

It's Time to Rediscover the Simple Blessings of Life

Psalm 16

James 1:2-4

Some of you got up this morning and had a leisurely breakfast. You enjoyed some time reading the newspaper. Then you got ready to come to church and here you are...relaxed and ready for worship.

Others of you had a decidedly different experience. The alarm clock startled you awake and you jumped out of bed right into a wet hairball the cat coughed up during the night. The kids are running around with jelly on their faces and holler as you try to get them into the bathtub. As you choke down your own coffee and cold doughnut you wonder why you even bother with all this production every Sunday morning. Eventually, everyone is in the car...and here you are – frazzled beyond belief and maybe not really in a worshipful spirit.

I invite all of you to try something this morning. It's called centering prayer. We all have times when we need to push aside the things of the world that call our attention away from an intimate experience with God. We need a basic tool that can help us re-center on the One who can give us peace and re-order our life. So, we're going to try centering prayer for a minute right now.

Centering Prayer:

- Close your eyes and take a deep cleansing breath, then exhale slowly;
- Think of God and how much you love Him and about His deep love for you;
- Choose a sacred word that best describes how you want to be in your relationship with God (e.g., shalom, peace, love, quiet, divine, Lord);
- Let that word be gently present as a symbol of your desire to be completely and utterly present and alone with God;
- When your mind begins to wander, recall your word and allow it to help re-center your spirit on God.
- Eventually, your spirit will calm enough to present yourself fully to God, and you will be able to feel His Spirit commune with yours.

Now that you know how to do that, when the world seems to be going at breakneck speed around you just stop and practice your centering prayer.

It's amazing to me how out of control we can get sometimes. Right now, for many people the world around them seems out of control. We are told incessantly that the economy is in the dumpster. Some have lost their jobs, and even those who haven't seem to be tightening their financial belts. The financial worries spill over into a myriad other parts of life – car payments,

mortgage payments, college loan payments, credit card payments, medical bills...the list can go on and on.

In times like these, most of those who are feeling that things are out of control are feeling that way because of the way their lives are linked to finances. We tend to carry too much debt to pay for things that we don't really need (as Dave Ramsey says, "to impress people we don't really like").

Others are feeling overwhelmed because the wrong people and activities are driving their lives.

Throughout history, tough times have had the effect of calling people back to the basics. And maybe it's time for we who call ourselves Christian to move that direction. It's time to reclaim the simple blessings of life.

Listen again to the words from James 1:2-4:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

James reminds us that tough times are an opportunity for us to return to the Lord so that he can help us endure and grow our faith. Notice he says that when our faith-assisted endurance has a chance to grow there is nothing else that we need. In other words, spiritual growth and maturity are much more valuable than the things of the world. They are a blessing to you.

If you need help being reminded of life's simple spiritual blessings and the positive effect they can have on your mind, body and spirit, just go to the psalms. For instance, listen to this song of praise David wrote to the Lord:

Psalm 16 [Bracketed words are elaboration.]

Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge. [We cannot hide in our jobs or our stuff] I said to the Lord, "You are my Master! Every good thing I have comes from you." The godly people in the land are my true heroes! I take pleasure in them! Troubles multiply for those who chase after other gods. I will not take part in their sacrifices of blood or even speak the names of their gods. [The 1st Commandment is there just as much for us and our sanity as it is to glorify God. When we have too many masters, or the wrong masters, our lives become chaotic.]

Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine. The land you have given me is a pleasant land. What a wonderful inheritance! [All that we have that blesses us comes from God alone.]

I will bless the Lord who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. [All of the other things we serve as false masters do nothing to comfort us at night...they only weigh on our mind and fret us.] No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. [God is the only one who will be with you forever. Your employer may cast you aside. People you thought were your friends may desert you. But your relationship with God will stand forever.]

Don't let the Enemy drag you into a poor mindset that only perceives the gloomy, cynical side of this life that God has blessed you with.

Deuteronomy 28:47-48 calls our attention to the dangers of wallowing in the world's pessimism:

If you do not serve the Lord your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received, you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you. You will be left hungry, thirsty, naked, and lacking in everything.

Friends, it's time to allow the Holy Spirit to freshen your view of the world around you. Ask the Spirit to take away your desire for the worldly things that bind you and weigh you down. Replace those burdens with the lighter basic blessings of life.

Seek to find joy and peace again in the simple – simple relationships, simple activities, simple pastimes, simple foods, simple worship and a simple relationship with Christ.

Sit on the back porch with some friends and just enjoy the pleasant weather. Notice again the smell of newly mown grass and recall the simple pleasures of childhood. Take a kid fishing and participate in the joy they find in catching a fish – no matter what the size.

Take a stroll with someone special and hold their hand.

Enjoy the taste of a crisp apple or the sweetness of a cool watermelon.

I want to encourage you, in the face of hard times be careful not to allow the Enemy to cast a pall over your life. Instead seek out the simple joys all around you that perhaps you had forgotten.

I want to close with a thought from Alistair Cooke, though it was penned sometime before the 1970's the words are still relevant today:

“In the best of times, our days are numbered anyway, and so it would be a crime against nature for any generation to take the world crisis so solemnly that it put off enjoying those things for which we were presumably designed in the first place. . . I mean the opportunity to do good work, to fall in love, to enjoy friends, to sit under a tree, to hit a ball and bounce a baby.”

The world is still the Lord's. His creation is full of wondrous blessings and simple joys; reclaim them and give Him praise.