

*“Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand!  
Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you— Galatians 5:1*

### God has been dealing with me...

The last two weeks I have been struggling. I knew the Lord had something personal He wanted to say to me as we went through the “2<sup>nd</sup> Mile” series. My heart’s desire is to live a life that brings LIFE in Christ to others. I also felt a burden.

I began to write this devotional over 2 weeks ago, but my focus needed to change. I struggled. This has become a normal process that God brings me through when I am wrestling with scripture, and conviction. Often when I see something that stirs me, if I can be honest, I get very judgmental. When this happens I notice a tension entering my life which affects my relationship with God and others; the sweetness of intimacy is absent.

I justify my critical spirit as my defense for truth, but ultimately I give up the fight and ask the Holy Spirit to show me what is in my life which needs to be dealt with. In this instance the Lord brought me to Romans 14:13, *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.”* The Holy Spirit turned the spotlight on me.

I am no longer writing this to anyone in particular, but desire to share with you how the Lord is dealing with me as I look at my walk with God, and my brothers and sisters. Maybe you will relate, and maybe you will only see Paul with more flaws than you cared to know, but my hope is that we both will see Jesus and the beauty of His gift; freedom to live in victory and unity within the body of Christ.

In my 51 years I have experienced the heavy yoke of guilt and condemnation for sin that had a hold on my life. When I repented and committed my life to Christ I felt as if I could breathe again, but there were still areas of life where I struggled. I could sense the Holy Spirit wanting to change these areas but often I justified my life by looking at other “Christians.” If they could do it, why couldn’t I? I didn’t want to be a religious fanatic, I just wanted to be a good Christian. I wanted to serve others. I wanted to know Him. “I wanted,” and I was vocal about my faith.

I passionately shared my belief in Jesus with others, but when they got close enough to see my life there wasn’t much evidence to be seen. I still held onto my lifestyle and habits. To those that were watching I was living the life of a hypocrite; my life didn’t line up with what I professed to believe. I was deceiving myself, but I wasn’t deceiving those who knew me. There was little peace and joy in my salvation experience, and the struggle became stronger. My heart’s cry was to change but I couldn’t give up my right to live as I wanted. There was a war going on within me.\*

Finally I came to the end of myself and cried out to God, “Change me or take me!” This was the beginning of “2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Christianity” for me. I found that Jesus was with me in my 4 year battle with cancer and its effects: this gave me faith to believe that Jesus would be with me as I was

\*The Apostle Paul talks about this war going on in his own life as well in Romans 7:14-25. The answer is Jesus. Read it.

willing to give Him authority in these areas of my life as well.<sup>1</sup> It was like cancer in that it was a process of dying, dying to self and the desires of the flesh. *The Apostle Paul talks about living in the flesh or living in the power of the Holy Spirit in Romans 7 and 8 among other places.*

**Let me make this very clear: I am still a mess, but I am not the mess I used to be.** It is always a decision to submit to the work of God in my life or not to submit and live my way. But His faithfulness in my past gives me hope for the future. I may put up a fight for a while, but when joy and peace begin to fade and the struggle is on, I get to the point where I say, “Change me or take me!” The messy parts of my life are being dealt with by a loving God. Get close enough and you will see there is a lifetime of work to be done in my life, but God is the one who brings awareness and the desire to change. Okay, I wanted to make sure that this message is loud and clear: I am a work in progress. My hope is that you will love me in spite of my messy life, and will see a life which “Shouts” God’s power to change lives, and bring others to Jesus.

This brings me back to talking about “2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Christianity.” The “1<sup>st</sup> Mile” was lived as a child. When I was a child I had parents that fed me and cleaned up my messes – diapers and all. When I did wrong I may have suffered the consequences, but they paid the price. But even in the consequences they loved me, and walked with me through them. I understand I had a family life that not everyone experiences, but we all can experience this with Jesus. My parents made many sacrifices to protect me from things that would harm my growth so that I could fully experience life. They did not expect perfection, but guided me on the path leading toward maturity. There were times where discipline entered my life which was often applied to my back side, but I never questioned their love. I understood discipline had a purpose.

You should understand “2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Christianity” if you have kids or someone that you would lay your life down for. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Mile is not lived so that we might have our desires, but for others; that they might find joy, peace, and life to the fullest. We shipwreck those we love by living only for ourselves. Christ came that we might have freedom, but that freedom is to be lived for others. It is in this that we find a life of joy and fulfillment. Pastor Paul Pope challenged me several years ago to consider the following question:

### **“What do I have a right to?”**

The Apostle Paul deals with “2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Christianity” in 1 Corinthians 10, as does Jesus in Matthew 18. Jesus called a child to Him and said that we must become like children to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus is using the child as an example of a new believer in Christ. Read the entire portion of scripture, it is fascinating and challenging; Jesus goes on to say this:

*“And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! - Mat 18:5-7 NASB (Emphasis mine)*

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1. “My Encounter with a Living Personal God as I Struggled with Cancer Is a Story for Another Time, but Suffice to Say It Was the Beginning of My Experience in Having Intimacy with God.”

## How we live our lives does matter.

What a beautiful gift freedom is. It is wonderful to receive, and what we have freely received through Christ He desires to give to humanity... starting with our neighbor. We don't just represent Christ. Those who are lost or babies in the kingdom of God, see Christ in us.

- ***What did Jesus say were the two greatest commandments?***  
Read: Matt 36-40; Mark 12: 30-31; Luke 10:27
- Do you remember when you thought your dad and/or mom could do no wrong and were invincible? *"My dad can beat up your dad!"* Do you remember when you realized they were not perfect? ***How did that effect you?***
- Have there been instances where you have seen inconstant living in those who profess Jesus as "Savior and Lord?" ***How did that effect you?***
- ***Find a quiet place; if you're in a group take a few minutes to privately read the following scripture from the Apostle Paul and ask God to reveal if this is speaking to you.*** Most likely the Holy Spirit will not be talking to you about meat that has been offered to idols, but it will be just as relevant to you as this was to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish and Gentile Christians.

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. - 1Co 10:23-33 NASB

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if your freedom is a stumbling block for others. ***If so, what is your prayer?***

### One final thought that gave me, Paul Widmark, great comfort:

Satan comes to condemn me, but the Holy Spirit comes and convicts me. When He convicts me and I repent He also does the work within me. There is always life in the Holy Spirit. He does not ask me to try harder, pray more, read the Bible more, He asks me to desire to know Him more intimately, and with that desire I find I talk with God more, I read the Bible more, and love being around other followers of Christ – Christians, too.

**This convicted me.** The Lord is still dealing with me in this area. I desire a more intense love for my God, Savior, Redeemer and Lord, and a more intense love for my neighbor. Yes I am flawed, but I warned you of this... But He is faithful!

**2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Living: Jesus Christ welcomes us to live this life "in Him"; "with and for" each other."**