

AUGUST 2008 Week 1 TEACHING

Growing Down and Sprouting Up Thankful!

My friend from Liberia endured unspeakable tragedies before coming to this country as a refugee. Recently he received a phone call from a fellow refugee who, although maintains some degree of normalcy in his new life back in a more peaceful Liberia, still suffers from witnessing the decapitation of his father right before his very eyes. My Liberian friend has shared many stories like this with me, and each time I am amazed that he was able to come through his experiences mentally, and even more so, spiritually intact.

My friend, who for the sake of his anonymity will remain nameless, is a very intelligent man who describes to me in great detail the circumstances of his ordeal. Before meeting him I would have questioned my own constitution to withstand hearing such things. I have even wondered why God allowed this information to fall upon my ears, but I wonder no more.

On more than one occasion he has told me of his family's prestige and honor in Africa. They were pursuers of education and held it in the highest esteem. *"In the war..."* he says, *"my own father, a professor, was killed, and we lost our honor. When I made the decision to become a refugee, my friends would ask me, 'are you going to leave and lose your honor...are you going to just give up everything without a fight?' YES! I told them, because I would rather give up everything and still have my life."*

Time and time again, God spared him. *"...and now,"* he said, *"I am in this country. I work very hard. I pay my bills; I have a roof over my head and food to eat. And most importantly I can sleep without having to run for my life every night. People say to me, 'why are you always smiling?' I tell them because I know that I am blessed. I don't have a thing in the world to be sad about. I just love the life that God has given me."*

Isn't it something how extreme hardship can bring us to a place of tremendous gratitude? Surely, if anyone has the right to be desponded it would be my friend. And we have nothing like his excuse, yet many of us are toppled, in comparison, by slight emotional or mental discomfort. None of us relish the idea of our horizons of thankfulness being broadened by extreme circumstances of suffering and degradation. Most of us will never witness a time of such severity. Nonetheless, it is essential to our continued spiritual well-being to ensure that the reservoir of thankfulness in our hearts and minds is as deep as my friend's.

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Thankfulness is an emotional agreement of your faith. It is the explosion of grateful feelings when a connection between your soul and spirit is made regarding the promises of God. It also provides the platform to seek those promises. Often we witness that connection in others during praise and worship. They hear something in a sermon or teaching that sparks a memory of how our Heavenly Father has brought them out and delivered them in some way, and they cannot contain their emotions of thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6,7 NLT

6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done.

It is easy to become caught up in the emotional side of the state of thankfulness without giving much thought to the other side. Notice that I have used the word “agreement” in my definition of thankfulness. You may not have thought about the state of gratitude in this way, but it is one in which a mutual agreement exists. Verse 7 of Colossians, Chapter 2, admonishes “*Let your roots grow down...*” “*Your roots*” belong to YOU! And YOU make the choice as to whether or not to allow them to grow down. Our roots are our hearts and minds, the *plug* side of the connection. If all systems are “GO!”, when they grow down, they will be met with nourishment from Christ Jesus; the spiritual or *socket* side of the connection.

I use the words “*plug*” and “*socket*” because an electrical current and the visual of sparks flying is a very good analogy of what happens when we truly inhabit a spirit of thanksgiving. Stay with me now, and really make sure you get a clear understanding of this because I’m really praying that it will add to your spiritual stature in Christ.

Now, you have to ask yourself a question; if your roots are growing down...where is down? Is it down in the valley...down in your heart...down in your soul? No. Verse 7 tells us to let our roots grow down into Jesus Christ. Again, this is a choice. You must intend that your roots are growing in the direction of God’s love, and you must also expect that something will sprout up in return. To examine this further, let’s look at an account in John 9.

John 9:1-11 NLT

1 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 “Teacher,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?”

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3 *"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him. 4 All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me, because there is little time left before the night falls and all work comes to an end. 5 But while I am still here in the world, I am the light of the world."*

6 *Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smoothed the mud over the blind man's eyes. 7 He told him, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came back seeing!*

8 *His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Is this the same man-that beggar?" 9 Some said he was, and others said, "No, but he surely looks like him!" And the beggar kept saying, "I am the same man!"*

10 *They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?"*

11 *He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and smoothed it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash off the mud.' I went and washed, and now I can see!"*

Here was a man born specifically for the purpose of revealing the power of God in a very unique and healing way. This record in John 9 really brings to light verse 11 of Ephesians 1, which says that we each were *"predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:"*. There is no doubt about it; each of us has a purpose within God's masterful plan.

