

THE BIGGEST TYRANT OF ALL

“...when each one knows the plague of his own heart”
1 Kings 8:38 (NKJV)

Before 911, most of us did not really understand the evil that some in the Muslim faith were capable of, but the tragedy of that day opened our eyes. We were horrified at the images we saw on television of innocent people dying at the whim of al Queda terrorists. We were shocked that such a thing could happen in the name of “religion.”

It hit especially close to home for us, as many people in our church and neighborhoods awaited news of what had happened to their loved ones. I have to admit that there was anger in my heart towards those who had committed this horrible act against our nation—anger that only the Lord in His grace could help me to put into perspective.

The events of 9/11 revealed the potential for evil that lurks in the hearts of men. But it is only God Who can help us to see this same deadly plague in our own heart. A plague is a disease that is infectious and eventually kills. It has its effect not only in our lives but also in the lives of all those around us. In time, the Lord helped me to see the plague of my own heart, and He did so through a Muslim lady named, Tahmira.

Tahmira works in a local store; that is how we became friends. One day when I was in the store I asked her how she was doing, and she began to cry. She told me how awful things were in her marriage. This gave me an opportunity to ask her about her faith. I said, “*Can’t you go to ‘Allah’ for comfort?*” I was grieved by her response. She looked at me with such emptiness in her eyes and said, “*I don’t get any help from my religion.*” How sad to be filled with such hopeless. It helped me to see the real evil behind the people responsible for 9/11, and it also opened an effective door for me to be able to share my wonderful Savior with my dear Muslim friend.

Afterwards I realized that there is something more evil than al Queda and Sadaam Hussein and that is the ugliness that resides in my own heart. If I let it, the plague of my own heart would be the biggest tyrant of all!

“Let the...meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord”
Psalm 19:14 (NKJV)

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MY NEIGHBORS

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”
Matthew 19:19 (NKJV)*

We really do not know how unloving we can be until we are put in a situation where we must love the “un-loveable.” I was tested on this a few years ago when a new couple moved in next door to us. Outwardly they were really hard to love. He had long hair and drank beer all day, she was not much better, and of course, they were not married. They were just not the kind of people that you would have picked as neighbors.

As a young mom, I felt it was my duty to protect my two children from evil outside influences—but how do you protect them from the neighbors? As it turned out, God really did know what He was doing when He moved them in next door—He was doing a work in my heart. He wanted to teach me what He really meant when He said that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

I have to admit that as I got to know them, they began to grow on me. But when my very impressionable 13 year old son wanted to hang out with them on Sunday mornings instead of going to church, that is when I started to panic. I wanted to ask my neighbor (in the name of the Lord of course) to stay away from my son who was already not too thrilled about being a pastor’s son. But instead God kept nudging me to invite them over for dinner, so that is what I did, and I am so glad I obeyed.

Not too long afterwards, while sitting in our house, my neighbor sat with my husband in tears. He told him that he was a back-slidden Christian, and that his father was a pastor. My husband asked him why he had walked away from God, and he said it was because of his father’s example—he was one way in the pulpit and another way in private. He told my son Jeremy, “you have the best dad, I see him come home and play baseball with you everyday. If I had a dad like yours, I’d still be walking with the Lord.”

He and his girlfriend eventually came back to the Lord and my husband got to marry them. My son learned a lesson through all this, but so did I. I realized that I would have missed out on one of the biggest blessings of my life if I had refused to love my neighbor. Isn’t it amazing how God works?

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BURNING CHURCH

*“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road
and while He opened the scriptures to us”
Luke 24:32 (NKJV)*

Kay Smith often shares that “*an unintended fire will soon become a pile of ashes.*” And what a great reminder that is for us to keep the fires within stoked and red hot for the Lord. After all, what good is a fire that has grown cold? And what good is a pile of ashes? In Revelation 3:16 Jesus laments, “*because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*”

In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, you read how Christian is drawn to a brightly burning fire. While he is watching, he notices someone throwing buckets of water on it trying to douse the flame, but it continues to burn with the same intensity. His friend, Interpreter, takes him around back to see why that is, and what they find is that there is a man behind the scenes who is secretly pouring oil onto the fire.

Luke reminds us in this passage that Jesus is the one Who tends the fire in our hearts, and as we walk with Him it is the Holy Spirit who is behind the scenes pouring oil on the flame.

I remember hearing of a church building that burned down one night. There was a Christian there who noticed a man in the crowd who had always boasted of his unbelief. He walked over to the man and said, “*this is the first time I have ever seen you interested in a church.*” His reply was, ‘*this is the first time I have ever seen a church on fire.*”

Charles Spurgeon said, “*get on fire for God and people will come out to watch you burn!*” Do we fail to attract others because our fire has gone out? Is there some poor soul who is wandering around in the dark because they see no light in our lives? Let us make sure we daily walk with Him and receive of His Spirit. That is what will keep the fire within burning brightly.

