

Simple Truths

by Logan Stark

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth"

Guns. Guns are a very controversial topic. And rightfully so. They are a weapon that can be used to take a life. Yet, they can also be used to defend and to provide food. Like any tool, they are neither good nor evil; however, they can be dangerous. Yet the topic of guns did allow me the opportunity to speak biblical truth.

Last month, despite weather and COVID, I was able to visit with some of the boys at Great Circle. I started my visit by joining a game of catch with two of them who were tossing a football around. We started out just throwing and catching it normally, before upping the game by trying to catch it with one hand. The two teens were a lot better at this challenge than I was.

Our game was interrupted when supper was brought out. The two teens joined their fellow cottage mates at the table as plates were prepared, and one of them even gave me a plate with a slice of the birthday cake that had been gifted to him that day. I smiled and said, "Thank you," as I sat at a table with another pair of boys.

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Stirring Beneath Continued . . .

What is happening on the surface is not at all a bad thing, but there is more going on than meets the eye.

Friend, I am not sure what season you are in right now. Perhaps you were up all night changing diapers and trying to convince a newborn to sleep more than two or three hours at a time. Perhaps you are facing an empty nest, unsure what the next chapter holds without any diapers to change! Perhaps you are picking a college major and trying to figure out which direction to chart your course. Maybe you are navigating a crisis this week. Perhaps you are considering job offers, or a move to a different city. Whatever surface issues you are facing, I truly believe that God is interested in these things. He can and does bring direction and comfort to the specific circumstance you are facing. But I would challenge you to peer deeper below the details, because the Kingdom is often stirring in deep places. You and I are generally obsessed with surface issues- my prayer life is almost entirely consumed with how these little events play out. It seems that we would be content if God would just engage in this specific stuff that is easily seen. I pray for good grades or victory in a game or financial success or career growth. While I am praying and planning and worrying about this current superficial decision, God is moving in ways through that circumstance that are so much more important than the apparent outcomes.

When you look at the daily goings-on in your life right now, there's a lot of rushing to and fro, a lot of things that just have to get done. But if it's true that the kingdom of God is percolating underneath all of that busyness, what exactly is God doing down there? I have seen that there are some basic Kingdom truths that keep reappearing in the middle of all of my business.

Jesus is fiercely pursuing your heart. There are no two ways about this. He's coming after you. The single minded love that carried Him to a cross has not abated; he has not given up on you, he has not finished pursuing you. Your current spiritual status, no matter how impressive or despairing you feel, is moot. Your denominational affiliation, your current relationship status, your financial circumstance; none of these things matter. The Savior never stopped moving towards rescue, and He will push through all of these things to bring you home.

Relationships are primary. In the midst of all the chaos of daily life, God uses these whirlwinds to deepen the roots of our love for and connection to Him and to one another. In the kingdom, relationship is the currency that matters most.

Necessary Maturity. It's time to grow up. I've mentioned this word already, but maturity is a huge deal. We are invited to grow into wisdom and understanding. Becoming 'Christ-like' is one way that New Testament authors specifically address this issue. Like every living thing that God made, from the trees to baby birds to platypuses, I am invited to grow into that specific thing God intended for me to be. God won't allow you to camp out in old ways of doing things and immature versions of yourself. You are an image bearer of the Most High God, He designed you to express His image in a totally unique way. His calling on your life is to rise up into that image fully. Like rings on a tree, all of us are invited to mature into something that looks more and more like our Heavenly Father. This is a character issue - how are the inner workings and structures of my very soul are knit together? If I took a look under the hood at who you are as a person, what would I find? Frustration? Impatience? A short temper? Jealousy? Take a look at the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 to get a cursory review of the directions that God desires to shape our souls as we navigate the daily to do list of life.

Can I challenge you this week to take the time to dig beneath the surface? As you ponder and pray about the outward issues, take a moment to ask Jesus where he is moving beneath these things. God is always leveraging the visible to advance His Kingdom in less visible places. You and I would be wise to join Him in these endeavors.

Your Kingdom Come - Your will be done - On Earth as it is in Heaven.

My conversation with the pair started safe, talking about the food, school, the weather, before the boys made it more personal, them sharing a little about themselves. One of them told me how he had spent time in Alaska, hunting elk and bear. He was excited as he told me about his trip, and about all the different guns that he owns, bragging that he's a skilled hunter. After describing his collection and his trip, he mentioned how he wished people took better care of the planet.

I responded that people are supposed to care for the planet. As stewards, we're instructed to take care of creation, of the planet, and the animals. Perhaps this is not the most profound truth in the Bible, yet a truth nevertheless, and a command that God did give to mankind in Genesis. Our conversation then morphed into how much better of a world this place would be if people not only took better care of the planet, but of each other as well.

Jesus is a much wiser man than I, but if you look at many of His profound truths and revelations, they revolved around common things, observations of the world that he lived in. Jesus used everyday concepts like baking, farming, and fishing to reveal spiritual truths. He also took the time to get to know people on a personal level, and utilized examples from their personal lives, like the woman at the well, to reveal His purpose. As a Christian, I try to mimic this approach, seeking opportunities to introduce Kingdom ideas to these kids and teens as I visit with them, instead of trying to cram Bible trivia down their throats. Thus, a conversation about guns became a brief conversation about the job that God has given to all of mankind.

This simple approach can be used anywhere, not just at a behavioral center but at school, work, even a shopping mart.

Although I'm actively seeking these opportunities as a chaplain, I'm not on a quest to spiritualize everything: "Oh you like tacos? Did you know Jesus ate food?" Neither do I seek to set up traps or pounce on others with these truths. Instead, I pursue authentic conversations and real connections with these kids, finding opportunities to love on them and to share with them the truth of the Kingdom.
