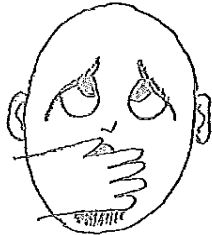
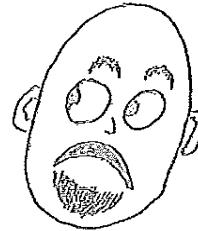


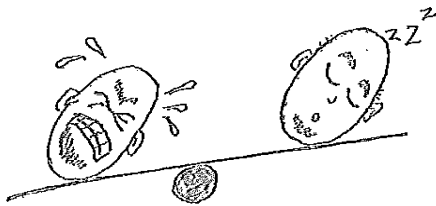
Real Everyday Challenges



Taming the Tongue



Fear



Balancing Rest and Work



Worry



Relationships



Health

A Sermon Series Devotional Guide
By Rev. D. Derrick West

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“Relying on God has to start all over everyday, as if nothing has yet been done.”

-- *C.S. Lewis*

Real Everyday Challenge #1

Relationships

August 21, 2011

The Porcupine Syndrome

I am fascinated by all things related to porcupines. If the boss would let me bring one in the house, I'd have a porcupine for a pet. But she won't. So I don't. But I do like to read about them.

My research on porcupines all started when I was curious about those little sticker things on their bodies. They are called quills and are very sharp. Each quill has a number of microscopic barbs facing backwards that catch on the skin and makes them difficult to extract. Even more difficult than splinters! Just take my word for it. I found out the hard way when I was a kid.

But do you know what is really interesting about porcupines? On cold nights, they all gather together in a huddle to keep warm. The closer they get to each other, the warmer they all become. However, once they get close to each other, their quills poke each other and they begin to move away from their warm little huddle. They carry on in this manner for hours, sometimes even days. They need each other so they draw close. Then they poke each other and draw away.

Relationships we have in life are like that, aren't they? We have friends that we are close to. Then the quills of friendship poke us and we distance ourselves. It is the same with family members isn't it? In fact, it even works on our end with God. We get close to God, walk with him and then we back off for a number of reason. He doesn't work like that. He never moves.

You see, relationships are incredibly important in life. Relationships with God, friends and family are the most important in life. And it is these three foundational relationships that are worth the every day challenge of nurturing.

Reflection Questions

1. I do a lot of funerals. A lot. You can learn a lot about clues to meaning in life by going to funerals. Who speaks about the person's faith or church affiliation? Who shares memories about the person from the good ole days in high school or college? Who speaks about what kind of parent the person was? What do these clues from funerals suggest about the meaning of life?
2. In my view, funerals tell us that meaning in life is found through (1) relationships with God (2) relationships with friends (3) relationships with family. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. You can tell a lot about an individual's relationship with God by listening to that person pray. One of the greatest relational prayers in the Bible is found in Ephesians 3:16-21. Read it. Reflect on it for a moment. What did Paul want the church in Ephesus to experience in their relationship with Jesus?
4. I have often been told by those much wiser than me that you will be lucky to have 5 true friends in your lifetime. I didn't believe it when I heard it. But the older I get the more I do. Read Proverbs 17:17; 18:24 and 27:6. All of these proverbs give us different truths about the nature of true friendships. What are they in your view?
5. Relationships with family members also provide a clue to meaning in life. Timothy was a young pastor who often struggled with difficult issues in his church. At certain times, he had mountain top experiences. At other times, he was down in the valley. He had great successes and heart breaking regrets. Yet Paul reminds him about the influence of two individuals in his life who not only nurtured him physically, but also spiritually. That reminder is found in 2 Timothy 1:5. Who were these two individuals? How can family relationships help nurture our faith and trust in God?

6. What relationships in your life need to be better nurtured? Well please nurture them. Walk with the Lord. You won't regret it. Be a friend, a real friend. Give of yourself as much as you receive. Make things right with your family members if "porcupine syndrome" has manifested itself in your family lately. Life is too short. Relationships with God, friends and family really matter. Everything else is a distant second.

