

A JOURNEY TOWARD A SIMPLER LIFE

Jesus was asked the question, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” He answered, “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

Let's face facts. Our temporal lives do not prepare us for Christ's answer. In truth, we spend our lives in the accumulation of possessions, the net worth of our human estate. We spend lifetimes based upon the gain/loss ratio, rejoicing in every gain and lamenting in every loss. In fact, our very lives are based on our human productivity, the worth of our earning power, and therefore, we seek to distance ourselves from the Lord's warning.

God's Divine Plan for our lives is centered in Jesus Christ. He provides the Way, the Truth, and the Life for our lives, which by Christ's human and divine natures, turns us toward God and away from our soul's desires to worship lesser gods. God's plan is simple and direct: Jesus Christ fulfills and completes our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. But, there is a catch. We, by our free wills, must accept Christ's Life above our own lives. This raises a conflict between God and us. We are never prepared to do what God commands of us. Give up our lives to receive the Life of Jesus Christ. And so, we do the best we can—we compromise. We assume falsely, that God has given us permission to work out a “Joint Custody” plan in which we share ourselves between God and our selves. In such a plan, we continue as the mediators of our lives, the sole governors of our lives through our souls. We believe righteousness is all about choosing good over evil, and we neglect to hear Christ's warning: Strive to enter by the narrow door.

In God's plan, Christ is the narrow door. We cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless we will to step through the narrow door. No one can pass through the door without completing the covenant: our life for Christ's Life. Those who choose to keep hold of their lives through their soul's authority and power are not recognized by Christ. We shall appear before Him, asking Him to let us pass through, and He telling us, “Depart from me, you worker of iniquity.” Do you think Christ enjoys having to cast us away? His very Life shouts God's Word of Divine Love and Forgiveness, and we, by our soul's pride, refused to accept it unconditionally. Whatever our reasons, we stubbornly clung to our souls and we remained enslaved by our soul's desires. We denied the promise of God's freedom from slavery to our souls through the Life of Jesus Christ.

The New Covenant is sealed by Christ's blood, shed on the Cross for the sake of the whole world, and God will never rescind it. By the very truth of the Covenant, we are commanded by God to give up our lives and receive

the Life of Jesus Christ. It is no longer we who live, but Christ, who lives in us. And by this very Covenant, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God without doing what God commands. God's grace Wills to fill life with the Life of Jesus Christ.

Can you, after a careful and honest examination of your life, say beyond a shadow of doubt that your life is wholly given to God and the Life of Jesus Christ wholly received as God's promised New Life? It's the plague of western culture to cultivate the infectious belief in the authority and power of our souls. A contagious individualism that strengthens our determination to worship lesser gods through the uniqueness of our souls. Everywhere we turn in western culture, we are met with temptations too great for us to overcome alone. The desires of our souls trap us by our human weaknesses. We succumb easily to human rationalization and justification, holding desperately to a human treasure that does not last—the worship of lesser gods. We seek to maneuver around God's command: “All or nothing,” in our worship of God only. We rationalize and justify why we do the things we ought not to do and do not do the things we ought. None of us are born ready-made in a belief of God. God, by His Divine Grace, implants in us His Divine Gifts of Faith, Hope and Love. These wonderful Gifts of God are for one Divine purpose only: our recognition and acceptance of God's Divine Presence in our present.

But in our present, we've cluttered our lives by the desires of our souls' pride. And in such pride, we are owners of complex lives lived through the soul's demand of desire. Our lives speak volumes on how we twist desire in our favor, convincing ourselves we are deserving of all that we desire. It is so easy to think of appropriate reason why we should deserve what we desire.

Our first step towards a simpler life begins with our recognition of fact. Our soul's desire, leading us to believe we deserve what we desire, which ultimately leads us to worship lesser gods. This may seem a disturbing thought to us, charging us with the responsibility of turning from the One, True God toward lesser gods. But our first step toward a simpler life does not begin with the illusion of where we think we are, but in truth, where we are in life.

Look around and touch what you see as your possessions. At first blush, you may say outwardly how insignificant such possessions are to your life. But inwardly, where it matters most, resides your soul desiring what you truly believe you deserve. There you will discover your self, your soul, at the center. All around you are placed the objects that matter to your life. If such objects were truly meaningless, then you would not place them around you. Think of how easily you tag your possessions with the cloak of sentimentality, or the time-saving reason, or the comfort reason. Don't

worry, it is not a sin to gather possessions, until you offer yourself as a slave to the possessions you possess as lesser gods. The experience is so gradual, losing your self in the pit of temporal existence. You awake, one day, to the realization that you are not you unless you can measure your worth by your possessions.

