

Discipleship

2009-2010

Submitted by Billie Jo Medin

September

Thought Closets

Sometimes we allow His salt in our lives to lose its savor. In a newsletter from Jennifer Rothchild's she speaks about our Thought Closets.

"One of the perils of being blind is that I can sometimes forget people can see me! This can really be a problem because I have a tendency to talk to myself out loud when I think no one is around! Thankfully, I kind of mumble when I do it, so it's not easy to understand what I'm saying. Most of the time, my mumbles go something like this; "I need to write milk on the grocery list." Or, "I thought I put my cell phone in the kitchen... where did I put my cell phone?" But, there are times when I "grumble mumble." In other words, I mumble complaints. Sometimes I stand clearly in the center of my Thought Closet and from that vantage point; everything I see looks far less tolerable! The biggest thought in my Thought Closet can be summarized by the phrase, "It's all about me!" When that's my situation, I mumble things like, "I always pick up his clothes, why can't he pick up after himself?" or, "I don't like this, I don't like that...blah, blah, blah!" Put simply, I grumble and mumble complaints!

We all have the tendency to talk to ourselves that way from time to time, don't we? If you're not sure, listen to what goes on in the Thought Closets of some you might know...

"This church never listens to my ideas." - "My mother-in-law is so annoying."

"That meal was too salty." - "I have nothing to wear." - "My house is way too small."

"Our car is old." - "He watches too much football." - "She is so disorganized."

"That preacher is boring."

Whew! It's highly unpleasant to read those phrases, isn't it? Yet, those statements symbolize what we often stow away in our Thought Closets. Those toxic phrases represent what we sound like when we choose to grumble. Sometimes we grumble out of habit. We've simply conditioned ourselves to see the worst in everything and announce it to everyone! Maybe we have a more naturally pessimistic personality so it's natural for us to bring out the negative. Or maybe we grew up with a parent who tended toward negativity, and now we are quick to complain and murmur. Whether it is habit, disposition or upbringing that contributes to grumbling, the real root is selfishness.

The Apostle Paul tells us to do nothing out of selfishness. (Phil. 2: 3) But rather do everything with humility of mind. My friend, humility never complains. Only pride complains. Selflessness never grumbles. Only selfishness grumbles.

We are to act with humility of mind, not selfishness. Complaining always reveals a lack of humbleness and plenty of self-centeredness. Complaining doesn't flow from a Thought Closet where God is the center. Our grumbles are simply because we are self focused rather than God focused. That was certainly the ultimate cause of the Israelites complaining. Throughout the book of Numbers, the Israelites grumbled about how hard their trip was; how they wished they could go back to Egypt; how there wasn't enough food, how they didn't like the food they got; the water was bitter, there was no water... blah, blah, blah!

Ugh! They had so much complaining in their thought closets that they were wardrobed with the ugly garb of rebellion, and the ill fitting frock of discontent. Before we get too judgmental toward those ancient complainers though, review what you grumble about. Are your grumbles more justified than theirs were? Mine aren't. Complaining reflects a sense of entitlement rather than a spirit of gratefulness. If we grow smaller in our own

thought closets, God can take His rightful place. When we decrease and He increases, we become less grumbly and more grateful. And our lives are wardrobed with His Life. So, my friend, let's purge our thought closets of the negative, self-centered complaints so our lives will be wardrobed with the fruit of gratefulness and our countenances will glow with gratitude."

Let's allow the salt in our lives to be rejuvenated by His Holy Spirit so that only pure salt pours from our Thought Closets.

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe." Phil 2:14-15 (NIV)

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October

What Instruments Do You Play?

In the life of Mary, Martha and Lazarus we find examples for us to follow as we grow in our relationship with the Lord. Max Lucado has drawn a parallel with Mary, Martha and Lazarus and their place in God's Band. He suggested that Martha represented the drum, the deep boom, boom, keeping and leading the tempo and rhythm of the whole band. Making sure everyone and everything is in order. Mary was likened to the flute. The music from her instrument soared, whispering, lifting, rising to the clouds. She was an instrument of worship and her music brought comfort. Lazarus was likened to the trumpet. After he was raised from the dead, he shouted to everyone, he raised the spirit and let everyone know what God had done for him. In a band all the instruments are important, not one more than the other. The soft flute needs the brash trumpet. The brash trumpet needs the steady drum. The steady drum needs the soft flute. So the comparison goes on and on with all instruments in the band. The operative word here is "need." All the instruments need each other. So we need each other in the body of Christ. In each women's ministry within the local church you need each other. Imagine if you only heard the steady beat of the drum how monotonous that would become after awhile. The loud, brash sound of the trumpet would soon begin to hurt our ears, and the softness of the flute soon would become lost or drowned out all by itself. So we need each other in the body to produce that full, majestic sound intended to glorify the Maestro.

