

The Art of Living Well: Trust, Part 2

Today we're continuing the series, "The Art of Living Well," which is a study of the Ten Commandments. You may be thinking, "The Ten Commandments?!", and some of you may be thinking, "Ohh, the Ten Commandments..." Opinions about these two tablets of instructions range all across the board. The great writer and wit H.L. Mencken once said, "Say what you will about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the pleasant fact that there are only ten of them." On that we can agree, and the trust is there is a great wisdom contained in these few instructions if we take the time to uncover it. So in this series, we are focusing not on the negative side of the commandments, but on the positive side. We're looking for God wants us to do with our lives, for what he has created and designed us to do.

Now I want to stress again that God gives these commandments, not to guilt us or make our lives difficult, but to give us basic instructions for how to live the life he's created us to live. God gave these laws to the people of Israel only after he rescued them from the land of Egypt, and from the house of slavery. He only gives these instructions after they are in a relationship with him, and after he has shown his love and mercy to them. In the same way for us, these instructions are set in the context of a relationship with God. If you and I were not in a relationship with God, these commandments would only create guilt; because there's no way that we could keep them. But God has shown us mercy and love, and through the death and resurrection Jesus Christ, we are rescued from our sin and brokenness--and given a relationship with God. It's in the context of that relationship that we hear these commandments--a relationship in which we are forgiven when we fall short, and given more grace to grow into the people God has created us to be.

Last week we looked at the first commandment, and the positive form of that commandment was, "You shall have one and only one God." It's the foundational instruction for all of the others, and the foundation for any life that is lived in a relationship with God--ultimate loyalty to God. When we our ultimate loyalty is solid and non-negotiable, when there is no competition for our final allegiance, then life becomes possible for us--manageable. We can handle every other competing demand, every changing circumstance, if the one thing at the center of our lives--loyalty to God--doesn't change. Steadfast loyalty to God is the secure foundation for human life that God gives in the first commandment.

And the second commandment is so closely related to the first commandment it's almost hard to distinguish them. That's why I've called this message "Trust, Part 2." The first commandment instructs us not to have any other god besides the one true God. The most obvious way for an ancient Israelite to break the first commandment was to worship another god by worshipping an idol. Most religions and cultures in that day worshipped images or idols, which were statues and carvings of their gods. Imagine that this small statue of a dog that I have actually represents a god; if we were to worship an idol, we would set this on the table and pray to it and ask it for things, just as if it were a living god. And this was not unusual at all in the religions that surrounded Israel--and certainly not in the religion of Egypt where they had been in slavery. This was how people in the ancient world worshipped. So if an ancient Israelite wanted to 'flirt' with another God, he would find a

statue--or make a statue that represented another god--and worship it. So the second commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."

Now what is the positive form of this commandment? The temptation addressed by the second commandment is to the temptation to not wait for God to reveal himself in his own time and way. Making an idol is making a God that will show up when we want him to, on our schedule and in our time. So the positive instruction of the second commandment is: you will wait for God.

I'd like to take a quick poll, and see how many of you don't mind waiting? In the drive-thru at McDonald's? In line at the toll booth? At the grocery store? For the cable guy? That's what I thought. I cannot stand waiting; in fact, I am sometimes embarrassed by how impatient I am. I think some of my most impatient moments come at the Redbox when we go to get a movie; I walk up and there's just a couple people there, and I think, "Oh, this will go fast." But then the person stands there and looks through every page of movies, and reads about three or four movies on each page, then goes to the next page, then the next page. Looking for just the perfect movie. And since I'm standing in public, I try to look pleasant and patient, but inside I just can't take it anymore!

Waiting can be tough. But no matter how frustrated we get by it, there is no other choice; we have to wait. And when something is really important in our lives, it is even more difficult to wait. There are some here today who are waiting for certain relationships to get better. It may be a spouse--it could be a friend or a parent. And you hold in your heart an image of what that relationship could be, of the joy that could come from it, of all the fulfillment and satisfaction that could come from that relationship. Yet you know that it is not there; it's broken, and not only does it not bring joy, it brings pain; and you've been waiting and waiting for the relationship to be better, but nothing's happening. You've tried, but it's not getting better; and you're waiting. You're waiting for God to do something that you haven't been able to do by yourself.

There is so much in our lives that we cannot do ourselves, and for which we must wait on God. There is so much hurt and disease that we cannot heal; so many problems we cannot solve; is so much uncertainty for which we have no clear answers. All we can do is wait for God. Some of the most powerful waiting done in our world in the past couple weeks has been by people waiting to be rescued in Haiti. I read this week the story of Dan Woolley, a missionary from Compassion International, who was trapped for 65 hours under tons of wreckage in the lobby of his hotel that had come crashing down onto his head. As he waited for that unimaginable 65 hours, he said, "*I always wanted to survive, but I knew that was something that I couldn't control. So I decided if I had to go, I wanted to leave some last notes for them.*"¹ And he wrote notes for his children and wife. Dan Woolley was buried alive and

1. Cited from http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/34933053/ns/today-today_people/. Accessed on January 22nd, 2010.

waiting for God to show up, to come in form of human hands who would lift the rubble and pull him out. He could not save himself, he could only wait.

