

Break Free...

*A Thought for the Week From Patrick Kemper at
No Strongholds Ministries*

Week 15

V.O.A. or D.O.A.?

Psalm 36:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.

My wife works in an inner city, level one trauma center in St. Louis. A normal day for her is filled with victims of auto and farm machinery accidents, drug overdoses and gunshot wounds. The teams of doctors and nurses work like crazy to patch up and sew together the vulnerable, fragile human beings that are brought to their door step, but there are some who arrive just a little too late and nothing can be done to bring them back to life. These unfortunate souls are referred to as D.O.A. – dead on arrival.

The designation leaves no room for interpretation.

Some arrive in ambulances, some in helicopters, and some are dumped, literally, at the door of the hospital. No matter how they arrive, all the available resources provided for them cannot sufficiently address the condition in which they find themselves. Their condition is of a nature that should have been addressed in a manner that prevented the need for those in the lab coats and scrubs. Those who dedicate their lives to traumatic situations are talented and committed individuals, but they cannot be expected to reverse damage as though it never occurred. For those who arrive D.O.A., their situations needed to be addressed, at a personal level, long before arriving at the hospital.

Individuals identified as D.O.A. will be remembered as having been unable to rise above the environment in which they existed - victims of circumstance or situations beyond their control... or their own stupidity (i.e. overdose).

As I visit churches and talk with people, there seems to be a growing number of Christians among the spiritually D.O.A. They walk the aisle, sign the card and pray the prayer, but they live like Dr. Frankenstein's creation - a body running around appearing to be fully functional, but the truth is, there is no real relationship (no real life) in them.

Reluctantly they show up at church, unhappily they smile through the handshakes and the service, selfishly they place their penance in the passing plate and then sluggishly stomp through life, moaning and grunting incomprehensively, about the circumstances they encounter during the rest of the week. They think they are okay, but everything about their lives - all the evidence - reveals there is no relationship.

They are constantly in search of (or so they say) the elusive power that raised Christ from the dead... instead of living in it.

There is no obedience because they cannot hear God. They cannot hear His voice because there is no authentic worship or submission. They arrive at the doors of the hospital (church) looking to get patched up... but they are D.O.A. Their condition is one that cannot be revived by the pastor – it is a condition that can only be reversed by personal submission and an authentic relationship.

Let's Chase a Rabbit

Yesterday ranked #2 among the worst days during the last 6 years of my life – it was brutal. As I sat in my office this morning, doing my absolute best to connect in worship and submit my life, my mind kept going back to the events of the previous day. The battle ensued and my attention bounced back and forth between honor and anger. Eventually the music, the writing and the influence of the Holy Spirit prevailed, and I began to get caught up in focus on God and His awesome characteristics.

I found myself at Ps. 36:5.

The verse spoke of how God's faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. As I was writing, this thought came to me:

Your faithfulness reaches beyond the furthest limits of the universe! Is this why it is so hard to believe the honor and respect I offer is anything close to acceptable? I live in a finite construct so everything is destined to fall short... but it's not about my offering being worthy and commensurate, is it?

No, it's not.

It's about my offering being **V**oluntary, **O**bedient and **A**uthentic. Submitting in worship - completely and humbly - will never be accomplished if we are attempting to reach some position of worthiness (or acceptability) by doing so. Offering flattery in an attempt to soften up God is immature, naive and arrogant. Finite creations are incapable of relating to their Infinite Creator...

... but they can humbly, and respectfully bow, acknowledging His greatness.

Submitting and honoring God in worship is not for scoring points, but for acknowledging His attributes, recognizing His qualities and revering His greatness.

We must choose to offer the limits of who we are, what we do and what we have. It is our *choice* to worship in spirit and in truth – it's voluntary. If we do choose to submit, it is our duty to do so without grudges, without being half-hearted and without exercising inauthentic obligations. The correct approach will move us to be submitted, humbly. The correct approach will remind us of the power – the uniqueness - of His grace, and cause us to relinquish everything out of gratitude.

The Infinite Creator who fabricated the universe, the world, and its contents, does not seek perfection - just our voluntary, truthful, humble submission. He doesn't expect perpetual, infinite praise (like seraphim), but He is jealous for our *daily, undivided* attention.

Application

Regardless of your current situation, in spite of the events that may be swirling about, pulling your focus in various directions, you always have the ability to choose to maintain the lifeline connecting you to the One who not only created you, but also wants to coach you through every minute of the day. The more complicated things get, the more essential it is to set aside the undivided time that He deserves.

The truth is, without it, there is no relationship.

The Infinite Creator never forgets you are a finite creature who lives in a finite construct and functions within finite boundaries. This truth will affect your life in one way or another.

How will you let this information affect your life?

Will it create an attitude of apathy, or will you use it to return to *humble*? Will this perspective allow you to be satisfied with performing poorly or, will it cause you to work harder (to raise the performance expectations you currently have of yourself) and be grateful for the grace that covers your shortcomings?

Does this truth give you permission to operate under the low expectations of your environment, or will it cause you to guard your heart more closely and work harder (in *spite* of your environment) to perform above the level the world (and the enemy) advertises as acceptable?

Does this truth encourage and empower you to always give your best and ensure that your relationship with Jesus Christ is V.O.A. (Voluntary, Obedient & Authentic), or prove that it's D.O.A.?

Homework for the Week...

1.) Are you spiritually D.O.A.? Do you wander through life like Frankenstein's empty project making noise about the circumstances in your life? Do you have a non-negotiable time of worship, submission and prayer? What is the cause-and-effect relationship between your answers to the previous two questions? In your own writing, identify what needs work and what methods will you use to begin accomplishing this (be specific). Who can you contact to help you? Ask God to help you discover how He created you to worship and submit.

2.) Mid-week check. List the opportunities you have had and how you responded (this is your obedience indicator). If you are still posting a doughnut, more than likely you weren't all that truthful when you asked God for chances to respond and improve. Check your heart; be authentic. Ask God to show you the way through what is blocking you from submitting in obedience.

3.) How are you doing compared to the way you started the week? If you still need improvement, refuse to move on to the next session. Stay here, submit, and choose to be obedient no matter what it takes. Explain how you have improved, or make a commitment to continue working. When you are operating in obedience in this area of your life... turn the page and move to the next session.
