

I can be a very routine kind of guy.

As a matter of fact, I AM a very routine type of guy.

I like to do things that are time tested and proven; don't want to get too far out of the norm.

If I'm faced with doing something brand new and I don't know all the ins and outs – I can really get out of sorts.

My daily routine:

It part of who I am and what I battle with. My spiritual life is wrapped up in that as well. I tend to stick to the same songs, the same bible readings and the same type of devotionals. I don't get much outside what's normal for me.

That's not all bad; but when it comes to moving to the next level in my walk with God; when it comes to moving my relationship with him to the next level – it becomes a problem.

We are not to stay where we currently are. We are to move out and move on. God's got more for you to do, more relationship to develop with Him; more life to be lived. Hebrews 6:1-3 speaks to this – as it was read this morning

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **And God permitting, we will do so.**

Well let's talk about the God permitting we will do so part.

What is it going to take for you and I to move to the next level of being immersed in

The same power that rose Jesus from the grave  
The same power that commands the dead to wake  
The same power that moves mountains when He speaks  
The same power that can calm a raging sea  
That power Lives in us,  
He lives in us

It is time to take this to the next level.

If you have ever looked about and felt complacent

If you've ever looked back over the last few years and felt like you haven't grown in your walk with God

If you've set in that same spot on that same pew and felt like you sung that song a 100 times or listened to that sermon for the 100<sup>th</sup> time and wondered – what am I doing here  
If “doing church” is just another event on your already full calendar

And if the days are just running together and you are just not sure about this God thing  
Then I got something to say to you this morning.

Something I need to hear as well, because those things describe me just as well.  
It's no secret that God wants us to live passionately for Him, for us to use the gifts He has bestowed on us to enrich the lives around us

In II Cor 5 Paul talks about the temporal and the eternal; that in this body we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven and that we are a new creature; the old things have passed away and new things have come which are from God because of reconciliation through Christ.

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf and then on into Chap 6 urging us not to receive God's grace in vain.

behold NOW is the acceptable time, behold NOW IS the day of salvation – not some time off in the future, now NOW, right NOW

And then Paul launches into this litany of trials and blessings of struggles and serendipity.

Then we come to verses 11 to 13:

NASB says:

<sup>11</sup> Our mouth [g]has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. <sup>12</sup> You are not restrained [h]by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. <sup>13</sup> Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide *to us* also.

The Message says it this way:

<sup>11-13</sup> Dear, dear Corinthians, I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!

Listen people – I'm not pulling a Joel Osteen on you this morning.

But we do need encouragement – you and I, we've been walking in the desert for a while and we need to be refreshed!

How do we get there, how can the journey start?

What I want to spend the rest of the time this morning with you is talking about baggage. I think it's where a lot of us need to start . . .

I got a house full of stuff. Garage, basement closets under the bed and all nooks and crannies got stuff in them. I can't see it all. It is too much and it wears me out to see it sometimes.

The first thing: we're holding on to stuff. Emotional stuff, baggage, hurts, old wounds, whatever you want to name it. We have a closet full of it or a garage full or maybe some of us have the house from attic to basement bubbling over or so it seems at times. And we sometimes wonder how we got to this place. . .

"Life can only be understood backwards; but must be lived forward," observed Soren Kirkegaard. That's a fancy way of saying, Hindsight is 20/20. Looking ahead is a little murky.

It's helpful to look back, to gain some understanding about how you got where you are, but the fact is you are here now and you and I are holding on to stuff.

God through His Word has a few things to say about this. I want us to notice the element of time in the passages

Ephesians 4:26

"Be angry, and do not sin": **do not let the sun go down on your wrath,**

Romans 13:9-11

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. **And do this**, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Matthew 5:23-25

"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

"Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Do you get the sense that the time to deal with all this stuff is, right now . . . that loving your neighbor includes dealing with some hard stuff at times with that neighbor so that love will continue to flourish

Make a quick list of some of the problems and conflicts that have surfaced in your life. How much of your time and energy is spent in dealing with these issues?

How has your emotional and spiritual health been affected by the weight of these issues? How about your physical health?

What fears surface when you think about giving up control of those situations? Why is it tempting to hang on to them?

What is scary about letting go of some of this stuff is that we are not sure who we will be after we have moved through it. It has become part of who we are, we think. After weeks, months or even years of nursing the hurt or wound or offense it has woven itself into our thoughts and feelings, become part of us and we are not sure what to do with the emptiness of not having it there.

Do you see God's wisdom in dealing with such things quickly before they infiltrate our lives?

There are situations that just seem insurmountable, that there just seems to be no common ground or the people involved are just not approachable or you have tried to resolve and have been rebuffed. If that has happened, then more often than not we did not look at ourselves and our own motivation for resolution

Let's start from the beginning

Ken Sande, author of *The Peacemaker—A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* and president of Peacemaker® Ministries: "As important as practical skills are, the focus always has to be on motive. If our desire is to honor Christ, everything else will follow."

Here some practical tips, gleaned from professional conciliators that can help you resolve personal conflict:

1. Pursue purity of heart. "Take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5 NASB). Before approaching others regarding their faults and shortcomings, prayerfully face up to your own. Confess any way you might have contributed to the problem.
2. Define the problem and stick to the issue. Clearly define the issue and stay on topic during the discussion. Conflict deteriorates when the issue that started the conflict gets lost in angry words, past issues, or hurts tossed into the mix.
3. Plan a time for the discussion. When you are tired, stressed, and distracted with other responsibilities, things rarely will go well. Face to face -- Not over social media!
4. Affirm the Relationship.
5. Listen carefully. Stop rehearsing in your head what you are going to say next and pay total attention to the other person's words and body language. Lean in; be present. Every communication expert on the planet agrees on this statement One of the most powerful communication techniques there is, is to listen well.

We all know why that is. It is God's wisdom wrapped in human words

James 1:19

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry . . .

6. Forgive. Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you. "Forgiveness is both an event and a process,"

The event is verbalizing the intent. I forgive you. At some point those words need to be spoken

The process is making these statements part of the future relationship

I promise I won't bring this up and use it against you in the future.

I promise I'm not going to dwell on it in my own heart and mind.

I'm not going to talk to other people about it.

I'm not going to let it stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

7. Propose a solution. Remember the relationship is more important than the issue. When working toward a solution, consider Philippians 2:4-5: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Seek solutions that keep everyone's best interests in mind.

Even after all that there are going to be times when situations remain unresolved because of unwillingness and a hardened heart

It takes two soft hearts for reconciliation to occur. If one person continues in sinful behavior and resists the relationship will ultimately suffer. Sometimes the other individual involved walks away from the relationship. If you find yourself in a situation like this, do not give up. Continue to pray, to hope, and to love. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18 NASB)

You are responsible for you, not the other person . . .

In closing I want to remind us of a story that resonates with the act of forgiveness and casting off the baggage . . .

Corrie Ten Boom

It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. I had just finished my message and everyone had started to leave and that is when I saw him, a balding heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.

One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin.

Betsie, how thin you were!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end

of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality.

Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

Corrie could have chosen to continue living in a prison fashioned not of barbed wire and the cold wooden buildings of Ravensbrück but of her own feelings of fear, regret and even hatred. But she chose differently.

So can you this morning.

Psalms 146:5-8

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

Prisons are not often the physical buildings we drive by and can see. They are often of the heart. God sets those prisoners free also . . .