

Your Thorn: Remove It or Embrace It

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“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Colossians 3:1,2

“..look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:18

For years these two verses meant very little to me because I had no idea what the “things above” and “unseen” were. This left me focusing only on the things of the earth. What are the things of the earth? I simply define them as those things which we perceive with our intellect and our five senses in the areas of living such as relationships and circumstances.

As I have grown in my understanding of Christ being my life, I now have a better idea of the “things above.” The “unseen” realm in 2 Corinthians 4:18 is the place of spiritual understanding of God’s truth about such things as who I am in Christ, who God is, and how Christ wants to live in and through me. Another reason that we need to live in the unseen or to set our minds on the “things above” is so that we can have some understanding of things that are going on in the “seen” realm. “Why did my sister have to die so young?” “Why do I have this chronic problem, temptation, or addiction?” “Why can’t my marriage improve?” The list goes on and on. The problem is that we try to figure out the answers to these questions with our finite minds. As a result, we have few, if any, answers to our questions.

In light of these two verses, I want to testify regarding a breakthrough in my life. As you know, I have been struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome for the past 25 years. Unfortunately, this not only affects my body, but it also affects my thinking as well. Some days the “brain fog” is so great that I feel like I am in a remake of the “The Twilight Zone.” For years, I have searched for the “silver bullet” which was going to cure me. The cures have ranged from anti-depressants to a guy who said the answer was in eating Blue Bell Ice Cream every evening (this is no joke)! The anti-depressants didn’t cure the depression or the fatigue, and I only got fat on the Blue Bell. However, the search has been relentless. I have tried many different remedies, and though some have no doubt helped, none have proved to be a cure.

I came to the conclusion that it might be a problem with stress or perhaps with some unresolved issue in my life. I beseeched the Lord, and yet there was no answer. Even though on some level I had given this issue to God, deep within my soul I was telling God that I would not truly be effective in ministry unless He healed me. After all, who wants a fatigued and “foggy-brained” teacher? My problem was that I was trying to figure out on the “seen” level what was going on. All I saw was a body and a brain that weren’t improving, and that was not acceptable. I had no idea what God was doing “above the line” in the unseen. As a result, there continued to be a struggle in my soul.

One day as I was sitting in our weekly staff meeting, the “brain fog” rolled in, and I knew what was coming next: the voices. The voices within me would be saying, “If only I didn’t have this problem. If only I was normal. If only.. If only....” Instead, I had a very different thought. I knew that it had to be of the Lord because it was so foreign. The thought went like this, “Bill, do you not understand what I am doing to you? Come up here in the unseen, and let me show you why I have not taken the physical and mental problems away. The reason that I haven’t taken them away is that what you think disqualifies you for ministry is the very thing that I have allowed to continue in your

life that does qualify you. When your body and your brain are on the blink, you have no place to turn but to Me. Everything in the “seen” looks negative and depressing as you look at life through your own eyes. However, I want you to see your condition through My eyes. It is through your condition that I am teaching you faith. Since you have nothing to offer in your own strength and mind, I want to be your strength and your mind. I will use your condition to transform you, to conform you to My image, and to minister through you. Therefore, **instead of asking Me to remove this “thorn,” embrace it.**” It was like a giant light bulb going off in my head. The very thing that I wanted removed is the very thing that is pressing me to Him and seeking the things above. As I look at my condition through His eyes in the unseen, I don’t see a thorn. I see a blessing and an expression of His love that keeps me close to Him.

We all have impossible situations. These may be hurting or broken relationships, chronic health problems, an unfair boss, inner strongholds, or addictions. Perhaps in some way you are counting on an “earthly” solution to your situation.. If you are, I would encourage you to seek the Lord in the “unseen” so that you can see the things of earth through His eyes and understand His purposes in your life. Remember that He may not give you an answer right away. However, keep seeking Him, and in the fullness of His perfect timing, He will give you understanding. If you do this, you may end up embracing the very thing that you thought you wanted removed.

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