

October 2014

Fresh Fire Ministries

The Expository Teaching Ministry of Jay Duane Driver

“Choices”

“But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”
Genesis 2:17 (NKJV)

The very first choice given man by God himself would be a choice that he, and we, would live to regret. Adam and Eve’s decision in the Garden of Eden impacted much more than just their immediate generation, but all mankind until Jesus comes. It slammed shut the door of a perfectly pure and sinless relationship, and opened the door to a world that would now be tainted and colored by the human condition, which is to say, the old sin nature. Every single person on the face of the earth would now have the distinct commonality of being born in sin and shaped in iniquity. Our sins would now be forever before us until the time would come that God would send Jesus to save us. God in His power, sovereignty, dominion, and love had to give Adam and Eve a choice or He would have become to them no more than a puppet master who controlled the thoughts, actions, and will of His subjects. We would be forced to serve Him. To keep it real, we need God far more than He needs us. Yet He has given us a very powerful and valuable commodity; the freedom to choose.

The ultimately choice that must be made is to come to know God through Jesus Christ our Lord. To refuse to do so carries with it the consequence of eternal damnation. This choice must be made, if you have not already done so, today. “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15 (NKJV) In the midst of a world that was very similar in context and contrast as the world today, Joshua chose to stand, he and his family on the word and work of Almighty God. His choice was urgent in light of the uncertainty of the times in which he lived. That same urgency is upon on us thus necessitating that our choices be parallel and consistent with what God has ordained for our life. The advent of the technology age has introduced us with choices that we never dreamed would ever be available to us. Many of these choices are covertly cloaked in deception and seduction. This means that there are choices that we make today that can result in catastrophe on tomorrow.

Some may remember the days when there were only 3 television stations, 2 brands of blue jeans, 2 kinds of soda or “pop.” Life seems so less complicated. Fast forward to the 21st century and now we have a myriad of choices before us. The tragic consequence is that we have re-prioritized our greatest priority and in many cases, Jesus has now become far less than who He needs to be in our world, our country, and in our personal lives. “But know this in the last days perilous times will come, for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.” II Timothy 3:1-2 (NKJV) Let’s be clear. These prophetic words spoken by the Apostle Paul are clearly upon us in real time, and unfolding before our very eyes, at this very moment in history. The reality of this is not one soon to come; it has come and to be perfectly honest, has been upon us for the past several generations of mankind.

Please be advised that life is filled with choices. However, every choice that we make has a specific consequence associated with it. Some choices will bless your life, interrupt your life, burden your life, or end your life. In the event that you “choose” not to accept Christ, you have essentially predetermined where you will spend eternal life. Choose wisely. Choose life.

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“Addition by Subtraction”

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30 (New King James Version)

This is a very powerful statement made by John the Baptist concerning the priority of Jesus’ ministry in relationship to his own. John was called to pave the way for Christ. It was he who declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29 (NKJV) John, who was not “Baptist” but the baptizer, ministered the sacrament of baptism to Jesus in the river of Jordan by example, and later to many of His disciples. The devotional text serves as a point of transition for John and perhaps a valid point of application for us all. In order to receive more of Jesus in our lives it requires that there be less of “self” ordering, influencing, and controlling the affairs of our life.

When we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, transformation begins. While salvation is instantaneous, the manner in which Christ becomes the dominating influence in our life is progressive. It takes time and patience, but we must be willing to step aside and let Him take his rightful place. John the Baptist knew the power of this transformation and knew right away, what he must do. He had to decrease. In fact, it was quite clear at this point in John’s ministry that people were leaving John for Jesus. John’s disciples did not like to see him abandoned while the crowds flocked out to hear and see this new teacher. Simply put, it was no longer about John but Jesus. John knew that the greater one had come, and his role in God’s plan would now be diminished.

In order for Christ to be fully portrayed in our lives, we must become less in our own eyes. Perhaps the Apostle Paul said it best, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live. But Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) The Apostle John would eventually say to the church that the “greater” one lives in us which means that all else would be less. (See I John 4:4) Everything that we think, do, and say must become less in significance, less in focus, less in reliance. Christ will have preeminence in our life when we subtract more of us from the equation and add more of Him.

