

Sloth

I've been getting hammered all week on laziness. I've heard it in sermons, Sunday school lessons, on the radio, and in books. I'm reading this book by John Ortberg called "If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat." It's about living a life of faith, getting out of your comfort zone and taking a risk. He brings up the parable of the talents – you know the one, where the master leaves each of 3 servants a certain amount of money for investing, and the 3rd servant buries it out of fear of losing it. When the master returns he really chews out this 3rd servant and calls him "wicked" and "lazy."

Ortberg writes that sloth is one of the 7 deadly sins. It is a specifically spiritual sin. To fail to be good stewards of what God has given us is just like robbing God. Sloth, he says, is not the same as physical laziness. It can co-exist with a lot of busy-ness. It is the failure to do what needs to be done when it needs doing. In Ortberg's other book, "The Life You've Always Wanted," he defines disciplined as doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason. So when I fail to be disciplined in my habits, I fall right into sloth which Jesus soundly condemned. When that sunk in, I felt like I'd been bludgeoned. My failure to do what had to be done, when it was supposed to be done, wasn't just unfortunate and unprofitable, it was downright wicked and ranked right up there with stealing! OUCH!

The good news is that I have God's grace and forgiveness, if I acknowledge my sin, repent of it, and obey quickly. What would keep me from doing that? Two things come to mind: fear, and lack of organization. I'd like to expand on what lack of organization means. It means I've been allowing myself to be distracted by the urgent and the easy. Put another way, I've never taken the time to assign importance to the things that I do on a daily basis. I keep putting off the important because of the urgent, or because there are easier things I can do, like watching TV. I haven't assigned a relative importance to the things I do because I don't have a dream that helps me assign importance to what I do. If I don't know where I'm going, I have no idea what path to take, nor what I will need to take for the journey. I wind up dressing with inappropriate clothes for the journey, doing unnecessary tasks that won't get me to my destination, and I stagger around on the path like some kind of wandering generality.

So how do I get a dream so I know where I'm going? John Ortberg suggests we ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What is my deepest dream?
2. How much passion do I experience in my daily life?
3. What do I want my epitaph to say?
4. How much am I growing these days?
5. How often do I take risks that require a power greater than my own?
6. If I had to name the "one true thing" that I believe I was set on this earth to do, what would it be?
7. How clear is it to me?¹

Here's my take on these questions. The first two questions are linked: if I have no passion, it's because I have no dream. If I have no dream, it's because I doubt. If I doubt, it's because I fear. If I fear, it's because I have no dream to help me overcome my fear. And without a dream, I have no passion, no strength or energy, to fight my fear. So how do I get out of this depressing cycle?

Question 3 on the epitaph helps us weigh our present fear against a greater fear. If I died tomorrow, has my life counted? Did I make a difference? If my fear of death and failure can outweigh my fear of success, then I can move ahead. I can get past my present fear and pursue my dream. To do that, I'm going to have to change – I need to grow.

¹ Ortberg, John, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2001) p. 50

Questions 4 and 5 are linked again. If I'm not growing, it's because I'm not being stretched. I'm not being stretched because I'm staying in my comfort zone: I'm not taking risks. And if I'm not taking the kinds of risks that require a power greater than my own, then I'm not living by faith. And if I'm not living by faith, then God won't get the glory. If God doesn't get the glory, then I'm robbing him again. OUCH... again!

Question 6 asks something very profound. It isn't what I think I've been placed here for that matters, but what God thinks I've been placed here for. I may think I've been placed here to earn money, watch TV, drive nice cars, take exotic vacations, and have the admiration of everyone I know. God may think I've been placed here to gather money to provide for his children, to acquire some knowledge of Him, to realize my relationship to him, to rescue the down-trodden and the hopeless, to knit broken families back together, to offer hope, and to practice humility. And as far as He is concerned, there's no time to waste.

Question 7 asks whether I fully grasp the urgency of the situation.

Ortberg writes, "What has the Lord of the Gift given to you that you need to invest in the kingdom? Maybe it's your mind. Your mind can be a place of unrealized potential, saturated with whatever is on billboards or in the mass media. You can fill it with junk, jealousy, greed, anger, or fear."

"Or your mind can be renewed. Filled with thoughts that are good, noble, true, and courageous. But you will have to invest it. Maybe it's your material possessions. Your bank account can be a place of unrealized potential. You can use money to accumulate stuff. Or, your money can build the church, spread the gospel, feed the poor, develop cities."

"You can offer [God] your spiritual giftedness – not compared with anyone else – as fully honed and developed as you can get it, identified with pristine clarity, cultivated with relentless perseverance, deployed with unstoppable vigor, submitted with sacrificial humility, and celebrated with raucous joy."

"He can take what you have to offer and make a difference that matters for eternity."²

I believe that our dream, correctly defined, will be the thing that helps us realize who we were meant to be, and the thing that helps us make full use of the provisions God has placed at our disposal. There's a lot in that statement. The dream can be unique for every one of us. Developing it involves a lot of effort in discovering who we were meant to be, and in finding out what provisions God has placed at our disposal to achieve that dream. This isn't a cut-and-dried, packaged success formula. It involves growth, and therefore risk – trial and error – and courage.

What I have been doing for many years is squandering time and resources. I have forgotten that my life is not my own. I am on loan to my family and to this world for a limited engagement only. It's time I got down to the business at hand, to pursuing the dream that God has in mind for me, and it is time that I repent of being the wicked and lazy servant described in the parable. As a friend once said, "There's a world dying out there! Don't you care?" We have a unique opportunity. Let's grab the golden ring and ride this baby home – for ourselves, for our families, for our community, and for the glory of God. This is the year. Now is the time. Let's get *moving*. Everything else, every blessing from God, will flow from that. It is His promise to us. Let's take him at his word and act accordingly.

William H. Gross 5/20/2001

² Ibid. pp. 50-51