

Sayings

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When we take up our cause, we lay down our cross.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. Isa. 53:7

Reflection: In all of us there is a need to be understood, a desire to be valued, and a wish to be vindicated. The Cross will deprive us of each. Such times are difficult and painful, so much so that we grow wearied with the suffering, and impatient with the Lord. We begin to defend, and justify, and explain ourselves to those who oppose us. But, in so doing, we imprudently grant ourselves, as it were, a stay of execution... the very purpose of the Cross.

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It is a terrible temptation to be relevant, productive, influential, and powerful. It is evil when we, in any way, use others to accomplish those ends.

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many." Mt.20:28.

"Do you understand what I have done for you? Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." Jn.13:14-15.

Reflection: We must neither be solicitous toward the prominent, nor presumptuous with the simple. Both are exploitation of another for personal gain. Jesus, who emptied Himself of all status, and gave Himself for all people, calls us to imitate His humility by offering ourselves in loving service to every person, regardless his station in life... Or, ours.

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We were not called to be relevant. We were called to be revelatory.

But, God who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might declare Him to the nations...Gal.1:15-16

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God, but the One and only who is at the Father's side has made Him known. Jn.1:17-18.

Reflection: It will be those "at the Father's side", nearest His heart, who will make Him known to others.

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We were not called to be productive. We were called to be fruitful. Nowen

You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Jn.15:16.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Jn.15:8.

Reflection: We can accomplish amazing feats without God. We can build grand buildings without Him; draw large crowds, amass extensive followings, raise enormous sums of money without Him. But, we can not touch a single heart, or convert a single sinner, or inspire a single saint without Him. If we strive hard enough we can produce almost anything without Him, except fruit.

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We were not called to be influential, that is, among men.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many of noble birth. But, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things-and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him....Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. 1Cor.1:26-31.

Reflection: In a world and a Christian culture which glorifies power, success, and influence we must remember that it far better to have influence with God than with man.

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We were not called to be powerful, that is, apart from weakness.

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, in hardships, in insults, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 1Cor.12:8-10.

Reflection: It is the Lamb, not the Lion, who was slain from the foundation of the world. It is the Lamb upon whom the Spirit descended and remained. And, it is the Lamb whom we follow...wherever He goes.

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Striving for anything except that which most surely reveals our Lord's true character and nature will most surely reveal our own true character and nature.

And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from a man's envy of his neighbor. Eccl.4:4

Those who speak on their own do so to gain honor for themselves, but the ones who work for the honor of the one who sent them are people of truth; there is nothing false about them. John.7:18

Reflection: We expend too much energy and effort on things that are of no consequence to God. They are only significant to us because we derive our significance from them. But, once we simply and singularly choose death to self we will find contentment, rest, and purity in all we undertake.

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True spiritual authority rests with those who have quieted, and stilled their souls; souls purged of any desire other than that of pleasing Him.

Your attitude should be the same as that of the Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And...He humbled Himself and became obedient to death-even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name...Phil.2:5-9.

My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. Ps.131:1-2

Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Mt.18:4

Reflection: Authority among men is relatively easy to attain. But, authority with God requires utter abandonment to His will and purposes, and grateful acceptance of that which His providence grants us, be it a crown or a cross.

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The world will inexorably be drawn to Jesus when they experience Him through us. That will occur when our ambition to work for Him is exceeded by our passion to be found in Him.

But thanks be to God, who.....through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 2Cor. 2:14-15.

"My prayer is not for them alone, but for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me." Jn.17:20-21

Reflection: There is nothing more appealing or more attractive than a life filled with the goodness of God.

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Godliness carries with it great influence because it both moves the heart of God, and inspires the hearts of men.

Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. The Lord will hear when they call to Him. Ps. 4:3

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Ps.51:10,13.

Reflection: Once, through virtue, we gain friendship with God, we will by that same goodness inspire others to follow Him, the friend of sinners.

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God is present to us in many ways. He is present through us in only one: holiness.

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. Heb.12:14

Reflection: He has chosen to make Himself visible through us. How repulsive He must appear when we are all that can be seen. Only when we surrender to the crucified life, and absolute death to self, will the Holy be revealed through the vile, the Perfect made known through the imperfect.

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If you are a leader you will inspire others to be like you. Because of this you should aspire above all else to be like Jesus.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock....All of you clothe yourselves in humility toward one another. 1Pet.5:2-3,5.

Follow me as I follow Christ. 1Cor.11:1

A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Lk.6:40.

Reflection: We inevitably become like our teachers. And, our pupils, for good or ill, become like us. So, we should learn from those who are most like Jesus. Then, go and teach others.

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Never confuse administration, which promotes order, with leadership, which imparts life.....because it is so willing to lose it.

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They were casting their nets into the lake for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left everything and followed Him. Mat. 4:18-20.

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mk.10:44-45.

I am the good shepherd...and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up. Jn.10:14,15,18.

Reflection: His light within us will inspire many to earnestly seek Him, forsaking all things and all others in their pursuit. That is leadership. All else is management.

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Those who seek to please God find that they are pleasing to many.

Those who seek to please people find that they are pleasing too many.

"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Even as he spoke many put their faith in him. Jn. 8:29-30

How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? John. 5:43-44.

Reflection: And, those who seek to please themselves find that they are pleasing to no one.

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The process of learning to please the Lord alone in all that we say, and do, and think is devotion. The journey is not measured as much by years, as by scars.

And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple...In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Lk.14:27, 33, 35.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1Pet.4:1-2.