Real Everyday Challenge #2

Taming the Tongue

August 28, 2011

May I Quote You

Very early in my Christian life God taught me a valuable lesson about gossip and rumor. I heard a rumor about an individual. Saw some things in that individual's life that indicated to me the rumor was probably accurate. So I picked up the phone and called my pastor. "Hello," I hear on the other end of the receiver. And then the lesson begins!

"Pastor, this is Derrick. I want to tell you about so and so." "Stop right there son," my pastor says. "Before you go on with your story, Derrick, I need to know if I can quote you in what you are about to say?" The silence on my end of the receiver was deafening. After a minute or two, I foolishly utter these words: "Ummm - well pastor - I'm not sure that would be a good idea." His response still echoes like a cymbal in my ears.

"Derrick, if you're not interested in putting your name on it when I talk to the individual, then I'm not interested in listening to what you have to say."

The tongue is the strongest muscle in the body and gets a lot of exercise from repetitions of gossip and rumor in doesn't it? When destructive language comes from our tongues, it has the capacity to destroy lives and reputations. However, when Christian speech flows from our tongues, it can do wonders for people. Taming the tongue is indeed a real everyday life challenge.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the most hurtful comment someone has ever made to you? What about the nicest compliment? Why do you think you still remember them?
2. Proverbs belongs in the wisdom portion of the Old Testament. It contains a lot of wisdom either written or collected by Solomon. Read Proverbs 11:12-13; 16:28; and 20:19. As you read, note in your mind

what kind of speech constitutes “wholesome speech” and what kind of speech constitutes “unwholesome speech.”

3. James 3:3-12 has a lot to say about the speech which flows from our tongues. Read it. What stands out to you about “taming the tongue” in the passage?
4. What is wrong with this picture: a gentleman gives his testimony in church in front of the congregation about how great God is. Then proceeds to gossip and point out flaws in others after church during lunch with friends?
5. Read Ephesians 4:29. What constitutes proper Christian speech? Why is that so difficult?
6. “Think before you speak, Derrick,” is a lesson I’ve been learning from the Holy Spirit over the last year. “Think” is also a good acronym for understanding the essence of taming the tongue. It has helped me and I hope that it will help you.

T – Is it true?

H – Is it helpful?

I – Is it inspiring?

N – Is it necessary?

K – Is it kind?

Real Everyday Challenge #3

Balancing Rest and Work

September 4, 2011

Sharpening the Axe

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, before the show *Axe Men* was ever on *A&E*, there were two lumberjacks who both enjoyed challenges. One day one of them challenged the other to an all day tree chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard and stopped only for a brief lunch break. On the other hand, the other lumberjack had a leisurely lunch break and took several breaks during the day.

At the end of the day, the challenger was puzzled and annoyed to find out that his competition had chopped substantially more wood than he had. "I can't make sense of this," he said. "You rested more than I did, yet you chopped more wood." "But you didn't notice," said the winning lumberjack, "that I was sharpening my ax when I set down to rest?"

Balancing rest and work is, indeed, a real everyday challenge isn't it? There is a way to have more balance in this everyday challenge. It begins when we learn about the nature of the Biblical concepts of "Sabbath" and "rest."

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does rest allow you to "sharpen" your axe in your life? What happens to your mood if you don't take time to "sharpen your axe?"
2. One of the Bible's key themes is rest. It is vital in the economy of God because it was practiced by God himself. Read Genesis 2:2. What did God do on the seventh day? Why?
3. Concepts like "rest" and "Sabbath," while important, need to be understood correctly or you will miss God's original intent. They were commanded by God for our benefit. He had us in mind. It would behoove us to rest not only because he commanded us to, but because

it would be in our best interest to do so. Read Exodus 20:8-11. Why do you think “rest” is so important that God made it a command?

4. The concept of rest isn’t limited to taking a Sabbath day of rest. Our salvation is coined by the biblical writers as “rest.” Our soul is at peace when he come to know Him as our Lord and Savior. It lays down to rest because God is now with us. Read the following verses: Zephaniah 3:17; Matthew 11:28; 1 John 3:19 and Revelation 14:13. Now, in light of what you have read, what does phrase “peace with God” mean to you?
5. “The Sabbath is a day of rest, Derrick” so I think you need to preach that people shouldn’t work at all on Sundays (which would apply to the single mother who has to have three jobs and work an occasional Sunday) to provide for her family. I’ve actually had someone tell me that. What is wrong with that statement?
6. Read Mark 2:23-28. What verse would indicate that the “Sabbath rest” was instituted for our benefit?
7. I hope you learned that a “Sabbath rest” was instituted by God for our benefit. That is the “spirit” of the law. If you are anything like me, you are very busy. You probably feel pulled in a thousand different directions. I’m trying to incorporate more “down time” in my life, but it is very hard to do. What steps can you take to incorporate more “down time” in your busy life?