Henry David Thoreau, a naturalist and philosopher, wrote of his experience on Walden Pond, “We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. . . To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. . . I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

It may be the greatest of all clichés to say that Thoreau went to live on Walden Pond with the purpose of discovering himself. He was in search of meaning for his life apart from identifying himself with his possessions. He sought a way to live life deliberately, “to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

It’s a sobering thought to realize how easily we take life for granted. We trap our lives within the web of human progress and convenience to our ordinary lives that we never stop to question whether our lives are richer or poorer in the experience. So easily have we bound ourselves, chained ourselves to ordinary living, that we fail ever to contemplate our most elevated and critical hour. An hour in which we awake to the true meaning and purpose of life. How can we contemplate such an hour when our lives are filled to overflowing with complexity?

In many ways, Buba, my wife, and I were in search of truth about our lives. It is one thing to think you know how you would answer, but quite another thing to actually search for the answer! How could we ever discover the answer living lives dulled and desensitized by the outward trappings of our ordinary lives? We settled from the start, questioning everything, asking ourselves “Why are we doing what we are doing?” Why, for instance, were we watching TV, enclosing and confining our lives around an object? Had we made the TV our worship of a lesser god? By the asking of such a simple question, “Why are we doing what we are doing,” we discovered the truth about our lives. Yes, we were worshipping a lesser god, and we had planned hours on which we offered our worship. And so, we unplugged ourselves from the antenna and the cable three years ago. Immediately, we were faced with a dilemma, what do we do with the hours made available by our decision to not watch TV. We filled them with work: Buba’s sewing and my

writing. Then, we had to ask ourselves again, “Why are we doing what we are doing?” We’d simply substituted one lesser god (TV) for another lesser god (Work). We were compelling ourselves to work in the place of compelling ourselves to watching TV. There was no freedom of choice in such a decision. We were doing it to fill the space of silence, fill the time with our business, and never preparing ourselves to contemplate our “Elevated and critical hour.”

We were continuing as slaves to our souls, desiring what we believed we deserved. So much of our lives are lived by habit, a routine of life that may seem comfortable or harassed, but always, desiring what we think we deserve. In truth, we live busy and complex lives because we desire our lives to be busy and complex. Oh, we may tell others how much we hate the lives we live, but in truth, the decision to be busy or still is ours to make. Why should we feel guilty when we decide to be still? Why do we think we are accomplishing something when we are busy? Why do we think God gave us time to make of it what we will? In truth, we are trapping ourselves by the same mistake: believing ourselves to be at the center of our lives, instead of God! When God is at the center of our lives, God leads us to moments of being busy and moments of being still. But regardless of being busy or still, we must remain awake in realizing that God’s Divine Presence is in our Present. We are not busy for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of God. We are not still for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of God. When God is at the center of our lives, it is God who makes of us what He Wills, not what we will.

Sometimes, we must ask ourselves the hard questions that lead to contemplate the significance of our lives to reach our “Elevated and Critical Hour,” to embrace the hour of Divine Revelation wholly prepared to receive it. In the present state of our lives, we must ask ourselves whether or not we are preparing for the hour adequately. Our lives are tumbled by life, and we find ourselves reshaped by our human fortunes or misfortunes. As Thoreau wrote, “Our life is frittered away by detail. . . Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail.” So alien is Thoreau’s idea of simplicity to us, we dismiss his reasoning instantly, until we awaken ourselves to the reality that our souls are at the center of our human success or failure, not God. We struggle daily with the desires of our souls, pushing us, prodding us forward to be all that we desire to be. Our humanity boils incessantly in the cauldron of the soul’s pride, the brew of our human making which leads us around the continuous circle of pain and suffering, violence and destruction. What good is Thoreau’s insistent cure for an “unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and

heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, . . . is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose”?

From God’s Divine perspective, humanity is caught by actions of perpetual disobedience. We are disobedient to God because we have chosen to be disobedient. The actions of our lives reveal the desire of our souls deserving slavery and not freedom. Each of us is born into slavery, thinking we are the masters of our lives. Such a mistake leads us to the worship of lesser gods by the soul’s desire for a conditional, temporal existence instead of an unconditional and eternal existence. We ignore God’s Divine Presence in our Present, finding it easier to delegate God to eternity rather than acknowledge His Presence in our Present. We seek the freedom of our souls to play upon our human playground, and like immature children, we fuss and fight over who gets the pail and shovel in the sandbox.

Herein lies the mystery of our human existence. God commands humanity to grow up, and humanity refuses to obey His command. Such growth toward the Divine would mean our willingness to give up what we cherish most—our independence from God. We love the civility of giving God lip-service of praise, but in reality, our souls are in full-blow rebellion against God when our souls are not in submission to God. We’d rather play games of subterfuge, to zig when God commands us to zag.

When we are encouraged to live life deliberately, our souls desire to kick into action, pressing us hard to the illusion that we are in control of our lives. The intended Divine purpose of Jesus Christ was not to save us first, but to awaken us to the reality of our human existence by His human and divine existence. Salvation by God through Christ remains an incomplete action by God as long as we will to keep our souls separate from God, unwilling to submit our souls unconditionally. Living life deliberately means deliberately living life through God.

