



E-Encouragement #8

The First Spoke on Your Wheel

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
- Matthew 22:39, NRSV*

In the midst of beginning the 2011 holiday season, this message could not be timelier. In the last E-Encouragement the challenge was to focus on applying the first two lessons to living out of our Center who is Jesus. Lesson #1 – **I need to let go of the rocks I am not intended to carry.** Lesson #2 – **As much as possible; I need to run everything through my Center. As I do, I will be able to better determine the will of God.** These two lessons alone, if practiced, will transform this year's holiday experience. Certainly there are unnecessary rocks we all pick up around this time of year. Rocks that need to be scrapped, choosing the best traditions while letting go of others. As you run the plethora of party choices and volunteer opportunities through your Center, Jesus will guide you through a less stressful time of the year; bringing back that missing decor of Joy in your heart!

Right now, we are going to focus on labeling the first spoke on your Wagon Wheel. With Jesus at the Center of our Wheel, the first label is you! A year ago at this time, I found myself embittered, frustrated, and as if I had nothing left to give. God used one of my accountability partners to point out how I had correctly labeled my spokes, but it didn't mean anything, if I ignored one. "You're depleted," she said, "that's why you have nothing to give." The words of Jesus from Matthew 22:37-39 say, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" The first commandment echoes the reason we make Jesus the Center of our lives. The second one depends on the first. The second also has another dependent relationship which is revealed with one word.

"Love your neighbor AS you love yourself." (Emphasis added) "AS" is the key word. First, we must love God with everything we have. Second, loving our neighbor is dependent upon loving ourselves. This was evident last fall, when I had eliminated everything out of my life that would have kept me fueled in order to make room for serving, giving and doing for others. There was no time to work in the garden and exercise was cut short or cut out. I had actually scheduled things on my calendar, but quickly removed them with what I had determined to be more commendable activities. The result left me fried like a french fry and burnt to a crisp.

Well done, overdone and undone, I had hit my limit. This state of being greatly affected my capacity to love others.



The Principle of the Cylinder

Our lives are like this cylinder, but imagine a hole on the side close to the bottom of it. The hole represents all the things that take energy from us. We give and are depleted physically, emotionally or spiritually and sometimes a combination of all three. There are those people and activities that we can immediately identify as draining. However, it can also be people and things we love and enjoy like family, ministry or our job. The top is open for things to be poured into our lives that keep us fueled. Time with God in His Word and in prayer is a must, gardening, exercising, reading, a hobby or playing a sport are possibilities on a list of things that can fuel. When you do these things, you are pouring into your cylinder keeping it filled so that the hole at the bottom does not deplete you.

But what happens when we begin to eliminate those things that fuel us because our lives are too busy. The fluid in the cylinder is being drained with nothing to replace it. As the fluid level begins to drop in the cylinder, there are three levels that mark danger. The first level may be headaches, heart pressure that cannot be related to a heart condition, pulled muscles, or trouble sleeping. At the second level, a variety of different emotional issues may occur like uncontrollable crying, continuous feelings of resentment, or anxiety attacks. The lowest level and most dangerous could be demonstrated with a nervous breakdown, clinical depression or other serious physical symptoms related to stress, anything that brings our life to a screeching halt.

Lesson # 3 to living out of the Center is **the lack of self-care directly impacts our ability to love others**. With a more balanced idea of how the “me” spoke affects all other spokes, I now am more mindful of protecting that scheduled time. Realizing the value of healthy self-care and how it directly impacts our ability to love others emboldens us to treat the “me” spoke as the priority it is rather than devalue it and disregard it. The challenge is to take time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what that looks like for you. The “me” spoke represents a wagon with some very important rocks in it. The following are all the types of rocks in my “me” wagon that are important to keeping my cylinder full.

- Daily time with God in Word & Prayer
- Regular Sabbath
- Rest/Sleep
- Eat Well
- Physical Health (doctor’s appointments, taking vitamins, exercise, etc.)
- Time with girlfriends
- Day of Prayer (Larger chunks of time to be alone with God)

- Gardening
- Writing
- Other Creative Outlets

I can not do these things well all the time, but I look to be more balanced in these areas. Sometimes I leave things undone to make sure I get enough rest. I schedule and keep my annual doctor's appointments. I plan time to play with girlfriends, a day of prayer and times to be creative. When things get crazier, I protect these things and do not eliminate them as they are what keep my cylinder full and my ability to continue to give with a heart that is joyful rather than resentful. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Proverbs 4:23, NIV) The aspects which fuel us in essence help to keep our spiritual heart healthy. It is out of a healthy spiritual heart then that we are able to "love others" in the way that Jesus commanded.

Let the Wagon Wheel roll:

- Attached is a list of possibilities to fuel you. Look over the list and star the ones that resonate with you. Then pray through and make out a list of God given rocks for your "me" wagon, which may need to include something you have starred. Yes, they are God given, because each of us is uniquely made, and as a result, different things fuel different people.
- After you have made your list of things that need to be in your "me" wagon, evaluate how you are doing on taking care of yourself. Do you need to put some things on the calendar, make a doctor's appointment, or renew your gym membership? Write down two action steps that will move you in the direction of taking better care of yourself.
- Consider discussing these things with a friend and asking them to hold you accountable to action.
- Congratulations: Properly identifying your "me" spoke is the first step to maintaining balance in your life and thus a smoother ride!
- Check out our website at www.southshorechurch.com click on ministries, then women for numbers 1-7, LOC E-Encouragements.

Credit goes to: Pastor Wayne Cardeiro for the Principle of the Cylinder

(All Scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless indicated otherwise.)

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