

391: Friend of God

I am in the Detroit airport heading home from a great weekend with my friends at Cathedral of Life Christian Assembly in Providence, Rhode Island. Now I am home until I head over to the UK on March 27 to be with my UK distributor, Everlasting Books. I will publish my UK itinerary as soon as I receive it.

I have been thinking the last few days about how spiritual it sounds to say, "Lord, I'll do whatever You want me to do." It is what any good servant should say. Yet I wonder if saying that does not avoid a subtle truth about our relationship with God. What subtle truth, you may ask? Ah, to receive the answer you will have to read on.

FOREVER A SERVANT

I want to look at John 15:14-16 as we start this discussion:

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

There are many who are comfortable with living in an eternal state of servant-hood where God is concerned. I wonder, however, if that position doesn't avoid a deeper relationship that moves from service to friendship. When you are a servant, you do what you have to do. When you are a friend, you do what you choose to do because you love your friend. Yes, you may serve your friend, but that relationship is totally different than the master/servant.

When you are a servant, you do what you are told to do. When you are a friend, you do what is in your heart to do. This is why I think that at some point you must transition from only being God's servant to being His servant and friend.

FRIEND OF GOD

Notice that Jesus followed His remarks on friendship by reminding the disciples that they were chosen to bear fruit and not just be friends with Him. He also reminded them that God would answer their prayers that flowed out of their friendship with Him. So is it safe to say that your fruit and answers to prayer will do the same?

I am not trying to reduce God to the level of your "buddy" or "pal." Rather I am trying to elevate you, trying to deliver you from the mindset of a slave. When you are a slave, you wait to be told what to do. When you are a friend, you anticipate what you have to do and that makes you a good friend. I want to be a good friend of God, while still being His servant and Him my Lord.

So what will it be? Will you choose a life of servant-hood only or a life of friendship with the Lord? I choose friendship, realizing that the role of friend requires fruit and prayer. I think I have chosen wisely, and I invite you to join me in this major step as together we seek to serve Him and one another. Have a great week!

392: What's Bugging You?

My father had apple trees in his backyard and he was always fighting bugs that threatened his fruit. I don't have apples but I grow vegetables and I have to fight the same problem. Did you know, however, that you have the same problem, even if you don't garden or have fruit orchards? You battle fruit bugs all the time and may not even realize it. Don't believe me? I challenge you to read on and see if it's true.

WHAT'S BUGGING YOU?

We have been talking recently about the expectation and even the command that you be fruitful. In my purpose meetings over the years, I have identified three significant enemies, let's call them bugs, to your ability to be fruitful. Here they are:

1. Bug One: Fear - How many fears can you think of that prevent you from being creative? I can think of fear of failure, poverty, ridicule, family, culture, authority, inadequacy, and success. Can you think of any others? If you are going to express your creativity, you must face and overcome the oppression of fear. It will paralyze your efforts and cause you to procrastinate, hoping for a more opportune time. Remember what Paul wrote his disciple Timothy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV). If you are afraid, what are you prepared to do about it this week?

2. Bug Two: Comparison - When you look at what you do and compare it to what others have done, it can cause you to stop being creative. In your opinion, you aren't "as good" as the other person. Stop and think about that. What is good where creativity is concerned? Is creativity a process and can your simple efforts today lead to stellar creativity tomorrow? Is it wise to compare your initial or even mature efforts to what someone else may have spent a lot of time developing?

Paul described an important principle that he used when he looked at his work: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12-13). Why not do something creative this week and discipline yourself not to compare it what anyone else has done. Is it the best it can be right now? If it is, then I would say you have done a good job.

3. Bug Three: Perfectionism - Way back in Monday Memo 154, I described the little old man that lives inside you, waiting to criticize and disqualify what you create because it isn't good enough. I know of only One who is perfect, and He is

God. While you should strive for excellence and your best performance, you can never expect it to be perfect. The pursuit of perfection is unrealistic and will hinder you from doing something great just because it isn't perfect.

I can't find a verse that talks about perfectionism, but I can find one that speaks to excellence: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23). Perhaps the distinction between perfection and excellence will help you do something this week that you haven't done just because it isn't the best that anyone can do.

DEBUGGING

It's time to debug your life and thinking so that you can be fruitful. Which one of the bugs above is bugging you? You will only debug by recognizing it for what it is: a hindrance to a God-ordained process. When you see that, you will look it in the eye and stare it down. You will learn to overcome your enemy, your bug, only when you know what you are dealing with.

I close by asking you another question: If you are a spiritual person and creativity is spiritual, and Jesus also commanded it, why don't you produce fruit more often and in greater quantities? I hope I have helped you identify some of the obstacles and I further hope that you will enter into a season of creativity that begins now as you finish this Monday Memo. Have a great and fruit-filled (and bug-free) week!

Feel free to write your comments to this entry on the site where it is posted.

393: A Fat Duck

I read this quote a few years ago from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." That is what I have tried to do through the Monday Memo and my purpose teaching: Inspire you to be who God created you to be, who you have always wanted to be. I have found, however, that some resemble the duck described by the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. I hope you aren't like this duck, but just to make sure you aren't, you had better read on.

GROUNDED

The story has it that there was a duck flying with other wild ducks when they flew over some tame ducks in a barnyard. The wild duck decided to stay with these tame ducks for a while. He stayed for an hour, a day and then several months. Finally, his wild duck cohorts flew overhead one day and beckoned the wild duck to rejoin them, which he gladly did.

