

Saturday, August 8

Acts 4:32—5:11 *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.* (v.32)

What led the early Christians to believe that their possessions were not their own to use as they please? What was the logic behind the love that caused to them to turn their incomes from asset sales over to the apostles?

I don't know for sure. I speculate that the disciples believed it was God who gifted them with the materials, knowledge, creativity, opportunities, and individual potential to allow them to obtain income. Perhaps they figured that effort and the willingness to risk on occasion were their only contributions. Probably they believed that all acts, including financial transactions, should reflect the loving will of God. And who knew the will of God better than the apostles?

If I believe that my income is largely a gift from God, I will not claim rights to it but will see its proper allocation as my duty to God. In the absence of the apostles, I need to approach that task with a spirit of love, obedience, prayer, and humility.

Judges 9:22-25, 50-57; Psalms 87, 90; John 2:13-25

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Sunday, August 2

Mark 3:20-30 *"but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."* (v.29 NIV)

I cannot imagine the enormity of the sin of blasphemy, nor can I imagine the terrible consequences to the soul of committing that sin to the end of its earthly life. The soul willingly and with foreknowledge rejects God's offer of forgiveness for sins and in so doing rejects God and salvation. More narrowly focused, the blasphemer may attribute evil to Jesus as the Pharisees did, claiming that he had an impure spirit.

God loves every soul unconditionally. Every soul is precious. Christ is so enamored of souls that, metaphorically, if he were a shepherd, he would leave his flock of 99 to go in search of the one that wandered away and was lost. I feel great sorrow for those so misguided that they reject the opportunity to live in joy eternally. I believe the Lord leads me to pray for these souls and to reach out to them, hoping they reevaluate their lives and turn to God. I rejoice with God over souls that return to Him.

Judges 6:1-24; Psalms 93, 96; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Monday, August 3

John 1:1-18 *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* (v.12)

For many years, I accepted this amazing gift. I figured I could escape hell—if by a hair's breadth—by merely believing. That was good enough for me. And I could turn my attention and efforts to the world.

How foolish. I missed so much joy and subjected myself to so much unnecessary anxiety and grief. As I approached middle age, God began to show me the benefits in this life of a radical reorientation of my habitual nature. I learned that Jesus called this reorientation "being reborn" and that it is a lifelong process, not a single act of assent.

Seeking union with God's will is vastly more satisfying than pursuing success according to the world's standards. Even when the objectives of God and the world correspond, acts done for the love of God are more fulfilling. I discovered that actively loving God with all my mind and heart brings joy and exultation; that prayer changes me for the better; that making difficult sacrifices for love brings its own immediate and long-term rewards. And there is so much more.

Judges 6:25-40; Psalm 80; Acts 2:37-47

Tuesday, August 4

Judges 7:1-18 *The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'"* (v.2)

William Henley, the author of *Invictus*, tells me that I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul. Indeed, modern culture celebrates strong leaders who step up when things are difficult and meet challenges all by themselves with resolute hearts and strong convictions of their personal invincibility. I have found it tempting, therefore, to take charge and do it my way, especially in crisis conditions.

But God's ways are not always our ways. Gideon's seemingly impossible victory over tens of thousands of enemy troops demonstrates this in dramatic fashion. Had Gideon done it his way, it is likely he and his men would have perished. Clearly, Gideon was not the master of his fate, the captain of his soul.

Too often, hubris rather than God has been the support of my resolute heart and the source of my conviction. Doing it my way and abandoning the search for God's will has been an invitation to heartbreak. I am learning to listen with humility to God communicating His will directly (intuitively) and through godly advisors, Scripture, and tradition.

Psalm 78:1-39; Acts 3:1-11; John 1:19-28

Wednesday, August 5

Psalm 119:97-120 *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.* (v.105)

This verse suggests that Christians are on a journey to union with God, which may explain why disciples initially were called followers of The Way. It reminds me to reflect on my spiritual growth, which I understand to be a lifelong active process directed toward becoming the image of God rather than achieving a static state of being.

I am led to understand that my life is a journey up a path that is obscure, narrow and rutted with trials and temptations. Otherwise, a lamp would be unnecessary. In my case, the spiritual journey has been interspersed with great joys and long periods of dry uneventfulness. Nevertheless, I must be unswerving in my pursuit of the goal of conformity to Christ, my model.

Finally, I cannot imagine myself becoming the completed image of God—perfect as God is perfect—while still earthbound. And even in heaven, I believe the quest for godlike perfection will continue because God is infinite and eternal.

Judges 7:19—8:12; Acts 3:12-26; John 1:29-42

Thursday, August 6

Judges 8:22-35 *No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god...* (v.33)

The theme is familiar. God saves a person or a people from an undesirable fate and later is abandoned as the one saved turns to other gods.

In my case, there were two reasons for my drifting away early in life. The first was my habit of taking God for granted, believing God existed and would save me, but considering Him irrelevant to most of everyday life.

Second, the allure of much that is not God attracted me. I did not appreciate that many of the world's glittering promises were shining baubles of great cost but little value. I finally realized that God was letting me find out for myself how my other gods were benefiting me long term. A life review left me feeling empty: "Is this all there is?"

I found methods to help solve this problem that are, unfortunately, hard for me to implement well. I work to maintain habits of praying to God frequently, listening for Him, demonstrating my love for Him by serving others, and practicing His presence as often as possible every day.

Psalm 145; Acts 4:1-12; John 1:43-51

Friday, August 7

John 2:1-12 *What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.* (v.11)

As a young Christian, I loved God's miracles. I loved to read about them, meditate on them, and talk to others about them. Just as they nurtured the faith of the early Christians, they strengthened my faith. (Jesus turning water into wine remains one of my favorites.)

However, my guides on the journey towards union with the Trinity made me question the wisdom of my continued boundless fascination and involvement with miracles. God's miracles, while good in themselves, are not God. Union involves loving God with all I have, following His will, and loving my neighbors as Christ loves them. Nowhere in that list is the necessity for miracles.

I learned that miracles may create awe and wonder, which may or may not lead to love of the one who performed them. But miracles and awe and wonder are not ends in themselves; they may create distractions and hubris in the beneficiaries and witnesses. Also, I should remember that even Satan can create signs and wonders that imitate miracles.

Judges 9:1-16, 19-21; Psalm 88; Acts 4:13-31