There is a worship song with lyrics that declare, “More of thee and less of me. Bind me closer Lord to thee. Blot out all iniquity, until there’s nothing left but thee.”

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“Discipline”

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” First Corinthians 9:27 (New King James Version)

Sin, trespasses, transgressions, and iniquities, while they do not originate in our body or flesh, soon become manifested there. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies.” Matthew 15:19 (NKJV) While our failings and faults present constant challenges; much of our temptation, which is a prerequisite to sin comes by way of our body. Unfortunately, as believers we quickly come to realize that we must still come face to face each day with the part of us that has been stained and tainted by the original sin of Adam, our flesh, even though we are clearly on our way to glory. In the meantime, and until we get there we must find the strength and power to discipline our body.

The struggle that we encounter is not new nor was it just recently discovered by the Apostle Paul. The text is only one of many where Paul eludes to the struggle that he and all believers face without regress. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” Romans 7:18 (NKJV) Paul realized as we must, that the flesh has to be disciplined and restrained if we are to bring glory to God and not bring reproach to our personal testimony. We must kill our flesh before our flesh kills us. Without the discipline prescribed in the word of God, our human efforts are fruitless and as a result, we will find ourselves repeating the same episodes that have haunted and hindered our walk with God since the time of our new birth. Our life becomes like the first track of a CD player stuck on repeat playing the same song; just on a different day.

The word discipline is translated in the King James Version to say, “keep under my body.” The phrase in the original text means “to strike beneath the eye, or to give oneself a black eye.” This expression is not advocating self-inflicted punishment to our flesh to discipline it, but the language that Paul uses here is a figurative idea, which illustrates the constant need for moral and physical discipline. Paul is simply saying that we cannot allow our body to get the upper hand on us; we must keep it under subjection. We must make our body and flesh a “slave” to the Holy Spirit in us and the word of God. In extreme cases requiring discipline we may have to “mortify” or put to death the deeds of our flesh in order to live a life free of bondage to sin. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” Romans 8:13 (NKJV)

Should we fail to obtain the level of discipline over our body that is required to be free, the consequences could very well affect our testimony to others. In short, our testimony runs the risk of being disqualified or invalidated. One of Paul’s greatest fears was that after having shared and preached to others he himself would violate the law of God and be considered a “castaway,” or “disproved or rejected for the prize.” The good news is that we have been given the power and authority to discipline our flesh and keep it under subjection, yet it is easier said than done. A consistent diet of prayer, worship, fasting, and reading the word of God will help us do what we cannot do on our own. A disciplined flesh always results in a maximized spiritual life and a maximized relationship with God.

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“Profit and Losses”

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Mark 8:36-37 (NKJV)

The worldwide economic collapse can be traced in part, to the accounting processes and procedures of numerous corporations and financial institutions across a broad spectrum of national and international interests. The demise of many of these organizations was ultimately determined by the outcome of the status of their profit and loss statement. A profit and loss statement is a quarterly or annual financial document that shows earnings, expenses, and net income. Profits should always outweigh losses. Should this be reversed, a business or organization can quickly find itself insolvent. Perhaps it is an appropriate analogy of the accounting that every believer must give as it relates to our spiritual investments and the priority that we have placed on our relationship with God. As sure as we live, the day will come that we must give an accounting of our life, stewardship, and discipleship to God. “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Romans 14:12 (NKJV)

Within the historical backdrop of His discourse with the disciples concerning the denying of self and taking up the cross to follow Him, Jesus uses thought provoking questions and economic terms to show the supreme value of eternal life. After more than 2000 years, these same questions are highly relevant given the environment of materialism and man’s insatiable desire to gain more through lust and greed. What does it really profit us to gain these things if in the end we become spiritually bankrupt? What good does it do to gain the world and all it has to offer and not gain eternal life with God? The world of pleasure centered on possessions, positions, or power is ultimately worthless and of no eternal benefit. “Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased. For when he dies, he shall carry nothing away. His glory shall not descend after him.” Psalm 49:16-17 (NKJV) The word “glory” as stated in this text is symbolic for wealth and high social status. To live without the profitability of godly priorities and principles will only ensure that we will die with ungodly losses and liabilities.