Reflection: The steps of a righteous person are, indeed, ordered by the Lord. But, they are not counted by Him. Tears are.

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Lord, I asked, what is it that makes us look most like you? Scars, he answered.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But, rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1Pet.4:12-14.

I bear on my body the marks of our Lord...Gal.6:17

Reflection: Consider the saints who have preceded us, who still inspire us, and whose lives we wish to emulate. They all have one thing in common: They loved the Cross, and they lived the Cross.

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Once we make our only ambition, our one aim that of pleasing God, we have begun the way of holiness.

I have not come to do My will, but the will of the One who sent me. Jn.6:38.

The One who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him. Jn.8:29.

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God....Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more...It is God's will that you should be sanctified. 1Thes.4:1-3.

Reflection: Holiness is not something we simply lay claim to as to baggage. Were that the case, the sanctified life would then, impossibly, be divorced from the crucified life. We plainly can not grow in sanctity apart from the taking up of our cross daily, and following Him.

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On the path to holiness we must eventually yield ourselves entirely to the Holy Spirit Who then begins the deep interior work of 'weaning us from all desires and every affection beneath heaven.' St. Benedict.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. Ps. 73:25.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Mat. 6:19,20,21

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters- yes even his own life-he cannot be my disciple. Lk.14:26.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Col. 3:1-2

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes and a pretentious life, is not from the Father, but from the world. 1Jn.2:15-16.

Reflection: The Lord will ask each of us to forsake all that we depend on, and follow Him. Neither possessions nor people will be exempt from His request. Only then will we realize how attracted we are to the many 'loves' of this world, how deeply attached we have become to them, and desperately we attempt to deny it.

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The sanctified life and the crucified life are like a tree and its roots. That which is evident draws its life from that which is hidden.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1Pet.4:1-2

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...Heb.5:8-9.

So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live in him, rooted in him and built upon him, strengthened in the faith...Col.2:6-7.

Reflection: In the world what goes up must come down. In the Kingdom of God what comes up must go down.

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Do not seek to become well known, or well liked, or well thought of by others. Seek to become well pleasing to God.

Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Eph. 5:10.

So, we make it our aim to please the Lord...2Cor. 5:9.

Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things. Ps. 119: 36-37.

He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false in him. Jn.7:18.

Reflection: Once we determine to make His pleasure the sole object of our desire, the degree to which we are animated by our need for the approval of others will become painfully obvious to us. And, when our ministry to Him eclipses in import our endeavors for Him, much of what we now consider meritorious will then seem rather worthless.

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Before entry into our eternal home, the Cross is the inevitable destination of every follower of Jesus. We cannot make the long, difficult trek to Calvary in place of another. We can only assist them on their way.

Cary each others burdens, and in so doing you will fulfill the law of Christ. Gal.6:2

Reflection: Like Simon of Cyrene, we can, temporarily, carry another's burden. But, only for a short distance, and only when pressed into His service.

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A greater love for others is not the product of a greater love for ourselves. But, defensiveness, moodiness, and melancholy are.

Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: immorality, impurity...idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness,...and the like. Gal.5:13,19-21.

Reflection: If we find that we are ill tempered, impatient, protective, defensive, demanding, and given to a host of other disagreeable temperaments, be assured, our problem is an excessive love of self.

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One simple act of obedience will do more to commend Him to others than a thousand promotions, plans, or programs.

*"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."
Jn.17:4.*

"But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what He has commanded me." Jn.14:31

"For I did not even speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say, and how to say it." Jn.12:49.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray...a man crippled from birth was being carried to the gate and asked Peter and John for money... Then Peter said,"Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus, walk." And the cripple went into the temple courts walking and leaping and praising God...and all the people were astonished and came running to Solomon's Collonnade...When Peter saw this, he addressed the crowd.....and many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. Acts 3:1-12; 4:4

Reflection: We will almost surely miss the mark if our aim is to do that which brings God glory, rather than to simply do God's will. As it was with Jesus, God is magnified through our obedience.

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Neither solicit words of encouragement, nor despise words of rebuke.

Let a righteous man strike me-it is a kindness; let him rebuke me-it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Ps.141:5

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Prov.27:5-6.

Reflection: We do, genuinely, need encouragement. But, we far more need the Cross. It would be better never again to hear a word of reassurance than to be separated for one second from the power of His Cross.

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In our walk with the Lord, we will receive both honor and vilification. We should be moved by neither.

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. 1Cor.4:3-5

Reflection: We do not commend ourselves for any accomplishment which God's grace through us has achieved. Nor do we condemn ourselves for any sin which His grace toward us has forgiven. Why then give heed to any one else who does?

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We should learn to accept equally accusation and approbation, derision and acclaim, honor and dishonor.

As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way....through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on...2Cor.6:4,8-9.

Reflection: Irrespective anyone's assessment of us, the truth is we are never as good as our admirers believe, and we are far worse than our detractors contend. Therefore, neither despair over disapproval, nor delight over endorsement are ever warranted.

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The longing within us to become like Jesus is a desire inspired by grace best nurtured in a community filled with grace.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom.1:7

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus...Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus. 1Cor.1:2-3

To the church in Corinth, with all the saints in Achaia: grace and peace to you...2Cor.1:1-2.

To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you...Gal.1:3.

To the saints in Ephesus...grace and peace to you. Eph.1:1-2.