Most importantly we need to be led by the Maestro, Jesus Christ. We have been given the guide of His Word and the Holy Spirit's leading. If we don't follow His direction our band becomes very noisy and out of sync with itself.

We also should not waste our time arguing who gets to have first chair or compete with one another, but in love work together. Accept the gift-mix/instrument God has given to each one of us instead of to secretly wish God had given us the instrument of someone else. He has given each one a different skill and ability, but all with equal value, a significant part within the whole Band. So we need to keep balance within the band as well to play our specific instrument under the leading of the Great Maestro. We must stay focused, flexible, working "playing" together, keeping perfect rhythm as a team. Then by the fullness, and sweet music, we share the effective essence of salt so others will be drawn to our Maestro who is worthy of all praise and honor.

The same prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians I share with you— *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* - Ephesians 3:16-19

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November

Team Work

Recently it has been brought to my mind again the importance of working in the body as a team. Not only does each team member have an important function in the “body”, so does she also have specific gifts that contributes to that team. We are reminded in scripture to encourage one another and be unified as one body. A body/team that functions well allows each member to do her part. Sometimes we need to help evaluate and affirm our “team” with the specific gifts that God has given. A well-oiled machine functions very well as each component moves and works, so too the work of the Holy Spirit is the most important factor as He infuses His love and power to help the team/body function at the highest level. I believe all of us after much prayer can begin to see our “team” work more effectively as we align ourselves with first of all God’s directives and allow His salt be poured out to all as we work to glorify Him and his work.

Verses: Ephesians 4:3-4 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit...”

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December

Greatest Gift Ever Given

Christmas always brings back memories of years gone by, traditions, treasures, certain essences, decorations and tastes of special foods but most of all the reason why we celebrate. I recently went online and found the question “Does Christmas have real meaning today?” Another quote was about Santa reaching in a bag and pulling out the fir tree.” Other similar statements were made. Obviously we are living in post-modern times, where the truth has fallen away and many never heard that Jesus loves them or the true meaning of Christmas. Only when I purposefully went to a religious site did I find the verses of Scripture which tells us the story we find in Luke 2:1-20 and Matt 1:18-25, which has become so familiar to us we often lose the “wonder of it all” and how God gave the Greatest Gift ever given to all who believe.

We need to teach the truth of Romans 6:23 that says “... *the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.*” Together cherish this gift so much to share it with those in our sphere of influence. What a perfect opportunity to celebrate together as recipients of this gift of love given so freely. The birth of Jesus, the eternal, all powerful and all-knowing Creator came to earth incarnated – in the flesh. He came as light and salt to this world in need. It was His great Love for you, me and to all who will receive.

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January

Rocks – First things first.

God desires the best of the best for us! He is waiting to pour out His blessings upon us, yet we need to put first things first. Steve Covey – in a Time Management presentation gives the example of placing rocks in a very large wide-mouthed jar on a table in front of his audience. On the other side of the jar there was a pile of some very large stones, often used for landscaping. The question was posed as to what was the best way to put the stones in the jar. He began to place them in the jar carefully, one by one to fit them as it were a puzzle. They were carefully stacked all around in the jar then on top of one another so as to not knock them against the glass which might crack or break with their impact. He questioned the group before him if the jar was full. One person cautiously raised his arm and responded. “Yes, yes the jar is full of all of those large rocks.” Steve lifted a pail of pea gravel that had been sitting behind him on the floor and slowly began to pour the pea gravel into the jar. As it fell, it filled up all the small spaces between the larger rocks until it reached the very top. Now surely the jar was full – it was much too heavy to lift from the table. But was it full? Further behind him he had placed a bucket of sand and began to pour the sand over all the stones and rocks. It was amazing to see how much sand sifted through small stones and rocks filling up the tiniest crevices imaginable. He turned to the audience once more and asked the question “Is the jar full?” “Oh, yes,” several murmured “it is full to the very top.” Then he grabbed a bucket full of water and began pouring it slowly into the jar filled with rocks, stones and sand. Amazing how much room there was for all that water. NOW the jar is full to overflowing. No more room for anything to be added.

