

Learning to live *with* God instead of *for* God...

I'm sure you recognize the old proverb: "A picture's worth a thousand words." It's actually a Chinese proverb and I suspect that, like me, you have accepted its claim. Yet, I've smiled for too many cameras when I was anything but cheerful, to ever trust the appearance of a picture. In other words, pictures may speak, but they don't necessarily speak the truth. What you see is not always what you get.

With this in mind, I was fascinated to discover that the proverb was wrongly translated. The literal translation is: "A Picture's *Meaning* Can Express Ten Thousand Words" and the slight variation is enormous.

This childhood photograph of my dad and me dressed in our "Sunday best" has become one of the most full of meaning and enlightening pictures I've ever seen. Shoes polished, suit clean and pressed, and every hair in place, we stood erect until the moment had been immortalized on photographic film.

In recent years this picture's meaning has spoken volumes to me about the origin of my earliest, most deeply rooted and terribly distorted ideas about God, myself, and the how and why of living *with* God instead of *for* God.

Every week when I was growing up my parents would drop me off at Sunday School, always with the same instruction, "Now Fil, you've been taught how to act. You make sure

you behave. Don't you disappoint us." Besides my parents, I never lacked teachers and preachers, neighbors and relatives to instruct me in the mores and manners of living for God.

Is it then, any wonder that my childhood understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus and live in relationship with God was as simple as following the rules and acting appropriately? Sadly, as I grew older, that's what my life became: *an act*. Hooked on approval for as long as I can recall, the interior urgency to make my mark as a spiritual leader bore unintended by horrific consequences. I threw myself again and again into a whirlwind of activity that garnered praise and admiration. I became a player in the kingdom enterprise, gained the world, and lost myself along the way.



Years later I'd pen these raw and honest words in a book entitled *Running on Empty*.

To the casual onlooker, my life appeared quite good. But something was wrong inside me. My life had become a ghostly journey, as I maintained a deadly course with an incapacitated soul. I was obsessed with helping others have the kind of relationship with God that I had never known... My life was filled with doing things for God rather than pursuing intimacy with God...

A terrible incongruence in my life was causing the cheese to slide off my cracker. Although I knew facts and ideas about Jesus, I didn't know what it meant to be his friend. I had confidence in my ability to live *for* God, but I was clueless when it came to living *with* God. I could talk with others about Jesus, but I knew nothing about how to sit still long enough for Jesus to talk with me. I was comfortable living my life *for* God, but the thought of being alone with God was enough to keep me occupied, leaving no space in my life for living *with* God.

Had I stopped to ask Jesus about my life, I don't believe he would've tried to pull me away from all my activities, events, and people that summed up my life. I don't imagine he would've said the things I was doing were unimportant. Nor would he have suggested that I withdraw to a life of isolation and quiet contemplation far from the struggles that were burying me.

Instead, Jesus would've nudged me to shift the axis of effort in my life, to refocus the center of my attention, to adjust, not abandon my life's values. I believe Jesus would've urged me to



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not be so “worried and distracted” and believe him that “there is need of only one thing” (Luke 10:41-42). I believe Jesus would’ve assured me it’s possible for my activity *for* him to flow out of my life *with* him.

If there’s a single word that identifies how Jesus lived his life *with* and *for* God, it is: congruence. That Jesus lived an extremely busy life is indisputable. However, the busyness his living *for* God required never undermined his living *with* God.

No wonder Jesus posed these questions: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life...Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace... Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matt. 11: 28-30)

A Note From Fil:

There are several things I wish to say to you. However, none is more important than expressing my profound gratitude for your prayers, financial support, and personal interest in the work God has given Journey Resources to do. Thank you!

Would you please prayerfully consider two requests?

- Due to the gracious response of many friends, we made it through the summer months with a small reserve remaining in our account. Next month we’ll be asking our partners to

prayerfully consider making a pledge to support our work in the following year. Would you consider a gift today to help sustain us? No level of support could be too small to matter.

- Would you consider e-mailing us, indicating your interest in receiving a “Monday Morning Note”, via e-mail, informing you of opportunities for which prayer would be appreciated? Just drop me a note at: filanderson@triad.rr.com

May the love of God flood your life!

Fil’s 2005 Fall Calendar

September

8-11 Focus on the Family Conference, Colorado Springs, CO

14, 21, 28 *Running on Empty* workshop, Epworth United Methodist Church, Concord, NC

15 Wake Forest University, InterVarsity

16 Braveheart Men’s Ministry, Crossroads United Methodist Church, Concord, NC

18 Grace Community Church, Greensboro, NC

October

5 *Running on Empty* Workshop, Epworth United Methodist Church, Concord, NC

7-9 Wesley United Methodist Church, Winston-Salem, NC

12, 19 *Messy Spirituality* workshop, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC

14-15 Prayer retreat, Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, TN

23-28 Autumn Refresher Retreat for Spiritual Directors, Seabrook Island, SC

November

4-6 Men’s Retreat, Upper Room Church, Edina, MN

11-13 Men’s Retreat, Faith Community Church, The Woodlands, TX

15 Running on Empty Retreat, Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC

29-30 Leadership Forum, Youth For Christ, Baltimore, MD

Jesus, you have reminded me of my need to anchor my soul in a place of prayer. Free me from my restless activity, my slavery to the clock, and my habit of bobbing along the open sea when you have called me to be still. When I consider how you consented to enclosure in Mary’s womb, in a narrow manger, in a carpenter’s home, on a wooden cross, in the bread of Eucharist...my heart is moved to seek enclosure with you.