

The Little Foxes

Lesson 3 – The Little Fox Of Spiritual Apathy

Song of Solomon 2:15 KJV Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes.

2 Chronicles 25:2 KJV And he (Amaziah) did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart.

2 Chronicles 25:2 NKJV And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart.

2 Chronicles 25:2 NASB He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart.

2 Chronicles 25:2 MSG He lived well before GOD, doing the right thing for the most part. But he wasn't wholeheartedly devoted to God.

I. INTRODUCTION—ON SPIRITUAL APATHY

A. General Quotes

Anonymous—Apathy is the glove in which evil slips its hand.

Elie Wiesel—The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, its indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, its indifference and the opposite of life is not death, its indifference.

Martin Niemoller—First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist; Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist; Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist; Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me.

G. Bowes—One apathetic Christian may do untold harm to a whole church. Pour a quantity of cool water into a pot that has boiling water and immediately the temperature change of the whole will sink. Just so the contact of men who are indifferent with those who are fervent, deadens their fervor, and tends to reduce them to the same apathy.

B. Where Does It Start?

Another of the little foxes that can spoil the vine is spiritual apathy. We are all susceptible to this creeping little monster and if it moves into our lives it can be quite destructive. In fact, if spiritual apathy ever gains a foothold it can spawn multiple other terrible conditions that greatly hinder the vineyard of our soul, our family, and our church. Spiritual apathy allows our spiritual battles to almost eat us alive. It opens us up to great feelings of being overwhelmed and frustrated. Spiritual apathy causes us to coast and lean more on natural abilities instead of leaning on the provision of God.

Spiritual apathy often starts in a subtle manner. We are converted and it seems like we cannot get enough of the Word, positive spiritual fellowship, and corporate worship at church. Our life seems to revolve around God and His house. Our priorities are set according to spiritual events so that growth can take place. Just being involved with the things of God creates a faithfulness, strength, and passion that open doors to a great walk with God. We feel the joy of spiritual growth and can sense that the sky is the limit with what God wants to do with us.

Because of this spiritual growth and maturity that takes place, it is not long before the spiritual leaders are asking for our assistance in Sunday School classes, youth work, praying with seekers in the altar, involvement in evangelism with home Bible studies, and various other kinds of activities. For a man who is called to preach this can involve opportunities and invitations for revival services, special events, and even serving with district work. Whether it involves a saint or a preacher, these opportunities cause even more spiritual growth to take place. Suddenly because of these opportunities, we determine those greater levels of prayer, the discipline of fasting and digging into the Word will only further what God wants to do and we give ourselves to this.

However as time passes, there can be the tendency to slip into the cruise control element of ministry. It all becomes somewhat of an old hat for us to wear and we can slip by on past accomplishments. It is almost as if we could do what we are doing in our sleep. This is a dangerous place for a saint to get into and it is even doubly dangerous for a minister to fall into this condition. Usually the fallout from spiritual apathy comes into play when a new spiritual battle presents itself or an opportunity to accomplish something of great importance in the kingdom of God opens up. It is then that the realization settles in that we cannot accomplish the task because our own spiritual apathy has consumed our development.

It can happen to pastors when they refuse to allow the fresh anointing of the Holy Ghost to envelop them on a daily basis. The excitement to preach has long vacated their soul, the hunger for revival and harvest has evaporated, and there is no push to attain a greater degree of spiritual excellence in their character. It can happen to saints when they simply begin to just go through the motions and accept their defeats and live with their inconsistencies and pass them with the excuses that no one has ever achieved perfection. It can happen to churches when as a corporate body, there is little excitement focused around the whole worship experience. The press for evangelism and the great task of reaching the lost falls into the background of just maintaining the building, the grounds, and the basic necessities.

C. Biblical References to Spiritual Apathy

The Bible is very clear about spiritual apathy. It gives to us the cause and effect of what takes place when spiritual apathy hinders our walk with God. The Bible is also clear about some of the remedies against spiritual apathy.

- **Luke 21:34-36**—Caused by a party spirit, drunkenness, and the cares of life. It is like a snare that takes men by surprise. The remedy is a constant state of watchfulness in the Spirit.
- **Matthew 24:12**—Because of the high content of sin, love for God becomes cold.
- **1 Timothy 3:1-5**—It takes place because of a gradual desensitization encouraged by a self-centered attitude.