To all the saints at Philippi, together with the overseers, and deacons: grace and peace to you. Phil.1:1-2

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: grace and peace to you. Col1:2

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 1Thes.1:1

To Timothy my true son in faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1Tim.1:2

To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace ...Tit.1:4

To God's elect, strangers in the world...Grace and peace be yours in abundance. 1Pet.1:1-2.

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. 2Pet.1:1-2.

To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come...Rev.1:4.

Reflection: Just as a tree yields more fruit when planted in an orchard as opposed to a pot, so we also yield more spiritual fruit when planted amongst our brothers and sisters - God's garden.

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Communities are just as dependent upon grace to be conformed to His Image, as are individuals. Our need for His grace corporately is as desperate as our need individually.

All the believers were in one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles testified to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. Acts 4:32-33

Reflection: No individual can become Godly apart from the grace of our Lord. Human effort will leave a Christian frustrated, striving, and ultimately defeated. In like manner, Christian communities, absent grace, will suffer the same fate.

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As we are conformed to His image in our minds and hearts, we will also be conformed to His image in our ways and deeds.

"Don't you know me...even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Jn.14:9-11.

Reflection: What we do with our lives is the most compelling decision we will ever make. But, it is only eternally significant within the context of who we are becoming. If we are becoming like Jesus, what we do will reflect who He is.

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Should we ever accomplish anything great in the eyes of men we should consider ourselves for what, and who we truly are. We are, and always will be, unprofitable servants simply doing our duty.

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." Lk.17: 10

Reflection: No act of humble obedience, whether great or small, goes unnoticed by God. Nor does any act of self-glorification, whether great or small.

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I will be transformed, as we are transformed. I will not attain to the full measure of the stature of Christ unless, and until we all do. Nor, should I wish to.

But, God has combined the parts of the Body, and given greater honor to those parts that lacked it, so that there would be no divisions in the Body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other..1Cor.12:24-25.

In humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil. 2:3-4.

And what more shall I say.....Others were tortured...some faced jeers and flogging, while others were chained and put in prison...they were sawed in two....they were destitute, persecuted, and mistreated...these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had something better planned for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Heb.11:32-40.

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the whole Body may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and becoming mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Eph.4:11-13.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name... I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love which surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled with to the measure with the fullness of God. Eph.3:14-19.

Reflection: Our union with Him and with each other is organic, living, and fully interdependent. Mindful of His Body, the condition of our brothers and sisters, both near and far, should become the paramount object of our prayers, encouragement, and generosity.

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The spirit, which today entices a man to make his mark, is the same spirit which tomorrow will entice him to take the mark.

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves.....Gen.11:4.

Reflection: Never underestimate the deceptive power of pride, or the degree to which it is present in us.

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In the pattern of Jesus, our selection of coworkers should be a result of intense supplication rather than intense scrutiny. The Father will tell us whom He has chosen for an assigned task. But, like Jesus, we too may end up with a Judas. Or, a John.

One of those days Jesus went to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them whom he also designated apostles: Lk. 6:12-13.

Reflection: God selects His servants as He wills, and rarely will they meet our expectations, standards, or specifications. But then, we must be quite a disappointment to others, as well.

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Frustration in any spiritual endeavor is a certain indication that our aim is to please ourselves more than God.

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose which prevails. Prov. 19:21

Abraham fell facedown and laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old?" Then he said to God, "if only you would bless Ishmael!" Gen17:17-18.

Reflection: Once we content ourselves in the providence of God, and exchange our anxiety for adoration, we will never again be troubled by appearances or self doubts.

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Rarely can we know anyone's true motives, and never should we presume to. It is a grave deception to believe that we possess the ability to discern the intent of another's heart, and a sure sign that we have lost sight of our own.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Mat.7:3-5

Brothers, if someone is ensnared in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently....But, watch yourselves, or you will also be tempted....If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Gal.6:1-3

Reflection: Love, which invites us to lowliness of mind, will guard and guide our giftings. It will give us eyes to see the promise in others, and the weakness in ourselves. The pure and humble, those filled with contrition and compassion can, on occasion, discern the secrets of others, but scarcely will, and never aspire to.

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The world, and now sadly much of the Church, tells us to love ourselves, accept ourselves, find ourselves, enjoy ourselves, fulfill ourselves, enrich ourselves, empower ourselves, esteem ourselves.

But, the Lord simply tells us to deny ourselves.

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it". Lk.9:23-24

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. In Him you were circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ. Col. 2:8,11.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight 1Cor.3:19.

Reflection: It has been said that the most effective lie is the one which most closely approximates the truth. Much of modern psychology, whether Christian or secular, is an unparalleled example of that axiom. The strength of its appeal is that it permits us to absorb ourselves in ourselves, which we are all too eager to do. But, while it has an appearance of godliness, it is thoroughly bereft of any converting power. There is no substitute for repentance. There is no substitute for forgiveness. There is no substitute for the Cross.

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It is a dreadful thing to quote His words, and not keep them. Worse still to actually believe His words, and not do them.

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...But, everyone who hears My words and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rains came, and the rivers rose, and the wind blew, and beat against that house, and great was its destruction. Mat.7:24,26-27.

Reflection: His words to us are not platitudes, or points for debate. They are, in sum and substance, the very power of God, not to be exploited or minimized, but to be unconditionally obeyed.

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Jesus did not purchase a ministry center, or a media center, or a counseling center, or a family life center, or a renewal center, or a worship center. All He purchased was a lost sinner.

If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.
Isa.58:10

You are the light of the world; a city on a hill which cannot be hidden. Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
Mt.5:14-16.

He will govern the peoples with justice. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed. Ps.9:8-9.

