

Friday Focus

From Emory

For Whom Do You Carry the Stone?

As we were preparing for a recent football game, I came to the sudden realization that I was becoming affected negatively by circumstances that surrounded me. Due to several simultaneously occurring events, the mounting emotion had escalated from edgy to near fury. I was just downright angry!

We all get upset and even MAD at times. In our humanity, we constantly deal with the onslaught of circumstances and situations that create opportunities for us to harbor or express anger in our frustration. But, that is normal and ok, correct? Is it Biblical? Well..... I was convicted this week in multiple areas where I have felt (and expressed) anger and now feel qualified (and required) to share some of what the Lord has shown me in that regard.

Reading the story of the recent weight room accident in which a USC football player dropped a weight on his throat during a bench press exercise reminded me of a similar circumstance that occurred here (but fortunately of a less catastrophic nature) that nearly sent me over the edge.

In the accident with which I was associated, our athlete was fortunate that his injury was not potentially life-threatening like the USC situation, in which their player needed a tracheotomy on the weight room floor to survive, stayed in the hospital for over 3 weeks, and may never speak normally again.

Although a case could be made for 'righteous anger' where perhaps there could be some justification for the emotions felt toward our near-tragic event, as I dissected my own level of emotion, I became convicted that it was more selfish and was anything but emotion expressed righteously. It was not righteous anger due to the injury of an athlete, but was purely selfish in nature. But, the Lord had a plan for me.

On top of a series of key injuries that had occurred to our football team that particular season, we also had suffered some tough losses, and the disappointment over our play had reached a pinnacle. The player mentioned above had now become a key part of our plan to salvage a victory over one of the few opponents left on our schedule that we felt we had a legitimate opportunity of defeating. As a result of a poor decision by both the player and an adult in supervision, the athlete mentioned above was injured in a weight room accident on a Monday afternoon at the school.

Although I was informed the day of the incident, it did not take its full toll on my emotions until that evening, after practice, when the full realization that he was out for a couple of weeks, as well as the mounting tide of side-events, only escalated the rising sense of hopelessness I felt.

As I drove home that night, I was so angry that I screamed out loud (with no one around) as loudly as I could, hoping to vent my body of some of the crud that was overwhelming me. The embarrassment of two days of hoarseness that caused me to sound like a coal-burning train when I spoke didn't faze me from the justification of emotional release that only the interior of a little green Jeep witnessed that night.

By Thursday of that week (one day before the game), I began feeling a strong sense of remorse and conviction for my attitude. As I shared with a close friend about the escalation of my attitude, I had come to a place where I had 'given up' any thought of victory, and my emotional involvement in the game that we were about to play was as sublime as I have ever had approaching a varsity football game as a coach. I

had made up my mind that I was just going to enjoy the game *and* the boys in our struggle to succeed and not worry about the game's outcome.

The result of that game and the drama through which it was played are only obvious by knowing the 'rest of the story.' Not only was our team outmanned and overmatched, the game was played on the road and with barely a handful more dressed out players than the 11 on the field, due to several in-season injuries.

What ensued in the game was an incredible last-second victory that was set up by a state record-tying 99-yard touchdown pass and a buzzer-beating field goal made possible by a 4th quarter turnover by our opponent- a gift, with the result being an incredible and unbelievable victory. I was blown away. Not so much by the way the victory was achieved, but by the conviction that this had happened even though I thought I had this all figured out, and when it didn't go my way that it was hopeless. And the lesson that was taught to me once again was that, although I am helpless, it doesn't mean that a situation is hopeless. In fact, during one's helplessness is perhaps when the Lord's greatest victories are won.

In dissecting my most recent bout with anger, the question that I find I must ask is "Why am I so angry?" And if I am really doing what I tell people I do here (service to God through service to His children), then why do I feel so negative when circumstances don't turn out the way I think they should? And then I must ask myself, "Whom do I serve?"

Tim Keller tells a wonderful story that is not in the Bible, but is about our Lord and is certainly Biblical.

One day Jesus said to his disciples: "I'd like for you to carry a stone for me." He didn't give any explanation. So the disciples looked around for a stone to carry, and Peter, being the practical sort, sought out the smallest stone he could possibly find. After all, Jesus didn't give any regulations for weight and size! So he put it in his pocket. Jesus then said: "Follow me." He led them on a journey. About noontime Jesus had everyone sit down. He waved his hands and all the stones turned to bread. He said, "Now it's time for lunch." In a few seconds Peter's lunch was over. When lunch was done Jesus told them to stand up. He said again, "I'd like you to carry a stone for Me." This time Peter said, "Aha! Now I get it!" So he looked around and saw a small boulder. He hoisted it on his back and it was painful. It made him stagger. But he said, "I can't wait for supper." Jesus then said: "Follow Me." He led them on a journey, with Peter barely able to keep up. Around supper time Jesus led them to the side of a river. He said, "Now, everyone throw your stones into the water." They did. Then he said, "Follow Me," and began to walk. Peter and the others looked at him dumbfounded. Jesus sighed and said, "Don't you remember what I asked you to do? Who were you carrying the stone *for*?"

Keller, Tim. The Prodigal God. New York: Penguin Group, 2008.

Even this week, as tension mounts on a number of fronts and my own emotions begin to rise, I have been reminded by this story that our service is to Him and not ourselves. He is responsible for the result. He asks only for our obedience.