- **Amos 6:1**—At ease in Zion because of carnal security (v. 1), presumptuous unbelief (v. 2-3), sensual indulgence (v. 4-6), and selfish indifference (v. 6).
- **Matthew 22:12**—It causes men to ignore the instructions for preparations for the wedding feast.
- **Hebrews 2:1-3**—It is not a deliberate turning away but an allowance of various pressures to remove one from service. Pressures such as economic, health, church, social, and family responsibilities catch up with us.
- **Matthew 25:1-13**—Apathy causes negligence to buy the necessary fuel for the lamp that is needed for the bridegroom's appearance.
- **Hebrews 4:1-2**—A loss of fear causes spiritual apathy to settle in.
- **1 Corinthians 3:1-2**—Apathy stifles spiritual growth and maturity.
- **Hebrews 5:11**—Apathy causes a spiritual sluggishness to develop.
- **Luke 18:9-14**—It causes self-deception about the true spiritual condition.
- **2 Timothy 4:3-4**—It causes us not to want to hear sound teaching and doctrine.

Another biblical word that is associated with apathy would be lukewarmness. While it is not our purpose to delve into this subject, it is easy to see the relation between apathy and lukewarmness. They go hand in hand over time will have a detrimental effect on an individual and a saint.

II. ISAAC—AN OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF SPIRITUAL APATHY

Spiritual apathy often causes us to coast on the victories of the past. He was so satisfied with the accomplishments of his father, Abraham that he more or less gave into the lifestyle of simply existing. There is a valid principle to understand concerning the children of Israel who were required to daily gather manna. For them what was good and nutritious on yesterday became moldy today. Every day has to be marked with a fresh confrontation of who God is and what He longs to accomplish in our lives. This is what happened to Isaac, he became so comfortable with just getting by that he found himself in a state of spiritual apathy.

To get an idea of who Isaac was it is noted that he is pretty much confined to the book of Genesis. Thirty-three times he appears in Scripture in the grandfather, father, and son relationship as “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Isaac is listed 119 times in the Bible but almost always only in his relationship with his father or his son, Jacob, or grandson, Joseph. Specifically you can note that Abraham is the main character in Genesis 12-24, Jacob is the main character in Genesis 28-25, and Joseph is the final character of Genesis 27-50. Isaac covers on three chapters in the book of Genesis. Everything that he had was what he inherited and he is the weakest of the four. His life provides us with some marks of spiritual apathy.

A. The First Mark—The Greatest Days Are in the Past—Genesis 21-22

The first mark of spiritual apathy in the life of Isaac is the sign that his greatest days were in his past. His birth had been foretold in a prophecy by God to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). His birth was a joyous occasion (Gen. 21:1-8) because it brought laughter to the life of Abraham and Sarah. His life then is marked by the huge testing in Abraham’s life of having to offer him as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22). Although Isaac was submissive to the guiding hand of his father, the reality is that God was examining the life of Abraham and Isaac was the vehicle that God used to accomplish this.

The little fox of spiritual apathy reduces us to living in the past. We can only point to sometime in the past when our spiritual walk was more vibrant. Somewhere in the past was a hunger for revival and harvest. It can be a sad thing to see someone who once knew the truth and lived it out with a devotion and passion to no longer adhere to what they once stood for. There has to be a conscious choice to make sure that you are going to finish as strong as you started. It won’t be easy but it can be accomplished if you will give yourself to the constant discipline of the soul that gives itself to fresh worship to God.

An elder minister once lamented the fact that many of the men that he went to Bible college with and had entered full-time ministry that only one of ten had finished their task. He noted that by the time they got to the age of sixty-five they had succumbed to moral failure, discouragement, liberal theology, or with a desire to make money. His advice was for working in the Kingdom of God is quite

simple. Stay true to Jesus by keeping your heart close to Him every day. You do that with prayer and gleaning things from the Word of God. The old preacher noted that the way to Heaven is a long winding road and the devil isn't in a big hurry to get you, just so he does.

B. The Second Mark—Dependence on Others for a Blessing—Genesis 24

The second mark of spiritual apathy is the dependence on someone else to provide a blessing. Genesis 24 gives us the story of the forty-year old Isaac letting his father arrange for him getting Rebekah as his wife. Abraham sends out Eliezer to find a bride for him. Even though Isaac was a forty-year old man, he was still dependent on others to provide blessing and provisions for him.

