

Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

Eliminating Self Comparison for Grateful Reality **Katie Sciba**

Hi, I'm Katie Sciba, and we are preparing our hearts during Advent for Christmas, the miracle of Christmas. There is so much prep that happens out there, that sometimes Christmas morning we wake up and we're spiritually underwhelmed. And so what we are going to work on is readying our hearts for Christmas so we can receive the Lord that way. And there are so many roadblocks, so many obstacles to that peace that Jesus wants us to experience. And last time we addressed busyness and how it just gets in the way - we have mile-long to-do lists, and then to-do lists in our head - and how we discovered that the antidote to this kind of busyness in our minds is to invite calm into our lives, specifically with increased prayer. And we look to Mary as an example of what to do when we're way too busy, and we discovered that union with the Father is the way to bring peace.

Now, this time we're going to be talking about self-comparison, and I'm talking about the kind when you measure yourself against somebody else and you find yourself either inferior or superior. Now, I used to think that when you compared yourself to somebody else, it was really only inferior that we found ourselves. You know, you think of "Do they have more money than we do?" "Do they have more kids?" "Is she prettier?" "Is he stronger?" And we look at other people and their gifts, and then we find ourselves lacking. Or maybe it's the flip situation where we look at other people and, like the Pharisee in the Gospel who's like "Oh, thank God I'm not like that tax-collector," we find ourselves to be better than them. We think that we have a better scene happening. And that, that's a form of pride, because we have conceit. You know, we look to ourselves as the source of our gifts instead of the Lord, who blesses us with intention, and also deprives us of things with intention.

So, I know this has been an obstacle for me personally, and it is for a lot of people. We just... we measure ourselves and our worth and our value by what other people do or have, and we neglect to realize that those charisms and things that they're blessed with, God blessed them with intentionally. On purpose. And in one particular situation I was in, it almost completely ruined a friendship of mine, because this other woman I was comparing myself with, she and I had so many things in common, yet I didn't look to those as things to admire or to prize, but I looked at the things she had that I didn't and I felt threatened. Sometimes we feel threatened by what other people have, and it's completely misplaced.

So I was in a bible study several years ago, and there was this wonderful woman who, at the beginning of every single bible study, she would say "Lord, thank You

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for everything I have and everything I don't have." And I remember that blowing my mind. She was thanking the Lord for things that she didn't have. I felt like that was such an act of humility, recognizing that the Lord is the one with the wisdom, the Lord is the one who has the full plan of our lives laid out, and He will bless us and deprive us accordingly.

We bless the Lord when we receive gifts, we're so grateful. "Thank You God for this vehicle, or our house, or this new baby!" But how many of us thank God for what we don't have? "Thank You that I don't have a house that accommodates all of my family." And it's a little counter-intuitive, right. We don't think to thank God for the things that we feel that we're missing, right. We almost become a little embittered by it. And so what do we do in this kind of circumstance? So when we look at other people and we see that they have something that we want, or we think that we're better than someone else - In this situation, as with several others, we look to Mary, the first Christian, the one that we should emulate absolutely. The one who followed Christ the closest, and sought to be close with Him.

So with Mary, she was given the highest honor in all of humanity. She was blessed to be able to bring the savior of the world to the world. And there's no greater prize, it doesn't matter how many Emmy's or awards you have. Like, it doesn't matter. The highest honor ever given to a person was the ability to carry our Lord within herself. That's amazing. And given the highest honor given to any person, any woman, she submitted herself and glorified God. And when her cousin, Elizabeth, acknowledged that gift and said "Blessed are you among women," and was amazed at Mary, Mary responded with the Magnificat. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." She could have bemoaned her situation because, on the surface, it was surrounded by scandal. Pregnant, but not married. Pregnant and betrothed. But instead she recognized the gift for what it was, for who He is, and said "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord."

And so if this woman, who was given the best gift ever, praised God and acknowledged God as the source of her gift, as the source of her honor, we should do the same and look to our lives and see what we have, and trust that we have those things by the holy intention and wisdom of God. And the things we don't have, that is also by God's design. When we allow for humility - humility is knowledge of self, right. It is recognizing that we are both wonderful in the eyes of God, and also super small, right. It is that simultaneous understanding. When we have humility, we can recognize that everything we have and everything we don't is from God, and that will be the antidote to this kind of self-comparison.

Another cure for self-comparison is taking that situation, when there's someone who kind of makes you feel a little jealous, or a situation that arouses that jealousy

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within us, but we can take that jealousy and turn it into admiration, and turn it into praise. “Wow, thank God that you’re such a wonderful...” Fill in the blank. Like “Wow, your home is so beautiful.” “Oh, your children are so lovely.” And you can recognize the gifts in other people and pay them that compliment, instead of letting that self-comparison stew within us.

Theodore Roosevelt said that comparison is the thief of joy, and how true is that. That when we find ourselves inferior, it takes away the joy from what we already have. It cuts God out of the picture as the blesser of our lives. When we find ourselves superior, then it takes the joy out of what somebody else has, and then it gives us the credit as the giver of our own gifts. And that’s just a farce. So, this Advent, we need to do away with our inclination to compare ourselves to others that would yield that kind of ugliness. And when we are in touch with God, when we pray, and when we recognize with gratitude the blessings that He has given us, then we’ll see more clearly that our lives are joy-filled, and we will have peace and contentment with what God has given to us.

You know, sometimes somebody else has something that we really desire, and we trust that that desire is a gift from God, right. Sometimes that desire is a gift from God. Sometimes there are things that the Lord blesses others with that we genuinely and deeply desire for ourselves. And if that’s the case then go, go to the Lord and ask. I have four boys - four sons - and one daughter, and three of our sons came first, boom, boom, boom, in rapid succession. And, notwithstanding the love that I had for them, I pined, I ached for a little girl. Really just deeply desired that.

And at one point I, in a time when my faith was dwindling, I took a giant leap and asked the Lord to bless us with a daughter, because it hurt how much I wanted a little girl. And I asked the Lord “In the name of Jesus Christ, I beg You to bless us with a daughter.” And I encourage you to do the same. What is it that you ache for, you pine for deep within yourself? Offer that prayer to the Lord, and then couple it with “But if it is not Your will, then help me to bear this desire with grace. Help me to bear this desire with grace.” Because sometimes the answer is no. And that doesn’t necessarily mean that the ache will go away, but it means that we can entrust those things to God.