Reflection: As we build the city of God, let us not confuse those things for which we are asked to spend our money with the thing for which we are asked to spend our lives. The light from that city set on a hill does emanate from its structures, but from its inhabitants. It is a city of refuge for the poor, and the dispossessed; the afflicted and the oppressed; the helpless and the abandoned; the orphans and the elderly; and for those who hear and respond to their cries for justice.

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Just love the person in front of you.

Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep, and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? Luke 15:4.

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise". Lk.23:42-43.

Reflection: Even when His death was imminent, knowing that He was reconciling the entire human race to His Father, when the iniquity of all of mankind was being laid upon Him, He turned His attention to one, solitary, dying man hanging beside Him. And there, in that exchange, He taught one of His final and most poignant lessons: Regardless the size of the field, the harvest is reaped one, solitary, dying person at a time.

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How is it that we devote so much of our attention to those things which offend us, and so little to those which offend Him?

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Ps.139:23-24.

Therefore, confess your sins to each other, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. Ja.4:16.

Reflection: We are far too mindful of the wounds we have suffered, and ruefully oblivious to those we have inflicted. We seek healing above pardon, and our counselors before our confessors. We are losing our way; the way of the Cross.

*

The fire of God inflames, and illuminates, and incinerates.

Everyone will be salted with fire. Mk.9:49

Do not put out the Spirit's fire. 1Thess5:19

But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. Mat.3:11.

Reflection: His Presence will ignite a passion in our hearts for Him. It will sear the strongholds in our minds which have kept us from Him. It will expose our hidden sin, and reduce to ashes our carnal appetites. He is a consuming fire.

*

Suffering is not sent to give us tough hides, but rather, tender hearts.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other time you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison, and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property. Heb.10:32-34...

I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead...Phil. 3:10-11.

Reflection: Every heartache, every hurt, every trial, every disappointment, and even every injustice is an occasion to be conformed to His death, so that we might be like Him in this life, and with Him in the next.

*

Experience teaches us that unjust criticism, rejection, and accusations mark the path which leads to humility.

Wisdom teaches us that praise, honor, and acclaim point the way to repentance.

Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God.." Jesus answered, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must suffer many things...and must be killed...and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him saying, "Never, Lord. This shall never happen to you." Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan. You have in mind the things of men, not the things of God." Mt.16:16-23.

Reflection: We are never so vulnerable to deception as when approved. And never will a contrite heart serve us more advantageously as then.

*

Rather than desiring honor we should fear it.

Rather than fearing humiliation we should desire it.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ... If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory, and of God rests on you 1Pet.4:12-14.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy to suffer humiliation for the Name. Acts.5:41.

Reflection: Few of our brothers have fallen by reason of suffering. Many have stumbled as a result of celebrity.

*

We will surely see more conversions when the fervor with which we profess our beliefs to others in public is exceeded by the sorrow with which we confess our sins to God in private.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But, the tax collector stood off at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. Isa.66:2.

Reflection: It is not enough to be repentant. We must become penitents.

*

Godliness is conceived in the womb of suffering. It is brought to term through patient endurance.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and suffering. You know what happened to me and the persecutions.....I endured. Yet, the Lord rescued me from them all. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2Tim. 3:10,11,12.

Reflection: At the point of His most intense agony, in an attempt to ease His suffering, Jesus was offered a mild analgesic, wine mixed with gall. He refused it. We too, at a critical moment in our distress, will be presented with some type of sedative. But, for the Cross to complete its perfect work, we like Jesus, must refuse the anesthetic and endure to the end.

*

Gratitude in all things attests to our abiding trust in the Providence of God. It is the stitching in the cloak of humility.

*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1Thess.5:16.*

And we know that God makes all things work together for good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. Rom.8:28-29.

Reflection: Trusting acceptance of our past experiences and present circumstances, despite the difficulty, regardless the duration is meekness. Genuine thankfulness for each trial is humility. Gratitude strikes a mortal blow to pride and self-love.

*

Why, once called into ministry, do we find secular employment so onerous? Perhaps we would more eagerly engage in tent making if we realized for Whom we were making the tent.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children... Surely you remember our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the Gospel of God to you. 1Thess.2:6-9.

You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory. 1Thess. 2:11-12.

Reflection: The privilege of ministry is not that others support us, but that we, like loving parents, are allowed to provide for, and sacrifice for God's family. Our affection for those we serve makes any burden light, and any work joyous because it is done as if for our very own children.

*

Most of my trials have been self-imposed. The rest have been the Cross. Regardless, God has used them all to my profit.

I will walk humbly all my years because of the anguish of my soul. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. Isa. 38:15,17.

Reflection: Our most difficult experiences are normally the result of our own unfortunate choices. But, even disastrous decisions can advance holiness when confronted honestly, and entrusted to God.

*

Hard work is not a curse. Hardly working is.

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 2Thess. 3:11,12.

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...1Thes.4:11-12.

He who has been stealing should do so no longer, but must work with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Eph.4:28.

The scribe...the farmer...the engraver...the smith...the potter...All these men are skilled with their hands, each one an expert at his own task. Without them no city could be lived in, and wherever they stay they need not hunger. They do not occupy the judges bench, nor are they prominent in the assembly... yet they maintain God's handiwork...Sir.38:24-34

Reflection: Give no thought whatsoever to the sort of occupation He calls you to, whether menial or prestigious. Regardless the kind of work you do, labor as if it is the Lord Himself who employs you...Because, it is. And share with those in need as if it is the Lord Himself to Whom you give...Because, it is.

