

TAKEAWAY

Collide
Part 1 – Acts 3

November 1, 2009

Dangerously Dehydrated

Along with carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, water is considered one of the essential nutrients. Our bodies can survive without the other nutrients for quite a while but usually cannot survive much longer than four days without water. We often don't drink water until we are thirsty. Did you know that the sensation of thirst is not really a reliable guide? Once you feel thirst, the delicate balance between the electrolytes and water in your body's cells has already become upset. On average, we lose about 2.5 liters of water during a normal day's activities. We are often dehydrated and don't even know it.

If spiritual dehydration is anything like physical dehydration, it can be present without us realizing it. The *Pensées*, a set of writings by the 17th century mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal, was a defense for believing in God. Pascal argued that all humans have an infinite abyss that can only be filled by infinite good, which is God Himself. Unfortunately, the more we move away from Him, the more we fail to recognize infinite good. We fill the abyss with anything that looks good to us at the time. And the more out of touch with God we are, the easier it is for ungodly things to appear good, even things that will bring about our own destruction. Pascal admitted it was strange that we might not even recognize our own need for God, that we might not recognize our own spiritual dehydration.

In the Bible, water is often a symbol of the removal of sin and the restoration of a right relationship with God. Perhaps this is because, like water for our bodies, salvation and restoration to our Creator are our soul's greatest needs. Read Isaiah 41:17-20. Who are the ones searching for water? What does God promise to do for the thirsty? Read John 4:10-14. How does Jesus characterize His gift of living water? Does a well provide water once or continuously? Do you drink from the well of eternal life only occasionally? Pray that God will help you see and understand that we are all among the poor and needy who continuously need the water of salvation. Go to Him, whether you feel thirsty yet or not, and drink from the gushing fountains of His endless life.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5:6 (NASB)

So, What's the Question?

In one of my favorite science fiction series, two simple questions were at the heart of the plot: *“What do you want?”* and *“Who are you?”* The bad guys asked, *“What do you want?”* Some characters were foolish enough to answer. When their wish was granted, those characters ended up suffering the sad and surprising consequences of their wishes fulfilled. The good guys' question was, *“Who are you?”* So what does this have to do with Jesus?

As Christ-followers, we are concerned with people knowing that Jesus is the answer. But as someone recently asked me, *“So, what is the question?”* Actually, I think it involves two questions—the two from my science fiction show. The answer to the question, *“What do you want?”* naturally flows out of the answer to the question, *“Who are you?”* Conversely, what we want can help reveal who we are. If we are brutally honest about answering these questions, what will the answers be?

If God hasn't been working in a person's heart, then telling them Jesus is the answer probably won't be very effective. However, if we have a good understanding of who we are and what we want, we can help others see that they have the same questions inside themselves. Then we can point to Jesus as the answer. But even when we understand this, we may be reluctant to pass it on to others.

Do you really believe that Jesus can tell your broken/religious/ordinary/successful friends who they are and why they do what they do? Do we comprehend that Jesus tells us all who we are and even what we want? Read John 8:42-44 and see if you can figure out who Jesus was talking to. Even those who are “doing all the right things” still need to listen to Jesus. Do we understand that those who don't know Jesus are condemned to an empty life while living on this earth, not experiencing what God made them to be? Now read 1 John 3:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. What has changed for those who know Jesus?

What about what we want? We humans are a thirsty, hungry lot. But what are we hungry and thirsty for? If a friend came to you and said they wanted to leave their spouse because they were in love with someone else, what would you say? If you just tell them they need Jesus, they might get angry or just ignore you. Maybe a better approach would be for you to ask them what it is they are after. What would it take to satisfy them? If they start down this road, where would it end? Would they ever feel fulfilled, or would they need more and more? Read Isaiah 55:1-3 and John 7:37-38 and soak in the impassioned plea of God to humanity. What is God offering us here? What does it cost? What does Psalm 37:4 say about how to “get what we really want”? How can who we are make a

difference in what we want? Are we convinced of this truth ourselves? If you find yourself advising someone and you think that they “just need Jesus,” pray and ask God to help you share the truth of these verses with them. Offer to pray with them. If they want to pray, let them know they can ask God Himself to help them understand these truths.

