

## That's Ingenious

We've all heard phrases like, "Why mess with a good thing?", "If it ain't broke, don't fix it.", and "Maintain the status Quo?". In the Army a popular one is, "Don't reinvent the wheel. Let's face it, most of us enjoy sticking with the norm and we'd be happy with very little change in our lives, unless of course that change involves winning the lottery. Yet we often read about how survivors use everyday items in less than ordinary ways in order to make it out of harrowing circumstances. This is why ingenuity is one of the twelve characteristics I've been studying. How can we as Eternal Survivors apply this principle to our daily lives? In the days of Moses, God gave His people the Israelites The Law. It was an incredibly detailed list of do's and don'ts filled with requirements and stipulations that must be kept in order for His chosen people to enter heaven. There is a reason that most people shy away from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. However, to gain some perspective on the Jewish culture and their resistance to Jesus as the Messiah it is a fascinating read.

The Israelites were never able to keep up their end of the covenant. Punishments for infractions and failures to abide by the commandments God gave to Moses were and still are severe, "for the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23. In the time of exile from the Promised Land, the Israelites were suffering the punishment for centuries of sinful behavior and their failure to repent and believe what was prophesied. God knew that without proof of their own inability to keep the covenant, without proof that He was faithful to His promise by upholding their punishment, without of His mercy by saving a remnant to tell the story, without numerous displays of His mighty power of deliverance, His people would be unable to grasp their desperate need for His most ingenious idea, a once and for all sacrifice that all might live eternally, His Son Jesus. Only it wasn't new to Him, it was God's plan from the beginning of time.

The Jewish people expected their Messiah to come as a powerful King and to dominate over and deliver them from their enemies. What they got was a man mostly like any other who simply died to save the entire world from the enemy - sin.

When He began teaching, much of what He spoke *seemed* contrary to their traditions, cultures and The Law. For these people, it became very hard to understand that Jesus was fulfillment of the law. That believing in Him and His sacrifice on the cross was enough for them to be viewed as righteous before God. That loving God and others was all that was required, not sacrifice, circumcision, or ceremonial cleanliness, not religious festivals, what they ate or the amount they tithed, not even their family lineage, cultural affiliation or adherence to the interpretations of the law by religious leaders of the day. But that loving your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself was enough. It is still a hard concept for us to grasp today as we sometimes wrestle with the idea of works based faith.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have begun to think outside the box already, but to live a life worthy of the title of Eternal Survivor, you must continue to break the mold we humans have been set in. The attitude of the heart supersedes any and all works we perform both in secret and before men, both good and evil. Unfortunately, the natural attitudes of our sinful nature are unworthy of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So we must deny ourselves and our nature if we wish to draw closer to Jesus. This goes against most of our cultural norms today.

Much of what Jesus preached was highly controversial during His lifetime. He threatened the Jewish leaders of the day by calling them out as hypocrites. He challenged the idea of social status by serving those who were sinners. He defied a works-based mentality by preaching love as fulfillment of the law. Though the bible is the most widely read publication in history, many of His teachings still cause deep controversy today. In some cases however, something much more dangerous is happening - a complete disregard for the truths held within. We, as Eternal Survivors must not disregard The Word and the Wisdom God gives us through it, we must live it out daily? and that means living our lives in a way that is set apart from how the rest of the world lives. We must live with the ingenuity of Jesus. Eternal Survivors are called to give our lives to Jesus, to love our enemies, to be humble, to pray according to His will, to give thanks for our trials.