*

The secret of His life and ministry was His secret life and ministry.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest under the shadow of the Almighty. Ps.91:1

Yet news about Him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.Lk.5:15-16.

"But, when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Mat 6:5-6.

Reflection: Above all else seek to develop the hidden, interior life with God. It is there, in our private encounters with Him, and our concealed sacrifices for Him that we begin to grow in purity, charity, and sanctity.

*

Someday all of our works will become evident. Then we will learn one of heaven's secrets: That our most invaluable sacrifices for God were also the very ones most invisible to others.

Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven...When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do to be honored by men. I tell you they have received their reward in full. I tell you do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret...And when you pray, do not do as the hypocrites, for they love to be seen by men. I tell you they have received their reward in full. But, when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. Mat 6:1-6.

Reflection: An adventurer journeyed to a remote corner of the world. By chance he happened upon an isolated leper colony where he found a nun who for many years had been tending to the diseased and infirmed of the area. Though grotesque from the ravages of leprosy, she tenderly and compassionately touched each one of her patients- her brothers and sisters as she referred to them- washing their sores, bandaging their stumps, and soothing their hearts. At once revolted and amazed by what he saw, the man exclaimed, 'I wouldn't touch one of them for a million dollars!' The old nun, without hesitation, and without turning her attention from the rotting 'brother' in her hands, glanced up at her guest and gently replied, "Neither would I." unknown
To this day, no one on earth remembers that nun's name. But, it is certain that she is well known to the entire host of heaven.

*

The more deeply our lives are hidden with Christ in God, the more desperately will we resist any desire to be noticed.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ appears, Who is your life, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature... Col.3:3-5.

Reflection: This is how we will know that we are concealed in Him. When, though in our presence, it is truly His Presence that others experience.

*

I once said to the Lord, “Tell me something that I do not know.” And, He called out my name.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind...” Jer.17:9-10.

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults...Then I will be blameless; innocent of great transgression. Ps.19:12-13

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and mind.. Ps.26:2.

All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Pr.16:2.

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself. Job.10:23

In your light we see light. Ps.36:9.

Reflection: It is not wise to believe that we have achieved a degree of self-awareness given that we are so inclined to self-deception. It is only in knowing Him that we begin know ourselves. And, it is only in the radiance of His light that we discover both the extent to which iniquity is secreted in our hearts, as well as the surpassing mercy, abundant grace, and unlimited patience of our Lord Jesus.

*

If our knowledge of God were sufficient to fill the pages of a thousand books, failing meekness and gentleness, we will have learned nothing.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and gentle in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Mat.11: 29

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Mt.5:5

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle. Eph.4:1-2.

See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey. Zech.9:9

Reflection: The very redemption of mankind was accomplished, not by force, or strength, or knowledge, or any appearance of success as we define it. The Father’s desire to reconcile His creation to Himself was fulfilled through absolute surrender—to a cross. As it was for Jesus, so it is for us. The purposes of God are achieved through meekness, obedience, and death.

*

Loyalty and trust are near companions. One will not remain where the other is absent.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, or boast. It is not proud. It is not rude or self-seeking. It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs...It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1Cor.13:4-8.

No greater love can any man have than to lay down his life for his friends.

Simon, Satan has desired you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith not fail. When you are converted, go and strengthen your brothers. Lk.22:31.

Reflection: This is the unfathomable love of our Savior: That at the moment the cock crowed, just as Peter denied Him, Jesus looked into the eyes His terrified friend with such compassion and understanding, that Peter knew, in spite of his curses and cowardice, the Master still trusted him. That loving gaze transformed a rogue into a rock, an apostate into an apostle. We are called to no less with each other.

*

The glare of the public spotlight is often so blinding that we dare not continue our journey except on our hands and knees.

An argument started among the disciples as to which would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside Him. Then He said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you – he is the greatest. Lk.9:46-48

Reflection: The Lord does not highlight ministries as a reward. He illumines certain works so that through them He can reveal His heart to His family and to the world. We are never the intended object of any attention. Those we serve are.

*

**Complaint is the sound of surrender to self.
Silence is the sound of surrender to God.**

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His pleasure. Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a perverse and depraved generation...Phil.2:13-15.

When they hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly. 1Pet.2:23.

When He was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He gave no answer. Then Pilate asked Him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge-to the great amazement of the governor. Mt.27:12-14.

Reflection:

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If we choose to dwell with the Lord, we will have to live in abasement.

I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit...Isa. 57:15

If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him. Jn.14:23.

Reflection: His works are over all the earth, but He abides with the lowly, and humble.

*

It is better to be known well by a few than to be well known by many.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken. Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. Eccl.4:9-13.

The pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. Prov.27:9.

The next day, the great multitude who had come for the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming... went out to meet Him, and took the branches of palm trees and laid them out in front of Him. They began to shout, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.' Jn.12:12-13.

Now it was the custom at the feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested... The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "No! Crucify Him," they shouted. Mk.15:6,9,13.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lyconian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form.' Then some of the Jews came from Antioch and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. Acts14:11,19.

Reflection: Our standing in the court of public opinion is never evidence of God's pleasure or displeasure with us. Nor should we esteem it as such. God's gift to us is not popularity, which is fickle, but faithful friends who forthrightly convey His counsel, correction and admonition, as well as His kindness, encouragement and support.

*

Those in prison, the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the elderly particularly touch the Heart of God. To our immense shame, and His profound sorrow we have neglected them all.

