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Working at the bottom of your Christian life.

Stopping Spiritual Leaks

By Reimar Schultze

“...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” —Joshua 24:15

There is a time for all of us to take a good look at our spiritual house to see whether our soul progress, or that of our family, is suffering from spiritual leaks. We might be taking in a lot of spiritual truth through church attendance, reading of the Bible and fine Christian books, listening to inspiring tapes, and much prayer. Yet, often, despite all of these efforts, we come to the end of the year only to discover that we have spiritually regressed rather than progressed.

Many fathers will have to admit that, despite their most earnest efforts, divine power and heavenly influences continue to wane in their Christian families. There is many a father who will admit at the end of another year that his son has been slipping in his relationship with God, that sports have begun to catch his interest more than Bible reading, that popularity with his peers has begun to rate higher to him than having favor with God, that church is less exciting for him than it used to be. There is many a father who, at the end of the year, will acknowledge that his daughter is more interested in dressing for the world than for Jesus, and is caught up more and more with listening to the world's music. And then, many a father will remember that dreadful day on which he heard something he thought he would never hear from son or daughter: “Dad, do I have to go to church every Wednesday night?” Yes, all of these are signs of spiritual leaks, of a spiritual regression in the Christian home.

Most modern Christians absorb more spiritual food in one year than Noah, Job, and the prophets absorbed in a lifetime, yet, these Christians remain spiritual skeletons. It is not how much you take in that makes you a spiritual giant, but how well you keep that which is taken in from leaking out. Take Noah and Job for example: both men were perfect in their generations. Did they have the Bible? No! Did they have Christian tapes to listen to? No! Did they have preachers to admonish them? No! Did they have a hymnbook to lift them up? No! Why is it that they practically had nothing of our aids to spiritual victory, yet they came to moral perfection and to a great intimacy with God? You have the answer—they plugged up all the leaks in their spiritual lives. What they got in spiritual truth, they kept and lived it and let it grow!!

Joshua said, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Yes, dad—yes, mother, that is what you want. Yes, dear single sister and brother, that is what you desire with all your heart. But how do we stop the spiritual leaks that lead to lukewarmness, you ask? Pastor Schultze, can you give us some practical advice to begin the repair job, to tighten the spiritual strings, to plug the holes, to get our homes and our hearts back to a spiritual overflow? Yes, my dear friend, today I have four areas of spiritual leaks worthy of inspection.

1. Stop Making Excuses!

Come to a zero tolerance level when it comes to making excuses. More spiritual life is drained out of hearts and homes through the excuse-making business than anything else I know of. If the average Christian would be paid for every excuse he would make, he would soon be a billionaire. Someone has said that the way to hell is paved by a multitude of excuses. Allowing excuses in your life for the things that God wants done is like trying to fill a bathtub with the drain plug pulled out.

Oh, dear ones, we have zero tolerance in our schools when it comes to drugs, to alcohol, and to knives and guns. We have zero tolerance in our work places when it comes to racial profiling or sexually abusive language. How about zero tolerance for excuses in our hearts, our homes, and our churches? How much spiritual power would there be in our lives if these excuse-making leaks would be plugged up once for all? Excuses are worse than lies, as Alexander Pope said, “An excuse is worse and more terrible than a lie; for an excuse is a lie guarded.” And all liars are destined for hell (Rev. 21:8). Do you think that excuse-makers will fare any better—those who wrap up lies in beautiful pleasantries and package them in the most attractive way?

“I could not make it to church because...” “I missed family devotions because...” “I can’t usher because...” “I cannot tithe because...” The Noahs and Jobs of our day do not make such excuses.

Indeed, the excuse-making spirit is passed on to us from the first excuse-makers: Adam and Eve. We are born with such a spirit, but my friend, who taught us the language of making excuses? Who taught us to craft, to fashion, to package, to present an excuse with such beautifully devilish smiles? Is it not any other people than those who taught us to tie our shoes, to brush our teeth, how to use a fork, knife and spoon, and who taught us the importance of washing our hands? Oh, my friend—father and mother—if your child is making excuses, did they not learn to do so from you? If not so, has not your tolerance of such excuses allowed the child to develop them? Have your children ever heard you say when you did not feel like going to church, or to pray, or to read the Word, “I am just not up to it now. I am too busy now. I’ll do it later”?