The world teaches us to look out for number one and that we have to take care of ourselves first. We generally feel like we are entitled to certain things in this life. That we deserve the best the world has to offer ? friends, family, money, possessions. Jesus tells His disciples that, ?whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it? in Matthew 16:25. There is no life apart from Jesus. God created each and every one of us and we are blessed with our very breath at His pleasure. At any moment our earthly life could come to an end and it will be the attitude of our heart toward Jesus that determines our next step. To give anything less than our whole life for Him, is to deny Him His due. If we love our own life on earth so much that we fail to live for Him, we will lose out on the eternal life Jesus bought for us on the cross. If we enjoy our riches so much that we fail to give to the poor, we are proving that we love our own life more than Jesus. If we enjoy our friendships so much that we never stand up for Jesus to those around us, we are holding on to life as we want it. If we delight in our position or status, but fail to recognize God as the source of all our success we demonstrate how much we value our earthly life.

Yet if we let go of all we hold dear in this life for the sake of Jesus, we will truly find a life worth living eternally in Heaven. What is this life without the promise of the next?

The world is typically governed by a system of justice that demands retribution. The Hammurabi code dictated that an eye for an eye was suitable punishment. In parenting we are told that the punishment should fit the crime. Jesus however teaches us to love our enemies, to pray for those who have wronged us, to turn the other cheek if we have been slapped once, to willingly go the extra mile for those who have demanded our service. He demonstrated grace and mercy by dying on the cross while we were yet strangers to Him and sinners. He loves us even when we are our most unlovable selves. By imitating Him in this, we will show the world that we are different. By forgiving those who sin against us and allowing God to provide our justice, we show our enemies that He is greater than any hurt we face. Those who harm us, sin against God and He says vengeance is Mine.

It is easy to love those who love us, but even those who don't know God care for those that care for them, so this does not set us apart. Living out the life of an Eternal Survivor demands that ?you love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.? Matthew 5:44-45.

There is more at stake than our pride when we hold a grudge against those who have wronged us. Jesus says that ?if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.? Matthew 6:15. In failing to show mercy, we will bring judgment upon ourselves, for we are all in need of forgiveness from our Father. If we show this love and mercy toward our enemies, we open the door to share the love of our Savior with them. If we demand retribution, however justified in our own eyes, we perpetuate evil. Paul tells the Romans, ?Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.? Romans 12:21. This is thinking ingeniously!

The world chases after people who are confident, independent, ambitious, upbeat, charismatic, but this is not what God desires. He blesses the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted, because in the Kingdom of Heaven they will find comfort, fulfillment, mercy, their inheritance and the very face of God. Matthew 5:3-10. Followers of Jesus who are reviled, persecuted and accused falsely by the world for His sake are to rejoice and be glad for they will have a great reward in Heaven. Matthew 5:11-12 Eternal Survivors must be more of what God seeks and less of what the world looks for. We are to take what the world sees as weak and ordinary and allow Jesus to use us in an extraordinary way for the Kingdom of Heaven. We are to be humble.

The world does not usually reward humility, especially in the work place. If you aren't tooting your own horn, you are usually overlooked. This was certainly true when I was in the Army but even now as part of the stay at home mom crowd, I see a lot of one-up-manship fueled by the need to validate ourselves by what we are doing for our children and our communities. When we do good deeds or make sacrifices we are not to call attention to these actions in a way that brings honor to ourselves. Jesus warns his disciples not to do their ?charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.? Matthew 6:1. He tells us that those who appear miserable to show the world they are fasting already have their reward found in the approval and admiration of man. Matthew 6:16. If we received our reward on earth from men because we boast about our good deeds and draw attention to our sacrifices, we will be shortchanging ourselves the opportunity of receiving a far greater reward from our Father in Heaven.

In both cases Jesus refers to those calling attention to themselves as hypocrites, because even though they may profess to do good for God, the attitude of their heart is seen by the Creator as they relish the accolades of man. For those of us living like Eternal Survivors, we should have an eternal perspective on our rewards as well. Sure, it is nice to be noticed by those around us, but the reward in Heaven will always trump anything earth can offer. So instead of tooting your own horn, sing praises to God. To combat the world's idea of success we should let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

The world finds it easy to pray prayers of petition, asking God to do what we want, to bless our desires and plans. As Eternal Survivors we are certainly welcome to ask, seek and knock, but must temper our own desires with a true thirst for the will of God in our lives. Jesus taught us to pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10. The world wants what it wants and if it doesn't get it often sees this as justification to accuse God of being unloving. We must instead recognize that what God wants is what is best for us, even when it is painful, difficult or heart wrenching. So, to pray "Your will be done" is an act of submission to God with the full belief that He has our best interests in mind.

