

Letting Go of Self-Sufficiency to Be Set Free

3/25/2018

Today ends my sermon series for Lent on *Letting Go Of _____ to Be Set Free*. We began with

- Letting Go of **People Pleasing**
- Letting Go of **Entitlement** (and I continue to see that in myself and the world constantly)
- Letting Go of **Unbelief** (talked about the difference between believing in God and having faith)
- Letting Go of **Mediocrity** (this is the idea where God can become commonplace – lose the wonder)
- Letting Go of a **Small View of God** (God exists to serve me)
- Letting Go of **Self-Sufficiency**

I distinctly remember the first week claiming that I don't struggle with being a **People pleaser** that much. Well that's not true of today's topic. **Self-sufficiency** is something I continually struggle with.

A couple of years ago I experienced a memorable moment at camp. I was attempting to help Mary and Nick Knoll fill up and tie water balloons. Well after many minutes had ticked by I had successfully filled and tied one balloon and Mary and Nick had done several. My big stubby fingers just couldn't seem to tie the knot on the top of the balloon. I'd get so close and then the whole thing would squirt the water out and I'd have to start all over. After attempting and failing several times I yelled out with great enthusiasm: **"I can't do this!!"**. And Nick continues to remind me of that defeated expression many times. But the thing is – that's so uncharacteristic of me normally. I go into most situations with the mindset – given enough time and resources, I can figure this out. If nobody else can figure it out – give it to me and I'll figure it out. And while I have numerous examples of me being wrong in that assumption – nevertheless I continue to believe **"I can do it"** or **"I can figure it out"**. Now while that may be harmless and funny when it comes to attempting to tie water balloons it becomes much more serious and harmful when it comes to bigger things in life. Because you see that assumption can quite easily lead to **pushing God off to the sidelines of my life** until I really need Him. It can lead to **reserving God for the emergencies or crisis in my life**. And that puts me in charge of directing and living my life rather than seeking God's direction and power. I've been preaching now for 28 years, and I believe I'm capable of planning and preaching a technically good sermon – but you see it will **lack the power to convict and transform lives** unless God is leading and directing and empowering me each step of the way. And I've been reminded of that many times over the years, especially when I preach what I believe was a "bomb" of a sermon – it felt while I was preaching it that it wasn't connecting at all to where you all are in life. And yet often afterwards I'll have someone tell me how powerfully that impacted their life – and I'm reminded that I'm **merely a vehicle** for God to get His Word into your lives. He's the one in charge, not me.

I was raised right here in this church by two godly parents. They sincerely believed in God and we prayed before every meal and attended church and youth group every week. I certainly believed in God growing up but I also watched my dad work a full time and a part time job for many years and when he wasn't working for money he was often working around the house. There wasn't a lot of time when he was just sitting around doing nothing. And so from that I acquired a very good work ethic. As a young boy I always saw my dad as someone who could accomplish most anything if he set his mind and energy to it. Maybe some of you can relate to that experience. **But I never saw my parents seeking the Lord's leading or power to live their lives.** And so, that's kind of the way I've lived much of my life.

It was only as I began to study the Scriptures and particularly the life of Jesus that I began to realize that I was missing a pretty important part of how I was designed to live my life. I began to notice verse after verse which talk about the importance of letting God lead your life and you follow.

Isaiah 41:13 (NIV) *For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.* (if you believe in God why wouldn't you want God to take your hand and walk beside you. Every Friday I get to hang out with my 2 year old granddaughter, Audrina. And often I take her to

Cabela's where we go and look at the live fish and the many stuffed animals. Her favorite is the moose. But going into and out of the store she grabs my hand and we walk to and from the car. And that's one of the highlights of my week – to walk hand in hand with this precious little girl. And as we're walking hand in hand, I'm her protector and guardian. I won't let harm come to her. I put myself between her and any traffic approaching. God wants to be that for each of us every day. How awesome is that? Why wouldn't you or I want to take advantage of that?

