

still waters

home church studies

Psalms 45:10-17

[Worship]

10 Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, 11 and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him; 12 the people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people 13 with all kinds of wealth. The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes; 14 in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow. 15 With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king. 16 In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. 17 I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

Consider:

[Think & Pray...]

Guilt-Free Loving

It hurts to watch someone we love feeling stuck. Witnessing that kind of frustration and self-recrimination challenges our hope that our love will somehow make things better. We want to be able to save each other, and it is terribly painful to realize that we cannot. Thus we desperately look for some kind of release—a solution our beloved hasn't considered, someone or something to blame, or we simply try to talk the person into believing that they are okay. But these reactions stem from our need to get out of our own feelings of helplessness, rather than reflecting what the other truly needs.

Paul's unabashed confession of the sin that dwells in his "flesh," and his need to rely entirely on the "higher power" of God in Christ, leaves us little room to assure him that he's fine the way he is. His admission of helplessness in writing "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15) is remarkably free of guilt. The sin he acknowledges is not something he's strained to recognize—rather, he experiences himself to be incapable of doing that which he truly wants to do.

Guilt, that complex emotion we all love to claim as our own religious inheritance, inhibits getting to the freedom Paul demonstrates here. Guilt does not encourage this kind of honesty, but rather preoccupies us with its eradication. So we live waiting for the other shoe to drop—to be discovered as the judgmental, lazy, resentful, jealous, you-name-it person we're deeply convinced we are.

What's more, guilt cripples our capacity to be in relationship, interpreting those around us as beings who might any day discover the truth about us. Guilt inhibits our capacity to genuinely say we are sorry, because it does not permit us the courage to sit in the pain of our own sinfulness and yet apprehend that we are still God's beloved. Thus God, too, becomes someone to avoid, rather than one to approach with a love that longs to know what God desires from us.

The God who rescued Paul "from this body of death" (Romans 7:24) isn't interested in increasing our guilt or shame but in a relationship of love in freedom. To enter into this requires an honest recognition that those "actions" we wrestle with—including self-hatred—increase sin's chokehold on the world. Each moment motivated by clinging to that which is ours—including our addiction to being inadequate, unlovely, and ungifted—leads to moments of meanness, of hatred, of judgment that make it that much easier to resist loving generously.

[The Scripture]

Romans 7.15-25

15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but 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. 24 Wretch that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

