

TAKEAWAY

NOT JUST FOR SUNDAYS

Baptism

June 6, 2010

Response

You are deeply in love. He has been waiting for just the right time to ask you to be his wife. You know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is the one, the only one you want to spend the rest of your life with. Time and time again he has gone out of his way to love you, to protect you, to show you every day that he longs to be your one and only. One evening, as the sun is setting on an unpopulated beach, he gets down on one knee and asks you to spend the rest of your life with him and only him. He pulls out a ring, the symbol of his undying devotion. As he holds out the ring, you snatch it from his hand, chuck it in the ocean, and mutter something in a not-so-nice tone as you simply walk away.

Can you imagine???

As horrific as it seems, how often do we do that very thing to God? He has pursued us. He loves us. He adores us even when no one else does. He gave His Son to die for us. Yet so often, instead of moving closer, we walk away. We toss aside opportunities to grow and respond to His unfathomable love for us.

Sure, going along with God's call for your life can be scary. Pursuing things of great value often is a bit frightening. But, God's promises remain. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Romans 8:31 (NIV) declares, "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Take a look at 1 Peter 1:3-7: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Do these verses give any indication that Christ is some sort of fair weather lover who will love you but leave you when times get hard? No way!

So, how should we respond to His amazing love? We should worship Him in corporate settings, in obedience to His call on our lives, in repentance of our sin, in praise, in the middle of life's storms, in gratitude, and in service. It might seem like a tall order, but when you work in tandem with the Creator of the Universe who wants you to learn more about His immeasurable love, how can you fail? When the love of your life asks you to be his wife, you say yes. When God—who loves you with a love you cannot even begin to understand—calls you, you go!

I can't think of a better example of this than the many people who have surrounded me recently as I have been dealing with my upcoming spinal fusion surgery. Men from Blue Ridge's home repair team came to my home and raised my sinks so that I will be able to wash my face and hands after the surgery. The CPR (care, prayer, and response) team has provided me with the names and numbers of community organizations that can assist me in ongoing post-surgery support. The team of writers who compose this weekly Takeaway is doing a fundraiser to help provide funds for the large down payment for my surgery. They have also been a constant source of prayer and support. Many men and women have contacted me about helping out with

meals, dog walking, cleaning, and simply keeping me company while I'm in bed for six to eight weeks. These folks have said yes to God. They have responded with love and a caring attitude—a true reflection of the grace of God.

Responding to Truth

What would happen if we went through our days unresponsive to and ignoring everyone around us? How could you carry on a conversation if the person you're talking to has absolutely nothing to say and just ignores you? Seems ridiculous, right? No one can function that way and nothing would get done. Even introverts need to communicate—if only to order coffee. The fact is that we humans are created by God to communicate. Nothing gets done without some form of communication. What does this have to do with responding to God's truth? Read John 16:13-14. How does God communicate with us? What does it say that His Spirit will do? What if we choose not to respond to God's communication? To be sure, He will allow us to do that.

In my own life, there have been times when I was unresponsive to the Holy Spirit as He was trying to guide me into God's truth. I can vividly remember a specific day 20 years ago when I was at a crossroads with God. I was attending a women's Bible study, and I arrived that first day depressed and confused. I had started my journey in Christ with a distorted view of God the Father, because I equated Him with my earthly father. God had been guiding me to a clearer picture of who He is and how He feels about me. He started speaking to me through the ladies attending that day. They were showing me Scriptures such as Psalm 139, Matthew 7:11, and Luke 12:6-7 that were part of the study. Those verses told me I was cherished and precious to God, but I felt so wounded I literally ran out crying and never returned. In that moment I chose not to respond to God's truth.

It was 10 years before I responded when God again challenged my distortions. When I chose His truth, the floodgates started to open. God began dismantling my ideas and teaching me—through Scripture, His Holy Spirit, and other Christ-followers—who He is as my Father. As I look back over the last 10 years, it has been an amazing journey with Christ that just keeps getting better and better. Just when I think I have enough of God, He challenges me to go deeper. I am learning to respond whenever He speaks. It's not always easy to follow Him. Some of the hardest places in my life have been during the last 10 years, but I have learned to love the one word I used to have such a hard time with: obedience.

The joy that follows my response to God's pursuit of me always blows me away. Last month, during the First Wednesday service, God reminded me of that day when I walked out on Him. I cried tears of joy as I realized that He has brought me full circle. Just the day before, during a Bible study, I had been the person trying to help other ladies grasp who God created them to be. It was like He was rejoicing with me and reminding me of His faithfulness and love and saying, "See...with Me, anything is possible!"

God is not done with me yet. I still have a lot to learn. But, He is like a faithful lover—always coming back and asking us to go with Him, even after we've tried to run away. Read Psalm 32:8-9 and 73:21-22. Have you been grieved and embittered? I know I have. Or maybe you've been like the mule with no understanding. I've been there too. Read Isaiah 30:20-22. What happens when we respond to God? What understanding results from our response to God's guidance? What are we then able to do? What would it look like for you to respond to God? What do you think would happen if you did?

For me, the knowledge that God will never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5) demands a response of faithfulness on my part. Why wouldn't I respond? When I do, my eyes are opened to this amazing love that enables me to understand and obey God's guidance. This guidance is always leading to His truth, which then leads to life and freedom. It is my belief that there is nothing in existence that compares to a great relationship between a child of God and his/her Father.

It's Your Turn

What is your response to God's love and truth? Are you running toward Him or away from Him? Or are you stagnant and content with it? Are you listening when He communicates with you? Are you doing what He's asking of you? Are you finding joy in obedience? What should your next step of response be? Will you take it? Ask God to reveal your heart as you reflect on and answer these questions.

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