Real Everyday Challenge #4

Fear

September 11, 2011

It's Called a Phobia, Miss Phoebe

I am a fan of many animal documentaries that appear on The Animal Planet television network. However, there is one type of show I will not watch under any circumstances. It is the type of show that features snakes. It ain't gonna happen, friend. No way, Jose. No thanks, Miss Franks. I would rather spend my time memorizing a Sears catalog. Why? I am deathly afraid of snakes. It is a phobia (the Greek term for fear) that I have. It is *ophidiophobia* to be exact. That's my fear diagnosis.

We all have phobias that tend to paralyze us don't we? You wouldn't be reading this if you have *peladophobia* because it would mean that you have a fear of bald people! Perhaps you dread the holiday season because seeing your Mother-in-Law gives you *pentheraphobia*. Or maybe you are like billions of other people in the world who have a great fear of a hippopotamus stealing your pajamas. If that's the case, then *hippolarconinsomiaphobia* is the official fear diagnosis for you!

The fear of God is a healthy fear. It is the type of fear we should all have. Not "fear" in the sense of fright. But "fear" in the sense of a reverence/respect that a child should have for his father. But all the other phobias are not healthy and they will actually paralyze you if you cave into them. I should know because for 33 years of my life I suffered from *atychiphobia*. You might know it as the fear of failure or performance anxiety. I still suffer from it occasionally but I've learned not to let it defeat me. It is a real everyday challenge I face. But learning the biblical difference between healthy and unhealthy fears has helped me in my life. What about you?

Reflection Questions

1. What kind of phobias do you have?

2. What is the difference between the “fear of God” and living your life in a constant state of fear (which usually manifests itself in anxiety and worry)?
3. A healthy fear is the fear of God. Not fear in the sense of fright, but “fear” in the sense of respect and reverence. Read Psalm 112. What blessings come to those who have a healthy fear of God?
4. I know you have heard me say this a lot: “God isn’t a God who throws lightening bolts at us.” I say that from experience. By far, the darkest days of my life were dark precisely because I had this type of fear of God. It was an unhealthy and non-Christian view point that neglected the character of Jesus himself. And it developed in me a spirit of fear. I could never measure up. Ever. Never. God had set a standard so high and I always failed. Royally. Read Romans 8:1-2. What does “no condemnation” mean? How is living in a constant state of condemnation (which usually manifests itself with thoughts like God is going to be mad at me if I don’t do such and such) a form of bondage?
5. The point of the lesson is this: a fear of God that manifests itself as a respectful and reverential type of fear (much like a child has of his father) is very healthy. But living your life in a state of fear will absolutely paralyze you and prevent you from living. The reason? Such a spirit is not one of faith. And without faith it is impossible to please God. In what areas of your life does a spirit of fear play a prominent role? How can living this way immobilize you? A church? A country? A world? An economy?
6. I want you to think about this for a moment because it is very important. Almost every single biblical hero had a spirit of fear about a task that was before them. And in every single one of those cases, 241 to be exact, the Lord responded “do not be afraid, for I am with you.” Isaiah 40:10-13; Exodus 14:13-18 and Luke 2:8-9 (my favorite) are three great examples. How might knowing that He is with you help you move past an unhealthy fear to a very healthy faith in areas of your life that make you anxious, worried, scared and/or afraid?

Real Everyday Challenge #5

Worry

September 18, 2011

Preach On, Blue Man

I am a preacher. And I love to preach! Sundays can't come soon enough for me to proclaim the Word of God unashamedly, courageously and fearlessly. As someone who loves to break open The Book and bring it to you, you probably aren't surprised to learn that some of the greatest influences on my life are preachers. I have learned a lot about courage from a preacher in the Old Testament named Jeremiah. I have learned a lot about how to preach from studying a preacher named Paul in the New Testament. From Ravi Zacharias, one of my favorite modern preachers, I have learned a lot about using illustrations to actually illustrate a biblical point, not substitute for it.

