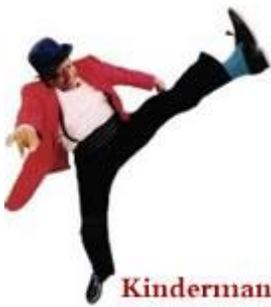


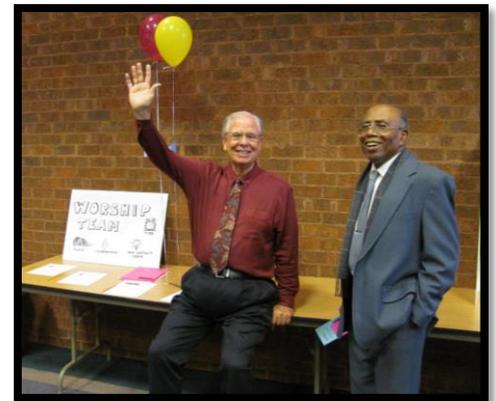
Dave's Laptop

October 28, 2014



I want to begin this week by expressing sincere thanks to our FELLOWSHIP Team, led by Imani Henderson, who spearheaded our effective and delightful presence at the recent Oakland Mills International Festival. Guided by our own inimitable Kinderman (aka John Taylor), the planning team included Imani, Kinderman, Chima & Ruth Ebinama, Fran Henderson, Tracey Manning, Nancy Wisthoff, and Pastor Neville, with a number of other volunteers. Well done!!

I also want to thank our MINISTRY Team, led by Nancy Wisthoff, who sponsored our recent CBF Ministry Fair, which was also very effectively done. Many thanks to the many folk who worked hard on the various attractive and informative displays. Watch for photos on our CBF Facebook page!



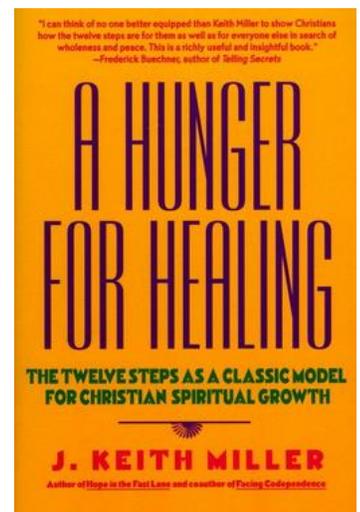
And I'll bet you know that next Tuesday is election day. If you're still in the process of deciding for whom to vote, www.wamu.org/vote will allow you to compare the positions of the candidates on your ballot and then to print a sample ballot to take with you to the polls. There are a number of important positions to be filled in this election, and I hope that you'll be sure to exercise your blood-bought privilege to influence how our government works!

On a different subject, I'd like to think with you for a bit about prayer. This Sunday we conclude our month-long consideration of the Twelve Steps of Sinners Anonymous as a model for spiritual healing and growth.

In our study, we've been reminded that our unredeemed selves have a tendency to do nearly every dimension of our lives in ways quite contrary to those ways that lead to abundant life. We've been reminded that the way of healing, hope, and abundance is to turn our lives completely over to the direction and purposes of God, which is what it means to "make Jesus Lord" (Romans 10:9; Colossians 2:6).

Even though now, "in Christ," we know that our true life comes from Jesus as we allow His Life to flow into and through our lives (Romans 8:1, John 15:5), we still tend to get things backward a great deal of the time. The AA publication, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*,¹ puts our problem this way:

We said to God, "I want to give this life to you." As we do this, God takes over the ultimate owner's responsibility for structural change. But we have the continuing job of daily maintenance [staying connected to the Vine]. This change of responsibilities is an incredible relief: we don't have to be perfect, right, in charge, popular, and 'totally successful.' (Many of us had it backwards, trying always to handle



¹ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981), p. 165. See also pp. 181-184.

the owner's ultimate responsibilities—which only God can handle—and trying to get God to do all the daily maintenance, which is our natural job).