We have witnessed the demise of many individuals who would seem to have, based on the world’s standard; the most profitable life that you could ever imagine only to discover that their ultimate loss clearly outweighed any and everything that they could have gained in this life. Is it really worth exchanging one’s soul to obtain worldly profit? Because anyone who gains this world, has in the end irrevocably lost eternal life with God, with nothing to compensate for it. To gain the whole world and lose your soul is inexcusable and demonstrates a lack of being able to properly prioritize the assets and liabilities regarding the value of life and the ultimate purpose that God has called each of us to fulfill.

Whatever you do, don’t be caught bankrupt, insolvent, or with a spiritual accounting statement that is clearly out of balance where the priority of this world is more important than the benefit of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you want to profit eternally then you must lose your life and become free of worldly entanglements. “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it.” Mark 8:35 (NKJV)

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“52 Days”

“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived this work was done by our God.” Nehemiah 6:15-16 (NKJV)

God is not only able to rebuild places and things, but He is also able to rebuild people and dreams. The context of our devotional passage shares with us how God miraculously rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity in a mere 52 days. Protection from those outside of the city made it a necessity that the walls be rebuilt. Please understand that He could have done it instantaneously, in one day, or in whatever way that He would choose because He is sovereign. There is much revelation to be gleaned from the leadership of Nehemiah and how he can provide profitable and productive life lessons regarding how we can rebuild the broken, breached, and battered areas of our own life. As a result, some very powerful parallels must be offered for our consideration.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem only to find the walls that once stood tall, encompassing the city, had been broken down and burned. It caused him to weep and reveal his passion for his purpose. He responded to the king, “I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.” Nehemiah 2:5b (NKJV) It is imperative that we have the passion and desire to see our circumstance beyond the intense pain or immediate problem. Are you interested in rebuilding your life? Restoring what God has graced you to be and become. Without passion, you will not have the power to proceed. It will be virtually impossible to rise from the ashes of your most debilitating circumstance. Once your passion and purpose is assured and you have determined that you are no longer willing to remain in the state that you are in God will provide you with the vision to rebuild the broken places in your life. However, you must be careful. You can’t share what God is doing to help you rebuild your life with any and everybody. “Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; but I told no one what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.” Nehemiah 2:12 (NKJV)

An individual named Sanballat, when the rebuilding of the walls began, laughed and mocked Nehemiah. Make a footnote right here. He was a secret enemy. Poised to harm, hinder, and halt Nehemiah’s vision to rebuild the walls. This same spirit may rule and reign in the hearts of those who we believe are our closest allies or friends. It is best that we be aware. Not paranoid but discerning of those who may secretly pray and wish for our defeat or failure. Our confidence is in the undeniable fact that God will provide. Not only will God provide, but He himself will become our provision when and if necessary. “So I answered them, “The God of heaven himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build.” Nehemiah 2:20a (NKJV) When we establish our passion to rebuild the waste places God will prosper us. No matter the lot of the haters, debaters, and naysayers, God will work it out for our good and His glory.

It’s really not a matter of days, months, or years. When God’s timing is perfected, He will help us to rebuild. He will not forsake us in the midst of our most challenging times. For some of us it may be a present rebuilding, for others it may be a seasonal rebuilding; then for some it may be a generational rebuilding. Don’t focus on how long it takes; but focus on the one who is able to complete it no matter what it takes. Rest assured that the secret enemy will know and perceive that our work at rebuilding, restoration, and revival is from God and God alone.

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“Wisdom and Discretion”

“When wisdom enters your heart and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you.” Proverbs 2:10-11 (NKJV)

God makes wisdom available to us so that we may have stability and balance in our spiritual and personal lives. Those who have acquired wisdom have had their eyes opened by their experience. Here’s the picture. One of the first truths that we attain as children is to understand through knowledge that fire is hot. Typically, we look at it, and are intrigued by it, and then someone tells us it is hot. Then there is the episode in the life of every child where we “know” that fire is hot but when no one is looking, we see an exposed flame, we are drawn to it, we touch it, and we get burned. We then move from the knowledge of fire being hot to the understanding that it is indeed hot. Now whenever we see fire again, we apply the wisdom that was based on our experience and the last thing that we will ever do is touch the open flame. Wisdom has entered our heart concerning fire.

