

Keith Shady

PRESSIN' ON

The Teaching Letter of Toward the Mark

LET IT GO!



Early in the 1800's there was a ship loaded with gold headed for America from a foreign country. Several days into the journey the ship and its crew found itself headlong in a ferocious storm. As the crew fought through the night to keep their beloved vessel afloat it became increasingly obvious to all that they were rapidly losing to the monstrous waves and high winds. Soon the hull of the ship began to break apart. After exhausting all of their options the captain sent messengers who notified his crew to implement the most dreaded order that any captain has to give, "Abandon ship!"

As the majority of the crew was fighting to get the lifeboats overboard several of the crew who were not content with only getting away with their lives, made their way into the storage hold of the ship and proceeded to fill their pockets with gold. By the time they returned to the main deck they found that the others had launched the lifeboats and had vanished into the darkness of night. With only a third of the ship still above water they had to do something fast. Looking at each other as if to say "we're rich", they held on to the gold in their pockets and jumped into the sea. After just a few seconds the weight of the gold and the frigid water began to exhaust the men. Rather rapidly each of them were confronted with a life or death decision, do I hold onto the gold and risk certain death or turn it loose and greatly increase my chances of making it out of an already terrible situation. As you can well imagine, the guys that "let go" lived to tell the story while the guys that held on greedily to the gold soon found their final resting place at the bottom of the ocean.

How many times in our walk with God have we found ourselves in a similar situation, holding on to a relationship, our pride, an old way of thinking, things from our past or anything else that hinders us from

moving further up and further in where our relationship with both God and His Word are concerned. The simple fact is, if we are going to be able to move into the things that God has for us we are going to have to become proficient at **letting stuff go!** Paul, knowing just how detrimental the past and the things that lie there can be to our future successes teaches us, *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

(Philippians 3:13-14)

Understanding early on in my walk with our Lord that obtaining the ability to "let go" was so important to my pressing into the things of God, I chose to use this scripture as the hallmark declaration for this ministry. Hence the name, Toward the Mark. So often we allow things into our lives that restrict our ability of *"reaching forth unto those things which are before."* Satan knows full well that if he can get us

loaded up with enough stuff that he can essentially anchor us to the status quo, making any forward progress in our lives extremely difficult to achieve.

"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:34-36)

A very wise man, who witnessed my overloading and spreading myself way too thin in the ministry once pulled me aside and said something to me that would forever change my life. He simply told me that I needed to select my battles more wisely. The following is

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perhaps the best story that I have ever heard concerning someone who has mastered this.

In the winter of 1988 I was being interviewed by the host of a local radio station in the Washington, DC area in preparation for an upcoming concert that the band and I were scheduled to do. After we had been on the air for about ten minutes, the host announced to the listening audience that we were breaking for a few commercials. No sooner than we had broken away the door to the studio opened and in walked a local Messianic Jewish Rabbi. Under his left arm was his brief case while in his right hand he was tossing a tennis ball up and down. Without warning he then threw the tennis ball rather abruptly at the show's host. Seizing the moment as an opportunity to display his sharp athletic ability, the host immediately reached out and grabbed the tennis ball. As the host was starting to gloat over his quick response to the pitch, the Rabbi then looked him square in his eye and asked, "Why did you catch that ball?" Looking rather puzzled the host replied, "I don't know, I guess I've always been programmed to catch things when they were thrown to me." At that, the Rabbi then asked him, Do you know why President Ronald Reagan was without a doubt one of the greatest world leaders that has ever lived? His answer would change my life! He said, "The reason that Ronald Reagan was one of history's greatest leaders is because he learned how NOT to catch everything that was thrown at him!"

Until we finally come to the place where we know without a shadow of a doubt that there is nobody or nothing worth our relationship with God, we will continuously find ourselves drowning under the weightiness of the cares of this life. Jesus warns us, **"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (excess), and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."** (Luke 21:33-35)

Perhaps one of the best accounts of someone being presented with a fabulous opportunity to let go of something to pursue God was this story in Mark. **"And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou know-**

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est the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10:17-30) What a deal! We give God what we have and He gives us what He has!

In the 25th verse of this chapter Jesus makes a statement that many have misunderstood for centuries. He says, **"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."** Even though many have thought so, He was not referring to the little hole in the end of a sewing needle. If that were the case, it would be impossible for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God. What Jesus was referring to however was a small opening in one of the walls that surrounded Jerusalem. Though it was referred to as a gate, it was really very tiny by comparison to the other gates in the city's walls and was primarily used for access into the city after dark. This was a protective measure used to protect Jerusalem from being attacked by armies in the night. When anyone wanted to enter the city through "the eye

of a needle,” they would have to leave their burdens or possessions outside the city, have their camels or burros get down on their knees and literally crawl through it. When Jesus made reference to “a rich man” in this passage he was not only referring to someone who had a lot of money. He was however referring to anyone that is weighed down with large and heavy loads or burdens, and those can be anything that hinders our pursuit of God and His plan for our lives. Remember, money is not the root of all evil, it’s the love of it that traps us. **“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”** (1 Timothy 6:9-10) If we are going to pursue God, we must “let go” of anything we may have in our lives that would deny our entrance into a close and personal relationship with Him!