Spiritual apathy causes the church to become nothing but a large nursery of sorts that have to constantly provide for grown “children” who have never really reached a point of maturity in their relationship with God. We find trait in people who have never really learned how to pray or to mine out things in Word on their own. They become dependent on the prayers of those who are given to prayer and they expect a pastor to spoon feed them the Word. Spiritual apathy caters to a withering immaturity that never allows us to reach our full potential in the Kingdom of God. 1 John 2:12-14 is the pattern that all must be seeking to reach for. We begin as infants, progress to a state of youth, and finally reach the point of being cast into the role of being a father.

C. The Third Mark—Lack of Discernment—Genesis 25-26

The third mark of spiritual apathy is a lack of discernment that causes a crippling entanglement with the world. In Genesis 25-26, Isaac makes the bad choice of lying about who Rebekah was. He lied to Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, and said that Rebekah was his sister instead of his wife. It is also in this chapter that we note that Isaac only re-dug the wells his father had dug out and never do you find a single instance of Isaac accomplishing anything new or moving beyond the boundaries his father had already established.

Spiritual apathy is also marked by a lack of discernment. Discernment in all points of our spiritual life is necessary. Discernment is marked by a level of discrimination that allows the Word of God to be the grid by which all of our choices and decisions are to be made. First Thessalonians 5:21 commands us to “prove all things” which means we are to carefully examine the world about us and its interaction with our lives. We are to have a level of discernment as to what we read, listen to, watch, and associate with.

As a church we have to be careful of modern day trends that attempt to offset our real purpose. The purpose of the church is to worship God. Those who are given to right worship will fulfill the great commission that God has called us to do. If we get the pattern of worship wrong then God will not be honored or advanced by anything else that we will do. Spiritual discernment can be fostered in the following manner:

- Desire wisdom—Proverbs 2:3-6
- Pray for discernment—1 Kings 3:5-14
- Obey the truth—James 1:22
- Follow discerning leaders—Ephesians 4:14
- Depend on the Spirit—John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:11-15
- Study the Scriptures—2 Timothy 2:15
- Keep growing—2 Peter 3:18

D. The Fourth Mark—Driven by His Appetites—Genesis 25-27

The fourth mark of spiritual apathy is compulsive, fleshly appetites. Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob because he was a hunter and had the ability to provide meat for him. He had a love for temporal things more than for the spiritual things. This hunger for meat caused him to make one of the worst decisions (although God had determined it already) when he was deceived by Jacob and ate the goat instead of the venison he wanted from Esau. Because of this action, a blessing was stolen. What is striking about the deception by Jacob is that Isaac questioned the character and quality of Jacob’s voice but because he was so driven by his fleshly appetite for meat he rushed ahead without any

thought of the future ramifications of this choice. Once Esau did show up, instead of Isaac repenting and attempting to make things right, he resigned himself to the decision and told him that nothing could be done.

Spiritual apathy leads to a loss of discernment, strength, and blessing. Because Isaac was driven by his appetites he ended up not fulfilling the greater plan that God had for his life. We have a clear mandate from God to resist the world and what it may attempt to offer us (1 John 2:15-17).

III. CONCLUSION—GETTING BACK INTO SHAPE

We have noted the negative impact that spiritual apathy has on relationship with God and it very well could be that this has prompted something in you causing you to realize that you may have dropped a bit from God originally wanted you to be. It could be that you have recognized some casualties of spiritual apathy as we have gone through this lesson. It may be a Sunday School teacher who has quit teaching. It could be a choir member who has retired from singing. It could be a prayer warrior who has lapsed into little or no prayer at all. It may be someone who is coasting on the blessings and experiences of God they experienced thirty years ago. It very well could be that you need to ask yourself the question as to when you have been involved in some new task to help the Kingdom of God advance in this dark world. *How do we get back into spiritual shape?*

The answer as to us getting back into spiritual shape is found in Exodus:

Exodus 16:16-21 KJV This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, *according to* the number of your persons; take ye every man for *them* which *are* in his tents. [17] And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. [18] And when they did mete *it* with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. [19] And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. [20] Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them.

[21] And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.

There will be a daily commitment to doing what God has called us to do:

- **Matthew 6:11**—Be thankful for *daily* bread.
- **Luke 9:23**—Deny yourself and take up your cross *daily*.
- **Acts 17:11**—The Bereans were blessed because they searched the Scriptures *daily*.
- **1 Corinthians 15:31**—We are to die *daily*.

If you will notice the pattern in these Scriptures, you will find daily bread, daily prayer, daily study, and daily death. The will of God is not fulfilled by our coasting on past victories.

Philippians 3:12-15 KJV Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. [13] Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, [14] I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Hebrews 3:12-15 KJV Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. [13] But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; [15] While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.