Most of us learn the lessons of life by bitter and often painful experiences. Some of us never learn anything at all from these experiences and continue to get our fingers burned even we have personally experienced the heat of the flames. It is our responsibility that we don’t compromise wisdom for the sake of something that does not benefit or bring positive productivity to our life. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom and in all your getting get understand.” Proverbs 4:7 (NKJV) Here the idea is that wisdom is the primary thing or the main thing that must be taken under consideration regarding any matters in this life that we may face. It is to be the first thing in rank, order, or time that engages us and connects us with the truth of any situation. We are to hold wisdom in full view at all times if we wish to profit from it.

Discretion will preserve us. Discretion is the common denominator to the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that are brought to bear in our life as a result of our experience. Discretion can be defined as “refraining from words or deeds that might lead to unpleasant consequences.” It means that we make decisions with care from a biblical frame of reference and with our eyes wide open. When we use discretion, we properly weigh what we are doing, where we are going, and the consequences of our actions. Not only the impact that it has on us individually, but we also appropriately evaluate the impact that our decisions will have on others.

Wisdom births discretion and discretion gives direction. Since we live in such a perilous world, we need discretion. If we use it properly, it will preserve us. The word “preserve” in the original text means that discretion will “guard, watch over, and keep us.” It is the picture of the watchman that carefully guards, keeps, and maintains the safety of someone’s most prized possessions. At the apex of our discretion are the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that we obtain from the word of God. These we come to know by our personal experience with Him. They are inseparable and must always be our frame of reference for living.

It is this episode in Abraham’s life in Romans chapter 4 where he describes Abraham’s body as being dead, along with the deadness of Sarah’s womb; nonetheless Abraham did not waver at the promise of God

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“Trusting God Without Evidence”

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going.” Hebrews 11:8 (NKJV)

It is virtually impossible to talk about the subject of faith without mentioning Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, and a man who God considered His friend. His inclusion among those who we find listed in the Heroes Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11 is not by accident but necessity. The classic example of the level of his faith is found in Genesis chapter 15 when God promises him an heir that would come from his own body. Abraham was around 75 years of age at the time, yet against all odds and in the midst of obvious biological impossibilities, Abraham trusted God. “And he believed in the Lord and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6 (NKJV) The Apostle Paul revisits this episode in Abraham’s life in Romans chapter 4 where he describes Abraham’s body as being dead, along with the deadness of Sarah’s womb, nonetheless Abraham did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief.

It is not unusual for God to promise us something that we can’t affix ourselves to in a tangible manner. It bypasses every component of our human comprehension. We are challenged to act on the promise when we have absolutely nothing to go on. In Genesis chapter 12, he calls Abraham from his family’s place of dwelling in Haran to go to a place that God promised to “show” him but He had not yet shown him. Genesis 12:4 says Abraham departed as the Lord spoke to Him. Our devotional texts’ rendering of the same event says that Abraham went out without knowing where he was going. No evidence, no roadmaps, no hints, absolutely nothing to go on. God did not point the way or turn him in the general direction. Abraham did not try to gain his bearings by looking for the North Star. He simply began moving towards the place of his inheritance without knowing the place of his inheritance.

Many of us have experienced putting something together without looking at the instructions, or the times when the instructions are missing all together. It does not stop us from forging ahead to complete the task at hand. We trust our instincts, our level of experience, and just plain common sense as flawed as it may be, that is all that we have. We don’t call the manufacturer or wait until customer service mails out a set of instructions that contains the evidence of what the completed project will look like. No, we forge ahead until we achieve the desired result. Yet when God promises us and speaks a word into our spirit that necessitates action on our part we need details, places, people, dates, times, colors, prices, this year, next year and the like. There is not much trust needed when we have all the details but it does make us feel a bit better about what lies ahead. That’s where we draw the line. Faith and trust is not about feelings it is about the facts contained in God’s word related to what He has promised us.