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) *In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.*

So, if God wants to make my steps secure and solid, why wouldn't I want to seek the Lord for His plans for my life? After all, **Jeremiah 29:11** reminds us that God has wonderful plans for us in store and our part is to seek Him with all of our heart. And if we do that He promises to be found. It's not as if God is playing a game of hide and seek. He's right there waiting to be found – but we must seek Him.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV) *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

And **Ephesians 2:8-9** teaches us that we're saved by God's grace and not by our hard works. But right after that, we're immediately reminded that God has works for us to do now that we're part of His family.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Repeatedly throughout the Bible we are instructed to seek the Lord.

1 Chronicles 22:19 (NIV) *Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God*

Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV) *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

When you read through the Gospels you see Jesus following this exact pattern. He would often get up early in the morning to seek the Lord and His plans and directions for that day. (**Mark 1:35**)

Out of this lifestyle of continually seeking the Lord, he makes claims like:

John 5:30 (NIV) *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

That's a powerful principle and example right there.

1. An admittance that on our own we can't do anything.
2. Our response to that realization is to always seek to please our Heavenly Father.

John 8:28-29 (NIV) *"...I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.*

Because of Jesus' close connection with His Father, as a result of time spent with Him, he spoke the Father's words. And God the Father is always with Jesus.

Similarly with you and me Jesus promised us that he would always be with us as well.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV) *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Our Response to this:

What should our response be to knowing all of this?

- **Seek the Lord daily and throughout the day.** I think that's what Paul meant when he said: *"Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray continually,¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* You may not hear an audible voice but you may. If you're practicing walking by the Spirit of God inside of you, you'll begin to feel confirmation and leadings down deep. But begin to ask the Lord to teach you what His plans are for your day and to help you hear and understand His leading. Repent of any sins you may have because those can block you from hearing the Lord's voice.
- **Remember who's you are, who's with you and where you're going – then go serve others with His strength.** I get this point from a passage which explains Jesus' actions in washing the disciples feet in the Upper Room. It says: *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* **(John 13:3-5 (NIV))** Do you see that knowing where Jesus had come from, the power he had and that he'd be returning to the Father – it empowered and motivated him to wash the disciples feet. Similarly, Jesus has given all of His children the same power He had. In fact, Jesus said that his followers would do even greater things than He did. And as God's children and disciples of Christ, we know that God is our Father and that we will one day be going to live with Him forever – so we don't have to try to impress others. We are secure in Christ and that ought to free us to serve others needs so that Jesus is magnified. Find ways to share God's love and grace with others in creative ways and give the glory to Jesus.

- **Pray for and anticipate God's glory to be revealed in and through your life.**

In the hours leading up to his arrest, Jesus left the upper room and led his disciples into the Kidron Valley which was full of grape vines. And as he did so often during his ministry, Jesus used these vines as teaching opportunities and began to talk about Him being the vine and us being the branches. In John 15:5 he said that apart from connection with Him **we can't do anything.**

John 15:7-8 (NIV) *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

We are called and expected to be fruit bearers. I think being a fruit bearer is two fold.

1. We display the **character of God** as we learn to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, which is living inside of us.
2. We direct people's attention to God and God then works on their hearts and minds to be drawn into a relationship with Him. And this is all for the display of God's glory. This is a promise God is excited to answer in and through your life as you learn to depend upon Him and seek His leading for your life.

This Friday and Saturday we're going to be offering a very different Easter experience. We're calling it "**Hope Restored**". We realize that there's a lot of people feeling hopeless. We want to try to reach out to them and tell them about the great hope we have through Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins and thus eliminating the barrier that blocks us from having a relationship with God our Father. We want to tell them how God has great plans for their lives. But we realize we can't do this on our own. We've sought the Lord on this and am asking Him to draw those individuals to this who need to hear this message of hope. So, please pray hard this week that God might draw individuals to this and that God would give the hosts at the various stations the right words to communicate hope. And that God would take our efforts and use them in incredible ways.