

THREE LITTLE WORDS

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We constantly struggle to capture the essence or essential core of the Christian faith and life in a few words. Our culture demands “sound bite” theology and “microwave” spirituality as we hurtle through life at break neck speeds, asleep at the wheel! But the sense of this life that you get from Holy Scripture is that it takes more time than we are usually willing to afford to it. Someone once aptly said, that we “worship our work, we work at our play, and we play at our worship!” Much is being said these days about the shortfall of the American Big-C Church and its impact, or lack thereof, in our American culture. In an increasingly secular and hostile culture, we as Christians find our voice growing ever more marginalized, even as it grows in shrill intensity and judgemental severity. What the world seems to be waiting and watching for is a different kind of Christian -- one who actually looks like Jesus!

When David, the King, came to God after the sordid incident with his mistress, Bathsheba – after Nathan, the prophet, fingered King David for what he had done in secret, David wrote an amazingly honest psalm of repentance that is still very much a part of the best of penitential poetry in the whole of literature. That Psalm is, of course, Psalm 51 in the Bible. David’s honest prayer and appraisal of his own sinful condition before God lays the groundwork for our beginning place, our first of three little words, that really are not “little” at all, but form the tracks on which the locomotive moves us along in our life in Christ. That first little word is found in Psalm 51: “Willingness”.

David prays, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of my salvation and uphold me with a WILLING spirit.” Willingness is the first crucial step in our thinking that leads us to action. Before we have the “do” we have to have the “want to.” Here is where the Holy Spirit, molding the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts, can create in us a mental and heart attitude that will form us into vessels useful in God’s Kingdom. It is at this most basic level that David finds the place to pray for the action of God through the Holy Spirit – to cultivate a willing mind and heart toward God and His purposes.

Once we are willing then what?

The next crucial step beyond simple willingness is taking a posture of availability. We are, in the west, one of the most structured and time-conscious peoples ever in the history of the world! Every moment is scheduled and accounted for in a frenzied race to make ourselves feel “of worth” or “successful” by some measure external to ourselves.

Into this frenzied pace, we try to fit some measure of work “for” God, some measure of devotion “to” God, or some measure of life “with” God, usually on a subsistence level, if the above were “daily bread.” God is all too easily pushed out of our busy lives, because He does not demand our time, our money or actually anything in return for all He has done in Jesus Christ. Romans 12:1 challenges us to “offer ourselves as living sacrifices, in view of God’s mercy, which is our reasonable service of worship.” Offering and sacrifice in this context speak

of our time and of the substance of our lives, given to God in offering as we make ourselves available to Him for His purposes. Availability is actually one of our most precious commodities today. The conscious attendance to God’s will that is modeled in Jesus as he walked this earth is the best example of availability we have. John tells us that Jesus “did only what He saw His Father doing.”

When we make ourselves available, God is faithful to take our “five loaves and two fish” that we bring to Him in our “schoolboy’s lunch” and break it, multiply it and send us home with the disciples tagging along, carrying a basket full of food each! Availability is the invitation that reciprocates God’s very own invitation for us to be “with Him” in partnership for the salvation and redemption of the whole world. Availability is the best we have to offer God, because we certainly can’t offer Him our ability! At least I can’t. For most of what He asks me to do I am completely and entirely inadequate! And the places where I think I’m adequate, He quickly corrects my perspective, by letting me try things on my own steam

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for a while. Availability is our reminder of WHO is the main thing here, and its not us.

But there is one final LITTLE word that is needed. That little word is OBEY!

Obedience is the final ingredient – the final test of a life following Jesus as His disciple. Jesus himself contrasted those who heard and knew His words and those who actually obeyed them as having two different foundations for life - one built on sand, and the other built on bedrock. Obedience has always been the key in our “with God” life - it was the test of Adam and Eve in the garden and it will be the test of the Church in these last days. It was better for Israel than the whole sacrificial system – it is really all that God has ever wanted of us. It is the key to unlocking all the riches of heaven in our lives and in this earth.

*God's initiative in our
lives: Willingness...
Availability...
Obedience...*

The story of God's action through the ages and its lived-out equivalent in our own lives is always falling along these lines as we respond to God's initiative in our lives:

Willingness – Are you willing to be, to do, to go where, and when, and how God asks you to? **Availability** – Are you so busy with your own life that doing your own thing fills the whole horizon of your existence? **Obedience** – As we find willingness in our heart (that God places there) and find room in our lives (that we make for God's word, will and work) the final “Yes!” must come as we enact and embody that which God has asked us to be, do or go. Those three

little words actually do spell, “I love you” in our relationship with the God who loves us and has given all to prove it.

Fr. Phil Eberhart
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