

DAYS OF HOPE

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way

FUGITIVE THOUGHTS by Jon Wells

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

-2 Corinthians 10

It is a startling realization to learn that not every thought in my head belongs to me. There is a lot going on in that echo chamber between my ears, and quite a bit of that stuff does not originate in me. There are a number of different voices that contribute to my daily thinking.

My Heavenly Father. If we know anything at all about God, we know that He is a communicator. From the moment He speaks the universe into existence to the moment He begins speaking to his creation, to the very last phrases in scripture, God is conversing, speaking to us and with us. A conversational walk with God is a beautiful revelation. The idea that God speaks to his children is not crazy talk- it is normative in scripture. Both Old and New Testament

men and women who walked with God also talked with God – and heard His voice. Jesus further expands on this notion in John chapter ten as He teaches that His sheep recognize and listen to His voice. Great reading on this topic can be found in *The Practice of the Presence of God* by the 17th century monk Brother Lawrence, or the more recent work, *The Power of a Whisper* by Pastor Bill Hybels.

The Enemy. Scripture presents evil as more than a generalized concept or force for 'bad' in the world. Evil has intentionality and personality. Jesus taught that this thief comes to 'steal, kill, and destroy,' and that he is the 'father of lies.' The book of Job and Revelation depict Satan as an accuser who brings charges against God's children. We see in Genesis how Satan approached Eve with cunning and malicious intent. Later in the Gospels, Christ is led into the wilderness and tempted with all manner of evil thought. Most believers are comfortable with the idea that Satan brings temptation into our lives. It is a startling thought to realize that not every dark impulse comes from me- our enemy is talented in the art of bringing those ugly thoughts to our awareness, inviting us to engage in harm. Not every accusation that rails against me is my own self doubt. And much of this nonsense that I am exposed to is simply not true.



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Fugitive Thoughts continued . . .

My Own Broken Self. Adam was given a good heart when he was made in the image of God. Like the Creator, he was creative, loving, powerful, and intelligent. This incredible reflection of the Creator was scarred by sin in the Fall. Each of us are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Every one us of carries that divine imprint as well as a sinful nature. This duality in our character explains the beauty and the devastation that humanity brings to everything we touch. We are in the same moment image bearers of the most high God *and* fallen creatures with foolish appetites. My broken, sinful nature still thinks and moves towards broken things. Paul tried to explain this internal struggle in Romans chapter 8.

“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”

I think we all can identify with this internal struggle. My good heart desires to engage the world and bring blessing, my sinful nature is drawn to darker things.

Other People. I have come to learn that each of us carries messages that we have internalized from others who have spoken over us in the past. For better or worse, the voices of people in our past surface constantly. These voices may comfort, they may bring accusation, they may wound. This is the reason why we are instructed in scripture to bless and not to curse others. Jesus takes this teaching to an extreme when he encourages his disciples to bless even their enemies. The words I speak over another person have the potential to remain and affect them for years into the future, especially if I hold a position of influence in their life. I do not want to join the enemy in bringing accusation, condemnation, and temptation against them. I must be careful to speak to the good in others, not the bad.

I have often thought that if you knew the crazy stuff that bounces around in my head, you would quickly find someone else to hang out with. The truth is, we all have a cacophony of noise resonating in our minds. No wonder Paul invites us to take each and every thought captive! We need to capture our thoughts and understand their source.

In Matthew 16, Jesus models this process for us. He was speaking with his friends about the cross he was about to endure. When Peter voiced opposition to the need for Calvary, Jesus responded with a shocking rebuke- “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” Jesus understood the source of that little thought, and addressed it directly. God help us to become adept at hearing and recognizing the voices that pop into our awareness. I want to become a skilled hearer of my Heavenly Father, and an absolute ninja at recognizing temptation and accusation coming against me!

LOOKING FOR LOVE

By Sean A Wilson

“Who is my family?” This is the question that Jesus asked when he was told His mother and brothers were outside asking to speak to Him. Jesus answered his own question with a startling response

“And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven are my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:49-50)

There is a great lesson to be learned here with respect to the response of the Lord. As I visited the children at Piney Ridge this month I had the opportunity to meet a lot of new residents. As I spoke to them and asked questions, I learned many things about them as individuals.

