

VISION FORWARD



FINKENWALDE

by Dean Wright, Executive Director The Desens House

In 1933, a young pastor and a historian walked through the countryside of Germany, just beyond the city of Finkenwalde. They talked about the experiment this young radical pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, had begun in his discipleship community. There were rumors the program was too intense, too spiritual, and there were fears for participant burn out. As they climbed to the top of the summit, they looked out below them to the vast military machine of the young Reich. Hitler's rhetoric had been effectively and persuasively capturing the hearts and minds of the German people. That July the Protestant church had given their support to the Reich Bishop and supported the German Christian movement that began defining christianity along racialized terms. Only a very small group of christians, Bonhoeffer's small group of radical disciples among them, stood faithfully for the message of Jesus.

If the German war machine were to be defeated, it would mean a new kind of discipleship that was stronger than the soldiers marching below "like so many ants...You have to be stronger than these tormentors that you find everywhere today." (Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*) The battle was not just a political battle across geopolitical lines, it was a battle for hearts and minds as the German people were given a choice of who and what to worship.

Jon Tyson, in his book, *Beautiful Resistance: The Joy of Conviction in a Culture of Compromise*, calls this "Beautiful Resistance" the idea that THIS must be stronger than THAT. The faith of Bonhoeffer's disciples had to be greater than the pull of patriotism and loyalty to the German politics of the 1930's.

I've been thinking about this idea a lot lately. This idea that THIS — our faith, our hope, the Gospel message of grace, forgiveness and freedom — must be greater than THAT — our shame, our guilt, a societal message that we are unforgivable, unlovable and worthless.

Moment by moment we are caught in-between the THIS of stepping forward, picking up our cross and following Jesus, or the THAT of frenetic busyness, distraction and escapism.

A lot of our friends in the recovery community talk about taking that initial drink or drug and realizing that the side effect was oblivion. It was an escape from shame or trauma, from the impossibility of being alone with themselves. Sitting consciously with their pain was too burdensome, and it

seemed a small price to pay to drink or drug and become someone entirely different.

In a way, that oblivion, while short lived, felt like a moment freed from the captivity of a broken reality.

Our Assistant Pastor, Joe, gave a sermon awhile back that mentioned the songs we sing in the desert. He described a

nomadic tribe seeing a cloud along the horizon and excitedly saying to one another, "Could that be the Israelites? The nation that escaped from captivity in Egypt? The tribe whose God parted the Red Sea and brought them through on dry ground?" And as they hurried to catch up with the Israelites, expecting to hear music and rejoicing, instead they heard grumbling: "We've been brought out to the desert to starve? Manna everyday? Sometimes a quail....where's the diversity. Sure the food is falling from heaven...but we need a little variety! We should be back in captivity where after making bricks all day at least we got to eat dates and honey!" (I'm paraphrasing.)

Sometimes there is a certain safety in captivity, a predictability. You know the routine: you wake up, you make bricks and think about how trapped you are, how much you hate clay getting stuck between your toes, the first thing you'll do on the other side of captivity...and then in a weird way there's almost a comfort to going home and knowing you'll do it again tomorrow.

I'm speaking from experience.

I was trapped in captivity in the shape of anger and bitterness for a very long time. I've spent years trying to get to the root of it, but I think more than anything, this is my struggle: my heart was set on anger and so I became angry. I was prepared for bitterness and so I dutifully cultivated it when it showed up.

I knew that joy, peace, patience, forgiveness etc. are at the heart of a true believer in Jesus, and that being filled with the Spirit requires laying down our sin at the foot of the cross... but I couldn't do it for some reason. It had become a habit, a comfortable habit and it was the place I returned to when I was tired, hungry, lonely or sad. Pretty much any negative emotion = eruptions of anger.

I wasn't in Egypt right away. The journey into captivity was an intentional journey. I chose path after path to walk further into Egypt, until I lost sight of the way back, and then I made metaphorical bricks, daydreamed about freedom and went to bed only to repeat the cycle over and over again.

Freedom felt unknown and scary. Who would I be without my anger? In a weird way, anger had become a coping mechanism. When the emotions felt yucky in any way I could just find a handy scapegoat and explode. At the end I would experience equal parts shame for my out-of-control anger and relief for the outpouring of pent up emotion. That was my solution.

A friend of mine, after hearing me share a version of this story at Celebrate Recovery, asked how I could live like this if I was a Christian? That's a good question. I don't think anyone wakes up one day and says to themselves: "Hmmm, you know what I want to do? Cultivate a lifestyle of terrible choices that leaves me feeling inadequate, ashamed and unlovable!" I think it's a slowly-building military machine. It's one ant finding the cookie and, then, left unresolved, the ant colony moves in and takes up residence.

So what do we do when we're trapped?

Usually things that are trapped become hopeless. The etymology of the word "haggard" means a "trapped adult bird." I get that. I've been that bird.