Abraham did not have all of the evidence when he was promised a son, but the day came when Isaac was born, just as God had promised. Abraham left Haran not knowing where he was going but he ultimately arrived there. “Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.” Genesis 13:12 (NKJV) Evidence makes faith unnecessary while the absence of evidence necessitates the manifestation of our faith.

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“Don’t Let Go!”

Then Jacob was left alone: and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, “Let Me go for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let you go unless You bless me!” Genesis 32:24-26 (King James Version)

The initial observation of our devotional text today reveals two very striking aspects in this particular episode of Jacob’s life. First of all, very little has changed concerning his character. He is still Jacob the supplanter, the schemer, the one who tricked his own brother out of his birthright. (See Genesis 27:36) The good news is that God will reveal himself to Jacob, just the way he is. He is no respecter of persons. Not only is that good news for Jacob, but it is indeed good news for us all. Secondly, and perhaps more revealing than his character is that Jacob is all alone. There comes a time in all of our lives when we must come face to face with God. We must come, all alone and all on our own; no prayer partners, church fellowship, or small group bible studies. Just as with Jacob, there comes a time when we must meet God face to face on His terms. Jesus grants us the access and the privilege to stand before God.

This is the second most significant time in Jacob’s life. He is on his way to meet with his brother Esau who had been victimized by Jacob’s craftiness. As he journeys toward reconciliation with his brother, he encounters God in a way quite unlike his encounter at Bethel. At Bethel he became a “believing” man, now, he would become a “broken” man. It would be a result of wrestling with a man who has been described as an angel in Hosea 12:4, but an even wider view is that Jacob wrestled with God. This encounter is characterized in biblical terms as a “theophany” (*theophany*). It is defined as “a manifestation or appearance of God in human form.” It was the desire of God to strip Jacob of “self” and invite him to total “surrender” that in spite of his past failings, God would still be willing to bless him.

Our personal one on one encounters with God don’t come without toil and travail. Jacob is willing to contend with God at a time of his most desperate need. He knows that God has willed to bless him, therefore he will settle for nothing less than his full inheritance. Jacob holds on as if it would cost him his very life. If he let’s go he will delay the blessing, deny the promise, and greatly impact his destiny that was birthed in the life of his grandfather Abraham. Jacob holds on and God causes him to confess who he is as a trickster and supplanter (v. 27) God then honors Jacob’s confession and commitment to hold on by changing his name to Israel. This name in the original text means, “God prevails.”

While Jacob may have prevailed, God ultimately prevailed. When we have a real encounter with God, we will never ever be the same. Perhaps you can recall the gospel song, “I know I’ve been changed. I know I’ve been changed. I know I’ve been changed the angels in heaven done signed my name.” Has He changed your name? If not, don’t let go until He blesses you.

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“God Never Gives Up On Us”

For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. Romans 11:29 (New International Version)

This is an extremely powerful passage. The original revelation and context is regarding the children of Israel, the chosen people of God. By application, it is to every believer who now through the blood of Jesus Christ has become the recipient of every promise made to Israel through the Father of the Faithful, Abraham. (See Galatians 3:29)

In spite of their rejection of the Messiah, multiple instances of disobedience, a hardened heart, and a plethora of other “issues,” God still remained faithful to Israel. The Apostle Paul reminds his young protégé in the Lord Timothy, “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself” (II Timothy 2:13 KJV). Now before we begin to look upon Israel with disdain, God has also been faithful to Gentiles (non-Jews) in spite of ourselves. He cannot respond to us outside of His character even when we have been unfaithful towards Him.

Every believer is gifted and has been called. Let's look at these two characteristics in reverse order. The call that we receive is three-fold in nature. God calls us out of, into, and in spite of. The word “call” in the original text is the idea of one being “invited” to a feast or perhaps a wedding. In this context, it is the divine invitation to embrace the salvation of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In our acceptance, He calls us “out of” darkness, “into” His marvelous light, and “in spite” of who we are and what we may have done. The word “gifts” in the original text means the “grace or gifts denoting extraordinary power that distinguishes every believer and enables them to serve the Body of Christ.” Every believer has been given at least one or more gifts for the work of the ministry.

