

Discerning the Fruit of Our Lives, A Good Tree Bears Good Fruit

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The message tonight is “How to know that I’m on God’s chosen path?” And now this is a teaching from my lips, not from His, but I feel that it’s inspired from Him. We’ve been talking an awful lot about discernment. And there are times when we get so tied up in discernment, we can’t see the forest for the trees. We may have a favorite opinion that we’re very attached to, and anything that threatens our opinion, we just don’t want to hear. Or we could

have looked at something over and over again and just given up, because we just have too many opinions about something. This has happened to me countless times. In fact, I would get leadings that I thought were from the Lord and seem to be confirmed. But in the end, they were definitely my flesh. What is this about?

I could feel an inner gnawing in my Spirit. “Danger! You really want this to be true, you really want this. Danger! You’re attached.”

Being attached to anything other than Jesus causes you to idolize that thing. In other words, you’re willing to deny anything to keep your attachment. Even that, possibly, He doesn’t want you to have this. I went through this with a DVD burner and labeler. Oh, how I hurt when he said “No” and I had the money for it. I tried every possible way to justify buying it. But deep down inside, gnawing away at me, I felt a little voice saying, *‘You shouldn’t be doing this’*.

I also experienced this upon the mountain. We had labored for five years to build a little chapel and little cabins up there in the mountain for retreat. And there came a time when the Lord wanted us to leave this work. I could feel it in my spirit, but I was really resisting Him. Finally, He got my attention. But it was hard. It was so hard to let go of something that I’d been building for five years and leave it, just leave it and walk away.

Why does He do this to us? I believe it’s because He’s purifying us until we are a supple tool in His hands, a tool that has no other objective than obedience to the Master. He’s given me a gift with graphics, photography, which I did as a freelance business in New York and San Francisco for 30 years. I love photography, love nature photography, nothing I like better than being out in the field... just about, anyway. And a gift for music and writing. And at any given moment, He may use the gift He gave me or not use it. Of course, I love certain gifts more than others, but I’m resigned to let Him have totally free reign over my will. That’s what love is all about. He could have called down armies of angels to deliver Him from death. But no, He wanted to fulfill the will of the Father, because He loves the Father; not Himself, not the work that He’d accomplished in the three years, the apostles and the following that He had. That was not what was important to Him. What was important to Him was obedience to the will of His Father because He loved His Father.

Very often, we try to engineer our own salvation and our own sanctity. We see somebody who we think is holy and spiritual and we dream 'I want to be like her, I want to be like him'. I went through this when we were examining the Catholic Church. I really wanted to be just like St. Francis. I was so impressed with his purity of heart and simplicity of life, his fasting and sacrifices, his selfless service even to the lepers - exposing himself to leprosy and the amazing miracles the Lord performed through him. To me, he was more like Jesus than any other person. Maybe Paul would be the one after him. He just was so conformed to the image of Christ.

So, we sold everything and moved into a tarpaper shack on the side of the mountain. We were accepted into the Franciscan order and had a spiritual director, who was the guardian of a monastery. That was a high honor. We even had gray habits to help us overcome our vanity and as a sign of our devotion to the Lord. I fasted on bread and water six days a week for years and did so many other things St. Francis and his early friars did in serving the poor. What attracted us to St. Francis was his love of Christ and his brother. He was very intimate with the Lord and God used him to perform countless miracles. And I have to say, I had a tremendous breakthrough from vanity and my preoccupation with vain and futile things. My intimacy with the Lord grew leaps and bounds. I was happy, fulfilled and deeply in love with Jesus, more than ever before in my life.

I thought that monastic life was the best thing anyone could do. Then, the Lord switched gears on me. He made it clear that He wanted me to move on. And I said, "But what about our habits? What about fasting, what about giving up the superfluous comforts of this world?"

