

Break Free...

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

Week 19

Which Comes First?

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (NJB)

11 'For this Law which I am laying down for you today is neither obscure for you nor beyond your reach. 12 It is not in heaven, so that you need to wonder, "Who will go up to heaven for us and bring it down to us, so that we can hear and practice it?"

13 Nor is it beyond the seas, so that you need to wonder, "Who will cross the seas for us and bring it back to us, so that we can hear and practice it?" 14 No, the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice.

Which do you believe came first, the chicken or the egg?

Well, duh, the chicken came first. I distinctly remember reading in the Bible how God created all the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and all the creeping things of the earth... not the eggs from which they would hatch.

In this week's discussion (*not* about chickens or eggs), I seek to call your attention to a specific musing – one which asks a question very similar to that of “bird or begotten?” and “hen or huevo?” My question is not concerned about a chicken or an egg, but is focused on what comes first... practice or the game?

Which would you say?

Initially, it would seem we competently perform only what we have practiced, but deeper probing adds more mud to the water by making an argument for the idea that it is not possible to practice what has not been already attempted and failed. In this case, then, the attempt (the performance) precedes the practice.

If there is more than one game to a season (which is typically the case), then is the game itself really the end-all (the goal) of the practice, or is the game really just a tool to show what needs to be worked on in the next practice? Weaknesses are revealed and strengths are identified, in both game and practice, but for what purpose? Are all games just practices for the final game, or is there purpose in the practice, the game and the final appearance? More importantly, where does it all start?

Isn't this all a bit of a stretch? Why is this even important? Perhaps we should add a little context. Let's consider this idea of practice and performance within the concept of

worship.

Application

Allow me, if you will, to set the stage by sharing a bold, but simple, truth: you are a creation who was brought into existence for the sole purpose of voluntarily worshipping the One who created you.

Do you understand that the days assigned to you (clearly defined with a beginning and an end) are not for getting your roses to appear in Better Homes & Garden, raising little clones of yourself as a legacy (to yourself) or making as much money as possible... but to practice the things you will perform for eternity? Like responses provided during an interview, you are only able to perform those things you take time to practice before the performance.

Let me see if I can get this to land a little closer to home.

Worship is not a slot on the Sunday morning church program. Worship is the undeterred demonstration of devotion to someone (or something) expressed through a specific method. Do you understand that worship of God is not just an expectation – it is an art form? Can you grasp that worship, as an art form, is also an acquired taste?

I would like to clarify something here. I'm not implying "the arts" when I use the term "art form." I use this term in an attempt to convey intentionality, authenticity and competency. Worship is validated not by the pomp and production of the pursuit, but the authenticity of the action. Authentic worship is intentional... and personally expensive.

Why should anyone - who chooses to live a worship-less existence here - expect to be endowed with all that is necessary to honor and worship Almighty God as they suddenly find themselves standing in His presence? Do you believe marriage is appropriate (and expect it to be successful) without dating?

God has gone to great lengths, immense cost and personal sacrifice to redeem you. He offers His moment-by-moment presence, challenge-by-challenge coaching and the opportunity for communion, with Him, throughout eternity. How could it ever be appropriate to presume that the Host of the party, who graciously extends an undeserved invitation to you, should be responsible for providing your evening attire as well?

It's up to you to prepare (practice) for how you will present in both manners (the humbleness of your spirit) and appearance (the condition of your heart and reputation). Now... is the time to get the feel for personal interaction with your Creator. Now... is when you are to practice until awkward-and-uncoordinated becomes fluent, authentic and second nature, not when you stand before the Lord of Hosts, God Almighty, the King of kings... for the first time. There should already be an authentic connection that naturally produces an intimate embrace, not an uncomfortable introduction and a handshake.

It is sobering to realize that far too many (who have called themselves "Christian" for many years), if they were to die this moment, would find themselves standing awkwardly before their Creator, hand extended and heart trembling, instead of running into the waiting arms of the One they have been longing to touch their entire lives.

Which one describes you?

Do you daily experience an intimate connection in worship with your Father, Creator and Coach at an authentic level (where the thought of passing from this life gives you new hope and energy), or do you wonder (worry) how the introduction will go?

Do you find yourself getting refreshingly lost in the vastness of His love, generosity and His commitment to the success of your life, or, when opportunities to worship materialize, do you always feel as though you are deciding whether or not to go on the blind date your great aunt set up for you?

I said earlier that worship is an acquired taste... because humble is not natural. But as when learning to ride a bicycle, initial fears and anxiety eventually give birth to freedom and exhilaration... with practice.

The Bible reveals the truth about the connection God offers to those who will trust Him and choose to live for Him.

Psalm 111:10 (TLB)

¹⁰ How can men be wise? The only way to begin is by reverence for God. For growth in wisdom comes from obeying his laws. Praise his name forever.

John 14:21 (TLB)

²¹ The one who obeys me is the one who loves me; and because he loves me, my Father will love him; and I will too, and I will reveal myself to him."

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how you were designed to worship your Father. Then *put into practice (v.14)* the things He shows you so your exit from this life becomes an instant "welcome home" into eternity.