With that said, I believe it is fair to conclude by illustration that God has made a very unique and invaluable investment in each of us. Any investor worth his or her salt always desires the proper return. Even when the stock goes up, down, stagnates, and even hits rock bottom the investor keeps on investing with the assurance that one day the return will exceedingly outweigh the value of the original investment. That is why God will never give up on us. Even when we have given up on ourselves, God keeps right on investing. He never has second thoughts about gifting and calling us. He never has regrets, even when we fall short of His expectations He keeps on investing. The investment can never be cancelled or revoked. He keeps on investing in us until He has received the return that will bring glory to His name. Lord thank you for remaining faithful to what you have invested in us.

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“Listen More, Talk Less”

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” James 1:19-20 (NKJV)

The art of listening is one that we all need to acquire. There is no doubt that there have been more times than none that we have been guilty of speaking too soon or not gathering vital information from simply listening before we formulated our response. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He often used the expression, “He that hath ears to hear let him ear.” He made this statement seven times while on earth and then another eight times from heaven as found in the book of Revelation. When we listen to what Jesus says we have a much greater opportunity to glean fruitful and beneficial revelation regarding what He has said. If we listen more, it will ultimately circumvent our tongue and our mouth, which is the delivery system that distributes the things that are in our heart. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Matthew 12:34b (NKJV)

Listening is the control mechanism that assists us in bridling the poisonous and venomous nature of our tongue. There are times that some things are best left “unsaid” because what we “say” does not provide benefit or blessing to those whom we are in communication with. It takes wisdom and discretion to determine when, where, and how we should respond to any inquiry or issue. Because the tongue is so unruly, we really have to be aware of the damage that we can cause if we speak too soon. “And the tongue is a fire, a world, or iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” James 3:6 (NKJV) Now this does not mean that the tongue does not speak good, but it is known to be notoriously inconsistent and has an unusual propensity to speak evil. However, if we listen more and talk less we can minimize the negative impact of our uncontrollable speech.

The context in which James pens this particular passage actually deals with the qualities needed by the believer when he or she is found in a trial or testing of their faith. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, know that the testing of your faith produces patience.” James 1:2 (NKJV) So within the big picture of our devotional passage not only is listening essential in our day to day communication but it also becomes an imperative when we are called to navigate through situations and circumstances that have us in a place that our faith and what we believe is placed in the forefront of our response. If we view the passage from this perspective, perhaps James is suggesting to us that we should be listening for the voice of God rather than offering up our own plans, platitudes, and proposals concerning our present dilemma. If we are talking, it may make it difficult to hear the voice of God and the ultimate resolution of our circumstance.

Furthermore, talking too much can breed wrath, malice, and destruction. As a result, our speech does not reflect the “righteousness of God.” All too often, unguarded speech gives expression to an inner turmoil in our own hearts. The most simplistic explanation of our text is to simply say that we would do well to simply think twice before we speak. We must learn to place a value and priority on what we say. Let’s get to a point where we speak a word “in season” that it will be timely, beneficial, and edifying to those who hear. “The Lord has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary.” Isaiah 50:4 (NKJV) on our behalf is called sanctification.

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"He Is Not Ashamed"

"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hebrews 3:11 (NKJV)

A work of art is being perfected in the life of every believer. At first glance, it may be hard to detect and for a time may even go, unnoticed because it is a work done by God himself within the heart, soul, and mind of those whom He calls His own. This act of God that is wrought on our behalf is called sanctification. Sanctification means to be "set apart, consecrated, or to be made holy." It is an ongoing process where God changes us and rearranges our lives, priorities, and behavior from the inside out. He sets us apart for service through the power of the Holy Spirit with the ultimate purpose to get out of us what He has invested and as a result, we bring honor and glory to His name. God through Jesus Christ is the "sanctifier" and the believer is the one that He "sanctifies." "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Hebrews 10:14 (NKJV)

The relationship between the sanctifier and those who are being sanctified creates a profound unity between Jesus and those He saves. The text declares that we "are all of one." While we are all descendents of Adam in the physical birth, in the new birth we become members of the family of God. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Romans 8:16-17a (NKJV) Since we are children of God and Jesus is the Son of God, in essence, as it relates to our new family, Jesus becomes our elder brother. It is a relationship that was conceived in love and manifested on Calvary's cross. It is a relationship of full and complete acceptance where we never have to fear rejection. Because we are being sanctified and become one in the family of God, Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren.