He found, however, that his barnyard living had made him so soft and heavy that he could not fly high enough to join his former mates. So he dropped back into the barnyard, promising that he would get in shape to join them the next time. The next time

he heard them, he flapped his wings but could not even get off the ground. Finally, after many attempts, wishful thinking and a lot of broken promises, the wild duck became a domesticated bird that looked good but never went anywhere.

FLYING HIGH OR NOT AT ALL?

Did you dream of flying high at one time? Better yet, did you actually taste the heights you had determined to reach? Then where are you now? Are you still flying high or content with the safety and provision of the barnyard full of chickens and goats?

I am almost 59 years of age and am in the midst of a Doctor of Ministry program here in Pittsburgh. This summer, I will release my ninth book, with one more in the works for this year. I continue to produce regular Bible studies that are sent to 5,000 people. I want to fly high and refuse to forsake the heights of productivity for the safety of the barnyard, with its regular rations. I listen to music that inspires me, go to places that move me and read books that engage me. I want to fly high and far and I do things that contribute to those objectives.

Flying high can be dangerous, but the view is fantastic! This week, ask yourself some tough questions. Do you talk about flying, or do you really fly? Are you content with barnyard chatter and routine, or are you ready to flap your wings to see how high and far you can go? I hope you are ready to fly and that you will take others with you on the journey. I look forward to seeing you in high places. If you settle for the barnyard, we won't be meeting any time soon. Have a great week!

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394: Sit Down!

It's been a great stay in the UK and I thank my hosts, Dave and Pam Graham of Everlasting Books, for taking such good care of me. Before I pack for home, however, I need to write this Memo. It's been eight years since I started writing the Memo and every time I sit down to write, something comes to me. This week's theme came this morning while I was writing next week's Bible study. It's nice when I can use one thing for two purposes, but it doesn't always work like that.

I realize that you are just dying to know what this week's topic is, but you know the rules. You have to read on if you want to know.

BREAD FOR YOU, BUT FIRST. . .

In John 6, Jesus had a massive crowd following Him and He asked Philip how they could possibly feed all those people, about 5,000 in number. Jesus wasn't looking for information or ideas; He already knew what He was going to do. He was testing Philip to see what he would suggest and, of course, he had no ideas, commenting that eight month's wages would only give everyone a snack.

Andrew, perhaps jokingly, said that there was a little boy who had five loaves and two fish but that certainly was not enough to feed the crowd. It was then that Jesus went into action. It was in what He told the people to do first that gave me the idea for this Memo: Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them (John 6:10).

Before Jesus would give them any bread, which was symbolic of His own life that He likened as bread from heaven, He ordered the people to sit down in a grassy place. It was then that I saw this for the first time in the context of Psalm 23.

... YOU HAVE TO SIT DOWN

To hear from the Lord, you have to sit down and quiet yourself. You can't be running here and there, hoping to catch the Lord on the fly. You have to sit down. I wonder if you don't know your purpose or aren't more productive because you don't know how or simply don't take time to sit down. Perhaps a refresher on Psalm 23 will help you this week:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet water, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:1-6 emphasis added).

God will make you lie down in green pastures and, once you recline, He will give you bread -- whatever it is that you need to sustain your life and purpose. So this week, why not take the time to just sit down? It's not very glamorous and I don't have any other suggestions except to take a pad and pen and write down what He says. If He can feed 5,000 from nothing once they sat, surely He can feed you when you do the same. As you do that, I am confident you will have a very good week!

395: Stand Up!

Last week, my title was Sit Down! This week my title is Stand Up! Sit down, stand up, sit, stand. Are you confused? What will next week's title be, Lie Down? Ah, this is the joy of being a serial writer. You can confuse your readers so that they must come back week after week to clear their confusion. Yet sitting and standing aren't really confusing at all, if you are willing to read on. If not, then you may just want to go for a walk.

KNOCKED DOWN

In Acts 26, we read Paul's account of his Damascus road experience to King Agrippa. We know that Paul was knocked down to the ground by a bright light from heaven, a light that temporarily blinded him. The light was intense, for it shone more brightly than the noonday sun in the Middle East. That is the kind of intense light of understanding that God can shed on your purpose.

There are many people who, when God "knocks" them down, want to remain down. It is comfortable and for some a super-spiritual experience. The Lord had Paul (then Saul) on the ground but did not keep him there for long. Rather than have me recount the story, let me include it for you to read yourself:

"On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you" (Acts 26:12-17 emphasis added).

Did you see it? After Saul was down, the Lord commanded him to get back up, to "stand on your feet." He may be telling you to do the same thing.

STANDING UP

You sit or lie while you are seeking, but you stand when you receive. You humble yourself and lay low while you search for God, but you stand up when you find Him. Why do you stand? You stand to signal you are ready to go. You stand because the God of the universe knows your name and is speaking to you because He has something for you to do! You stand because one always stands in the presence of royalty. You stand to say, "I am ready, Lord, to do Your will right here and right now!"

So are you lying down, sitting or standing? If you are seeking purpose, you can do either of the first two. If you have found it, then you must stand. Stand at attention, ready to go and do. Stand facing God's face, so you can not only see His words, but catch His facial expressions as well. When God speaks, you don't judge His words. You act!

So this week, choose a position and be serious about whichever one you choose. If you seeking, seek with all your heart. If you are hearing, then stand and go. It's that simple. Whatever position you find yourself in, I trust you will have a great week!

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