

Evotional – 29 September 2013 – Journey through the Wall (EHS4)

What is the Wall?

One of the best images of our spiritual lives is as a journey, with its ups and downs. Sometimes we may get stuck at a place, or we may hit a 'Wall'. A Wall experience strikes to the core of who we are. It is necessary if we are to develop into mature Christians. For most of us the Wall appears through a crisis that turns our world upside down:

A failed relationship, betrayal, a job loss, the death of someone close, a cancer diagnosis, a disillusioning church experience, a deep depression, a shattered dream, a wayward child, a car accident, an inability to get pregnant, a deep desire to marry that remains unfulfilled.

It results in a dryness or loss of joy in our relationship with God. We question ourselves, God, the church. We discover for the first time that our faith does not appear to "work." We have more questions than answers as the very foundation of our faith feels like it is on the line. We don't know where God is, what he is doing, where he is going, how he is getting us there, or when this will be over.

Some of you at Wall today, others been there or know people who are there.

Abraham at the Wall:

Abraham had given up everything for God (see Genesis 12:1) ... or nearly everything. Now in Genesis 22 God asks him to sacrifice his most precious thing; his Son, his only, long-awaited Son, through whom all God's promises were supposed to be fulfilled. (Note the linguistic parallel between 12:1 and 22:2 – a three-fold emphasis on what is being sacrificed.)

What's the thing that you really wouldn't want God to touch?

Why would God touch that thing? To the extent we get any answer it is an uncomfortable one. Abraham was tested to prove (to God?) that he truly loved and feared God, that he was not just in it for what he could get (v12).

Could God take you to the Wall? Is God an end in himself for us or just a means to an end?

Why do we live the way we do, come to church, read our Bibles, pray, etc?

Is it to relieve stress, to make friends, to get healed, to avoid hell, to achieve purpose and fulfilment, to please other people, to be lost in worship, to get recognition, to be entertained?

All those may be valid, and good places to start, but God wants people who would follow him even if all that is stripped away, people who love God for who he is and want to grow closer to him because they know that is all that really matters.

At the Wall I relinquish what I cling to for identity; that which holds me back from intimacy with God.

What does this mean in practice?

Peter Scazzero suggests three steps:

1. Awareness of sin

At the Wall I begin to admit and name my issues. In my brokenness I realise my need for healing. Suffering can make my sins and weaknesses more obvious, can flush them out.

In the 'Dark Night of the Soul', St. John of the Cross looks at the seven deadly sins (pride, greed, luxury, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth) and challenges us to think of them in relation to our spiritual life.

For example, do I look down on others as less spiritual than me? Am I greedy for better spiritual experiences?

2. Acceptance of the wall

These sins get rooted out of us at the Wall; the ordinary way we grow as Christians is through dark nights of the soul. Our wires/affections/DNA get reworked as we are prepared for a higher degree of love for God, for being able to commune with God more abundantly; purging our palates and our taste buds so we may truly hunger for God and taste the love of God.

So we need to 'befriend the darkness'.

Richard Rohr said, 'Life is hard; You are not that important; Your life is not about you; You are not in control; You are going to die.'

Our prayers don't become ways of avoiding dark nights but pleas that God may bring things into our lives:

- To strip me of illusions
- To make me realise that I will never be totally healed in this life; I will always be in recovery; this is a journey.

3. Focus on forgiveness

Often the Wall will throw up issues of guilt and failure. Almost always it will force us to confront where our true hope is. The story of Abraham and Isaac points to Jesus in lots of ways; eg compare v2 with Mark 12:6 ('a son, an only son, whom he loved'). God gave the best thing, the last thing, the most precious thing – to save us.

He has been through the Wall for us and ahead of us, so we know that the Wall is not the end but the beginning.

Conclusion:

Are you willing to pray, "Lord, bring me closer to you, no matter what the cost"?

'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.'

Questions:

1. Have you had a Wall experience? How did it help you (or not) to grow closer to God?
2. Which of the seven deadly sins do you find the most seductive in your spiritual life?
3. What do you think of Richard Rohr's statement quoted above?
4. Is it reasonable to be expected to say "Lord, bring me closer to you, no matter what the cost"?
5. Where is Jesus when we are at the Wall?