

CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF LAY MINISTRY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



**QUARTERLY
PROGRAM OF STUDY
OCTOBER ~ NOVEMBER ~ DECEMBER 2007**

**“THE *STRUGGLE* OF MEN
AS GODLY EXAMPLES”**

**PREPARED BY:
CLIFFORD L. HARRIS, PRESIDENT
CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL**

**DR. VICTOR TAYLOR, GENERAL SECRETARY
BISHOP THOMAS LANIER HOYT, JR., CHAIRMAN**

PREFACE

In April of this year I was invited by, Mr. Leo Pinkett, General Secretary of the Department of Ministry to Men, to share in the *first* Sixth Episcopal District Men's Retreat.

This Quarterly Program of Study is a revised version of that sharing opportunity and is a *reflection* of the Department of Lay Ministry's support of Men's Ministry as we work to strengthen our great Zion. Thus, this first Quarterly (rather than monthly) Connectional Lay Council Program of Study has the blessings of Dr. Victor Taylor, General Secretary of Lay Ministry and Mr. Leo Pinkett.

I trust as you receive this lesson, while it is designed to minister to the men of our church, that innovative Lay Leaders will find opportunity to share the information provided in creative ways to enhance the spiritual walk of all laity regardless of gender.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

As Christian believers and as men of faith, there is a struggle that is shared by most if not all males who love and want to please God. That struggle is wrapped up in the challenge of being *Godly examples*. – We will define *Godly Examples*, as those who desire, seek, and live a *life* that God is pleased with and one that commands respect from both men and women. To be such an example is more difficult for some than it is for others. Each man's struggle has its own uniqueness; we have different personalities and come from various backgrounds and experiences, hence our struggle takes on many faces.

It will take more time than one can imagine if I attempt to address *every man's unique struggle*. My approach, therefore, will be twofold:

- ❖ First, our focus will center on what we have found to be common in our struggle.
- ❖ *Secondly*, we want to provide Biblical reference and insight into what *men* must do to master the struggle and live lives that are *worthy of being identified as "Godly Examples"*. Thus, we stand on the fact that the Bible is God's infallible true witness to his saving activity for men and all of humanity in Christ Jesus. For this reason Scripture is incomparable, forever finished and uniquely binding. No human words or declarations of religious institutions are equal to its authority. Hence, we must use God's inspired word to conquer the power of sin, Satan and the world, in order to live "Godly lives".

INTRODUCTION

The August 27, 2006, Sunday School Lesson was entitled, “Leaning on Grace”, and 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10 was established as the background scripture for the entire lesson. In this lesson there appeared a section entitled, “*The Stake In The Flesh.*” The writer referred to the message that characterized verse 7 as Paul’s famous “*thorn in the flesh*”. It reads, - “*even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.*” There have, the writer said, been debates for centuries as to what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was. He alluded to several possibilities: Was it his physical appearance? Was it severe headaches? Was it eye trouble? Was it sexual temptation as was believed by the monastic tradition in the Roman Catholic Church? Was it malaria or leprosy?

“Whatever it was, nobody knows, declared the writer of the August 27th lesson. What he did leave us to know, however, is that whatever Paul’s thorn in the flesh was, it was a serious affliction that was an impediment or challenge to his ministry.

Hence, if our subject, “*The Struggle of Men As Godly Examples*”, has any meaning or significance, we as men, must recognize, acknowledge, and confront the “**thorn(s)**” that are threatening our efforts and causing our role as **Godly Examples** to be a **STRUGGLE**.

“I further submit to us that, if a man does not establish God as his purpose or if his ultimate purpose does not revolve around pleasing God, being or becoming a true Godly Example will be virtually impossible.”

WE ARE MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT: WHAT IS YOUR THORN?

As a Godly Example, what is the thorn that defines your struggle? Is there one or are there many? This lesson is not designed to be used as an *open forum of true confession* or as a *pity party*, but the intent is to cause each man who reads and studies it, to reflect on and examine what is going on in his life and his quest to be a *Godly Example*.

THE THORN OF PRIDE AND BOASTFULNESS - *As men, our innate nature is to be proud of who we are and what we do. Our actions as Godly Examples can, if not checked, become saturated with pride and boasting.*

What Does the Word Say About Pride and Boastfulness?