But my favorite preacher is not Jeremiah, Paul or Ravi Zacharias. Instead, it is a little parakeet that I bought for my son for his 4th birthday named "Blue Man." That's right. My favorite preacher is a bird! Why? Well, ole "Blue Man" never worries. Ever. I put bird seed in his bowl every night and he always hops right up to it and takes as much as he needs in order to satisfy his hunger. Then he hops up onto his little perch, preaches to me in little chirps an important message about thanksgiving, then goes to sleep, leaving tomorrow to take care of itself. He isn't a preacher who worries. But his audience is one that does. That's right. Worry is a real everyday challenge I face. He preaches to me everyday a sermon he got from the greatest preacher of all time in Matthew 6:25-34. Read it.

Reflection Questions

1. Over the course of your life, what issues and/or situations simply worked out because you worried so much about them?

2. Was that one hard to answer? OK, then, what about this one: have you ever changed how people think about you or what they actually will do that you don't want them to do by worrying?
3. What is the difference between concern and worry?
4. *Concern* is good in my view because it can move you to action about a particular situation. But worry is another matter. Read Matthew 6:25-34. What is the image Jesus wants us to have about God? Absolutely beautiful isn't it?
5. Our Minister of Education and Administration, the Right Reverend Lance Fancher, has told me on occasion that I'm being arrogant when I worry because I'm not trusting God to handle the situation. Do you think worry equates to a lack of trust in the Lord? Why or why not?
6. What situations and/or areas of your life do you need to quit worrying about and trust God to handle? Easier said than done isn't it?

Real Everyday Challenge #6

Health

September 25, 2011

The Temple of the Lord

I'm sure you've heard a phrase like this if you have been around church people for a while: "Hey Bubba; we have worship in the church sanctuary at 10:30 AM. I sure you would like to see you there." Or what about this: "the church is the temple where God dwells. We need to take care of it." There is nothing wrong with those phrases because I believe they are well intentioned. But they are a bit misleading and more descriptive on an Old Testament faith than a New Testament one.

You see, my friends, in the Old Testament God dwelled in a physical location and building called the "temple." You went to the temple to worship at the "sanctuary." But in the New Testament, the "temple" and "sanctuary" where God dwells is not a building. The "temple" and "sanctuary" where God dwells is inside of you. We don't go to the "temple" to worship. We are all individual "temples of the living God" who come together to worship the Lord in a building. The Father dwells inside of you. The Son dwells inside of you. The Holy Spirit dwells inside of you.

Much like the Godhead, you are a temple with a mind, body and spirit. All three of those aspects of your temple should be nourished correctly to get the most out of your faith and life. A healthy temple, one which feeds the mind, body and spirit, is not only a good one, but a very well balanced and productive one. And dear friends, that is the greatest real everyday challenge I face.

Reflection Questions

1. God is a Trinity. Explain.

2. God created human beings in the image of himself. Therefore, we have a (1) soul (2) mind and (3) body. They all three make up who we are as one human being. Some great preachers, theologians and churchmen throughout the ages and up to the present would disagree with me on this. Do you agree with me? Why or why not?
3. Read the following verses from Deuteronomy: 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16 and 30:2-10 and then complete this sentence. "Nourishing my soul would be to love God with all of my h_____ and s_____." How can having a daily quiet time with God nourish the soul?
4. Read Luke 10:25-27. Jesus is quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy but adds another part of who we are that should love God. What is it? How do you think you can honor the Lord by nourishing your mind?
5. Read Genesis 1:30. What type of food did God first ordain that would nourish our bodies? Read Leviticus 11. It contains the Jewish kosher laws. What did you learn from them about the types of meats that were in God's early plans for us? How can your body benefit from eating vegetables and meats that were in God's early plans?
6. Read Romans 12:1. In short and in summary, viewing health from a Christian perspective means that we need to view our bodies as a temple of the living God. We have a soul that needs the proper nourishment to be healthy. Our mind needs nourishment to be healthy. And our bodies need proper nourishment to be healthy. What steps can you take to take care of your temple?

