

Sunday 11 November 2007 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

**Renovation of the Heart Sermon Series
Week 7 - Entanglements**

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Reading: All of 2 Corinthians 4

Encouraging us all recently to surrender our heart & mind, our character, and as a result our actions to the ways of God. I hope and believe that a lot of us are really engaging with this process. God's HS will lead you through it if you let Him – and won't crush you or push you too far, but it may be a challenge and a 'squeeze' on us. 'Take up your cross' said Jesus....Losing our life, laying it down for the sake of Jesus' real life in us will **sometimes be a painful process** – a sense of loss.

Let's **always keep the vision and truth** of God's **mercy, grace** and abounding **love** as our motivation. He wants us to change to be more like Him, so that 'the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph 1:18-19)

When we talk about '**refining**' and '**purifying**' – as the prophetic words are very clearly saying at this time, the instant temptation is to cringe, to worry, to feel anxious of what God is going to do to us or in us! Actually, **refining is always good for us. Not always nice for us** at the time, but in the long-term....do I want to be impure, distant from God because of my heart and lifestyle? NO. I want to be in the best place to be used by God and loved and known by my loving Father in heaven. So I want to be refined for that reason.

Let's choose to engage (as I know a lot of people are doing) for God's sake.

Entanglements

As we earnestly begin to attempt this **we find that we have to grapple with ourselves**. Its not always easy to change, to reform our hearts, or to lay things at the cross.

Our character is fallen, **shaped by**

- **Our habits** in ways of thinking and feeling
- **Our social world**, family, schooling, community, etc – past & present

These permeate our body and condition our responses, even to the subconscious levels of our motivations and our soul. **We are a product of our surroundings.** (eg. effect of adverts – driving desire in us)

When we being to **try to make positive changes** towards God, we sometimes encounter our **inner self obstructing us** (how frustrating!).

- Just like Paul says (Romans 7) "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do!" (v15) and he comes to realise that although his intention is different "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." (v17)

Our fallen natures will always get in the way of being 100% sold-out for God, 100% holy. But **our character CAN be renovated to be more like Jesus**, it takes dedication on our part and on His part, lots of God's spirit.

What is entanglement?

We find that we are entangled. Hebrews 12:1 says – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and **the sin that so easily entangles**, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

We find that we are entangled. We’re not as free to move, to change, to reform ourselves as perhaps we liked to think we are.

It’s a bit **like a smoker saying ‘sure, I can give up anytime I like’** but when that day comes, he’s craving the nicotine hit, craving the company of others as they smoke, craving the comforting feeling of opening the pack, going through the routine etc. And he finds he is more entangled in smoking than he realised

The bible teaches us that it is DESIRE that entangles our hearts. Not even just the desire, but **by being enslaved to desire.** (as Paul explains in Romans 7). **Temptation to sin always originates in desire.** Sin = other paths, choices, ways than God’s way. (see James 1:14-15).

We set our hearts on too many things in life. Some are wrong and some are in conflict with each other. Others are healthy and helpful – desire to be in God’s presence. It’s the problem of having to follow our desires which can lead us onto paths of sin, and away from paths of righteousness.

Often people are driven by feelings

- “This feels good, I’ll do it.”
- “I want to feel respected and powerful – I’ll keep working for my promotion at work
- I need to feel my friends admire my dress sense

The result here is actually entanglement too if we aren’t careful. **Entanglement to the desire - the feeling**

Getting into the habit of following a desire usually leads to that desire having a stronger & stronger hold over us.

EGs. – maybe one drink, leading to another and another. Or need for cash quickly – maybe you’ve booked your holiday, but haven’t yet had the money in to pay for it – leads to buying one **national lottery ticket.** Then more....)

So habits form. Its easier to keep doing what you’ve been doing, than to stop and doing something else!

We tend to keep doing what we have done – we are creatures of habit.

Once a habit is formed, our minds have a clever way of keeping the cycle going. When our heart enslaved to a desire, and enslaved through a habit, the desire will in turn try to enslave *the mind*. **We start to justify ourselves in our minds.** We start to use our intellect to rationalise the habit we’ve formed.

This is an internal process, in the head. But it can actually lead to us rationalising behaviour **that makes no sense** to anyone in the harsh light of day.

- ‘Smoking Kills’ is the sign in big letters on the front of cigarette packets.
- People buy and smoke cigarettes because they rationalise to themselves that actually this will make their lives better or easier. In big letters in front of their mind.
- Smoking Kills (reality) vs. Smoking improves my life (the rationalisation)

I’m afraid that these kind of ‘entanglements’ keep even well-intended people from following Jesus into the depths and heights of lasting spiritual transformation, and inheriting life to the full and the kingdom on earth.

The bible also calls these entanglements 'idols'.

- The biblical understanding of an idol is far more than just a stone or wooden carving, its basically anything that takes the number 1 place in our lives, attentions. Anything which we treat as more important than God's will in our lives is an idol.

Getting entangled is a lot like a Sheep – persistently going for grass etc (stick head thru fences, or nose-dive under thorny bushes), doesn't realise its getting more & more entangled in the thorn bush until it tries to get out. Result – struggle, wool left behind, maybe even blood.

So – we need to make positive choices to train our hearts, characters, our will, in the ways of God.