Psalm 102:7 describes it like this:

"I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on a housetop." Another translation says, "I am like a desert fowl, alone aloof."

Joe talked about how important the songs we sing in freedom and captivity are. This is the beginning of freedom and the beginning of restoration: the songs we sing. Do we cultivate anger or do we bring a "sacrifice of praise"? Do we cultivate bitterness or do we thank God, the author and the perfecter of our faith?

For me...the songs came after repentance. I had to make a few phone calls and ask for forgiveness. I had to realize that there was something I valued in the muck and the mire of my anger and, if I wanted freedom, I had to be willing to get out of the pigsty and make the journey back home.

The cool thing is that God always runs to us with open arms. But another cool thing is that we, the people of God, get to posture that joy of the Father and run towards each other... and I think THIS is what becomes greater than THAT! Seeing people run towards each other with grace and an outpouring of love and affection is way more attractive than the polarizing world in which we live.

THIS: Seeing a people speak hope into the midst of chaos instead of THAT: fear mongering, stirring up division, discord and polarity.

THIS: Hope that God can use us in our brokenness for his glory, that he can use us in our freedom for his glory and that he can even use us in seasons of rebellion for his glory, instead of THAT: an unreasonable and unrealistic demand for perfection.

THIS: The fundamental belief that God has called us by name and that there is a purpose and a plan for our lives, even in the pain and heartache instead of THAT: life is meaningless, purposeless and without hope.

I Peter 2:9-10 says:

"...But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

In a miraculous way, God has restored the "years the locust have eaten". Relationships I thought were unsalvageable for years have become strengthened and renewed. God has brought reconciliation, hope and joy into the messy brokenness of my heart and I have received mercy, I have been set free.

But, anger and bitterness are my "drugs" of choice. I have to guard my heart. I have to recognize that the battle is not against flesh and blood. That I, like Bonhoeffer, can also stand on a hill overlooking the great military machine of the

enemy. An enemy that is cunning and devious and sometimes sounds like my own voice encouraging me into old patterns of behaviors. There are two sides to this battle. Every moment of worship, thanksgiving and praise is an act of war. We know who ultimately wins this battle, but I want to be the most effective soldier I can be. I'm done sabotaging myself. I'm totally in. All in.

I was talking to another friend in recovery the other day, asking what keeps people from truly pursuing sobriety. She said, "Their addiction is doing something for them...There's something that's pulling them back and they keep returning to it."

That thought is as relatable as it is devastating

Friends, whatever is holding you back, whatever lies you are believing to return day after day to captivity, I'm telling you this from experience: it's not worth it. The scariness and unpredictability of freedom is far superior to the known bondage and captivity of our hearts. It's time to shake off the chains. We've been set free!

Hebrews 10 says:

"Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching..."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved." (Hebrews 10:23-25, 39)

We belong to those who have faith and are saved! That is pretty incredible.

If you are struggling with a "hurt, habit or hang-up" or are tired of living in captivity, come check out our tribe of men and women living out the freedom and hope we have in Jesus at Celebrate Recovery, every Monday night at 6pm.

Polly Meadows and Brandon Abassi have done a terrific job organizing this safe space for growth and healing. We all have mess and muck and sometimes sharing your burdens can be the first step to letting them go!

For questions on how to get involved in Celebrate Recovery email: Polly Meadows: busterpurrl@aol.com or Brandon Abassi: baubak8684@gmail.com

DO I BELIEVE I HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

By Pastor Jonathan Evans

Let's be honest: Do I believe I have a relationship with the Holy Spirit? If so, how would I know it?

Our life in the Spirit is one in which we are to "keep in step" or "keep pace" with the Spirit at all times says Paul (Galatians 5:25). We don't step in and out of it like we do our home. We don't phase in and out of it like we do jobs or careers. What God has done for us is called us to live a life—all of life—in the Spirit.

All that God is and does is IN the Spirit and IS the Spirit. And this Spirit comes to breathe new life into us and to be the breathe of new life within us. So we are related to the Holy Spirit as life is to breath. But we are also in relationship with the Holy Spirit as the Father and the Son are in relationship. This relationship of the Spirit, by the Spirit, and with the Spirit is daily, living, ongoing, and sustaining.

As a result, the Spirit will do many things in us and for us. But one of the major and more significant things He does is convict and convince us of sin. Our sin. This is because we are ever transformed from one image into another, from one kind of glory into another. Sin is able to be rooted out, dealt with, crucified, BECAUSE there is a new principle of life at work within us. An evidence, then, that we are in a life-giving and life-sustaining relationship with the Spirit is conviction and repentance of sin.

This conviction may not be daily, but the transformation is daily. Still, as we are transformed day by day, there will be and there must be conviction of sin. All that is not in conformity or in alignment with the character and truth of God and the character and truth of our new life in Him must change.

Now it is true that the Spirit comes to assure us of the Father's love, to encourage us, and to remind us that all the promises of God to us are "yes and amen". Yes, the Spirit empowers us to do the works of Jesus and to speak the words of Jesus. Yes, the Spirit is the Spirit of joy and strength, of power and glory, of wisdom and discernment.

