



# e - Votion

Wednesday April 9, 2014

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading Proverbs 27:17:

*"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."*

Devotional:

Some of you may know that I often say (a little tongue in cheek) that one of the Beatitudes that got "left out" is "Blessed are the flexible for they bend and do not break." That thought has saved me undue stress several times, especially during or just prior to a worship service when something unexpected happens. When things don't go the way we expect, we can get stressed out!!!

I use the word "flexible" as the opposite of "rigid." For me, rigid means stubborn, arrogant, unwilling to grow or learn, self-righteous, maybe

even static: all the things that I don't want to be as a disciple of Christ.

For me, the word flexible means, I don't have all the answers; I am growing, seeking, learning, humble, but with lots of faith. I used to believe that flexibility was a weakness, but now I consider it a great strength. When we think about big structures like bridges, for example, the ability to flex a little while it is twisted, contoured, battered allows it to stand firm. But a rigid structure falls apart at the first sign of stress. Our faith is the same way. Doubt, failure, differing points of view or beliefs, tragedies-- all might cause a rigid faith to crumble, but a flexible faith endures and even remains strong.

A rigid faith might say that anything that differs from my point of view is dangerous and must be treated as hostile. I am not suggesting that "anything goes." There are certain things we have to avoid due to our standards of righteousness; however, rigidity creates an impenetrable fortress. A fortress does keep harmful things out, but also can keep out truth and love, necessary elements of our faith.

When I cut off communication from those who believe differently from me, or when I refuse to interact with those who are different from me, in essence, I sever the relationship and eliminate future opportunities to love and serve. When I feel like differing views are personal attacks, the walls of my fortress go higher. I am inside and the other person is outside and never the twain shall meet. (I confess that are times that is tempting...) Whatever labels I might attach to people, when I am rigid, I deny their humanity and strip their worth as being created in the image of God.

When I am safely inside my rigid fortress I don't have to listen, grow or change. I have my faith figured out and there is nothing God or anyone else can do. I stop growing in my faith.



One of my seminary professors was fond of saying, "When you think your theology is absolutely correct, that theology has become an idol and is separating you from God." There are some absolutes in our faith, that are not negotiable--things like "Jesus is our Lord and Savior." "God is our creator and loves us and gives us grace beyond measure." "The Holy Spirit is our comforter, sustainer..." ETC... But God is beyond all knowing--omniscient, and when we think we know it all, then we create God in an image of our construction and not truly who God is. So, when my faith says I don't have any room to learn, that is a big UH-OH...

The other thing that strikes me about a rigid faith is that it is shaky --- because it doesn't allow room for things that aren't acceptable. And I KNOW that God rewards the righteous and judges the wicked, but what about the little girl who was killed in the car accident? And I KNOW that God listens to every prayer prayed in faith, but what about all the people who were cured of cancer, while my dad didn't make it at a time when I needed him the most? And I prayed continually for his healing.

If my faith is rigid, then I don't have a way to resolve discrepancies, tragedies, disagreements along with a whole lot of other things. Is my faith so shaky, built on blocks of absolutes and when one of those blocks gets removed, my whole tower of belief and faith comes tumbling down?

All that to say, have decided to embrace a flexible faith. I don't have to defend God--God is God! So when I listen to someone who believes differently than I do, I have the privilege and opportunity to sift through both the fallacies and the truths. And I am able to see that person as a child of God, wonderfully made in God's image, rather than their particular belief I don't agree with. We can dialogue, learn from each other, grow in our faith and show God's love. :)

Along with my flexible faith (and hopefully yours) comes a great deal of humility. I don't know everything. God continues to reveal to me daily through Scripture, through other people--both those I agree with and those I disagree with-- and through the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are things that I KNEW and I knew I knew 5 years ago that I don't believe today. With humility we can all say, "It took me all these years to figure this out and accept it, so I love you and stand beside you in your struggle whatever it might be."

With my flexible faith, I embrace, thrive, difficulty and challenge. Because my moments of doubt and uncertainty give me the great chance to self-examine. When I am confronted with an experience or a point of view that shakes me, when doubt comes upon me--I can give that to God and God can handle anything we can give to God. And then because I give my doubts to God, I can look at whatever I am facing with an open heart and mind. And regardless of the situation, I come out ahead because God is right there with me.

If my faith is rigid, and I can justify a rigid faith by pointing to God's standards and strong convictions, but what do I do about sharing the gospel and showing love to others? Honestly, my faith doesn't stand on knowledge, or doctrine, or right practice, my faith stands on and exists solely in the person of Jesus Christ. And my goal is to share Jesus with everyone I meet. I don't agree with everyone but I do try to treat everyone with the love and respect of God. I try to be flexible enough to hear what they say, accept the truth I hear, and acknowledge my own limited understanding and completeness. I place my trust in God.

All of that longness-- (I think I should've saved it for a sermon) to say that "as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Its easy to sharpen other people, but not so easy to let others sharpen us. My prayer is that we will never be stagnant or arrogant in our faith but always be humble, open, growing in our faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Blessed are the flexible for they bend and do not break.

PRAYER CONCERNS:

Please pray for Elizabeth Bailey who is at Franklin Woods with a serious infection.

Please pray for Helen Holyfield

Please pray for our church

Please lift up unspoken prayers. God knows the need.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS and CALENDAR

Many of you know that we are running a significant financial deficit. We haven't met our budgeted income, but even more we are spending more than we are bringing in. We have many wonderful ministries taking place at the church, and we would love for those to continue, as well as continue to seek to bring new people into the church for the sake of Jesus Christ. Please consider whether you can help with this deficit. And if you can't, please pray that we will make wise decisions regarding spending.

Next week is Holy Week. We will have 1 service PALM SUNDAY April 13 at 10:30

Maundy Thursday service following fellowship dinner at 6:30 (No Wednesday niter)

Good Friday noon prayer service

Easter Sunday 7:45 prayer service followed by breakfast and 10:30 CELEBRATION THAT CHRIST IS RISEN!!!

Please note that we will not have the daily noon prayer services during Holy Week this year.

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,  
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