What is the application from this analogy? How very important it is that we deal first with the big decisions that we face. If we put them off and try to address them later, there is no more room to put them into the jar of our life. Space has been totally occupied. As we resolve the big issues first in an orderly fashion, then there is room to take care of the smaller, not so all-consuming concerns. Then the daily, mundane tasks can sift down through all the major decisions, and the water enters and begins to overflow leaving no more space but fully fills our life up to the very top. For completeness, it is the Holy Spirit who represents the water. He melds everything together, keeps perspective and then overflows which brings fullness and grace allowing us to bless and lead others. Matthew 6:33 says “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things will be added unto you.” How are you dealing with the stones in your life? Are first things first? *James 3:12* “*My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*” Is the Holy Spirit your source of fresh water?

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February

Women's Accountability Breakfast

Purpose: To encourage and hold each other accountable to live our lives in a Godly manner. *Mark 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."*

Gather every Saturday morning for breakfast at a local restaurant, starting at 7:00 am. The atmosphere is quiet at that time of day. Stay for as long as each woman is able. Go over some questions, air struggles and victories, and offer up suggestions to help one another. Pray for each other.

By growing in the Lord, there is a new boldness in witnessing to others and memorizing more scripture. Some questions modified to suit your group:

1. Have you prayed with/for your spouse this week?
2. Have you shared your faith with someone this week?
3. Have you given of your time/tithes to the Lord this week?
4. Have you spent time in Bible reading/devotions/memorizing this week?
5. What has God been saying to you through His Word this week?
6. Have you seen any movies/shows, read any books, listened to music that you would be embarrassed to tell your Christian friends?
7. What sins in your personal or business life did you experience this week that need to be confessed?
8. How did you influence your marriage and family this week? How positively? How negatively? What could you do to improve?
9. What challenges or struggles are weighing on your mind?
10. What Bible study or personal devotions are currently doing?

Laminate a copy of the questions for each woman to carry with them.

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March

Grace

In the study *Becoming a Woman of Grace* by Cynthia Heald, we come to understand grace in a much deeper way. She brings particular emphasis on the Law of Love. It is imperative we understand that it isn't the "warm, fuzzy, emotional" type of love, but the deep abiding love of Christ in us as we fulfill the greatest commandment of all by "loving one another."

She used the example of "Peanuts," by cartoonist Charles Schultz. Lucy is quoted saying "I love mankind; it is people I cannot stand." We can be committed to loving others when we are alone, but when we face challenges it is hard to be kind and loving. Cynthia says: "As I have tried to understand why it is hard for me to love others sincerely, I have come to realize the depth of my selfishness and strong commitment to protect my "rights." I have a right to be loved first; I have a right to be treated kindly; I have a right not to suffer; I have a right to repay those who hurt me. Why should I love those who are unkind? How can I love those who wound me? How can I be expected to lay down my life for those who don't appreciate me? Why should I be asked to love others, not just as I love myself, but as Christ loves me, unconditionally—no ifs, ands, or buts." It is difficult but it is the law of Christ. "Love is the excellent way to live. Love heals. Love blesses not only the recipient but also the giver. Love is full of grace."

As we grow and develop in our walk with Christ we can only be effective as light and salt if we invite Him to be our love and grace as we minister to one another. The study of His Word and power of His Spirit are essential in our lives.

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April

Listen, Discern, Encourage

In order to meet your friend where she is at, we need to be good listeners. Take time to hear her pain. Ask for the Holy Spirit to help you discern when it is time to give her godly counsel, guide her in faith (or a deeper one if they are already a believer), encourage her to take God at His word and believe His promises for her life.

Be effective and full flavored salt in the lives of others by knowing when to pour out truth and other times only listen. Seek to give counsel from His Word and not your own advice. The right measurement of salt definitely makes the difference.

Verse: *Galatians 6:2* "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

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May

Mothers

In the reading of many articles, books, etc. we are often referred to as “like mother, like daughter.” Sometimes that is good and sometimes not so good. Often we observe little things we don’t want to imitate when we grow older.

- What are/were some special things that you think of when you think of your Mom?
- A good thing?
- Why is/was your Mom so important to you?