He told me in essence, *"Do not make an idol out of monastic life. I know what's best for you and when it's best. I know My plan for your life, what you must do, who you must reach, what is most healthy for you. If you make an idol out of this attachment, you will never accomplish what I have called you to do. I have a calling on your life and in order for you to fulfill it, you have to let go. Only be attached to me and the truth. Never to any form of life that seems to you to be the holiest. Thinking this way leads only to pride, self-will and idolatry".*

So, that was basically what was on His heart. He didn't speak those words but that was what was on His heart. I'm just summarizing for you. In other words, I could not exalt myself with fasting and an ascetic lifestyle. That might be a holy path for someone else, but it was not the path of obedience. I have learnt in my almost seventy years that I cannot engineer my own salvation or sanctity. I cannot be attached to what looks holiest. I can't be attached to a work that I've done that's taken me years to accomplish. I can only be attached to my sweet Jesus and His will from moment to moment.

Oh! That was hard. I had begun to identify with my lifestyle, thinking that made me holy, when in reality I was deeply entrenched in pride. My attachment to my lifestyle was a dead giveaway that I was prideful. I knew what was best. I had traveled many roads and my experiences had led me to what I thought was my final destination. But holiness is not found in pleasing ourselves, rather only in pleasing God and living only for Him and His purposes. Total, unconditional surrender.

I remember a little story from the life of St Francis. He made a beautiful piece of pottery and kept it in his hermitage. Then, one day he realized, "This is truly beautiful. I look at it a lot. That's really well done.

But it's distracted me from the Lord." So he destroyed the pot and resumed his single-minded love for Jesus.

How do I know that I'm analyzing something? This is a good question. Well, the Lord sends His messengers to plant little seeds of doubt here and there. He allows a disorder in my life that just feels wrong. I wake up with any uneasy feeling that I've missed Him somehow. And the surest sign of all is when I drop a wall of defense, a knee-jerk reaction if someone threatens me by asking questions about my walk.

When we first put the habits on, I didn't feel like I have to defend myself. I felt peace. I was in His will and I knew it. Even though, we had some very stiff resistance and persecution, our lifestyle was pleasing to Him. It bore beautiful fruit. He loved my fasts and self-denial for His kingdom. And He recompensed me with His presence and a growing love, a love that was so deep and wide and so pure. But there came a time when He wanted to change gears for His own reasons. And, I had to let go and move on.

He is a jealous God and He will not allow us to have any other affections, than our affection for Him. No other justification than His justification on the cross. No other status than being His - and His little wallflowers, at that. No attachment to "this kind of prayer" and "this kind of worship only." When He doesn't show up during worship for weeks on end, something isn't right.

I had made an idol of certain forms of prayer and worship. He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. And "spirit and truth" do not always look the same. And in fact, I've found they love variety. He loves to plunge us into deep water when we can't even swim. He doesn't like us to say, "Oh, no problem! I can do that, no problem at all". Rather He likes to see us reach out to Him, "Lord, I'm going down, I cannot do this on my own. Help me".

It is when I feel self-sufficient that I begin to tremble. I mean literally tremble. That's a sure sign I'm falling deeper into pride. Now, I said "deeper" deliberately, because I know for sure, for real and all honesty, I have a lot of pride. So, I cannot say, "I'm falling into pride." No. I have to say "I'm falling *more deeply* into pride." Wrong direction. I feel much more secure as a little child that is totally unequipped for the job. Then I know He will do it through me and it will be His work and not my work.

In the final analysis, there is an acid test for the path we are on. And I must ask this of myself *only* when I'm in a moment of profound truthfulness with myself. (And this is a grace. It's not something I can do.) But a gift, the Lord Jesus will give me, when I ask.

And that test is this: "Do I feel a deep peace about what I am doing and what kind of fruit have I borne?" When I say "fruit", I don't mean how many people are following me, how much money I made, how famous I am. I mean righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, for the Kingdom of God has settled upon my life.

I pray for all of us Youtube family, that the Kingdom of God will settle on our lives, and that we can have that righteousness, peace and joy. The Lord bless you.