As long as I have been serving both God and His people perhaps one of the most heartbreaking things that I have witnessed has been Christians who have grown lukewarm in their walk with God due to the fact that they refuse to turn loose of a person, a group of people or anything else in their lives that keep them from moving into an intimate relationship with God. This is evidence of one of two things. Either they have a greater love for things that are contrary to the things of God or they simply lack faith in God’s ability to provide the abundant life that Christ came to give all who trust in Him wholeheartedly. **“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”** (Hebrews 11:6) If we are going to be pleasing to God we are going to have to trust Him enough to take Him at His Word! **“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”** (James 1:21-22)

When I was a youth pastor, I personally witnessed hundreds of heartbreaking cases of high school and college aged people who instead of waiting for God’s best where a mate was concerned grew impatient and settled for or pursued relationships with either unbelievers or at best lukewarm believers. In the vast majority of these cases, I found that the unbelieving or

lukewarm partner always affected the believing partner with ungodliness much more than the believer ever affected the unbeliever with the things of God. Even though the believing partner went into the relationship thinking that they were going to win the unbeliever to Christ, the opposite almost always proved true.

I am not saying that it is not possible or that it has not been done before but what I am saying is, if you are going to pursue as your mate someone who does not love and serve God with their whole heart, you better know without a shadow of a doubt that it’s God’s will for you and that those over you in the Lord are in agreement and are monitoring what you are doing very closely! This mode of dating, referred to in many Christian circles as “missionary dating” is in reality a very deadly practice. As a matter of fact, this is not only practiced by younger unmarried people in the Church but as a result of the narrowed field of available possibilities to them, this can be practiced with even

more frequency in the lives of older unmarried people. No matter what age you may be, participation in this deadly game of chance can leave its victim bound in chains that are very costly to let go of, both emotionally as well as financially!

The same thing goes for any other aspect of our lives whether it is a mate you are looking for, a new job, a new Church home or anything else that requires direction from

God. Never forget, whenever we take something to ourselves that is not in God’s will or timing for our lives what we are doing is in fact calling a curse down on our own heads. The kind of faith that truly pleases our wonderful God and King is our obtaining the ability to **trust** in Him, **rest** in Him and **wait** on Him to perform, in His time, what His Word promises.

No matter how we slice it, the effects of sin are terribly weighty! Like having a ship’s anchor tied around our waist or someone three times your size continuously pinning our shoulders to the floor, the results of sin will always cost us our freedom and ultimately can and will cost us our lives. Whether the burden you may be carrying today is self-inflicted or a result of someone else’s actions, it really does not matter. What does matter is that we become proficient at **“letting them go!”** Jesus said, **“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have**

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fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5-10)

You might ask, what if the thing that I am struggling with is not a direct result of my committing a sinful act, what do I do then? It is of the utmost importance that we first understand what sin really is. Sin is not simply sex, drugs, murder, stealing and the like. These are merely means by which sin gains access into our lives. Sin is actually “anything” that separates us from God Himself. It’s that simple! Whether the sin in your life is self-inflicted or a result of a generational curse, it does not matter. Sin is sin and Jesus stands more than ready to forgive or deliver us from them all! So, if you know that things are not right between you and God, if your communication with Him has been cut off, do not panic. Take a deep breath, relax, examine your heart, confess your sins, and walk away from practicing whatever it was that gave the sin access into your life. Ask Jesus to forgive you and move on. Remember, falling in the water is not what causes us to drown, it’s staying there that will eventually cost us our lives! ***If we confess our sins, he (Jesus) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*** (1 John 1:10) Paul says, ***“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:38-39) Praise God for His divine forgiveness!

I would like to share a great little story with you that I find to be very applicable to this teaching. In certain parts of Africa monkeys are captured and sold for a number of different uses. Some are sold for research, some are sold to zoo’s or animal brokers who in turn sell them to pet stores and some are even sold to various regions of the world as a culinary delicacy. Because monkeys are so difficult to catch, the trappers came up with an ingenious way to capture the animals without injuring them. To do this, they have taken a lesson from their ancient tribal ancestors. What they do

is find a gourd, they cut a small hole in the side of it just big enough for a monkey to get its hand in. They put a chunk of food inside of the gourd and then tie it in a tree. Once the trappers have placed the gourd where they want it, they then hide in the bush and wait for the monkeys. When a monkey smells the food, he very cautiously approaches the gourd. Once he has made his way to it, he then looks inside, sees the food and reaches in to get it. Not knowing any better, when he grabs the food inside and tries to pull it out, the fist that he had to make in order to grab the food is the very thing that traps him. The trappers then run out of the bush making loud noises. When the monkey hears them coming he becomes so startled and confused that he does not think to turn loose of the food. The trappers then climb the tree, cut down the gourd, with the monkey’s hand still in it and places them both safely into a cage. If he would have only **“let go”** of the food, he would be a free monkey instead of one now either being served up in some restaurant or bound in captivity for life! I beseech you desperately, if there is anybody or anything in your life that is separating you from God, ***“LET IT GO NOW!”***

God loves us and stands ready to bless those who seek Him with ALL of their hearts! Paul teaches us that ***“God is rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*** (Hebrews 11:6) If there is anything or anybody that is hindering you from diligently seeking and spending time with God, I encourage you to make whatever changes are necessary to position yourself at the feet of Jesus. Always remember, the joy God feels when we lay our accomplishments at his feet, will never compare to the joy that He feels when we lay ourselves at His feet!

Your friend and fellow servant in Christ Jesus,

Keith



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