I am thankful for a mother who had a zero tolerance for excuses. I will never forget that day when I was a twelve year old lad in Germany taking my customary thirty-five minute walk on top of a cobblestone dam to get to school. On that day, I got caught in the worst lightning and thunderstorm of my life. In less than a minute, I was as wet as a fish. I returned home to be mercifully and justifiably excused by my mother. As a small lake began to form around my shoes, that woman telescoped herself into a ten foot Prussian general and began to turn on the lightning and thundering more than I experienced on the cobblestone dam. Friend, that one experience taught me never to come to that woman or anyone else with an excuse for the rest of my life. Hallelujah! And my spiritual growth since my conversion has been solid to this very day, without puddles forming around my feet. To God be the glory!

Stop the excuse-making business. Stop the leaks in your life and in your home. And don’t excuse yourself because you have bad genes or an undisciplined upbringing. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13) is for every one of us, no matter what our genetic makeup or our upbringing has been. Just one excuse can leak out a whole week’s worth of spiritual virtue. Because, remember, an excuse for not doing the will of God is more than an excuse—it is a lie guarded. Are you still with me? Are we making progress?

2. Stop Blaming Others and Circumstances.

If you blame others or allow your children to blame others, you create another spiritual leak. No matter how much you pray, read the Bible, and serve the Lord, if you blame others or life’s circumstances, you are also a complainer. And your spiritual bathtub will never have enough water in it to cover a tadpole.

Jesus was ridiculed and falsely accused. He was spat upon, smitten, beaten, and nailed unjustly to the cross, yet he never blamed anyone, nor did he ever complain. His response toward his abusers was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Those who treat you badly today—do they know any more than what those rebels were doing at the foot of the cross of Christ? I say, no! Anyone who does not have the light of Jesus,

does not know what he is doing. And you did not know what you were doing before Jesus became the Lord of your life. You were harsh, you were unfair, you complained, you played favorites, you misjudged people and circumstances. You were selfish and self-indulging. Jesus' blood would never have availed for our sins had he blamed just one person! Just one! Because Jesus never blamed anyone, he could atone for our sins.

Johnny comes home from school and says, "My teacher scolded me for something I did not do." Parent, how do you respond to such a child? First of all, how do you know who is telling the truth—the boy or the teacher? Should we not first be more suspicious of the boy being wrong than the teacher? Should we trust a child more than an adult, a youth more than a youth counselor, a nurse's aide more than a doctor, a drug sales clerk more than the pharmacist, or a private more than a general? What are we doing to children when we talk down adults—trained, tested, and seasoned adults? What are we doing to the child when we teach them to be suspicious of superiors and to question their wisdom? Are we not also subconsciously sowing some seeds of doubt in the heart of the child concerning the wisdom and authority of God himself? Are we going to side with God-ordained authority or the whimpering, complaining, blaming spirit of a little boy? Does the Bible teach that all authority is of God and ordained of God, or does it not? Look at Romans 13:1. Does it say in verse two that whosoever resists authority resists God and brings damnation upon himself, or does it not?

But, you say, some authorities at times are unjust or unfair. I ask you, was the authority that killed Jesus just? Was Roman authority that killed tens of thousands of Christians just? Paul lived under that kind of authority, and he said: it is of God, don't resist it! We are not called to be goats with butting horns but sheep who will go to the slaughter, even as our Savior did, and thereby, we shall conquer. But we will never conquer by blaming others! We will never conquer by taking on the goat spirit. Never! We must not allow that goat spirit to enter into our children.

Let's tell that little Johnny, "Son, become a better person. Become like Joseph in Egypt or like Jesus. