Bits of Wisdom

Discussion

During my quiet time over the past several weeks God has really been working in my life. And one of the things that I have noticed is that simple pieces of wisdom He passed on to me years ago are now bearing fruit in my life. As I reflected on them, I realized too that these things are worth sharing with you in hopes God may use them in your life.

For what it's worth, here are a few bits of wisdom to help you through the day:

The hotter the fire the stronger the steel.

All through God's word we see His use of fire for cleansing and strengthening. Gold becomes purified, and the dross is easily removed after being subjected to intense heat. We see the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who not only walked out of a fiery furnace completely unharmed, but they walked out of a furnace containing a fire so intense that men died just trying to get close enough to throw the three of them inside. As we go through times of trials and testing in our lives we need to remember this truth: God is building us up and making us stronger as He leads us through the fire.

A broken bone heals stronger than its original strength.

I heard one time that a bone, once broken, will heal to a condition of strength much stronger than it was prior to the break. Have you ever considered that sometimes God has to break us down before He can build us up? It is only after we are brought low into humility and selflessness that God can truly accomplish all that He desires in our lives. Our pride and our own independence are actually weaknesses which prevent us from growing strong in the Lord. God's word tells us that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, oh God, you will not despise." If you feel broken this week, is it because God is preparing to do something awesome in your life? Is He in the process of strengthening you for the work at hand, the challenge of the day, or perhaps preparing you for some new work?

Butterflies, diamonds and marble are not initially beautiful; their beauty comes from the transformation process God puts them through over time.

Speaking of transformation, a lump of coal and a pile of limestone aren't much to look at, but through transformational processes they become diamonds and fine marble. From coal to diamonds, and from limestone to marble; who would think that!? From the ugliest black piece of carbon to the most beautiful and desirable jewel in the entire world - Wow! And what about simple limestone which becomes the gleaming marble that adorns the hallways and entryways of king's castles? Both coal and limestone have something in common: they both require very intense heat and unimaginable pressure over an extended period of time in order to be transformed. Do you see the truths God shows us in that? He will use us even if we are that ugly piece of carbon, and he will transform us into a diamond. Or if you are a plain hunk of limestone, He will turn you into fine and gleaming marble. It may require a lot of heat and pressure; however, in the end you will become something that you never imagined in your wildest dreams; and it will happen in ways you that never thought possible!

Cliff Barrows, the Music Director for Billy Graham, once said that "Everyone wants to grow, but no one wants to change".

We don't like change much. We would rather that God wave a magic wand or do something miraculous in our lives that does not require effort on our part in order to change us into what He wants us to be. But God isn't like that and we shouldn't be either. Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. If we truly want to grow in Christ, we need His Holy Word in us; and we need to be ready for change. God will do the rest. Next time you feel the heat, don't get out of the kitchen, because it's probably God at work in your life. He is shaping, molding, and transforming you into a completely new creature, one who will not look like the original. And when God is done, you will be someone that could you could not even have imagined at the time He started.

God loves people we don't...but He expects us to love them anyway.

I believe it is a truth that God loves people that we do not. Jonah encountered this truth firsthand. God wanted the people of Nineveh to hear the gospel, but Jonah did not particularly like the Ninevites and did not want to go. I think that all of us have had this experience, knowing people we did not like, but also knowing that God loved them. As we move through life, God will place many people in our path, and He will call us to minister to many more. Don't allow your personal dislikes to keep you from following God's will, even when it hurts. After all, Christ died for everyone; we should be willing to do the same.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust. Bad things do happen to good people.

I find myself often frustrated, just like King David and King Solomon, when I see the wicked and the unrighteous succeeding, while the righteous suffer. Something inside just doesn't set right, and yet I realize as well that Christ taught us that the rain falls equally on the just and the unjust. As I have grown older, I've learned to catch myself when these feelings of injustice strike me; it helps me to ensure that I don't allow the emotion of the moment to cloud my judgment. So now, when bad things come into my life, as I'm sure that they do in yours, I let them draw me closer to Christ and not push me away. Funny, I have also noticed that I used to have similar challenges when good things came into my life - that for some reason I ran to Christ when I was in trouble or hurting, but not always when I was being blessed or succeeding at something. Now I've come to see Christ in everything, good and bad; and each day that I live brings a greater dependence on him. As I grow stronger in my walk, I am able to refuse to allow the successes of the unjust to hinder my relationship with Christ.

Cattle are driven; sheep are led. Think about it.

This is a truth that I was taught over thirty years ago, and it still speaks to me today. So often we want something to happen, we want change, or we want to succeed, or we want our children to do something like "go to college" or "get a job", and we become driven to make it happen. Then I remember that cattle are driven, but sheep are led. As we go about living the life that God has granted us, remember that He is our Shepherd, not our Cattle Driver; and in turn, we are to follow that model. Leadership is leading, not driving, those whom God places under our sphere of influence. We as individuals may be driven by our desire to achieve something - and that can be a good thing - but when it comes to leading people, follow Christ's example. Otherwise, you will see what happens when sheep are driven - they scatter!

I often do not recognize the wisdom that God has given my wife.

I must confess that as a husband, father, and now the primary breadwinner in the family, I have often overlooked, or even discounted, my wife's wisdom. However, the past few years of growing older together has shown me the error of this kind of thinking. God gives, in marriage, two people to share in the work and the relationship, and He equips each with specific talents, gifts, and wisdom. Ignoring either the husband's or the wife's wisdom and talents greatly handicaps the relationship and limits the realization of God's plan for the couple. Now, I realize that in order to truly know God's will for me, one of the first people that I seek advice from and pray with about it is my wife. She is wiser than even I can describe, and God works great things in me through her. How about your relationships? Whether it is with a spouse, a parent, or a brother or sister, are you recognizing the wisdom that God has granted them as it relates to your life?

And finally - on a more practical and somewhat humorous note - here are two life lessons that I've learned as definite truths:

Never sneeze while brushing your teeth

Need I say more?

Calories do count

It's painful but true: what we put in our bellies stays there unless its worked off. . . Boy, speaking of heat and pressure! :-)

I pray that God is actively working in your life this week to accomplish His perfect will in you; and I pray that perhaps He will use something I've shared here to speak to you this week.

In Christ,

Wes