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Sleeping in the Acorn
Genesis 24:34-38, 42-46; Romans 7:15-25a

Vision seems to be the most important characteristic in any long-term success. Whether it's business, sports, politics, or spirituality, vision plays a crucial part in one's ability to make the right decisions at the right time.

My favorite coffee company, Starbucks, is going through a shift and a necessary refocus. Moving from the original owner's vision, Starbucks developed into a chain business, selling coffee and coffee products in Barnes and Nobles, Target, and Harris Teeter stores, in addition to their own stores. But, moving too aggressively and expanding into brand sales, items not related to coffee but containing the Starbucks logo, are causing the company to move to a more conservative fiscal position and refocus on what they do best—sell coffee.

Last Friday, Jeff Francoeur, the Atlanta Braves young star and a great young athlete Jennifer and I have followed since his high school football and baseball days in northeast Atlanta, is going back to the minor league for three weeks...to help him regain his focus. Athletes are under enormous pressure to perform day after day. For a rookie who started off in the major league batting over .500 and dazzling fans and teammates with hit after hit, Francoeur has been in a slump for practically the entire season.

In a campaign year described as one with "more religious ferment...than any since 1960,"¹ we've witnessed Mitt Romney and his Mormon faith, Mike Huckabee and his "Christian leader" ads, John McCain and John Hagee, Hillary Clinton and her "prayer warriors," and Barack Obama and Jeremiah Wright.² Losing focus of the "state's" first responsibility and the "Church's" first responsibility is an ongoing challenge. In one series of "24," fictional president, David Palmer, was told by his Chief of Staff that his lack of full commitment to a

¹ *Christian Century*, "Religion-politics Mix Proves Perilous," July 1, 2008, quoting GOP strategist, Ralph Reed, p. 14-15.

² *Ibid.*

certain decision was making his Joint Chiefs uncomfortable. Palmer's response was, "my first responsibility is not to make the Joint Chiefs comfortable."

The Apostle Paul spoke of his struggle to stay focused and to do the right thing at the right time. In that letter to the church at Rome he said:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (Romans 7:15, 18-19.)

The Old Testament reading for today is the unique and not-so-well-known story of Rebecca being chosen as the wife of Isaac. The story is being told from the perspective of Abraham's servant. We don't even know his name. Responsibility has been given to him to find a suitable woman from Abraham's own people to be his son's wife. Such matchmaking was the norm. As the servant was standing by a spring used for public water, he offered a prayer: "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going!" Then, the following scenario is proposed to God. "Lead me to the woman who will be sensitive—so sensitive that she will respond to my request for water, and kind enough to offer to give my camel water as well. And, may this sensitive and kind woman be the right woman for my master's son."

Unfortunately, the English translation leaves the original Hebrew a bit anemic from its original meaning. Actually, it sounds much more like many of our prayers: "Lord, help me be successful in what I am doing." "Lord, bless me in what I am doing." The prayer more correctly means, "give me vision...show me the way to go...open my eyes so that I will see what You see and do what You want me to do."

The difference in the two ways of praying are substantial! Rather than selfishly asking God to "bless us" as we go about our own way, the prayer becomes one in which we ask for wisdom, spiritual insight, and sensitivity to the ways of God. "Show me the way as I go about my responsibility."

Blind Helen Keller once said: "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision."

Because of the conflict of principles, one of the political candidates—Barack Obama—mentioned earlier in a montage of candidates struggling with religious perceptions, withdrew his longtime church membership from Trinity United

Church of Christ in Chicago's southside. Trinity, an otherwise solid church, has been tarnished by sermon comments and recent interviews of their former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Obama lamented the difficult decision and responded to the question about what kind of church and pastor he would want: one "who would not shy away from speaking out on those issues when he or she saw fit" and yet one also focused on reconciliation—"unifying people" and having "a sense of righteous indignation about injustice."³

Paul said:

I do not understand my own actions...I don't do what I want, but do the very thing I hate...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. I know what I should I do, but I often do the opposite.

Three things—three points of reconciliation—are necessary for having consistency between our thinking and our actions: we must have reconciliation within ourselves, we must have reconciliation with others, which leads to a reconciliation with God and the world.

The starting point with consistency between our thoughts and actions is to be at peace with our self. When we are angry, when we are struggling with issues in our past, when we are having difficulty being honest with our self, when pleasing others or unhealthily taking care of others is taking precedence over being honest...we are in turmoil internally. "I know what I want to do, but I'm not sure everyone will accept my decision." When we are struggling with unresolved issues of our past, we often don't even think. We just react to the pain of our past, treating everyone and every situation the same—protecting ourselves from being injured again.

Likewise, when we have unresolved issues with others (living or dead), that relationship gets in the way of making the best decision today. The psychological terms are transference and counter-transference. We're transferring our feelings toward a person or problem in our past to someone or something in our present that may have nothing at all to do with the current relationship or decision.

³ John Dart, "Obama: On Finding a Balanced Church," *The Christian Century*, July 1, 2008, p. 15.

Sometimes, we can know in our head what we should do, but it's a long way from the head to the gut—a long way from our thoughts to our emotions.

“I do not understand my own actions,” the apostle writes. We're hearing the words from a disciplined person, an educated person, and a follower-of-Christ-person. Yet, within this individual, as with all of us, an ongoing struggle of internal integrity is at play—letting my actions be consistent with the person I truly am. When we are at peace with ourselves, and when we are at peace with others, being at peace with the One who loves us and called us into being becomes very natural. For the humble servant of God, “Make successful the way I am going” becomes “Show me the way I am to go...give to me vision and insight...help me pay attention to everything around me so that I will not get lost with my responsibilities as I make my way through this life.”

James Allen wrote the little book years ago, *As a Man [a person] Thinketh*. It was never meant to be so much an exhaustive treatment of the power of thought as it was an inspirational volume with suggestions for healthy living. He suggests that the mind is the master-weaver of the inner garment of character and the outer garment of circumstance, and that as we have previously woven in ignorance and pain, we may now weave in enlightenment and happiness. At one point, Allen writes:

*The greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn; the bird waits in the egg; and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs. Dreams are the seedlings of realities.*⁴

Vision seems to be the most important ingredient in any long-term success. “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” the writer of Proverbs has said.⁵ Whether it's business, sports, politics, or spirituality, vision plays a crucial part in one's ability to make the right decisions at the right time. “Wretched [person] that I am! Who will rescue me from myself?” God will—those sensitive to God, those with their hearts wide open will be rescued. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

⁴ James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (Filiquarian: 2007)

⁵ Proverbs 29:18.

Prayer

Being consistent in thought and actions is sometimes hard, Lord. Forgive us for asking you to bless our already made decisions, rather than giving us a vision of the way we should go. We submit our ways and our lives to you this day...through the peace of Christ that goes beyond all understanding, we pray.
AMEN.

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

³⁴So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. ³⁶And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. ³⁷My master made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; ³⁸but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son."

⁴²"I came today to the spring, and said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also" "let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son."

⁴⁵"Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink." ⁴⁶She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels." So I drank, and she also watered the camels.

Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!