Our study of the Twelve Steps has reminded me that we often approach prayer in a backward way, too, even as we tend to do with everything else. Prayer, of course, is conversation with God, and one of the central purposes of prayer is to help us learn to hear God and to read the signs in our lives that guide us toward knowing and living life as God intends for us to do, which is Abundant Life.

Our problem is that we who have the Sin Disease (put your name here) and who “play God” at the drop of a hat have to be very careful how we talk to God. Sin causes us to be so controlling and self-centered that *most of our requests to God for ourselves and for other people are tainted by our assumption that we know what is best for other people and for ourselves.*

While we do well to pray for things that seem to be clearly God's will as revealed in Scripture, those things are not so numerous as we might imagine, nor do we usually see them clearly. The Sin that is in us always attempts to turn even our prayer life into an arena for control, manipulation, and self-centeredness.

As one frequent example of this process, we generally approach illness, either in ourselves or in others, as something to be removed, and we frequently pray for such healing. While this may, in fact, generally be warranted, and even though I certainly tend to pray in such ways myself, it's pretty easy to miss what God may be up to in such times.

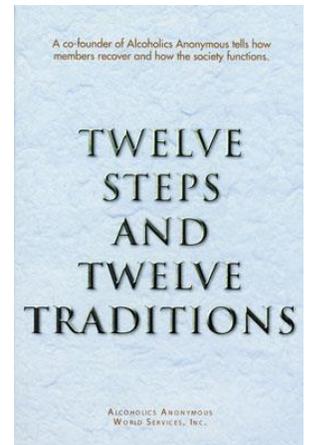
In the first place, while *for those who are in Christ, every illness is healed*, this healing sometimes comes in the form of resurrection. There must be some mechanism, after all, by which we transition from space and time into eternity, and only God knows the best time and manner by which such transition takes place in our lives.

I've long been challenged by the words of Swiss physician Paul Tournier, who told his patients, “As your physician, I'm going to do everything I can to help you experience healing from this illness. But you need to know that **I'm also going to be praying that you do not get well until you have learned what this illness has to teach you.**”

That's a different way of thinking about things, isn't it? It reminds me of the wise words of C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*:

“The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt. . . . And pain is not only immediately recognizable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. . . . Pain insists upon being attended to. **God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain.**”

We pray very differently if we recognize that God is at work in the pain that we or others are experiencing. God may or may not have *caused* this pain, and perhaps most frequently, God had little, if anything, to do with its genesis, but God can certainly work *through* this pain, and always *will*, if invited to do so. Once we become convinced of this, once we realize that love does not remove persons out of pain if that pain has the potential to lead them to true healing and to abundant life, we pray differently.



I first learned this method of prayer from Edward Thornton, who described his approach to prayer something like this: “I don’t pray for people the same way I once did. I hold them up in my cupped hands, imagine God’s cupped hands, and put them in God’s hands, taking my hands away and saying *nothing* to God about what He should do. I don’t know what they need. It’s not that I don’t care or that I’m just tossing them off to God. I care about them deeply. But I do not want God to take them out of their pain and frustration if that same pain and frustration will lead them to recovery and life. And only God knows that.”

Whatever your approach to prayer, surely we can join together with Samuel’s affirmation that “*As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you*” (1 Samuel 12:23).

Praying on . . .

Dave



The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know

O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

Week forty-one: Forsaken!

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ (Matthew 27:46).

During the intense struggle of the cross, our Lord spoke seven times as He hung suspended between heaven and earth. This was the strangest of all His cries: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* Was Jesus actually forsaken by the Father during His moments of agony?

As the battle raged, Satan tried his best to entice Christ to give up, to give in, and to give out. On the cross the enemy sought to get Jesus to give up, to call legions of angels to set Him free. This was the spiritual battle. When His disciples deserted Him, Satan tempted Him to just give in. This was the soulish battle. During Jesus’ trials and beatings before the cross, the devil sought to get our Lord to give up. This was the physical battle.

