

May: Reform Yourself not Others

Introduction

Jesus said, "Why worry about a tiny little speck of dust in your friend's eye when you have a dirty great log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the dirty great log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the dirty great log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the tiny little speck in your friend's eye." Matt 7:3-5

I don't know about you, but I find that I am very good at seeing exactly what's wrong with other people. Better at it than them anyway. It always amazes me just how easily people can miss their glaringly obvious faults. If I had any faults I certainly wouldn't be that blind....

It's easy to point out other people's faults isn't it? We do it without thinking. And we've been doing it for a long time too. In one of the very first stories in the Bible, we hear Adam saying, "It's not my fault; Eve gave me the fruit," and Eve was no better, "It wasn't my fault; it was the snake..."

Whenever there's something wrong with one of our relationships, it's easy to think that it's the other person who needs to change. She just needs to stop trying to control my life. He just needs to be more romantic. Mum just needs to stop being so annoying. If only my kids would just do what I say. The same thing happens for larger groups. Atheists need to stop attacking us. Muslims need to learn to fit in. Refugees need to stop getting in boats.

But this kind of thinking doesn't solve anything. It doesn't bring peace or harmony or positive change. A lot of the time it just brings more fighting and more brokenness. Jesus knew that we will only find peace and harmony between us if we are willing to take a good hard look at ourselves first. We have to look first at our own weaknesses, with humility, and work to take away some of those dirty great logs first. Only then will we be able to see clearly enough to help others with their issues.

The challenges this month are to help us take that good hard look at ourselves, to help us start to get rid of those dirty great logs in our own eyes. This month we hold a mirror up to ourselves to humbly take stock of our own shortcomings. It might be helpful to let you know right at the outset that this is not the easiest month you'll do in your big year. Anyone who's done a big year before remembers this month. This month can be brutal, especially if you haven't done the humility month yet and still think you're awesome. But it can also be one of the most meaningful months you'll do. Jesus knew that sorting out our own problems sets us free to live life more fully, and enjoy it more deeply. This is the kind of life he wants for all of us.

As we go about this, it's important to keep in mind Jesus' well-known tip at the end of this section: "Do to others whatever you would like them to do for you." The idea of this month is not for us to spiral down into a pit of despair, demoralized by our own failures. One of the good things about acknowledging our own weaknesses and then working through them is that when we do, we become much better at helping other people with their issues.

Think about it. The best person to help someone struggling with an addiction is someone who has gone through addiction and come out the other side. Only someone who has worked hard to reform themselves knows how hard it is for someone else to change. We reform ourselves so that we can help others. Even this month, while we're spending time looking at ourselves in the mirror, it's not about us. We do it so that we can help others. Once we've removed the dirty great logs, we will be able to help others with their little specks.

This month the challenges are about working to correct our own weaknesses, and also about learning to see people with more compassion and humility. If you were a refugee who'd just arrived in the country, what would you want people to do for you? If you were a Muslim living in Australia, how would you like to be treated? What would it look like to respect atheists the way we would like them to respect us? If you were gay (or if you were straight), what would you want from people in the other group? Or maybe a little closer to home: if you were your sister, or brother, or mum, or spouse - what would you really wish people would do for you?

It might not be easy, but we encourage you to face up to the challenges well this month. Work hard on getting rid of those dirty great logs, so that you can become part of the solution for others.

Challenges

REFORM YOURSELF NOT OTHERS



- Consider the Proverb (15:30), 'A smile makes you happy, and good news makes you feel strong'. For one week this month, reform yourself and make a conscious effort to smile more often. Research tells us that smiling, even if it's forced by holding a pencil lengthwise in your teeth, makes you feel happier and encourages those around you to smile too!
- Compassion is the ability to empathise with another person's situation. It is to be able to imagine how you would feel in their shoes. This month borrow a pair of someone else's shoes that you can put on but that don't fit well. Put the shoes on and think of someone in your world who you desperately want to just write off. As you walk around, imagine what life is like for this person and pray for him or her. Do this a few times throughout the month and ask God to show you if there's a way to begin building a bridge.
- Have lunch or coffee with someone who you wouldn't normally spend much time with socially. It might be someone who you think feels judged, rejected or often excluded. Try to listen more than you speak. Make your 8 hour challenge for the month to spend 8 hours learning about and listening to people who are different from you - without judging!

- Have a Let it be day once a week - this means that, for the whole day, you commit to no nagging, complaining or criticism. If you keep forgetting, then get a recording of the Beatles song "Let it be" and play it on repeat until you remember.
- Wear a rubber band on one of your wrists for a whole week this month. Watch your speech carefully. Each time you find yourself gossiping or talking in a judgemental manner, flick the rubber band. You might need to change wrists if you have a particularly bad day!
- Attend a meeting of a religious group which you think might be radically different from your own. This could be a different denomination, religion, community consultation meeting or even the 'union' meeting. Attend with someone else if possible and talk about the experience afterwards – find something praiseworthy about what they did and consider what you might have to learn from them.

- God grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know it's me. Write or print out a copy of this alternative version of the Serenity Prayer and put it on your bathroom mirror so you read it at the start of each day to remind yourself what this month is about.
- Find someone selling 'The Big Issue' in your city/suburb. Go and buy a copy and take a few minutes to have a conversation with him/her. Listen to their story without judgment and consider what you can learn from them.
- For National Sorry Day / Reconciliation Week (starting 26th May), read a biography, article or blog of someone who is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Talk with your Big Year crew about the positive things you see in his/her life or culture. If you can, attend an event during the week and take some time to talk to people about what 'sorry day' means to them.

