

Beyond Being Bent by Pastor Marty

This month's newsletter focuses on the issues we deal with related to becoming whole persons. If you have read any of the prior newsletters, you know that I have often discussed aspects of salvation that the Church today as a whole has forgotten. A majority of these instructions revolve around what it means to Practice the Presence of God—a modern description of what it means to put on the armor of God, walk in the Spirit, or abide in Christ; all of these (along with variations) are biblical phrases that describe an intentional choice to live from the new, redeemed, true self instead of the old, sinful, false self—and in the process, they touch on how we have daily personal relationship with each Person of the Trinity. In this newsletter, I wanted to discuss the process as it relates to the woman described in Luke 13:11-17, an account only shared by Luke. This story is not only entirely true but also significantly useful in providing us an insightful analogy of what is involved in our becoming whole persons in Christ.

Luke 13:11-17 provides us with an excellent analogy of what it means to grow in Christ.

For convenience sake, I am going to repeat this passage here before discussing its significance. I think this will help us see how each part of it relates to our personal relationship with God in our world.

And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him*? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him. (NASB)

Again, my describing this as an analogy does *not* mean that it did not actually take place, for it certainly did; it simply means that it is a perfect example of what we all go through in the process of salvation.

This account is a perfect example of what we go through in the process of salvation.

This woman had been in bondage for a significant period of time. It does not say that she had been born in this bondage like some of the other instances described in the Gospels and Acts; instead, it was an affliction that came upon her. We also know that it was an affliction caused by a spirit. This is important because nothing in the text indicates Jesus used any kind of deliverance-related language in healing her; He simply proclaimed freedom to her. This tells us that when a spirit is afflicting a person for a specific intended result, addressing the result can sometimes be enough to get rid of it without an overt exorcism. Of course, we also see instances in the Gospels when a deliverance is performed, and a healing follows. This shows us that whether an affliction appears to be demonic in origin or not, we are nevertheless still responsible to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to know how we should proceed.

Regardless of how things look, we must depend fully on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Turning to the perspective of the woman, we can learn something about ourselves and our own experiences in life. She was bent over so she could not stand upright. Clearly, this had to involve some issue with her spine. If we bend over to pick something up, we usually are not stuck in that position; however, she was. For at least eighteen years, her life had been completely reduced to only being able to look at the ground and her own feet. If the affliction had been less pronounced, she might have still been able to look forward to see what was in front of her, but in this case, it was significantly more serious. She could not interact with people face-to-face; she could not look people in the eyes; she could not see more than a few feet ahead of her. This affliction had limited her entire world to the visibility of a few feet. The only time she could actually see people, things, or events was when she was sitting down—meaning she was only an observer in life instead of a participator. The ancient Hebrew culture was different than ours: except when people were actively repenting, prayer involved looking up toward Heaven with their eyes open and hands raised. This woman could not do that. Even worse, this was a culture that tended to see ongoing physical infirmity as the result of personal sin and the judgment of God, and after being in this condition for eighteen years, she probably believed it. She was living continually out of a position that was reflective of sin, guilt, shame, and separation from God.

Fallen human nature drives us to identify ourselves by the circumstances in our lives.

In his book *Perelandra*, C.S. Lewis paints an insightful picture of evil. Ransom, a Christian visiting that planet, attempts to describe what evil is like to the Green Lady, the unfallen Eve of her world. Not knowing evil herself, she has trouble understanding it. After much deliberation, he describes it as being like a plant that chooses, against its nature, to turn and grow toward the ground instead of toward the sun. She is amazed that anything would actually choose death instead of life, and he quickly points out that this “bentness” is precisely the nature of evil. Lewis here provides us with an excellent description of our fallen nature: we tend to look down and focus on ourselves and our limited situations instead of standing and looking toward God to hear what He is saying and see what He is doing. Paul points out to us that when we see Jesus on the last day, we will become like Him because we will see Him as he is; Moses face shone with transformational light whenever he would leave his face-to-face time with God; Stephen’s face glowed like an angel when he looked toward heaven and saw Jesus at the right hand of the Father; and when we are focused on God instead of ourselves, we are changed from glory to glory. The act of standing tall and looking to God for our identity is how we all become what we are intended to be, and it is the way we learn to Practice the Presence of God, abide in Christ, and walk by the Spirit.