Many today know the haunting feeling of being forsaken. Perhaps there is no more haunting word in our English language than the word *forsaken*. Let’s take a brief journey with our Lord from Galilee to Gethsemane to Golgotha and learn from Him how to overcome being forsaken.

IN GALILEE JESUS WAS FORSAKEN BY HIS FAMILY (Matthew 13:53–58)

Jesus’ own brothers and sisters distanced themselves from Him when He began His public ministry. They thought for a while that He was mentally imbalanced. It was at this point that He said, *“A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house”* (Matthew 13:57).

But when those who knew Him best forsook Him, instead of giving up . . . Jesus reached up. We read these words: *“When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there”* (Matthew 14:23). When Jesus was forsaken by His own family, He did not give up. All alone, He reached up to His heavenly Father.

This is a challenge for all of us who know the haunting reality of being forsaken. Instead of giving up, we can reach up to the Lord in prayer. He is the only One who can truly identify with your feelings and needs. For He too knows what it is to be forsaken.

AT GETHSEMANE JESUS WAS FORSAKEN BY HIS FRIENDS (Matthew 26:36–56)

That night, before the Crucifixion, Jesus needed His friends and followers more than He ever had. But immediately after He had agonized in prayer, sweating drops of blood in Gethsemane’s garden, the Bible bluntly states, *“All the disciples forsook Him and fled”* (Matthew 26:56). They forsook Him. And that is not all. They fled! They ran away. They denied they had ever known Him. They fled into the darkness of the night. Jesus was forsaken, abandoned, in His hour of deepest need. And He was forsaken not by His foes but by His own friends.

But after His disciples deserted Him, instead of giving in . . . Jesus reached in. Hear Him from under the olive trees of Gethsemane: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. . . . If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (Matthew 26:38–39). Our Lord did not give in to the circumstances that swirled around Him. Instead He reached in—into the depths of His own being to find His solace not in His own

will but in the will of the One who sent Him. Have you reached in lately? That is, have you come to the place in your own experience where you join Jesus in praying, “Not as I will, but as You will”?

AT GOLGOTHA JESUS WAS FORSAKEN BY HIS FATHER (*Matthew 27:33–46*)

What happened to compel Jesus to ask, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” Does a loving God forsake His own? He did not forsake Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 6). He did not forsake the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace of Babylon (Daniel 3). So why this strange cry from the lips of our Lord in His most agonizing moment?

The Bible tells us that a holy God cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13). On the cross Jesus was bearing your sin and mine in His own body, suffering the punishment for our sins as though they were His own. As Isaiah said, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (53:6). As Paul reminded us, “*For [God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). During the darkness, the Light turned away. There, on the cross, bearing our sin, Jesus was momentarily forsaken in order that we might never be forsaken.

When this happened our Lord was tempted by the devil to give out, to cry, “Enough! I quit!” But instead of giving out . . . He reached out. Hear Jesus from the cross as He reached out and said, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*” (Luke 23:34). Hear Him reaching out to the dying thief alongside Him: “*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*” (v. 43). Jesus’ arms are open wide to us today. And never were they opened wider than when they were stretched out on the cross. Jesus did not give out; He reached out.

What about your own life journey? Have you been to Galilee or are you there now, in that place where you are so tempted to give up? Reach up. This is the place where you surrender your will to His will. Have you been to Gethsemane or are you there now, in that place where you are so tempted to give in? Reach in. This is the place where you search yourself. Have you been to Golgotha, or are you there now, in that place where you are tempted to simply give out? Reach out. This is the place where you sacrifice your will to Him, as Christ did.

Yes, our Lord was forsaken by His family, His friends, and His heavenly Father—but only so we might never be forsaken. “*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*” (Isaiah 53:4). What a Savior!

As you memorize this verse, meditate on the way we never experience anything in this life that Jesus Himself did not experience before us and for us. Forsaken? Don’t give up; reach up. Don’t give in; reach in. And don’t give out; reach out.