

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Submission
Mark 8:34-38
WRCoB 9.6.20

At the end of the age when all believers
Waited in line to get into heaven

God appeared and commanded
"I want all the men to form two lines over here."

"One line will be for men
Who were the head of their households."

"The other will be for men
Whose households were headed by their wives."

God continued,
"Women, I want all of you to report to St. Peter."

The women left and the men formed the two lines
As God commanded.

The line of men
Whose wives dominated the house
Stretched on endlessly.

The line of men who were head of their households
Had only one man.

God spoke to the first line.

"You men ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"I appointed you the head of the house
And you have not fulfilled your purpose."

"Of all of you
There is only one man who has obeyed me."

"Learn from him."

Then he turned to the lone man and asked him
"How did you come to be in this line?"

The man replied
"My wife told me to stand here."

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We continue our series on Spiritual Disciplines.

Today, we look at the seventh spiritual discipline
Submission.

Richard Foster, in his book,
Spiritual Disciplines writes

1

"Of all the Spiritual Disciplines none has been more abused than the discipline of submission. Somehow the human species has the extraordinary knack for taking the best teaching and turning it to the worst ends."

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With submission as their defense
Men abuse women
Adults abuse children

Bosses dominate employees

And governing authorities demand subservience.

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No, we tend to think of submission

As a passive stance in the face of injustice.

But that's not what I'm going to talk about today.

More marriages

More families

More congregations

More relationships in general

Would enjoy better health

By our willingness to submit to one another

Than insist on having it our own way!

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Surrendering our need to control

Over to God

Is a very freeing act.

So many have this need to be in control.

And yet, truth be known

We have little if any control over anything!

This tension between our need for control

And the actual lack of it

Is at the root of many people's problems.

Again from Foster

2

“The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today” (p.111).

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The Bible speaks of four areas of submission.

3

- Submission to God (James 4:7)
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Submit to our governing authorities (Romans 13:1, 1 Peter 2:13-14)
- Submit to the church (Hebrews 13:7)

I think rather than discussing this subject
With the idea that we are to submit
To the differing authorities around us

It would be of greater benefit to us
To flip it around and think of submission
As not having to have our own way.

Hear the difference?

We think of submission
As being passive toward someone or something
That lords over us.

Like we're being instructed to be a doormat
For everyone to walk on.

I don't see Jesus advocating something like that.

I believe he spoke out against the injustices of the day
But he was nonresistant to the forces around him.

Jesus saw that the way to a more equitable and just society
The way to more equitable and just relationships
Was not to force one's will on to someone else.

Jesus knew that ultimate power is found in love.

And love does not force its will onto others.

And so to better understand submission
Is to understand that what we're really talking about

Is this destructive need to control circumstance and people.

Our personal lives and the lives around us
Would be a lot happier
If we did not try to have our own way.

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My guess is that many of our personal problems
Stem from not getting what we want.

It is, as the clinical psychologist Gail Benner calls
An "if only" kind of mentality.

"If only" my spouse would do what I want
I would feel better.

"If only" I worked harder
I could have had that promotion.

“If only” I could retire
My life would be happy.

In other words, our sense of well-being
Is contingent on an outcome
Outside of my current life and circumstance.

An “if only” kind of attitude expects
People or circumstances to make me happy.

This way of thinking
According to Benner results in

4

- Delaying happiness until a future time
- Assumes happiness is not available now
- Believes that people and circumstances beyond our control are responsibilities for our happiness
- Wanting people to do or say what we want them to, rather than what they are actually saying or doing.

What begins to happen is rather than living in the moment
We live for some future time or event
When we finally get what we want.

The truth of the matter in this attitude
Is that we are never at peace.

We believe our external circumstances
Is the key to our well-being.

We say to ourselves
If they would do what I want them to do

Or if things would work out the way I want them to
Only then can I be happy.

Our sense of well-being links directly
To things we are not in control of.

Hence, it stresses, agitates, and disappoints us.

We are unhappy because we cannot have our own way.

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But if we can move from having to have our way
To acceptance of the reality that life flows on
And there's very little we can do about it.

That to live in the moment
To focus our sense of well-being
On ourselves and in the present

We begin to learn the true meaning of submission.

Not having to have our own way
Frees us to attain a sense of well-being
Not tied to people or things.

To live in the moment.

Reinhold Niebuhr's well-known prayer
Really speaks to this.

5

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot
change, the courage to change the things I can, and the
wisdom to know the difference.*

Usually those things that we cannot change
Are external in nature

They includes people and circumstance.

What we can change is within us
Our attitude and perspective.

Benner suggests we consider the following.

6

- First, **examine the content of your thoughts** and realize how much you are actually resisting reality. For most of us, our normal thought pattern is a running commentary on what we want or don't want, what should or shouldn't happen.
- Resistance to reality is expressed by some form of "but," in one's thinking, as in, "But I want..." "But we should..." **Replace "but" with "it's like this."** Just experiment with it and see what you discover.
- **Focus on your own inner experience** – feelings and bodily sensations – rather than on another's behavior. Meet all of your experiences with tenderness and compassion.
- **Realize that life flows**, things come and go, regardless of your personal desires. In this sense, you are just like a tree. Study a tree to see how it relates to what happens and apply what you learn to yourself.
- **Be with the reality of the moment.** See it in its amazing array of experiences. It is the only moment that exists right now, and it is as it is, not as you wish it to be. Any given moment is what life is offering you. If you want to be happy, your job is to receive and accept, not control and resist.

What strength we will find within us
Knowing that the world cannot shake the peace within.

What peace of mind we'd discover
Knowing people and circumstance cannot alter
Our trust in God.

Paul writes to the church in Philippi.

7

Philippians 4:11-12 NIV . . . For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² . . . I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Paul knew in whatever place or circumstance
The present moment found him
It was exactly where God wanted him.

It was where he needed to be.

The ultimate teaching, then
On the spiritual discipline of submission
Is to learn how to submit our will to God's will.

To learn that not having to have our way is a better way.

It is not an easy thing
To turn control of our life over to God.

It is easier to do so
When we realize we have very little control to begin with.

And the sooner we come to realize this
And to let go and let God
As the expression suggests

The sooner we discover contentment
In whatever place or circumstance we find ourselves.

As another hymn also suggests

8

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that Rock I'm clinging*

*Since love is Lord of heav'n and earth
How can I keep from singing.*

Not having to have our own way is the better way!