Plan B

I am a control freak. I hate putting that admission in writing, but it is the truth. Recently, we had placed a contract on a house—a house my husband and I had prayed long and hard about. Yet, because the loan process took longer than expected, I started looking at new homes at a lower price and even hunting for rentals. Even though we were sure God had told us this would be our house, I decided that because it was not totally in my control, it would not happen. I let doubts convince me that we would not get the house, so I went looking for plan B, C, or D. It was not until the loan officer called to congratulate us on gaining the final approval that I realized I had been trying to develop a backup plan for God’s plan. The more I mulled over that thought in my brain, the more preposterous it sounded. I—a human—was trying to out-plan God! I wanted control. Even though God had said, “*Wait...Trust...I have it under My control,*” I wanted the power, the control, the reins.

That got me to thinking about the thousands of other times I have done the very same thing. I want God to be the answer to all the big and small questions in life, but I also want to be in control. I want things my way and in my time. Unfortunately, that is just not the way God works most of the time.

Then, I was struck by the stark resemblance between my own attitude about control and that of the Israelites hundreds of years ago. Even as a young child in Sunday School, I remember thinking how silly it was that the Israelites—despite the fact that God delivered them from bondage, manifested Himself in visual ways for them, and promised them their own land—still did not have the courage to take the promised land. They whined and complained until God sent them back into the desert for 40 years. As ridiculous as that sounds, what I’m doing now in my own life is not far from that. The more I look at it, the more I realize that control is what God desires and what so much of our walk with Him comes down to.

As you read Numbers 13 and 14, look at the way the Israelites talk and the way God responds. Compare that to your day-to-day life. If you are anything like me, we sound a lot more like the Israelites than we care to admit. God has brought us out of our past, called us from our sins, and offered us eternal life. Sometimes we don’t like the way He asks us to live or the sacrifices He asks us to make. We grumble when things are not happening the way we want and when we want. We forget that we serve a God who has delivered us from bondage, just as He did the Israelites. Not only that, but even when we do struggle with giving Him the control of our lives that He deserves, He is still with us, just as He was with the Israelites. Read Nehemiah 9:21. Think of the manna He provided for them so they would not starve. On the other hand, think how much easier life would have been if they had listened and accepted what God had to say the first time. Think of how your life would be if you gave God total control.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) says, “*In his heart a man **plans** his course, but the LORD determines his steps*” (emphasis added). If God is the answer to all the questions and the solution to every problem, allow Him to control your life. Stop making backup plans, and allow His purpose to be your daily goal. Think back over the topics of the last series—being Spirit-led, submission, family, idolatry, sexuality, divorce, and love. Where do you need to give God control in your life?

A Prayer

As I sat down last night to work on my writing for this week’s Takeaway, nothing came to mind. Or perhaps I should say nothing encouraging. After listening to Woody’s talk last week and reading what the other Takeaway writers had written this week, I was left with an undeniable conviction. So, in the end, there was nothing for me to do but pray.

There are many signs that the embers of a lukewarm believer’s life are getting stirred so that they more closely resemble a fire. For me, one of them was the realization that my actions haven’t really shown that I believe Christ is the solution to the world’s problems. It’s what I do with this new revelation that will either fan me into a flame or allow those embers to die out as my heart slowly grows harder. If something in the following prayer resonates with you, pray it yourself. If nothing about these last two weeks has convicted you personally, then by all means take time to lift up another brother or sister in Christ.

Okay, God, I’m not sure I even know where to begin. Last week, You showed me that I’m a lukewarm Christ-follower, and as if that weren’t bad enough, now I’m faced with the question, “Do you really believe that Christ is the hope of the world—the answer to all the world’s problems?” I don’t know how to answer that. It’s like a one-two punch! My head tells me that You are the answer, and I want to believe that You are. But I guess a majority of my actions and responses say that I don’t. Help my unbelief and walk me through this

*Father, help me to do the right things the right way, but more importantly help me to **want** to do the right things—not for the sake of following the rules, but to please You. Help the people I love do the same thing, and help me to love those people more. I guess, most of all, forgive me for the half-hearted and somewhat apathetic way that I’ve lived out my life for You so far. Thank You for hearing my prayers. I’m so grateful that I can trust you for forgiveness and the grace to overcome.*

Q: How can I make sure I get the Takeaway every week?

A: (1) Sign up on our website to receive the Takeaway by e-mail, (2) download the Takeaway from our website, or (3) pick up a copy as you leave the auditorium on Sunday.