

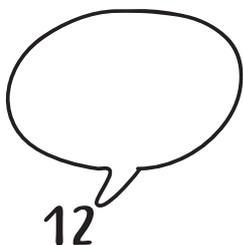
INSPIRATION

In one popular Christian song, Rich Mullens writes:

*Surrender don't come natural to me
I'd rather fight You for something I don't really want
Than to take what you give that I need
And I've beat my head against so many walls
Now I'm falling down... I'm falling on my knees*

These lyrics speak to the heart of many who believe, consciously or subconsciously, that we should want for nothing, simply based on our relationship with God. We errantly use scripture to justify beliefs that we should have 'the desires of our hearts', but conveniently overlook the need to yield our hearts to God. While God is intimately aware of our needs and desires, He is much more concerned about the condition of our soul and our need for a healing that is deeper than we even perceive.

Consider some of the spiritual giants of the bible that God himself held in high esteem: Moses - who was chosen to lead the entire Israelite nation out of captivity - never had it easy. Neither did Noah - who was found to be the only righteous man alive in his time. David was called a man after God's own heart. Yet even after enduring many years of persecution and ultimately ascending to the throne, he still did not find peace in all the things he had attained.



Finally, Jesus himself, the very Son of God - didn't live a wealthy life, lacking nothing. Why do we assume, or even hope we will? We tend to look at what we have and what we lack as rewards or punishments from God. This is just not the case. It may be a difficult thought to reconcile,

but God desires to meet our needs with His PRESENCE, not with His PRESENTS. The more we dwell in His presence, the more He illuminates our perceptions of what we need and want, gradually transforming them into reality.

APPLICATION

If we go through life holding tightly to the things WE want, we can't receive the things GOD wants for us – our hands are closed. Not only can we not receive from God with clinched fists, we also ultimately end up squeezing the life out of what we do hold. What you give to God, you keep. What you keep from God, you lose. (Ref. Mark 8:35) Live each day open-handed to the leading and presence of God. It's been said that the most miserable Christian is the one that just won't die. The very act of "seeking YOUR life" is exactly what will cause you to lose it. But giving it freely to God results in abundant life. Make the priority of your life giving more of it away to God each day, as opposed to living each day for how much you can gain for yourself.



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CONTEMPLATION

1. In what areas of your life are your fists clinched?

2. How have your perceptions of the rewards and punishments of God affected your faith?

3. What steps do you need to take to give more of yourself away?



ELABORATION

One of the costs of following Jesus has to do with the things that we have to give up as a follower of Christ. One example of these “things” that we have to give up has nothing to do with things at all. Being a follower of Christ means giving up revenge and hatred. Mark 11:25 says “And when you stand and pray, forgive anything that you have against anyone.” Jesus is also even more pointed about forgiveness in Matthew 6:14. Jesus is clear. It is costly to follow Jesus. It will cost you all of your hate, anger, bitterness, and vengeance. If you’re in the habit of holding on to things, then it is a good idea to look back on what Jesus told us about forgiveness. Have you had difficulty with forgiveness, and why was this important to Jesus? Is this a real cost?

Further Reading - Colossians 3:1-14; Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 14:33; Luke 16:13

PRAYERS & PRAISE



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