But here's what is also true: If the Spirit ever only speaks well to me or well of me — to bless me, to anoint me, to reveal great things God has in store for me, to remind me I am called, loved, chosen — but never to convict me, then I may not have a relationship with Him.

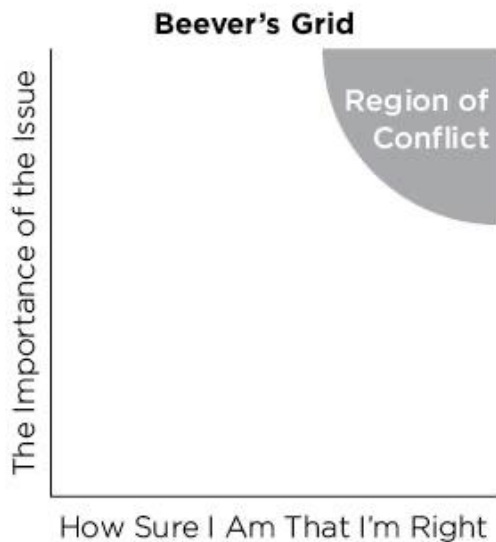
The Spirit of Truth will speak well of me and to me, but being the Spirit of Truth He will also speak to me of my sin. He will say hard things to me by His voice, His Word, and others in my life in order to correct me, discipline me, and train me. Too many times too many of us turn a blind eye to the hard things we need to see and hear about ourselves. As a result, the words of blessing and affirmation we want to hear become words of stumbling because of the words we don't want to hear. Blessings can confirm us in our waywardness and sin when we choose to ignore the voice of the Spirit and/or isolate ourselves from others because we fear the truth we need to hear and see about ourselves.

So, we need the Spirit to assure us of the Father's love, but at the same time, because the Father loves us, we need the Spirit to search and convict us of our sin wherever He may find it.

Let's be honest: do I have a relationship with the Spirit? If I only ever hear what I want to hear from Him—blessing, affirmation, promise—but never or rarely what I don't want to hear from Him—correction, conviction, discipline—then chances are I either don't have a daily relationship with Him or I need to grow and mature in my relationship with Him.

Dear Elim Grace, let's pursue a full relationship with the Spirit. Let's keep step and keep pace with Him as HE sees best to lead us. Let's sow and live at the bidding of the Spirit in ALL the areas of our life.

BEEVER'S GRID: WHEN IS AN ISSUE IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO CORRECT SOMEONE?



(Beever's Grid copyright 1986 by Ernest Beever)

Sam Crabtree, in his book, "Practice Affirmation," explains (pp. 161-162) how this can be used to help determine when to correct someone and when to let it go:

The vertical axis indicates the importance of the issue being considered. The bottom reflects issues of low importance such as trying to resolve whether President George Washington ever wore socks that didn't match. It is an issue of virtually no consequence. Moving up the axis, toward the top we reach issues that are important, issues that have life-and-death significance, perhaps for a great many people. Between the top and the bottom is an array of issues and their relative importance or unimportance.

The horizontal axis indicates my certainty that I am right. Toward the left are issues about which I don't have the foggiest clue (what is the name of the dog owned by the bit player in that 1938 movie that no one saw?). Toward the right are issues about which I am sure that I'm sure before God, the angels, and all the witnesses that could be summoned that I am right. Most people find that there are surprisingly few of these issues.

Any issue of controversy can be plotted on this matrix.

The lower-left quadrant contains issues that meet two simultaneous criteria: (1) they are of low importance, and (2) I do not know much about them. For example: how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Who knows? And who cares? Here's the point: it wouldn't be worth consuming relational energy to argue about this issue or to correct someone else's viewpoint.

The upper-left quadrant contains issues that meet two simultaneous criteria: (1) they are of high importance, but (2) I still don't know with certainty what the truth is. For example: When is Jesus returning? That is of crucial and everlasting importance to every person who lives or ever *has* lived! And yet I don't know when he's coming back. One of the things about which I'm certain is that I am *not* certain about exactly when he's returning. The point is: arguing about it or correcting others is not worth the relational energy it would consume.

The lower-right quadrant contains issues about which (1) I'm certain I'm right, but (2) they are of low importance. For example: how many knots are in the log I am now looking at? I know the answer, but why make an issue of it?

And now we arrive at the main observation to be derived from Beever's Grid. **The upper-right quadrant simultaneously contains the issues (1) that are important, and (2) for which there is virtually no possibility that I will be shown to be mistaken.**

And here's the point: reserve your conflict, your arguments, and your persistent corrections to that quadrant.

Here's its corollary: *keep that region small.* The fruitfulness of correction tends to come from a smaller region than we assume. We default to making that region larger than is fruitful. We wear people out by putting more issues in the upper-right quadrant than belong there.