It’s a rule we break constantly while our souls govern our existence. Our souls seek the burden of arbitrariness, deliberately avoiding living through God. The New Life in Christ becomes apparent to us the moment we begin to understand that our lives are lived through God and we cease to live our lives through ourselves.

Abandoning ourselves to God means in Thoreau’s words, living in the “Infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep.” Such a hope is grounded on God governing our lives, not from our human perspective of agreeing or disagreeing with God’s actions, but accepting God’s actions through our obedience to Him. In the mix of “Why”, we cannot invalidate God’s action by our human rejection. God Wills to work His purpose out, with or without our agreement. We either stand with Him or we stand against Him. There is no middle ground to stand

upon. Before the Cross of Christ, we are not provided a middle ground to stand with one foot in the Kingdom of God and one foot in this world.

Entering the Kingdom of God by way of the narrow door of Christ and His Cross, means we enter into God’s gracious Will to govern our lives. God is never pleased with any of us living under Him, for to live in this way would mean living as slaves. God’s grace is for us to live in Christ, and therefore, live in the freedom of Christ. A freedom shared between God and us that allows us to accept the wonderful privilege and honor of God breaking our souls and releasing our spirits so that we may live deliberately in God, live obediently in God. Within the Kingdom of God, we are obedient to God because of our love of God in our worship of God. Our spiritual need of obedience overcomes our soul’s desire to be disobedient by the very love and forgiveness of God through Christ. It is Christ, living in us and we in Him, that is at the center of our lives. His love is our love. His forgiveness is our forgiveness. His obedience is our obedience.

Our souls demand that we serve ourselves. This should be obvious by the conditions our souls demand of our lives. What God demands is the unconditional surrender of your soul to Him. Now, you are free to ask as many questions as you have reason, but the bottom line of God will never change—unconditional surrender means unconditional obedience. Living life deliberately in every moment of our existence means the certainty of our unconditional surrender leading to our unconditional obedience.

Now, if you are looking for a “Beyond the shadow of doubt” proof, then you need not look further than Jesus Christ. When God the Father Willed God the Son to stand in the midst of humanity’s soulish pride, Jesus questioned the Father’s Will by saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” Our Lord knew where the sin of pride would lead—to death. It was after His statement, Christ revealed His unconditional surrender and obedience to God, by saying, “Nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done.”

The Father’s Will was for Jesus Christ to die upon the Cross for the sin of the whole world. Do we think God’s Will demands less than the whole of our lives given to Him?

Buba and I came to this understanding of God’s command of unconditional surrender means unconditional obedience, both separately and then in union as husband and wife, many years ago. Living life deliberately, living to our “Most elevated and critical hour,” means in truth, “Not my will, but Yours, be done,” by the unconditional Way of Jesus Christ. This is an impossible truth for us to live unless we first offer our souls to God, abandon our very lives to a God, accept God’s Divine Will as true and our human wills as false. We harbor no illusions that we are given an authority and power to govern our lives, but in absolute truth, this authority and power

belongs to God alone. And yes, in truth, we live by a Divine Wisdom of accepting that God breaks and transforms our lives for a very good Divine reason. What other way is there in living the New Life given to us in Jesus Christ?

To live life deliberately, means through a Divine obedience to God to be in the world, but not of the world. It is not merely a question of living life simply, but living life that demands that you live life God's way. By Christ's example, He is present at the very center of our existence. We are no longer the center—Christ is the center. The inescapable truth of Christ is that He is at the center of our lives, witnessing God's indisputable truth of obedience. In our "Elevated and critical hour" we must contemplate life lived **through** God instead of life lived **to** God. Lives lived deliberately **through** God means we live obediently **through** God's Will for our lives, allowing us to pass unfettered through the narrow door. Christ will recognize Himself in us, which for all eternity, is the Divine Password that seems to be slipping from the memory of humanity.

Yes, indeed, Buba and I are finding our lives freer today than we were three years ago. Our decision to live life more simply is becoming living simply through God in Christ. This year we decided not to turn on our air conditioner for the entire summer. What we discovered in living without it is how easily we sought our human comfort, placing ourselves at the center of our lives. There is nothing wrong in living with the comfort of air conditioning until our lives are governed by such comfort. Desiring what we think we deserve is the story of Goldilocks demanding her porridge to be: "Not too hot and not too cold, but just right." We became concerned with our lives lived "Just right," with every day ending without saying aloud, "Thank you, Lord, for this most excellent day." What we are discovering is that every day is an excellent day because God's Presence is at the center of our Present. No, not everything goes "Just right" in our excellent days, but one thing is certain, some of the things we stumbled over are not there today, making our journey with God easier with each day.

Now, we're on to stretching a roll of paper towels to last for a couple of weeks! Seems a bit foolish until you begin to examine your life to see what you worship as lesser gods.

The Rev. Ronald E. White



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