There are familiar analogies for Christian life – 'a marathon not a sprint', training & getting fit to last the course. The New Testament is full of calls to **become single-minded**, and to get there through effort and a battle with our inherited ways

- Hew 12:1-2 – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
- Luke 10:41-42 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.”
- Phil 3:13-14 – “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Paul again)

Grace in it

The great thing about our Dad in heaven is that He knows we're like sheep (he says so plenty of times in the bible!). He knows what we're like, and He knows what we need. And like a shepherd, as He knows each one of us by name, God has patience and time and a stick/staff sometimes, but **He will point us in the best direction in life if we choose to let Him.** He's the **God of new starts.**

Youtube video clip 5 minutes on 'Afluenta' (click the link, you may need to hold 'Ctrl' button at same time)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFZz6ICzpjI>

Where are you entangled?

Where are you enslaved to desire?

- Money or its effect (Jesus taught about this more than anything else)
- Sense-driven feelings (food, cosmetics, relaxation, adrenalin)
- TV
- Work & success
- Comfort & convenience (as Paul Mac explained in recent KC sermon)
- Unhealthy relationships which don't really build each of you up, or even actually drag you down
- Technology & gadgets – boys' toys
- Our cars or our houses – what they 'say about us' to others (perfect kept home)
- Service/Serving others so much that you can forget yourself and your own heart issues and hurts
- Clothes, appearance, how other people view and judge you.
- Shopping
- A sense of guilt or unworthiness? A sense that you'll never amount to anything which drives the way you think and act
- Loneliness
- Or even so many friends & people around you that you can't bear to be alone, just you and your creator

Its worth identifying our entanglements, because that way we can begin change

- I fell into gorse bush as a kid walking on in the peaks – effect was that I never wanted that to happen again – positively avoided gorse bushes! (Hew 12:1-2)

Processing time

Pick your 1 or 2 biggest likely entanglement at this time. Write it down.

How do we disentangle ourselves?

Vision – this is possible & worth it

The last thing I want is you to feel discouraged or overly down-on-yourself. As we examine ourselves, as we allow the Holy Spirit to challenge and change us...The vision has to be Jesus (otherwise, why would we bother)

It is worth renovating our hearts – because its so worth being part of Jesus' kingdom. **What we sow in our characters and hearts, we can sow to eternal life.** To eternal inheritance and rich rewards – for us and others

Do you want to get on the conveyor belt like everyone else? Or live a life of kingdom significance, excitement, challenge, danger, reliance and destiny?

When we begin to implement our decisions to untangle, we will **discover that it isn't a simple task.** These issues have a grip on us. Our usual routines, our thoughts & feelings have a massive influence over the choices we make more complex and powerful influence than perhaps we realised.

2 necessary steps to disentanglement

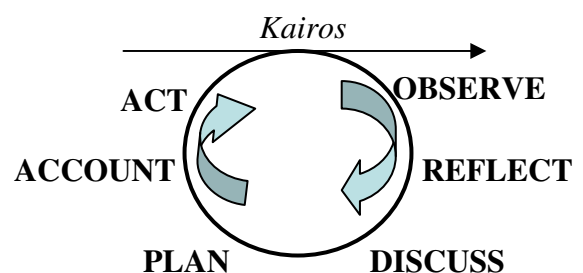
1. You have to want to

You have to be determined because it will mean challenging choices and possibly short-term pain for long-term gain

Change of will (determination/motivation) PLUS **change of action** = **lasting change**

USE THE LIFESHAPES LEARNING CIRCLE

- With accountability
- And action
- **DON'T ONLY GO ROUND HALF THE CIRCLE!**



2. The Spiritual Disciplines (or, the disciplines of spirituality). Use time-honoured set of lifestyle tools **to clear space in your heart for God to move** and renovate you.

Living the spiritual disciplines:

Engagement – taking things up, taking things on deliberately for a time to change your focus & allow new influences

Abstinence – deliberately giving things up for a time to change your focus & allow new influences

What happens is **they allow the ungodly stuff in us to come to the surface**. Then God by his spirit, and us, can deal with it.

- Solitude – being alone with God for extended periods of time
 - You suddenly and starkly come face to face with yourself, perhaps your insecurities or coping mechanisms
 - So you realise that what you see as extreme busyness in life, is perhaps partly an inability to trust God with the details of life
- Serving others – with no thought of good for ourselves
 - Will perhaps bring to the surface how really we perhaps don't respect others, or how much we focus on pleasing just ourselves in everyday life

Practicing the spiritual disciplines **make room**. For God's word and God's spirit to work in us. To show up places for improvement and usually submission to God. And to allow God's spirit in more and more to make those improvements with us (Eg. worship, meeting with other Christians = engaging)

Always God's grace in it (as we fail, and as we follow). Always keep the vision of a Jesus-driven kingdom lifestyle ahead of us.

CLOSE

Notes: Some of the spiritual disciplines.....

Engagement

study
worship
celebration
service
prayer
fellowship
confession & accountability
submission/obedience
service
perseverance

Abstinence

solitude
silence
fasting
frugality/simplicity
chastity (for a while)
secrecy (acts not trumpeted for all to see)
sacrifice (breaking holds)
meditation
financial giving
our thought-life – taking thoughts captive