

Stewardship

True Discipleship: ALL IN

Frankton – 11/16/14

Scripture: Genesis 1.26-28 Cheating God

Proposition: Out of God's generosity, he has given us everything; shouldn't we want to be generous toward God?

With heartfelt thanks to Max Lucado and Og Mandino, I tell this story and hope I do them justice. We don't know what led to God's decision; we can only guess, but whatever it was, God chose to make our world. No one forced or coerced God into making our world. There certainly wasn't some gray haired little old lady school teacher standing over his shoulder saying that his homework assignment for tomorrow was to create a universe and everything that goes in it. There wasn't any product marketer promising God big bucks if he could design a world like ours. God, by himself, chose to create. Genesis says, "In the beginning, God created...." With his one decision, history began and existence became measurable.

God proved to be **[SLIDE] powerful and mighty**. God caused the canyons to be carved. God caused the oceans to be dug and filled with water. God caused the rocks to pile up to make the mountains. He didn't have just one or just one thousand points of light, but thousands of thousands of thousands of points of light all shining for his glory. Giant planets whirled through the universe and tiny electrons whirled around their nuclei. And all of his creation showed God's power and God's might. Nothing else could have done what God did. No other power could pull this off. Only God, with his power and his might could have done this. But at least one more quality other than power and might was necessary for creation to happen. This is it: God had to be **[SLIDE] creative**. Here's why; it was in his blood. It is one of the things that makes God, God. It sounds silly to say, but if God wasn't a creator, you wouldn't be listening to this great sermon.

As naturally as a bird flies and a fish swims and a lion roars, God creates. An artist paints, a singer sings, a runner runs, and God creates. He was a tireless dreamer, the ultimate designer. The Ageless Wonder took up his artist's pallet and his sculptor's chisel. Even before there was anyone around to witness what was happening, God's creation was already pregnant with shock and awe. Brooks didn't just flow, they babbled. Flowers didn't just grow, they blossomed. Leaves didn't just wither; they burst into radiant colors. Rivers didn't just go somewhere, they meandered. Snow didn't just fall, it flurried. He gave the clouds their cotton-ness, the oceans their blue-ness and the sand its fine-ness. There was no room for mundane-ness in God's creation – still isn't.

Dancers have fun dancing, golfers have fun golfing; readers have fun reading and God had fun creating. In my mind's eye, I can picture God at work, a smile going from ear to ear, relishing his creation. I'm sure he had some fun commanding creation. "Mr. Antelope, don't just run, lope! Mr. Frog, I have quite a unique tongue just for you. Come on over here giraffe, let's make sure you can get the leaves on the top of the tree. Hippo, you can't just walk around, you'll waddle. Hyena, let me show you how to laugh. Raccoon, I made a mask for you. Hey there little skunk, I may not have given you very much color but I've got something special just for you." God was powerful and mighty, but God was also creative.

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But there is one last characteristic that is at God's heart. Without it God wouldn't be God. This is something so important that you need to listen closely to what I'm about to say. Even greater than his power and might and better than his creativity: [SLIDE] God is all-consuming love. Fire must be hot; you can't take the hot from the fire. Water must be wet; you can't take the wetness away from water. In the same way, God must be love, you can't take the love away from God and still have God. Deep within him, in every corner of his being, from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, everywhere you look, you'll find love in God. In every one of God's thoughts there is love. In every one of God's actions, there is love.

And because of his love he created a paradise, a sinless sanctuary as a gift for his ultimate creation. Now came his final step. Imagine what happened late on the sixth day. God is at work in his paradise. Angels stopped angel-ing to watch the creator create his ultimate creation. Giraffes stretched their necks to see over the other onlookers. Mice crawled between the lion's legs to get a better view. Hawks hovered to watch. Trees whispered the news. God gathered up some clay and formed a lump on the ground. He spoke to the onlookers as he worked, "Nature, you will have to show my glory, because I made you that way. Universe, you will obey my laws because you have no other option. But this last one, my greatest creation, will be like me. This one will have the power to choose." All of paradise was silent as God reached within himself and removed something – a seed. "It's called choice," he said.

All nature watched in silence and gazed at the still-lifeless clay form on the ground. One angel hesitantly broke the silence, "But what if ..." and his voice trailed off. God continued the angel's question, "What if he chooses not to love? Come I will show you." And with that he grabbed the angel by the hand and unbounded by the time he had created, he led the angel into the Realm of the Tomorrows. "Now look," God said, "Notice the fruits of choice are both sweet and bitter." The angel was moved at what he saw. Daring devotion. Lullaby love. Touching tenderness. He felt the love of Adam and his sons and the joy of Eve and her daughters. He was wowed by all the warmth. The angel just couldn't get over how good God's creation had become.

But then the angel saw the other side of choice; actually he smelled it. The stench almost overcame him and the angel turned to God and said, "What is that?" God, looked forlornly at his creation, then answered with one word, "Selfishness." The angel stood speechless. Never had he seen such disgusting sights. Hardened hearts. Lost loyalties. Pummeled promises. God's children wandering aimlessly; hurting others without care or cause. "This is the result of choice?" the angel asked. God silently nodded his head. "They will ignore you?" Again God nodded. "They will REJECT you?" Once again God silently nodded. "They will never come back?" "Some will, some won't," God answered. "What will make them listen?" the angel pleaded.