One young man told me a little about himself. Tyrell (name changed to protect identity) had recently transferred in from another facility. In that last program he had been an outcast. One day he was cutting himself and another young man approached Tyrell and told him that he did need to do that. This new friend encouraged him and accepted Tyrell the way he was. He then began to share with Tyrell about a group called Insane Clown Posse (ICP). I was not completely aware of this group and what they stood for. I asked Tyrell to explain what they believe. Tyrell couldn't clarify very much, but he did ask for the Insane Clown Posse Bible. He did share that they believe in God and another god as well.

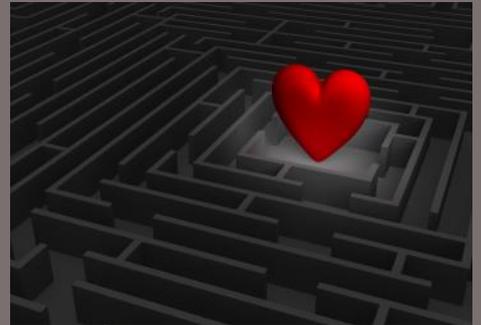
I continued to listen and in my heart felt very sorry for this young man. *How many of us have felt abandoned and gravitated to the first thing that we call love or family? How many young men and women have we failed to share the love of Christ with?*

A second young man told me about his family. His family was a gang and he said they looked out for one another. They stuck together and helped one another when they needed it. Why do I share these examples today? Simply put, the family that these young men should have been introduced to is the Body of Christ. Tyrell said that his dealings with Christians at his last facility were bad. Why did he say, ‘bad?’ He felt that the people just wanted to give him advice, but they did not really listen to him.

When ministering to anyone we must become like physicians. We must listen to what the patient has to say before we give them a prescription or administer any type of aid. We all need Jesus- that is an absolute fact. But we must never engage in any type of ministry without prayer and following the lead of the Holy Spirit. The best way to help people is to first listen to their cry. If we are willing to listen, the stories people tell us will show us what is really on their heart. We will begin to see that the family they are really seeking is the Body of Christ. Now this is the lesson that we could learn from what the Lord said in the beginning of this article.

‘Who is my family?’ Our family is essentially who we identify with. Lost children will always identify themselves with other lost children. This is where we have an opportunity to step in and help bring change by presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They need a new family and a new name. They need to be made into a new creation.

This is a great reminder of the importance of outreach, evangelism and just loving people. What a great way to begin the year! Let us purpose in our hearts to be the answer to someone's prayers by sharing the love of God with them; let's build the Kingdom of God together.



LITTLE NICODEMUS

by Jon Wells

Christmas Day was a busy one in residential! For some reason, there were more kids on campus than I have ever seen for that day. There were many opportunities to minister to kids and staff alike. One young man in particular cornered me as I was handing out stockings to the boys in his cottage.

“Pastor Jon, I need to get baptized!”

“That’s awesome, I can help you with that.” I replied.

“Yeah, I really want to get born again, but I have to get baptized first.” he said.

“Well, you can do that right now!”

The other boys sitting at our table seemed confused.

“You can’t be born all over again.”

“Are you gonna go back into your mom?” piped up another.

I had to hold back a chuckle. We seemed to be rehearsing the conversation that the Jewish leader Nicodemus had with Jesus in John chapter three. I opened my Bible to that page and began to share with them what it means to be ‘born again.’ The room was noisy, and my squirming little audience was having trouble tracking with the big words in the passage.

“Pastor Jon, just tell me the words to pray so I can be born again.”

I prayed with them there at the table. When we were finished, my determined little friend was still not satisfied.

“Pastor Jon, I am not gonna be able to remember al of this. Can you write this down for me?”

As the boys in the cottage opened their stockings and began to play with the toys inside, I wrote this little guy a letter, translating the big fancy theological terms we like to use into a simple summation of salvation. I let him know that we would bring him a baptism workbook so we could begin the process of scheduling that as well. I am not sure if he was happier about that stocking or the letter I gave him. What a way to celebrate Christmas!