As the record continues, the Pharisees demanded to see this man who had been miraculously healed by Jesus. They wanted to question him, and when they did he told them exactly what Jesus required him to do in order that he might be healed. The Pharisees didn't believe his story, so they called in his parents.

John 9:19-23 NLT

19 *They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he see?"*

20 *His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, 21 but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. He is old enough to speak for himself. Ask him." 22 They said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. 23 That's why they said, "He is old enough to speak for himself. Ask him."*

Can you imagine such a thing? To have a son who has been blind all of his life and then witness him miraculously receiving sight. The appropriate response would have been to fall all over themselves thanking Jesus Christ for what he had done for their family. Instead they cowered in fear. They made a choice

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which signified that it was more important to hold on to what they knew than to release it for something exponentially better.

Some would say that his parents were being tested...that God wanted to see what they were made of. God already knows what we're made of; He created us and He knows everything. It is never about God's need to know something, for nothing can exist without His awareness. It is about His desire that we know ourselves. He wants us to acknowledge our strength, power, and our capacity to demonstrate a God-kind-of-love through the gift that we've been given. He desires that we appreciate the transformation from who we use to be to who we are now through Christ. Only then can we be truly anchored in faith.

Later in this record the son made a confession of belief in Jesus Christ, but the lasting legacy of his parents is their fear of the Jewish leaders. The difference between him and his parents in John 9 represent two very different scenarios; one of a connection being made and one where it was severed by fear. Fear...sin...same thing. Both will stop you dead in your tracks and cut you off from what you desire most.

Colossians 2:7 (NLT) tells us to let our lives overflow with thanksgiving for all God has accomplished through Jesus Christ ...for us and in us. "*Overflowing*" is a bountiful reality of which only "*overcomers*" can relate. My friend has made a connection to thankfulness that fuels his walk with Christ from day to day. I am so blessed that God allowed me to bear witness of this man's testimony. I have seen firsthand how it is possible to overcome unimaginable tragedy and garner an even greater walk with God.

When you and I make the decision to grow our roots in the right direction, Jesus Christ will hold up his end of the agreement. He will meet us with nourishment for our souls and cause our lives to blossom. There is never any deviation from that promise. Witnessing his faithfulness is cause to celebrate not just a few minutes on one day of the week, but everyday as we become grounded in the things of God. We don't ever have to worry that we'll come up short, because Jesus Christ will always meet us when we seek him with our whole hearts. He will nourish our roots as they grow down, and we can't help but sprout up thankful.

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AUGUST 2008 Week 1 Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Please forgive me for the things I have thought, felt, said, and done that were contrary to Your will, and hear me, O' God, as I make the desires of my heart known before Your throne. Help me, Dear God, to understand the impact of my thoughts, words, and actions on my spirit, and to reroute them so that they line up with Your Word. Show me how to recognize the greatness of the gift that abides within me; help me to design my life in such a way that I am governed by it. I know that You are aware of the circumstances I am facing today. You knew I would face them long before they confronted me. Deepen the well of my understanding so that I may learn the lesson they were fashioned to teach me. And as I learn, meet me in that place of spiritual growth and light, so that I may be filled to overflowing with thanksgiving. I pray these things in the powerful and precious name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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AUGUST 2008 WEEK 1 Scriptures:

Scriptures link to
[New Living Translation.com](http://NewLivingTranslation.com)

Day 1: 2Corinthians 4:15	Day 4: Colossians 2:7	Day 7: Colossians 3:17
Day 2: 2Corinthians 9:11	Day 5: Ephesians 5:4	
Day 3: 2Corinthians 9:12	Day 6: Psalm 106:1	

Spiritual Focus for the Month of AUGUST 2008:

The Choices of an Overcomer

WEEK1Prayer FOCUS:

To experience an abiding and deep sense of gratitude

(Remember to pray for those on the SMS Prayer List.)

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