God took the angel by the hand and stepped through time once again. The pair stopped by a rock. A rock that would someday be hewn out to form a manger. Even then God could smell the hay that would someday line its sides. He could feel the softness that would surround him. Then, the angel almost had to hide his eyes from the starlight as he heard a heavenly chorus singing, "Glory to God in the highest!" And he could hear, very faintly, the sound of a newborn baby crying. With another step through time, the angel could smell the smoke of the campfire with twelve men all eyeing and listening to a faintly familiar human form. With another step through time, God paused beside a tree. It stood at the top of a hill with two others. Even then God could feel the wood rub against his stinging back.

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In an instant of recognition, the angel gasped, “You’re going down there?!” “I am,” replied God. “Surely there must be another way,” the angel protested. “No, there is not,” said God. “Wouldn’t it be easier to not plant the seed? Wouldn’t it be easier not to give them the choice?” pleaded the angel. God spoke, “Yes, it would.” And with that the angel grabbed God by the arm and started trying to pull God back toward the beginning crying as he tugged, “Then don’t give it to them. Don’t give them the choice.” God didn’t budge. He gently held the angel by the arms, looked him straight in the eye and said: [SLIDE] “To remove the choice is to remove the love and I love them most of all because I created them in MY image.”

God looked around the hill and observed the scene. Three figures hung on three crosses. Arms spread wide, heads fallen forward, blood running from their wrists and ankles. Men in religious garb. Cocky, arrogant, thinking they had protected God by killing this false one. Men in soldiers garb. They played games in the dirt and laughed. Women garbed in sorrow at the foot of the cross. In shock, crying. One speaking to the other, “No, I’m staying. I want to hold my son just one more time.” Meanwhile, all heaven stood ready for a fight. All nature rose in readiness for the rescue. All creation was waiting for the command to come and stop the horror, stop the pain. But the command never came. The creator was silent knowing what must be done. As he began to lead the angel back to the beginning, he heard the cry that he himself would someday scream, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” The angel, with tears on his cheeks and with a quivering voice, said, “It would be a lot less painful...” The Creator interrupted him, “But it wouldn’t be love.” And they walked back to the beginning and the paradise that awaited them.

The duo stepped into the Garden once again. The Maker looked lovingly at the still-lifeless clay creation. A monsoon of love swelled up within him. God’s form bent over the clay face. He cupped his hands around the clay’s nostrils and breathed a breath. Dust stirred on the lips of the new one. His chest rose and fell, cracking the red clay of his origin. The cheeks took on the red color. A finger moved. An eye twitched open. It curled its toes. The very breath of life was in the new creation. The very spirit of God resided within the new one. And one by one all the other creatures watching the new creation gasped at what they saw. They didn’t just see a new creature; they saw something deep inside of him. They saw his soul, his eternal soul. The Creator hadn’t just created another creation; he had created one with a part of himself inside. The one who had chosen to love had created one with something no other creature had: the choice to love God in return or not.

God gave you the power to choose to love God or not. God gave you complete control over which you choose.

Your can choose to act...or you can choose to procrastinate.

Your can choose to heal...or you can choose to wound.

Your can choose to live...or you can choose to die.

Your can choose to pray...or you can choose to curse.

Your can choose to love...or you can choose to hate.

Your can choose to give back to God for all he has given you...or you can choose to withhold from God denying him what he deserves.

I was at a FHS volleyball game a while back. One of the young men in the crowd had a T-shirt on that really stuck with me. The front of the shirt had the name of his basketball team on it – and I don’t remember the name and it’s not important to the story. What is important is the saying that

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was on the back of his shirt. It simply read: [SLIDE] ALL IN. To me that's the definition of a disciple: someone who is all in for Jesus. They don't just know about Jesus. They know Jesus. They aren't just fans who cheer Jesus on. They are followers who try to emulate what Jesus did here on earth. And a true disciple goes ALL IN – doing all the things that Christ wants us to do. A true disciple does the things that are easy and the things that are hard. A true disciple believes that following Jesus takes 100% commitment and nothing less. They are ALL IN.

A true disciple understands that being ALL IN means building a relationship with Jesus daily through lots of means. Daily scripture reading. Daily prayer: conversation with Christ. Daily listening to good Christian music and reading good Christian literature. Daily conferencing with other Christians about God in their lives. Attending worship and partaking in Holy Communion as often as the church performs it. And yes, Extravagant Generosity. A true disciple understands that being a good steward of what God has given us is a part of being a true disciple – a part of being ALL IN. Using our time, talents and resources for God is a part of being ALL IN.

Many people who call themselves disciples follow the disciplines of prayer, and scripture reading. They listen to good Christian music and read good Christian literature. Many attend worship and talk with others about God in their lives. But they fail in practicing Extravagant Generosity: choosing to give to God what God deserves. They fail to be true disciples by failing to be ALL IN. And we know the choice is theirs because God gave them the power to choose. And you know the choice is yours, because God gave you the power to choose. And knowing all that God has done for you...how could anyone choose to not give back to God what he deserves. How could anyone choose not to be ALL IN?