Jesus didn't just teach this principle in empty words, he modeled it in His own prayers. As He prayed in the Garden before He was betrayed, He asked His Father "if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" Matthew 26:39. He was asking that He not become the object of God's wrath. Jesus did not want to be separated from His Father. He did not ask just once, but three times using the same words. Each time following up His request with a commitment to God, stating, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39.

So, when we pray and ask God for a bigger house or a better job, a more loving husband or the blessing of a child or we beg Him to end to a difficult situation or to heal our loved one, we must ultimately accept that if He doesn't answer the way we want it doesn't mean He doesn't love us. It simply means He loves us too much to remove the benefits of sanctification brought about by answering it in His own way. Eternal Survivors must constantly fight the urges of our own desires and learn to want what God wants for us instead.

Giving thanks, praising God and worshipping Him in times of plenty is fairly easy for most of the world. We might even be practiced at counting our blessings as a way of consolation during tough times. Who among us hasn't been told to "Look on the bright side," or "Look at all the blessings you do have?" But Eternal Survivors should strive for more meaningful worship. We should give thanks *for* our struggles, knowing that it is through these that God is sanctifying us. Instead of being such good complainers, we should learn to look for the manifestation of hope which comes from holding fast to our faith in trials. Paul tells the Romans to "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." Romans 5:3-4. Each time we endure a trial [holding on for dear](#) life to the promise of God, we are encouraged that His promises are true. There is nothing better than growing our hope based on the unfailing love of Christ.

James even goes so far as to tell us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:2-4. Living like an Eternal Survivor requires more from us than just praising God for giving us what we want; it demands that we worship Him when we don't feel like it, that we find joy in the trials that produce spiritual maturity, that we glorify Him for counting us worthy to endure hardships in His name.

Jesus freely gave up His life, knowing what suffering He would endure. He called Peter who vowed to protect Him from death Satan and told Judas to go quickly in His betrayal. He knew saving His own life on earth would mean giving up eternity in Heaven.

Jesus loved and forgave His enemies, even those who placed Him on the cross and pierced His side. He loved them so much He died to give even His murderers eternal life.

Jesus was humble despite His true deity. He came to earth as a carpenter and a teacher. He caroused with sinners - murderers, tax

collectors and prostitutes. He never once laid claim to the privileges or honor I often associate with those who have power and authority. He was certainly the most powerful creature walking the earth, but He never once used it for personal gain as many of us would be tempted to do. Instead, of a crown of jewels, He chose a crown of thorns.

Jesus exemplified submission to the Father's will. He asked three times to be spared from suffering and separation, but insisted that the will of His Father was more important than His own desires.

Jesus gave thanks for the cup which represented His blood that was to be shed during his punishment and death for our sins when He shared the last supper with His disciples. My translation says He "blessed" the bread which symbolized His body that would be broken as He paid the price for our eternal salvation. Matthew 26:26-27 I cannot think of any greater example of praising God for the very harsh circumstances necessary to bring about one's spiritual completion.

Certainly, Jesus' life is an example for us to follow, but the lessons about how we should live out our days on earth as His remnant are found quite ingeniously in how He approached His death. So, be different than the world. Don't allow the way everybody else has always done it be good enough for you. Live the ingenious life of an Eternal Survivor ? give up your life to follow Jesus' example, love your enemies to multiply heavenly rewards, humble yourself so you may be exalted by Christ, find the glory of eternal hope in your trials. How will you think outside the box today?