



The Problem is Here | Ronnie Johnson | 1.13.19

LG Weekly

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

How are you doing with your New Year's Resolutions? Has anyone successfully made it through the first two weeks of the year?

SHARE

“Dream Big.”

As we begin a new year, we all have dreams of what we hope it will become. Whether last year was painful or the best year of your life, we all anticipate what's next, it is human nature. For some of us, this year, we are dreaming of that promotion that we have worked so hard to see materialize. For others, it is an opportunity on the horizon, but we just need some things to line up, maybe it will be any day now.

We have big plans and we set our gaze on that big idea...that distant formless-hope, when right in front of us is a tangible reality we can touch and embrace. Right smack in front of us are actual people, oxygen to breathe, friendships, family members, resources, giftedness and a God that wants you to get to know Him and His plans for you, right now.

There is nothing wrong with dreaming big dreams and to pursue the God given ones, but the moment we make the dream more important than the God who gives them, we create a lifeless idol for ourselves and grow distant from the living God who loves us. Our dream job is

the one we have right now, that dream spouse is the one you live with, that dream opportunity is the one you have each day you walk out your front door.

We can dream big, but live better.

As Christ followers, we need to be wide awake to the reality all around us. Instead of believing that there has to be something better way out there in the future, we can live with purpose, power, and joy today through the power of God at work within us. We can live awake to life in all of its fullness each and every day.

G R O W

Read Genesis 50:15-21

What is your initial reaction to Joseph's words to his brothers?

If you were in his shoes, how would you have responded to them?

This week Ronnie talked about Joseph's journey. His brothers threw him in a pit, Potiphar threw him in prison, but over time, God placed Joseph in the palace. The story is recorded in Genesis 37-50 and is a brilliant reminder that God is always at work behind the scenes, using the trials we go through to shape and mold us. By the end of his life, Joseph was the sort of spiritual giant that we all look up to and aspire to be. Instead of paying his brothers back for the evil they inflicted on him, he showed them mercy and saved his entire family. Joseph's life was far from easy, but God used the trials to create a pure heart within him.

When it comes to matters of the heart, there are no quick fixes. One of the small details that is often overlooked in Joseph's story is that he was in an Egyptian Prison for two years (Genesis 41:1). Two years! That's a long time to stay in an Egyptian Prison (especially for a crime you didn't commit). When faced with a trial, our knee-jerk reaction is to do whatever is necessary to get out of it immediately. But God seems to work on a different timeline. He usually isn't in as big of a hurry as we are. Often, He lets us sit in an "Egyptian Prison" for two years, because He is up to something much bigger.

God isn't as concerned with our living condition as He is our heart condition!

While Joseph sat in prison, God molded him into someone who could handle a tremendous amount of responsibility without letting the power go to his head. Genesis 50:15-21 is a beautiful picture of a transformed heart!

Whatever season you are in right now, there are opportunities for you to love someone, encourage someone, forgive someone, and bring someone joy. Conditions may not be ideal, but it's always a good time to make disciples. Look for opportunities to do that this week, even if you find yourself in an "Egyptian Prison!"

Are you facing your equivalent of an "Egyptian Prison" right now? If not, have you ever had a long, drawn-out difficult season? Tell the group about it.

What do you think God is/was teaching you in that season? What is He preparing you for?

If it's true that God is more concerned with the condition of your heart, what is one practical way you are able to allow the Holy Spirit work on your heart this week?

M O V E

Read Matthew 12:33-37

Have you ever been shocked by something you said? Ever felt words leave your mouth and immediately wish you could grab them and take them back? We've all been there. According to Jesus, the words we say aren't the issue; the issue goes much deeper than that. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was constantly trying to show us that the things we say are an overflow of something much deeper going on in our heart.

In Matthew 12 Jesus is in hot water with The Pharisees. They are angry with Him because He is casting out demons and healing people on the Sabbath. In an attempt to honor the Sabbath, the Pharisees built up a rigorous set of rules about what can and can't be done on that day. In other words, they've completely missed the point. They took something that was supposed to be healing and life-giving and turned it into a legalistic ritual.

Jesus takes the argument as an opportunity to help everyone see that the problem is actually

within the heart. "Make a tree good," He tells them, "and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit... for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Matthew 12:33-34).

Everything is a heart issue, and the fruit we bear (whether good or bad) is the natural outcome of our heart. So anytime we say something we regret, it's an excellent opportunity to take inventory of our heart.

- What's going on beneath the surface?
- What hurt, or pain is causing me to say the things I am saying?
- Who do I need to forgive in order to heal and move on?
- What steps can I take to move in the right direction and not make the same mistake next time?

These questions are not easy to ask yourself; this work is difficult. But it is one of the best things you can do. And here's the really good news. God is in the business of purifying, cleaning, and completely transforming our hearts. When we do this work, we create space for the Holy Spirit to pull the weeds out from around our hearts so that our tree can grow and bear even more fruit!

This week let's join the Psalmist and ask God to "create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

What work do you feel God is trying to do in your heart? How can you create space for this work to happen this week?

What are some of your goals for 2019? How can you see those goals through the lens of both the story of Joseph and the words of Jesus in Matthew 12?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying with and for each other. If you are in a coed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to share more freely.

T O G O

Psalm 1:3

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
And whose leaf does not wither- Whatever they do prospers.

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