



Forgiven. Accepted. Loved. So there!

I've just been through a rather heavy travel and work time. It was one of those times when the fear is that one simply can't get done all one must do. Now my schedule is better and everything is slower...and it's driving me crazy. Over the last few months I have begged the Father for more time, for a slower pace and for a little bit of breathing room. Now that I have it, I don't know what to do with it.

We used to have a German Shepherd who chased motorcycles. I have no idea what he would have done with one if he caught it. Well, I've caught the "motorcycle," and I feel out of place...sort of like I ought to be doing something else or, at least, something more.

Desert Spirituality

I've been reading a book about the desert fathers by Henri Nowen. The book is mostly the material that Nowen gave at a seminar at Yale Divinity School, and it has been a pleasant surprise. The book is titled, *The Way of the Heart, Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*. Let me share a passage:

"In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no phone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces. I give long, hos-

tile speeches to my enemies and dream lustful dreams in which I am wealthy, influential and very attractive—or poor, ugly and in need of immediate consolation. Thus I try to run from the dark abyss of my nothingness and restore my false self in all its vain glory."

Relearning Lessons

Every time I have time, I have to relearn some very important things. First, I remember that all the stuff that made me busy really wasn't that important. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10). In other words, in the silence I remember God is ultimately important.


I saw one of my old books, on a remainder table the other day, on sale for ten cents. I thought about how hard I worked on that book, and how important I thought it was when I wrote it. Now, they were selling it for ten cents. When I complained to God, he said I should be glad they could get ten cents.

Someone told me about a funeral director who closed all of his letters with "Eventually Yours." The truth is that the funeral director will be "Eventually His," and so will everyone. When one isn't so busy, one thinks about one's death and that has a way of putting things into perspective. John Wesley said, "God buries His workmen and goes on with His work. Hallelujah!"

Secondly, when I have time, I learn to face not only the reality of my unimportance, but I have to face the reality of my own sin. "Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips..." (Isaiah 6:5).

If you do what I do for a living, you find that people have a tendency to think of you more highly than they

...after God shows me that what I do isn't that important, after he reminds me of my sin and shows me my weakness, he laughs and hugs me.



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he asked me...

ought to think. If you read enough affirming letters, preach enough sermons, write enough books and say enough spiritual things, you begin to believe it. But when the storm dies down, you realize that God isn't impressed at all.

Oliver Cromwell, in a prayer he prayed shortly before his death in 1658, said, "Teach those who look too much on Thy instruments to depend upon Thyself.... And pardon the folly of this short prayer."

Thirdly, when I have time, I learn not only to face the reality of my unimportance and the reality of my sin, I face the reality of my own weakness. "I am like a man without strength" (Psalm 88:4).

Unimportant, But Loved

But finally and best, after God shows me that what I do isn't that important, after he reminds me of my sin and shows me my weakness, he laughs and hugs me. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

My friend, Jim Kennedy, I am told, was walking through a cemetery. He noticed the impressive tombstones listing all that those buried under the stones had done. One stone, however, impressed him. It gave a name, the date of birth and the date of death. Then there was one word: "Forgiven!"

That's what I'm going to put on my tombstone...with a little addition: "Forgiven. Accepted. Loved. So, there!"

I have some time and since God doesn't need my help for a while and since he loves me, I think I'll do something spiritual for a while. Maybe get a milk shake or read a novel or go for a walk on the beach. If you have some time and belong to him, you can do stuff like that, too.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown