

Taking for Granted? or Rehearse and Replay?

Most people mistakenly think the *Bible* is a book of dos and don'ts and, with this mindset, they fail to grasp what God, in it, is trying to communicate to us. In contrast, as Jesus so succinctly stated, the *Bible* is far above all a book about relationships:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments [dos and don'ts], which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mk 12:28-31

As a common and practical example, how many men take their marriages for granted and, as a result, return (soon after they are married) to video games, sports, work . . . as their primary focus and are shocked when their wives announce they are divorcing them? "Taking for granted," is a common temptation and phenomenon for everyone. It is a form of a sense of entitlement – the foolish notion that without protection and care people and things will remain the same even as we neglect them in pursuit of other people or things.

So, is the solution as simple as: "Don't take what is important for granted?" No. As in most cases, majoring on don'ts does little to show and tell us what to do. The *Bible* is generally far better at pointing us to the "dos" of life that will, in the end, resolve key issues rather than focusing on the don'ts as we so often tend to do.

Using another example to illustrate: in a short section of *Deuteronomy 4 – 6* we are warned, time and again, of the major *Bible* theme of being careful to (guard, protect and grow in what is important) and remembering God and His commands given for our good and necessary for a vital and authentic Christian life:

Observe them carefully . . . be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget . . . Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember . . . teach them to their children . . . watch yourselves very carefully . . . Be careful not to forget the Covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you . . . Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other . . . be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess . . . be careful to obey so that it may go well with you . . . These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates . . . be careful that you do not forget the LORD . . .

In other words, we must rehearse, replay, become disciplined in, focus on how to get Better in . . . what is most important versus surely, at some point, declining and failing if we fall into the non-thinking default mentality of taking what is important for granted. Taking for granted is a cousin mentality to assuming – assuming what is important will be there for us tomorrow if we neglect it today.

Yet this danger CAN be thwarted with a discipline of thankfulness by:

- Considering what is surely most important to us – the key relationships in life,
- Routinely rehearsing and replaying these blessings, and
- Consciously deciding (assuming it is true) there is not a next Better – believing we are greatly blessed to have the greatest spouse in the world (have confidence in this, and acting on this belief, will almost always make this become a greater and greater reality), the most fantastic children, great co-workers . . . and, most of all, the true, loving, saving, gracious . . . GOD – all of which will keep us more than busy in our rehearsing, replaying and seeking, to make these relationships even Better, so we are not tempted to take them for granted and pursue (in the end) foolish and far less pleasing other things while losing, or diminishing, the best that we now have.

For, if we can truly say like the Psalmist:

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. ^{Ps 16:6}

we can, and should, be motivated to work our “land” more to make it even Better tomorrow! If we see how God has already blessed us with His promised eternal inheritance (salvation) and His temporal relational and material blessings we are wise to fight for them through developed and improving appropriate disciplines (remembering, rehearsing, replaying and being regularly and consciously thankful for our blessings) versus taking them for granted and diminishing or losing them altogether! This is faith that we are currently blessed beyond what we deserve versus feeling we are entitled to more.

And this likewise highlights a second, complementary, discipline necessary to achieve the goal of guarding and protecting what is most important, a discipline of filtering. We have the option of making life broad or deep, but not both. Conscious filtering – focusing on dedicating, to the extent possible, our time and energy to protecting and growing key relationships (versus wasting our time and energy on secondary issues and people) will make life both smaller and deeper versus possibly broader, but certainly more superficial. We choose to live focused on meaningful, real and growing relationships or the more recent “Facebook friends” life, but not both! As a recent example of this increasingly shallow (Facebook friends) trend; when people face real (sometime not even real) significant trials and challenges the first thing many they think of is going on Facebook (or e-mail) and asking as many people as they can think of to pray for them rather than personally and deeply seeking Christ directly for help and Grace (and seeking, in His Word, what Grace He offers and the stated conditions for this Grace) – it is almost as if we think God is impressed by our number of social media “friends” – this is not Biblical!

There is also a great difference between being comfortable and seeking and being content. *Bible* “contentment” requires thought and work for Better with what we already have rather than always seeking new while being too comfortable with and neglecting what we have (assuming, incorrectly that, we can have our cake and eat it to) – for even the best “cake” gets stale and unappealing without care, protection and seeking to make IT even Better!

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Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. ^{2Co 13:5}

We can probably best judge this by looking at what attributes generally (attributes of a feather flock together) accompany each approach and condition (Building on sand or on rock?) and, thus, define our lives (as we have looked at in the recent *Assume? – Faith?* Blog Posts series):

Building on Sand

Pride • Alone • Opinions • Assume • Foolish • Decisions • Entitled
Take for Granted • “Friends”
Passive • Undisciplined • Weak • Lost • Death

vs.

Building on Solid Rock

Humility • Grace • Truth • Faith • Wisdom • Answers • Thankful
Rehearse, Replay & Seek to Make Even Better • Relationships
Active • Disciplined • Power! • Saved • Life

Better certainly requires much and focused work (of God and us), and the rewards are certainly worth it! And BY FAR the best guide for this? Regularly reading the *Bible* to:

- Find the truths of life and death,
- To be reminded of God’s Grace promises and appropriate and necessary Grace-disciplines to protect and build on them, and
- To be encouraged to actively pursue Better in the key relationships of life, temporal and eternal.