You see, God has a plan for women as He made us very unique. God gave women something very unique and special. He gave us sensitivity and care for others.

In a recent study through Christianity Today, several young Christian artists were asked to share the best lessons they’ve learned from their mom. They were:

- My mother is my best friend and she’s my prayer partner. We have many things we enjoy doing together.
- My Mom has modeled sacrifice and servant hood. I’m proud of her as my mother and my friend. I can talk to her about anything.
- My mother’s strength and her relationship with the Lord inspire me. She applies Scripture in every situation. She has talent and is a concert pianist.
- I’m amazed by my mom’s knowledge of the Bible. She will always be there for me.

What will/do our children say about us or what do we say about our mothers? Do we or have we imitated Christ to them? Have we been salt and light?

It is God’s love outlined in 1 Corinthians 13: 3b-8a & 13. Love opens up possibilities, and it is only God who can truly satisfy that intimacy and closeness that we all desire. We are to mirror Christ as role models portraying who He is. What an incredible challenge to all of us!!

Let it be our prayer to be imitators of Jesus Christ as salt and light to our children and grandchildren and those in our sphere of influence.

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June

Hunger for truth

Teri Myers was a spiritual mentor that we read about in the book *Having a Mary heart in a Martha World*. She tells a story of having company over for dinner one night. She'd worked hard all day on a beautiful meal – four courses and a fancy dessert. It was going to be wonderful. Somewhere around the middle of the afternoon, Teri all of a sudden realized she was very hungry. She had been so busy cooking and cleaning – she had completely missed lunch. Here it was nearly four p.m. and her dinner wasn't served until six p.m. She always kept a hidden stash of snicker bars. She grabbed a couple of candy bars and sat down to rest, enjoying her clean living room and beautifully set table. It did the trick, her stomach wasn't growling anymore. She able to take a shower, do her hair and get dressed with plenty of time to spare.

It wasn't until Teri sat down to dinner that she discovered the problem. There she was with that wonderful dinner she had worked on all day to prepare, but her appetite was gone! The mid afternoon snack had taken the edge off her hunger. She ended up picking at her plate as she watched everyone else dig in and enjoy their meal.

The Lord spoke to her at the moment and showed her that often we fill our lives with spiritual snickers bars – things like good friends, books and shopping. They may be good things, but not when they take the edge off our hunger for God. Maybe you too can relate. Do you not like quietness, so you fill up the silence with sitcoms, talk shows, Christian music and the news? Remember it is in the quiet of the night that Samuel heard God's voice? If we have not fed on the Word of God how can we know the truth? *"Taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalm 34:8 James 3:11 "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?"*

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July

Effective salt

Often we need the challenge to allow the Holy Spirit help us evaluate if salt in our lives is effective. It is much easier to use over and over what is familiar and has been proven in the past, however sometimes that which was effective and good has become obsolete and invalid. Certain discipleship methods were once very effective, however with the change in life's issues they too need to be evaluated. A practical example is an auction where we had to sell my mother and her husband's household items. Because they moved into a small apartment there was no longer use for some wonderful items that had served them well for so long. Beautiful furniture and decorative pieces did not fit in their new living space. Selection had to be made and even purchase of new things, so it was out with the "old" in with "new" that will better serve them for at least a few more years.

In Matthew 5:13 we read "*You are the **salt** of the earth. But if the **salt** loses its **saltiness**, how can it be made **salty** again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*" Are we effective in ministering to one another, or has our salt lost its saltiness? May we be challenged to keep in God's word and allow the Spirit to keep us pliable and teachable to be on the cutting edge in truth ministering to one another.

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August

Mentoring / Accountability

Make a list of all the women in your church. Make it a project to pray for every one and reach out to her in some way. You can't do it by yourselves but there are others who can/will share your vision. Establish accountability partners/ breakfasts, etc.

Objective: To make sure no woman is left behind in your church. That every woman is connected to someone, receives weekly phone calls, is prayed for, is reached out to, is reminded about and invited to events, and just plain feels loved!

Target: All woman ages 18 and older

Procedure: The leadership team ends up with a list of woman they then begin to shepherd. They are in charge of calling, praying for, inviting to events, sending notes or emails of encouragement to, etc. the women on their list.

The goal is to not have any women "fall through the cracks."

*Colossians 4:6 "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with **salt**, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*