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. Eze. 16:49

"He defended the cause of the poor and needy and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord. Jer.22:16.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the king will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me.' The righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we do these things for you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these the least of my brothers, you did for me.' Mat.25:31-40.

Reflection: We will truly love, and serve the least of our brothers when we no longer treat them as 'objects to which we do good,' but when they become to us, as Jesus said, His very Presence in our midst. 'Thomas Merton'

*

There are habits which promote virtue, quietness being the most profitable, and the least practiced.

In quietness and trust is your strength. Isa.30:15.

The fruit of righteousness will be peace. The effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. Isa.32:17.

When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Ps.4:4

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness....Ps.23:1-3.

Guard your steps when you go to the House of God. Go near to listen rather than offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God...so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. Eccl.5:1-3.

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak....Jas.1:19

Reflection: In silence we learn to prefer the sound of His voice to our own.

*

When we are defamed God is killing our reputation. Slander is the executioner.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.... Mat.5: 11-12.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself of no reputation, taking on the very form of a servant. Phil.2:6-7

It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe...We are fools for Christ...We are weak... we are dishonored. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. 1Cor.4:9-13.

Reflection: Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, and our early mothers and fathers in the faith understood and gladly embraced the secret of true power, all but forgotten in contemporary Christian culture: Our reputation and His cannot co-exist.

*

Self-pity is the gateway drug of the soul. Sympathy, both addictive and intoxicating, is its active ingredient.

We sent Timothy... to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we are destined for them. 1Thess.3:2-3.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature, and complete, not lacking anything. James.1:2-4

Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart...Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons...but God disciplines us for our good that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled, but healed. Heb.12:3,7,10-12.

Reflection: Self-pity speaks alluringly, but do not listen, even for a moment, to its enticements. It offers us excuses for our anger, anxiety and fear. It justifies our misbehavior. It lures us into self-absorption, self-analysis, and self-indulgence. It resurrects our past, distorts our present, and plunders our future. It is the most deadly of deceptions because it disguises itself as mercy, while secretly making a mockery of the Cross.

*

Few of us sincerely think more highly of others than we do of ourselves. But, we should sincerely pray to.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Phil.2: 3

Honor one another above yourselves. Rom.12:10.

My brothers, as believers in our Glorious Lord Jesus, do not show favoritism. Ja.2:1.

Reflection: When we are dismissive and disrespectful with some, but deferential and courteous with others we evidence by such partiality that we are proud, and the love of God is not yet formed in us.

*

The cross is often heavier when we are ignored, overlooked, dismissed, forgotten, and excluded. Though tears and not blood are shed, it nonetheless results in death. All the more then should we be thankful that we are deemed worthy to suffer in such manner.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Instead he chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. Heb.11:24-26.

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But, the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...2Tim4:16-17.

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him...Then all His disciples deserted Him. Mat.26:50,56.

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mt.27:46.

Reflection: It will appear at times that God is ignoring and neglecting us. But He is, in fact, closer to us than we realize. For, it is when we feel most abandoned that He is allowing us to participate more fully in the sufferings of Jesus, so that we may become more fully transformed into His image.

*

Where iniquity is the disease, mortification is the remedy.

Where pride is the poison, suffering is the antidote.

Where self-love is the cancer, obedience is the excision.

Where selfishness is the infection, generosity is the poultice.

Where bitterness is the lesion, gratitude is the ointment.

Where resentment is the injury, forgiveness is the dressing

*

Our need for inner healing is often nothing more than our need for inner healing.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. 1Pet:5:8-10.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right will you not be accepted? But, if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Gen.4:6-7

Reflection: We nullify the transforming work of the Cross when we attempt to avoid the reproach it imposes, and the wounds it inflicts. We abandon the Cross altogether when we venture, in any way, to preserve our lives.

*

Stillness of heart and peace of mind are not contingent upon what we have, but what we are willing to give up.

But, godliness with contentment is great gain. For, we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But, if we have food and clothing we will be content with that. 1Tm.6:6-8.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. Phil.4:12-13.

Better one handful with tranquility than two handfulls with toil and chasing after the wind. Ecc.4:6.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 1Cor.8:1.

The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble. Prov.19:23.

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for God has said, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you." Heb.13:5-6.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Phil.4:6-7.

Reflection: The soul is stimulated by complexity, but Godliness finds its contentment in simplicity.

*

When we give our money to the poor, much of it is wasted. Perhaps we would be less distressed over that if we first placed it in an alabaster box.

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them..."Do you see this woman? I came into your house and you did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman has not stopped kissing my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-for she loved much. But, he who has been forgiven little, loves little...Then Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.Lk.7:36-39,44-47;Mk.14:10.

Reflection: Sometimes the very gifts we withhold, believing them to be wasteful and reckless, the Lord would welcome as the extravagance of adoration.

*

Before we too hastily ask The Lord to conform us to His death, we should envision Him as He was at death; marred and disfigured, bruised and lacerated, contorted in agony, and mocked through it all. Then ask ourselves if we are indeed able to drink of that cup.

His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form marred beyond human likeness. Isa.52:14

I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death...Phil.3:10.

Then James and John came to Him, 'Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask.' "What do you want me to do for you?" He asked. They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Mk.10:35-38.

Reflection: We must never forget the severe cost of discipleship. And, we must never, like the prodigal, use our faith, our birth-right, to prematurely extract our inheritance from God. Once a follower of Jesus, the most priceless gift we will ever receive from Him is a cross, which takes little faith to claim, but an enormous amount to carry.