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AVOIDING ICEBERGS

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”
1 Samuel 15:22 (NKJV)

We all know that an iceberg sank the Titanic, right? But would you be surprised to learn that that is only partly true? Yes, an iceberg sliced a hole in the hull of that unsinkable ocean liner, but the reason that the Titanic actually sank has its roots in something else—a failure to listen attentively to instruction.

Harold McBride was the telegraph operator who was on duty that night. He was busy transmitting messages from well wishers until the wee hours of the morning. But, the monotony of hours spent sending and receiving things like, “*Aunt Flo, wish you were here,*” had an effect on him, and he was no longer paying close attention to what he was hearing. The incessant greetings had caused him to become dull and slip into “auto pilot.” It is because of this that he missed the warning that would have changed their course. Harold’s failure to listen and obey resulted in shipwreck, and the tragic loss of so many lives.

In 1 Samuel, Saul made the same tragic mistake by not paying attention to and obeying the commands he had received. This failure not only resulted in the shipwreck of his own life, but of the lives of the whole nation of Israel during his years as king over them.

As Christians we need to be careful that we do not make this same tragic mistake. We are called to obey the Word of God. Listening and obeying mean the same thing. When you say, “*Yes Lord, I’m listening*” are your actions saying, “*Yes Lord, I am obeying?*” James says we are to be “*doers of the word and not hearers only.*” A “doer” is someone who listens attentively. It is only by listening to and *obeying* the clear instruction given to us in God’s word that our lives will stay on course and we will avoid the tragedy of personal shipwreck.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”
Matthew 11:15 (NKJV)

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GET BACK ON THE HORSE

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord... though he fall, he shall not be cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand.”

Psalm 37:23-24 (NKJV)

One of my favorite activities as a young girl was horseback riding. I especially loved jumping. It was such an exciting sport, but one that could be very dangerous as well. The higher the jump the more likely you were to be injured. One day when I was attempting a jump that was very high, my horse froze and stopped dead in his tracks. Unfortunately, I kept going and was catapulted into the air, and over the hurdle. Afterwards, I lay on the ground stunned and in pain. As I slowly got up and started limping away, my trainer asked me—“*Where do you think you are going?*”

I thought that was a silly question, obviously I am done here! But she said, “*If you don’t get back on that horse right now you never will.*” She made me push through my pain and fear that day, and I am glad that she did.

I think of that lesson often in regard to the ministry. Being in the ministry is also an exciting and dangerous place at times. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, “*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed, we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken.*”

On those many dry, lonely, difficult, overwhelming, and painful days, when we are tempted to limp off saying, “*I am done here!*” we need to listen to the encouragement we receive from the Lord to persevere. How many times I have wanted to stop, but He tenderly reminds me that the blessings are just ahead. The Scriptures promise us, “*He who began a good work in you will complete it till the day of Jesus Christ.*” (*Philippians 1:6, NVJV*)

So we need to dust ourselves off and get back on the horse, praying as Amy Carmichael did:

God harden me against myself, the coward with the pathetic voice who craves for ease, comfort, and joy. Myself, arch-traitor to myself, my hollowest friend, my deadliest foe, my clog whatever road I go.

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WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

*“Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him,
“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me...
He who has seen Me, has seen the Father”
John 14: 8-9 (NKJV)*

Aunt Bessie was an infectious older woman who came to our house every week to teach the Good News Club. Her energetic and genuine love for the Lord held us kids spellbound as she brought the stories of the Bible to life for us. The beautiful bright flannel graphs that she used to illustrate Biblical scenes certainly helped—but it was her life that was the real inspiration.

Mrs. Vaughan was another godly woman who influenced my life greatly. She was my Sunday school teacher, and although you could not help noticing her saggy nylons each week, she was beautiful. Her sparkling blue eyes were full of the love of Lord—she was glowing for Jesus.

Today, as a pastor’s wife, I have to say that there is no one who is a greater inspiration to me than Kay Smith. Her steadfast love and devotion to the Lord has been a tremendous example to me over the years. She has truly “shown me the Father” by the way in which she has willingly allowed Him to use her in the ministry.

It is my desire that my life would be a reflection of the Lord to others as well. I want to be a godly influence. To be an influence means to have sway, and the ability to affect the way another thinks and lives. An influential person sets the pace and compels others to follow. To be a godly influence means that your *life* is an inspiration—the way you live spurs others on in their faith.

There really is no greater blessing than to meet a woman, who at one time had been in your ‘sphere of influence’ (whether in a Sunday school class or a women’s bible study) and to hear her say that she saw Jesus in you.

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