Lew Smedes has described waiting as our “human destiny.” He writes, “*Waiting is our destiny. As creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for, we wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending that we cannot write. We wait for a 'not yet' that feels like a 'not ever.'*” The most famous story from the Bible about the people of Israel making an idol to worship comes when they are very impatient, stranded out in the desert and feeling anxious about their future. Moses went up on the mountain to receive the commandments from God. And apparently he was up there for a very long time. Meanwhile, down on the ground, the people had lost their patience, and they were complaining to Moses’ brother Aaron. Maybe they thought that Moses had gotten lost--maybe they thought he had died--maybe the Lord took him, or maybe he had decided he had enough and was leaving the whole lot of them. Who knows. But for whatever reason, when the people saw that Moses was not coming down with a word from the Lord right away, they said to Aaron, “Come make gods for us who shall go before us. As for this Moses, who knows what happened to him.” So Aaron told the people to take off their gold rings, and give them to him; he took them and melted them down, and formed them into a calf. When the people saw it they said, “This is our god who brought us out of Egypt.” And Aaron had them built an altar and sat the calf on the altar and declared a festival to the Lord; and they people rose the next day and worshipped the calf that Aaron had made. They could not wait--they would not wait--for Moses to come down the mountain. He delayed too long, God delayed too long; and so they gave up on him, and created a god for themselves.

I can’t imagine asking someone to create a statue of gold for me to worship as a god; but I can certainly imagine to the impatience of the people who gathered around that mountain and waited for God. The problem is, the golden calf that Aaron made--though perhaps it made them feel better to worship it--was not actually God. It did not lead them out of slavery, it did not rescue them from Pharaoh. It did nothing--it was powerless. And that’s the problem with idols that we create, and the gods that we come up with: they are powerless. Whenever the people of Israel would worship idols, God asked them--in the Psalms, in the Prophets: “Why do you worship something that cannot speak, or think, or do? Why do you worship what has no power? Why do you not wait for me, the living God to speak and act?” There is much truth in that question. We might decide, in a moment of desperation, want to give up on god and worship something else. Say for the sake of argument this little dog statue. That’s fine as long as we are speaking to it; but when need a word back, when we need something to happen, for god to be alive and present to me, this dog statue does no good. We need the living God.

And so we must wait. We must wait. There is simply no use making up other things to worship--other gods that we wish might save us. No use, for none of them has the power of the living God. The challenge for our faith is to wait for God. Waiting for God is part of learning how to live well; learning to trust God is learning to live as we were created to live. Some of us think that waiting is a waste of time--when there is a need, where there is a problem, it requires action. As the saying goes, “He who hesitates is lost.” And perhaps that is true in many areas of life; but not with God. Those that wait for the Lord, the Scriptures

say, those who put their trust where it truly belongs, in the only God who can help, they are blessed. As Smedes says, God has created us to wait; but not simply to wait, to wait upon him.

Henri Nouwen, a Catholic spiritual writer who died just a few years ago, wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*, in which he gives a beautiful picture of waiting on God. He writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists with the circus, and their lives had an effect on him. They were called "The Flying Roudellas." They told Nouwen that there's a very special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches. Now, this relationship is especially important to the flyer. When the flyer is swinging high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. He arcs out into the air, and his job is to remain as still as possible and to wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck him from the air. This trapeze artist told Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher." The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him. But he must wait.²

The flyer must never try to catch the catcher; the created must never try to create the Creator. No golden calves; they are useless. We must wait for the living God. It is how we express our complete loyalty to God--to trust him and wait for his time. When Dan Woolley, the missionary who was trapped in the rubble this week in Haiti, was waiting for God, he wrote notes to his family. One of those notes were too his two sons, Josh, 6, and Nathan, 3. He wrote, "*I was in a big accident. Don't be upset at God. He always provides for his children, even in hard times. I'm still praying that God will get me out, but He may not. But He will always take care of you.*" That is trust, a trust that waits on God, and never, ever gives up. Prays, yes; becomes discouraged, yes; grows impatient, yes; prays even harder, yes; but never, ever gives up.

Isaiah 40 says:

*"Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint."*

Wait. Wait for God.

Amen.

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2. Cited from a sermon by John Ortberg entitled, "Waiting on God." http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/article_print.html?id=30631. Accessed on January 22nd, 2010.

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