*

Pride has many offspring, all of them ugly.

Pride breeds strife...Prov.13:10.

Reflection: Lying, exaggeration, cheating, stealing, stinginess, criticism, slander, anger, irritability, impatience, judgement, envy, jealousy, arrogance, entitlement, defensiveness, rudeness, condemnation, condescension, favoritism, sensitivity, moodiness, exploitation, intimidation, control, manipulation, vanity, stubbornness, belligerence, talkativeness, religiosity, indifference, boasting, fear, anxiety, selfishness, possessiveness, self-protection, self-absorption, self-pity, self-importance, sectarianism, secretiveness, and hypocrisy are all the progeny of pride and self-love. What a frightful brood!

*

His power will flow through our hands when His compassion courses through our hearts.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick. Mt.14:14.

Two blind men were sitting by the road side and when they heard that Jesus was going by they shouted, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.' Jesus stopped and called to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 'Lord,' they answered, 'we want our sight.' Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him. Mt.20:30-34.

A man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said. "Be clean." Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Mk1:40-42..

As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. When the Lord saw her His heart went out to her and He said, "Don't cry." Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. "Young man, I say to you, Get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to His mother. Lk.7:12-15

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd....He called His twelve disciples and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. Mt.9:35-36,10:1.

Reflection: Compassion issues from the Spirit of God, sympathy from the spirit of man. One possesses the power to raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, to heal the sick, and feed the hungry. The other contains no power at all.

*

We will all, one day, be quite surprised to learn which prayers the Lord has heard...and which ones He has not.

Who are you to judge another man's servant? To His own master he stands or falls. And, he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Rom.14:4.

You then, why do you judge your brother? Or, why do you look down upon your brother? For we will all stand before the judgement seat. Rom.14:10.

Reflection: Do not be arrogant and judge others over matters which pertain to piety. God does not respond to the manner or method of our petitions, but to the motivation of our heart.

*

The rich young ruler would, quite likely, have followed The Lord had only he been asked to give his fortune to the ministry, rather than to the poor.

But, just as you excel in everything-in faith, in knowledge, in speech, in complete earnestness and in your love for us-see to it that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2Cor.8:7.

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.2Cor.8:12.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound to every good work.2Cor.8:7-8.

Reflection: There is a grace, which when received, profoundly transforms the motives for our generosity and enables us to give perfectly, with purity, sincerity, and liberality. 'See to it that you also excel in this grace of giving.'

*

I have been allowed now to pray for thousands of people, and have come to realize that I am not worthy to unfasten the sandal straps of any of them.

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Lk.7:28.

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Lk.18:16.

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and have revealed them to little children." Lk.10:21.

Reflection: They are, for the most part, unknown, unpretentious, uncomplicated and unremarkable-by this world's standards. But, they are the salt of the earth and the light of

the world; the ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom have been revealed, and they shine like stars in the universe.

*

All criticism is useful to those seeking Godliness. Even and especially our harshest critics assist us in our quest for purity of heart and holiness.

Agree quickly with your adversary...do it while you are still with him on your way, or he will hand you over to the judge, who may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Mt.5:25.

Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb.12:3

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Gal.2:11.

Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to make you beat me these three times?" Balaam answered, "You have made a fool of me. If I had a sword, I would kill you right now." Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes to see the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. The angel of the Lord asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me." Num.22:28-32.

Reflection: Sometimes very good and sincere people will suspect and impugn our motives. Very bad and cynical people will do the same. We must not, however, console ourselves by considering the source. In either case, it is the Lord, purging us of duplicity.

*

If the experience of Jesus is any indication, our deserts, filled as they may be with deprivations and assaults, are in fact, evidence of our Father's pleasure with us.

And a voice came from Heaven: "You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased. At once the Spirit sent Him out into the desert.... Mk.1: 11-12.

"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." So, Saul stayed with them and moved about Jerusalem freely, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Ceserea and sent him off to Tarsus. Acts 9:15-16,28-30.

"Who made you judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you did the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid...When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled and went to live in Midian.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. Gen.37:28.

Reflection: Just when we think we are fit and positioned for ministry, our Father sends us instead into a wasteland. And that is how we feel. Wasted. But, He is actually

qualifying us for His service in the same way that He prepared Moses, and Joseph, and David, and Paul, and His very own Son.

*

When carving out our niche in His Church, we take the enormous risk of severing a part of His Body.

But God, in fact, has arranged the parts of in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor...But, God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no divisions in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 1Cor.12:18-25.

It is true that some preach the gospel out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love...the former preach Christ out of selfish ambition...But what does it matter? The important thing is that Christ is preached. For this I will rejoice, and I will continue to rejoice...For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Phil.1:15-18,21.

Reflection: Selfish ambition has delivered more blows, inflicted more wounds and caused more division in His Body than any other single assailant. For His sake we must, each and every one of us, purge ourselves of this evil, and sincerely honor, protect, and prefer all in God's family, especially our weaker members.

*

Like John, the beloved, some of The Lord's closest friends are sent into obscurity, exiled to monotonous and menial tasks. However, it is just such desolate places that He is known to frequent.

After He dismissed the crowd, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. And when evening came, He was there alone...Mt.14:23.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went to a solitary place, where He prayed. Mk.1:35.

But, Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Lk.5:16.

Reflection: What we suppose to be a place of barrenness is actually one of solitude. There, He invites us to join Him in fellowship and communion with the Father.

