

Life Lessons: a Right Perspective

By Ashley Hanney, December 4, 2009

Greetings faithful partners in ministry,

Life recently has been full and God has been busy. Busy placing new people in front of us, busy granting us new ideas for how better to live each moment for Him, and of course, busy teaching each one of us new lessons daily.

For me personally this past month and a half has been full of highs and lows. Highs when I have recognized the wonder of my salvation in Christ, lows when I have looked at what is happening **or not** happening in the ministry, at least from my perspective.

I often forget that I am in the midst of a battle; a battle against invisible enemies but praise God, we are not fighting this battle in our own strength as He reminds us in His Word:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”
(2Corinthians 10:3-5)

I would like to share with all of you one of my most recent battles. This past month was the first time that I was hit hard with serious doubts regarding the ministry in Italy and whether or not this is truly where the Lord has called me. Most of the struggle stemmed from “the grass is greener on the other side of the fence” mentality, *i.e.* discontentment. Discontentment in what I've been doing and what I believe I've been missing.

Allow me to explain . . . I have spent the majority of my time this past month working on our websites (Aiutobiblico and Vera Vita), keeping them updated weekly with new material but also doing various projects which had accumulated. After spending an unusual amount of time on the computer, complete with bloodshot eyes and a fried mind (probably many of you who work daily on computers can relate!), I began to look for a way out. I allowed my thoughts to run wild instead of taking them captive and began to stew, daily becoming more discontent. I started thinking: “I didn't sign up for this”, “I've already expressed that I don't like working on computers”, “Sure, I see the need, but I'm not sure that I want to fill it” and finally, I began to feel like I would be closed up in front of

a computer screen for the rest of my life, without people contact (but I enjoy people!), and I started to suffocate, thinking of filling the “technology” need long term here.

Yes, it's easy to see on paper how distorted our thoughts can get at times, how it starts small and then becomes extreme (by the way, I had good fellowship with people daily that week), but it's a battle in reality. Not taking our thoughts captive is always followed by danger:

- 1) rash decisions - maybe I should just pack my bags and leave
- 2) forgetting our multiple blessings and not being thankful - I am in daily fellowship with believers. This is a gift that many don't have
- 3) committing the sin of complaining against God for the circumstances in which He's placed us - the God of the universe surely knows better than I what I need in order to grow!
- 4) losing perspective - working in front of a computer daily in comparison to the man who works for \$1/day, in a backbreaking job?!
- 5) Etc.

Through other believers, time in prayer and actively and specifically thanking the Lord for the numerous blessings which I have, the Lord reminded me of several things which I continue to try to keep in mind. These are certainly not new lessons but worth repeating (I seem to be slow to learn!)

- 1) stopping to think: I have a choice to either let my thoughts run wild or stop and remember that it is not a change in circumstances which will make me content. Only a change of heart and focus can do that.
- 2) truly repenting: this is such a necessary step in battling our invisible enemies. I needed to recognize and confess that discontentment is a sin in order to have victory over it.
- 3) the importance of practicing thankfulness: Anytime I am discontent it is because I'm not counting my blessings. There are always abundant blessings for which to be thankful.
- 4) His perfect care and infinite love: in the “computer instance”, God allowed me to be temporarily hindered from seeing all the fruit of the min-

istry so that I could find my full satisfaction and contentment in Christ alone, not ministry

I will close for now but for those of you who are interested in reading on, I have included a few short snippets from many much lengthier e-mails which we receive in which people comment on the teaching on the sites. I share these in the prayer that they may be a demonstration that God is making His name known. Indeed, the nature of a website full of Bible teaching is such that it would be very possible to never see or hear any responses. However, the Lord has been so good and gracious in encouraging us that our efforts are not in vain and that He is saving people and drawing others to Christ through a useful little tool called the computer and the Internet. We are grateful for His lovingkindness in stimulating us to press on.

Pressing onward,
Ashley

Examples of letters received from visitors to the sermon website

I pray that these give you a taste of how God is at work in lives and a reason to rejoice in Him. To God alone be the glory!

Carmelo – I see the work that the Lord is accomplishing in me, using this trial to do so, but I confess that I don't believe it to be the most important thing. My treasure is a life without problems and not Jesus Christ as it should be. I have asked forgiveness for this sin and I pray that He will give me the strength to repent. The Holy Spirit and your sermons are opening my eyes to see the truth. The most important thing is that the Spirit is helping me understand is that I must submit my life and my will to the Lord

Ricardo – I decided to write you because I think that you would be happy to know that 2-3 years ago, I wandered onto the internet in search of evangelical material and I came across your site.

The desire to know more came through knowing our neighbors, an evangelical family, who haven't said or communicated anything but now I understand that the good Father was calling me . . .

... this evening I felt in my heart that the Lord wanted me to send these little thoughts to you in order to encourage you in your work among your church body and on the web.

The Lord has used you and the web in order to bring me and my wife to salvation.

Nunzio – I wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the wonderful work which you are carrying forth on the pathway that Jesus Christ has orchestrated for your

lives. I have received numerous blessings, much comfort, and much encouragement from your written sermons and it seems to me that the least I can do is thank you for this.

Raffaella – Many, many thanks for your precious site, which has been of great help to me... Peace and good will and may God bless you in order that your site can be a light for others who need help.

Dear Pastor Marco, I want to tell you first that my name is also **Marco**. You know, I often go to your site, for spiritual counsel which I find extremely important, and I wanted to let you know that God blesses me through your ministry and not only that but I also encourage others to listen to your teaching.

Giuseppe – With great pleasure, I continue to keep up with the sermons on the site. . . As you have come to know my family is searching for God . . . I have written all of this in order to ask you to help us and to stay close to us, so that with your help and by the grace of God, our hearts can cling to our Lord Jesus, as the only true God. Amen.

Francesca – It goes without saying: IT'S NOT BY CHANCE that I found the pages of your site on the monitor of my computer. It's been some time now that I have been seeking . . . the Truth, in the search for myself, and the reason for everything in this world, and the significance of my existence, and what will become of me . . .

A different **Carmelo** - Dear brother and Pastor Marco, I am writing you this letter in order to let you know that through you and your "work" God is at work. I read and listen to your sermons every day and I ask the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to help me to digest the Word. In my Christian walk, I have a long way to go, the way is tough, because there are many temptations and obstacles. Though I recognize that I am a sinner and in need of salvation and mercy, I know this: nothing is impossible for the Lord. He can save me (He did it with Jesus) but above all, He can change me heart.

My name is **Sabato Romano**. I wanted to thank you for the help that you are giving me through the sermons that I am reading on the site. For about the past year, I was always sad , so sad that I made my girlfriend sad. Thanks to you all I am able to smile and I wanted to thank you and our Lord for helping me to find this site, which is helping me a lot. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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