The term "brethren" is not gender exclusive. It encompasses all that are being sanctified whether male or female. This should never be a point of contention because the pivotal point of the passage is that He is not ashamed to consider us a part of His family. Perhaps you can recall as a child someone in authority maybe a teacher or your parents upon discovering an error or transgression that you committed say to you, "I am ashamed of you," or even more so, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." Do you remember how it felt? The pain, the anguish, the remorse and regret was often overwhelming. One of the reasons for this is that shame always carries a weight of guilt with it. It creates withdrawal symptoms from the party that is shamed, broken hearts, and hung down heads. Jesus says to us today that He doesn't feel that way about us. He has not one single ounce of regret or shame in calling us His brethren.

Now, if you have never done anything to be ashamed of, or that you are currently ashamed of then this will not apply to you. However, if you have, lift up your head, wipe away the tears, and come into the loving embrace of Jesus, our elder brother. You are a part of the family of God. Jesus cares and knows our every weakness, yet He is still not ashamed of us. He loves us in spite of what He knows about us. He knows things about us that no one else knows, the secret things that we dare not share with anyone. He has been touched with the feelings of our infirmities yet He is not ashamed of us. The only way that He will ever be ashamed of us is if we are ashamed of Him. "For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." Mark 8:38 (NKJV)

JANUARY 2012
Fresh Fire Ministries
The Expository Teaching Ministry of Jay Duane Driver

“We Are His Workmanship”

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 (New King James Version)

In chapter 2 of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus, he begins by describing the state of every individual born upon the face of the earth prior to their initial encounter with the grace of God. Paul says that we were all dead. The tools that were used to lead us to our eternal demise were “trespasses and sins.” (v. 1) As a result, we were habitually disobedient, conformed to the world system, and consistently fulfilling the lust of our flesh and mind. The record clearly states that we were in a total and utter mess. Our lives had no rhyme or reason.

Enter the mercy of God. “But God who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.” (v. 4) The mercy of God where He allows us to “miss” what we rightfully deserve; as a result of His great love for us, reaches down into the muck and mire of our mess, cleans us up and gives us something that we didn’t deserve; grace. It is at this precise moment that God saves us, places His hands on us, and begins to make out of us what He ultimately wants us to be. It is the picture of the potter and the clay where the potter patiently and lovingly places the clay on the wheel and begins to form it with his own hands.

Not only does He save us, but he also raises us. (v. 6) This He does that He may seat us positionally “in Christ” that we may walk in the newness of life. “In Christ” is the spiritual position of every blood bought and twice born believer. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) Christ’s death and resurrection for us and our identification with Him by faith allows God to begin and continue the new work in our lives until the day that He returns for his glorious church without spot or blemish.

We are His workmanship. The word workmanship in the original text means, “to make.” It is the picture of a manufactured product that has been specifically designed to meet the blue print and the desired objective of the manufacturer. God is the master designer and He works on us because of the value of the investment that He has placed in us. His desire is to make a good work out of us. This He determined beforehand and “ordained” it to be so. That is to say that, God has sovereignty and selectively planned and purposed the work that He would perform in our lives in advance. Through trial and trespass; suffering and sin; God desires to perform a good work in us. Work on us Lord until you get everything out of us that you have invested.

October 2011
Fresh Fire Ministries
The Expository Teaching Ministry of Jay Duane Driver

“You Will Rise Again”

*“Do not rejoice over me my enemy; when I fall, I will arise, when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.”
Micah 7:8 (NKJV)*

The contemporary application of our devotional passage can easily be assigned to anyone who has experienced the wrath of the enemy, fallen into unpleasant and potentially devastating circumstances, or who find themselves living in darkness and in need of a word or revelation from the Lord. Let it be known that whenever and however, you may fall, it is categorically and unequivocally guaranteed that you will rise again. How long you decide to stay down and in the midst of the event that placed you there is strictly up to you. You will rise again. “For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.” Proverbs 24:16 (NKJV) For the sake of clarification in this context, a “righteous” man is not gender exclusive but is defined as “a just person who is in line with God’s standards.”