(2 Corinthians 12: 1) “Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.”

(2 Corinthians 12: 5-6) 5 “On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weakness.” **6** “But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me.”

(2 Corinthians 10: 16-18) 16 “so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory.” 17 “But, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” 18 “For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”

(Psalm 34: 1-2) 1 “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the Lord.”

(Psalms 44: 8) “In God we have boasted all day long, And we will give thanks to Thy name forever.”

(Proverbs 27: 1-2) 1 “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth. 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

THE THORN OF STRIFE AND FRICTION - *The competitive and authoritative nature of many of us men can cause undo frustration, anxiety, and conflict, which in turn can portray us as less than a Godly example.*

What Does The Word Say About Strife and Friction?

(1Timothy 6: 3-5) 3 “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

(Proverbs 20: 3) “Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.”

(Proverbs 30: 33) “For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of anger produces strife.”

THE THORN OF ANGER OR A HOT OR QUICK TEMPER - *In spelling the word anger, it is found to be one letter short of (d)anger! An angry man can be a dangerous man. Can you seem to get everything in check except your temper?*

What Does The Word Say About Anger or A Hot or Quick Temper?

(James 1: 19-20) 19 “This you know my brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

(Matthew 5: 22) “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca’ (a term of contempt) shall be in danger of the council: but whoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

(Ephesians 4: 26-27) 26 “Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

(Proverbs 15: 1) “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

(Proverbs 22: 24-25) 24 “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.”

THE THORN OF HOLDING GRUDGES - *Have you ever heard a man say that nobody or nothing is going to keep him out of heaven? Well, unforgiveness can and will. “An unforgiving spirit, and grudge haboring, do not wash well in the same tube”.*

What Does The Word Say About Holding Grudges?

(Leviticus 19: 17-18) 17 “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

THE THORN OF JEALOUSY - *As men, we do not like to associate ourselves with the term jealousy. When allowed to manifest, jealousy can cause competitive and unruly behavior when the order of the day should be cooperation, collaboration, and peace.*

What Does The Word Say About Jealousy?

(1 Corinthians 3: 1-3) 1 “And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. **2** I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, **3** for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are not walking like mere men?”

(2 Corinthians 12: 20) “For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”

THE THORN OF SLANDER AND GOSSIP – He who is without *fault* (sin), let him throw the first *rock* (stone)! If I point one finger at another man’s faults, I am pointing three fingers back at my own shortcomings.

What Does The Word Say About Slander and Gossip?

(Ephesians 4: 29) “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

The Thorn of Arrogance – Is it real or is someone making the wrong interpretation? Do you *appreciate* yourself so much that you turn folks *away*, as well as *off*, by your self-centered attitude?

What Does the Word Say About Arrogance?

(Psalm 5: 5) “The arrogant shall not stand before thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity.”

(Luke 14: 11) “For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

The Thorn of Sexual Temptation /Challenging Marriages or Relationships

Do you place yourself in situations that will cause you to be tempted? If your struggle in being a Godly example lies in the one closest to you, don't rationalize yourself into sin.

***What Does the Word Say About Sexual Temptation,
Marriage, and Relationship?***

(Matthew 26: 11) “Watch and Pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

(James 1: 13) “ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

(1 Corinthians 10: 13) “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.”

(Revelation 3: 10) “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

(James 1: 12) “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

(Matthew 6: 13) “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I lastly submit to us, **as Godly Men**, we must confront our “*thorns*” with a **conscious that is not in denial** and with **unwavering determination** if we are to master the struggle of being Godly examples. Paul asked God three times to take away the thorn. God’s answer was not what Paul expected and surely not what he felt that he needed at the moment. For God’s answer was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12: 9). Paul’s committed response is found in the same verse; “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. He concluded in verse 10 with these words, “Therefore, I am well content with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

References:

- The New Open Bible Study Edition,, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN
- The Full Life Study Bible, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids MI
- Discovery: Adult Student Bible Studies, Summer 2006, CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN
- Spiritual Renewal: Transforming the Mind, Bob Perry