Standing tall and looking to God is how we begin to become what we are intended to be.

I would be remiss to let anyone think I discovered this concept myself. Honestly, I only came to understand this from the teachings of Leanne Payne. In all of her books, she describes how healing and wholeness come from choosing to look to God instead of ourselves, other people, or things. If we think about it, every area of brokenness and sin in our lives results from being separated from some good that is from God and being bent toward something not of Him. Before we have our own experience of Jesus, we are trapped in the bent position: we have no other choice because we are dead in sin and in bondage to the spirit who kills, steals, and destroys. However, salvation breaks that power in our lives. We are given the extraordinary ability to stand up straight and look to God instead of remaining bent toward ourselves and our own natural limitations. However, we need to remember that this is not just a salvation-thing that happens when we are saved; it is something we have to learn to do continually.

We must continually train ourselves to reject our bentness, stand up, and look to God.

When Jesus delivered this woman from bondage and healed her body, she immediately began to glorify God. I am absolutely certain that this was not done in a quiet and respectful way. We have to remember that she had been bent over double for eighteen years. Suddenly, Jesus proclaims freedom to her, and she can stand upright again. This was more than just a physical healing to her. He gave back to her everything that she thought was gone forever: dignity as a person, identity as a daughter of God, ability to relate to others face-to-face, empowerment to make a living instead of depending on others, and invitation back into the worshipping congregation of God's people. The woman did not approach Jesus when this took place; it says He called her over after He saw her. She had probably given up hope that things would change. When she suddenly found she could stand up, I am sure it only took a short moment before she began shouting praises to God. She was grateful, and everyone instantly knew it. This was a culture where people were very expressive of their feelings, and she had received a new life. John tells us that we love God because He first loved us, and we give out of what we have first received ourselves; when we experience real transformation in our lives, we significantly changes how we live.

When God enables us to stand up from our bentness, we have power to listen to Him.

If we look at this account as an analogy of not only salvation but also growth in Christ, we have to notice the next event as it relates to the Church. Jesus sees this woman in bondage, proclaims God's will for her, and heals her. In response to her healing, the woman begins glorifying God. As we know, the Jews were very opposed to His claims of being one with the Father. However, she was not praising or glorifying Jesus here; she was glorifying God. Still, the leader of the synagogue was upset and stated that if people need healing, it should not be on a Sabbath. If she had remained quiet, nothing may have happened here; instead, she created a bit of a disruption. We need to realize that when we receive the power from God that enables us to forsake our bent position and stand up in our new identity in Christ, our churches will not always be supportive. This sounds contradictory, but it is often true. This happens because standing up and walking in a relationship with God that involves actively looking and listening to Him often disrupts the status quo. When we see clearly and learn to listen to the Father, we begin to recognize how some of our leaders are unhealthy, manipulative, and controlling; how portions of our theology contradict God's self-proclaimed character and nature; and how many in today's Church have embraced a sinful culture. When we replace our masks of holiness with actual holiness, sin is revealed.

When we replace acting holy with actual holiness, we become threats to concealed sin.

I may be reading a bit into the story, but I wonder if the woman's troubles were not completely over when she was healed. After eighteen years, she had adapted her life to living in this bent position. She had become used to relating to people based on hearing their voices and seeing their feet. Now she had to learn how to look people in their eyes and interact with them face-to-face. She had to learn entirely new behaviors in her relationships. Her home may have been so adapted to her previous bent position that she had to go through major remodeling—or even find a new home. She had to find her place in society all over again. Because she had lived so much of her life close to the ground, there is a distinct possibility that she sometimes found herself bending over because it was more familiar to her. Similarly, we need to realize that learning to forsake our own bentness and choosing to stand up in our relationship with God will take a great deal of effort at first. We may experience surprising resistance from friends, family, or even others in the Church—not to mention the spiritual warfare that will surely come from the forces of darkness that do not want us walking with God. Nevertheless, facing difficulty in our new relationship with God cannot compare to the surpassing joy and love we will begin to know. When we consider how we will be truly walking with God, any of the trouble is going to be worth it.