The historical backdrop of the passage speaks directly to the ultimate restoration of Israel. They had sinned; just as we do. They had rebelled against the word of God; just as we do. They had lost their focus and chosen other gods or material things as their priority; just as we have. They had become willing victims of sin’s deceptions, disappointments, and distortions; just as we have. It was said that the moral climate of that day was so decadent that a man could not trust his friend or counselor. Family relationships had fallen into the deepest forms of dysfunction and disrepute. “For son dishonors father; daughter rises against her mother in-law. A man’s enemies are the men of his own household.” Micah 7:6 (NKJV) Israel had fallen; just as we have at some point and time. Thank God, that was not the end of the story.

“Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” Micah 7:7 (NKJV) This is the proper attitude and mindset for those of us, including Israel who find ourselves in any fallen condition. Who we look to when we fall will determine who we look to when we rise. When we rise, the enemy cannot rejoice over us. When we rise, we will be better than than we ever were before. When we rise although we were once in darkness, we can now experience the light of the Lord. These statements are a creed for crisis times. They make specific what the vision, attitude, and faith of a believer should be. If you want to rise again from being down then look up to the Lord. We look up in a spirit of repentance. Okay, you made a mistake. You fell short. You came short of the glory of God. You fell but don’t ever underestimate the mercy of God, you will rise again!

When you are down and fallen, there is only one place to look. “I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Psalm 121:1-2 (NKJV) God is able and willing to lift us when we fall. Falling is not an “if” condition. As long as we live we have the potential to fall, it is merely a matter of when. Yet, as long as we live, we have the irrefutable truth of God’s word that when we fall, we will rise again. *“We fall down, but we get up. We fall down but we get up. We fall down but we get up. For a saint is just a sinner who fell down, and got up.” Donnie McClurkin.*

January 1, 2011

Fresh Fire Ministries
The Expository Teaching Ministry of Jay Duane Driver

Expound-Exhort-Explore

“Stand the Storm”

I said, Oh that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert. I would hurry in my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm. Psalm 55:6-8 (New International Version)

This particular Psalm of David penned at a time when his son Absalom's rebellion was coming to a head in Jerusalem is called a maschil psalm (pronounced mahss' keel). It is written for instruction, as much a sermon, as it is a song. If we have been tempted to give up, to run away from our problems or storms that we encounter, then this psalm is for us. Most of us have been where David is in this passage. We have been hard-pressed by circumstances that are partly our own fault but which have passed beyond our control.

Storms always occur as a result of pressure. When a low-pressure system comes in contact with a high-pressure system it creates an atmospheric disturbance characterized by severe winds, heavy rains, hail, and often thunder and lightning. The high and low pressures that permeate the circumstances of life are inevitable. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” The word “tribulation” in the original text gives us the word “pressure,” which in turn creates storms. For the believer, storms can materialize in order to correct us, perfect us, or direct us.

Storms of correction challenge us to make an adjustment in our behavior, attitude, or obedience to God (Jonah 1:1-12). Storms of perfection occur at times to help us grow, mature, and endure as a result of our experience (Matthew 14:23-33). Then there are storms of direction, that appear to emerge out of nowhere but have a way of helping us to maintain our focus, purpose, and ultimately arrive at our God ordained destination (Acts 28:9-24) While we cannot clearly observe from the text exactly what type of storm David was encountering, it is important to note that there are unique times in our life that one storm seems to birth another. It is similar to the hurricane that spawns a tornado or the tornado that creates a thunderstorm. Then just perhaps, it is fair to conclude that sometimes we are the “I” of our own storm.

David desires to flee. If he had wings, he would fly away like a dove. Given a choice between two possibilities, he would rather the desert than the storm and tempest. Can we really blame him? Yet the time comes when we can't run or hide, but we must endure. It is then that we discover that we have an anchor in the promises of God, “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” (Hebrews 6:19a KJV) These are the words of a gospel song that says, “*Stand the storm, it won't be long, you'll anchor by and by.*” Be encouraged!