

June, 2010

Saying No to Destruction

No one purposely wastes time. Most often, we think we are doing just fine ordering the priorities and goals for our day. But, then there are times of sudden insight when we discover how far we have drifted from the desires of our hearts, our original goals and plans; we scramble to find out where the time went. And, in regrouping, frustration often sets in as we ask ourselves how in the world we got so far off course; but, on the other hand, we wonder how do we stay the course?

Sociologists tell us that we modern people are growing too accustomed to enjoying and even relishing barrages of data and images being thrown at us each day. Diversions, rabbit trails, and scintillating new possibilities for our over-exercised brains are becoming a way of life. But the price we pay for this lifestyle can be steep. As we pursue this kind of pace in our lives, we often discover that we have unknowingly let our guard down, left the backdoor open in our lives; our private, sacred space is suddenly occupied with unwanted stuff, people we're not sure we know, and demands on our time we did not anticipate.

One of the unexpected gifts of my current struggle with cancer has been a heightened sense of time and space in terms of knowing the limited amount of energy I have each day to navigate my personal responsibilities, goals and healing. In addition, an enormous amount of very kind people are praying for me and my family, hoping that we experience the Lord's peace and presence as we juggle the many demands of chemotherapy and five children. I have found myself appreciating as never before the wonderful presence of the Counselor, the Holy Spirit who I sense is helping me discern each day which circumstances are helpful for my healing or daily responsibilities, and which are not. God has given us a great gift in the Holy Spirit.



But, the Holy Spirit isn't a gift or available only for our crises. He is always around, accessible through our faith and trust in God. The Holy Spirit brings light into darkness, order into messes, and reveals wasted efforts and motions in our lives. These days, I feel motivated as never before to pray for other people as they have prayed for me. We all need the gift of faith and the counsel of the Holy Spirit to see our lives, relationships, and priorities in a fresh and objective light.

For the past three years, I have been a member of a wonderful mission prayer group. We meet once a month and pray for the many missionaries we know, the unreached people of our world, and the Church, wherever it may be growing for the first time in history. Many followers of Jesus in the world, unfortunately, live within political systems that can be hostile toward the growth of individual believers and the Church. Sometimes this oppression or persecution can be quite open in its hostility as the oppressors receive backing from government officials, overtly or tacitly. Yet, other times, the persecution and violence can be more subtle, still illegal, but widespread nonetheless.

There are certain groups of Christians in the world which particularly capture my heart and prayers. These dear people live within countries that are often afraid of allowing Christianity to flourish for fear of their people returning to the old days of colonialism or the perceived or real abuses of the Western powers. My mission organization, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, bends over backwards to support new Christian movements in the world that are indigenous, not run or made dependent by the Western world.

For instance, in India, we support the explosive growth of the Church among the lowest caste, the Dalits. There are now nearly three million members of the Rural Presbyterian Church of Northern India. These precious people, however, meet constant resistance wherever they turn; pressures perpetuated mostly by the Hindu National Party officials and their followers. Even though it is entirely illegal for these party officials to harass these new Christians, the government often turns a blind eye and allows for tremendous abuses. The Hindu Nationalists fear that the Dalits will no longer act as they should as the lowest, most despised rung of the social ladder; but also they fear these new followers of Jesus are being supported by the West and will hasten the return of colonial, outside influence. In their minds, to be Indian is to be Hindu.



The Rural Presbyterian Church of Northern India is not operated or managed by missionaries, only by Dalits themselves. The style of worship, dress, songs, and church governance is purely Indian. It is a beautiful sight to see. But, these Christians can waste no motion. They must be constantly vigilant. They are opposed on all sides. They are focused people accomplishing great things for the Lord.

They pray constantly for guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit as they help give birth to a brand-new church movement in history. They do not want to be a Western church; they want to be a Dalit Indian church. We in the West are privileged to be partners with them in the most humble, unobtrusive ways. They bless us mightily by their witnesses and power. They are rich in the simple life of the Spirit, unencumbered by the many particular temptations of the modern world.



A rural church in northern India

My mission prayer group prays for many other Christians in the world, too; for example, for the fledgling Bosnian, Chinese and Egyptian churches, which face many of these same challenges. These new Christians, too, want to be thoroughly independent, completely Bosnian, Chinese or Egyptian in character and practice, but they face many unfortunate challenges each day. At any moment, they can be thrown in jail for unsubstantiated charges, ripped from their families for months or years at a time. But rather than be crippled by fear or back down, over time, especially with the Global Church praying for them, often their lives become more courageous, simple, wise and powerful.

Ring in my ears these days have been the words of Jesus during his Sermon on the Mount in the seventh chapter of Matthew. In the 13th and 14th verses of that chapter, Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."



Jesus is the ultimate purpose of our lives. He gives meaning to each and every fragment of our beings. He takes our disparate parts and makes them whole. Until by grace we see Him as Lord and the destination of our souls, we will often, unfortunately, choose roads and back alleys which lead to pain,

confusion and even destruction. After all, the road to destruction is wide and easy; it is readily available to each of us every day. But, if we become followers of Jesus, the sirens of destruction are exposed for who they really are. Through faith, we receive the undeserved gift of divine empowerment to stay on the straight and narrow path that leads to the abundant life now and forevermore.

Who is wise on their own, apart from the wisdom of God? Who is so proud that he or she thinks they can tackle the challenges of each day without God's guidance through prayer?

God asks us to choose life; we are invited each day to enter the narrow gate. It is not a wide gate, but there is no greater freedom in the world apart from it. If you walk through the narrow gate, you will leave behind many wasteful parts of your life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit will be yours.