*

We are all destined to hold a rank in Heaven. Unless we are kind to the insignificant here, we will be kind of insignificant there.

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done. Prov.19:17

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring, and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes.....have you not discriminated among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Rom.12:16.

Blessed is he who is kind to the needy. Pr.14:21.

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for His maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors God. Pr.14:31.

A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor. Pr.22:9.

"Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For, I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me, sick and you looked after me, in prison and you visited me. Mt.25:34-36.

Reflection: Try to understand the heart of our Lord: We give special honor, even reverence, to the poor and destitute, the marginal and contemptible among us because He so thoroughly identifies Himself with them. He is among us through them.

*

We should never presume to speak for Him if we are not prepared to die for Him.

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. Mat.24:9.

Brother will betray brother to death and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me. But he that stands firm to the end will be saved. Mk.13:12-14

You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And this gospel must first be preached to all nations. Mk.13:9-10.

Reflection: We would be less beguiled by visibility if we reflected more often upon our persecuted brothers and sisters who know full well that the platform on which they stand is actually a gallows.

*

Perhaps the most commonly heard question amidst the throngs following Jesus was, "Which one is he?"

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. Isa.52: 2

For you are not to be called Rabbi, for you have only one Master, and you are all brothers... The greatest among you will be your servant. Mat.23:8,11.

Reflection: No matter our position, rank, title, or gifting there should be nothing in our appearance or demeanor which distinguishes us, in any manner, as superior to anyone.

*

At times, those closest to us will be fully persuaded that our pursuit of sanctity is at the expense of our sanity. And, should our quest be motivated by anything other than a guileless desire to please God, they will ultimately be proven correct.

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were unable to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He must be out of his mind." And the teachers of the law said, "He has a demon." Mk.3:20-22.

Reflection: Unless our pursuit of God emanates from a simple and pure desire to love Him, we risk being driven to the extremes of idealism, legalism, or fanaticism; all of which are madness, and all of which have tragically discredited our Lord.

*

Our detractors are God's tutors sent to instruct us in the virtues of meekness, patience, humility, and long-suffering.

As David approached Bahurim, a man from Saul's family came out and cursed David. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, 'Get out, get out you man of blood, you scoundrel...' Then Abishai said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.' But the king said, "If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?' David said to Abishai and all his officials, "My own son, even my own flesh is trying to take my life. How much more this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for surely the Lord has sent him"...So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went, throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself. 2Sam.16:5-14.

Reflection: Even when it is within our power to do so, we should not attempt to silence our accusers, for it may very well be that the Lord has sent them to humble us.

*

Never did, or would Jesus leave His exhausted, sleeping disciples huddled in the wilderness in order to secure more comfortable accommodations for Himself, even when offered. Nor should we then ever request, expect, or accept preferential treatment for ourselves over another.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I need clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. The righteous will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to visit you? The King will reply, "I tell you the truth whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Mt.25:34-40.

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you...Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few. Mt.7:12-14

Reflection: The pathway to humility is narrow, and precipitously descending. But, it is clearly marked. It is marked by the respect and dignity we afford those who have little power and less influence; by the courtesy and deference we extend to those who have nothing apparent to offer, and by the attention we pay to those most easily dismissed. It is marked by the esteem we hold for those most objectionable, and the memorial we construct in our hearts for those least memorable.

*

Preoccupation with the enemy generally results in enemy occupation.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Rom.12:21.

He who seeks good will find goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it. Prov.11:27.

The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we looked the same to them... But, because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants shall inherit it. Num.13:32-33, 14:24.

But, I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Rom.16:19-20.

Reflection: The human personality is fashioned such: We become what we behold.

*

We will occasionally find our superiors lacking in virtue. However, this is no miscarriage of Divine order, for in God's kingdom and by His design, the greater is ordained to serve the lesser. Bearing this principle in mind will both predispose us to meekness when obedience proves difficult, and preserve us from arrogance when we ourselves are given some small measure of authority.

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But, you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But, I am among you as one who serves. Lk.22:25-27

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Jn.13:14-15.

The teachers of the law...sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. Mt.23:2-3.

Reflection: We must not become envious of, or impertinent with those who are in authority, even if their manner with us is harsh. Paul, himself, apologized for his honest but intemperate remarks to the very High Priest who had earlier ordered him beaten. All leaders, including the unkind, serve God's purposes. They are employed by Him to forge in us the very Nature of Jesus.

*

Survey the harvest, then go and labor amongst those who have no money. The Lord Himself will feed them...and us.

When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Lk.14:13-14.

Then He took the seven loaves and the fish, and when He had given thanks, He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Mat.15:36-37

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body what you will wear....But, seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you. Lk.12:22-23,31.

Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted.....for where your treasure is there your heart will be also. Lk.12:32-34.

Reflection: If He has given us His heart for the destitute of this world, He will just as surely give us all that we need to care for them.

*

If our most persistent petitions of Him are for anything other than love, we are distracted.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends. Jn. 15:13

Dear friends, let us love one another for love is from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God...Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is made complete in us. 1Jn.4:7,12.

The entire law is summed up in this one command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Gal.5:14.

Suppose one of you goes to a friend at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' I tell you though he will not get up because he is a friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. Lk.11:5-10.

For the Love of Christ compels us...2Cor.5:14.

Reflection: The Lord commended a man for his importunity and boldness, noting how tenaciously he implored his neighbor for help. As a result, he received all that he needed. And, what so compelled the man's determination? Though having nothing, his plea was not for himself. It was that he might provide for his friend, whom he loved.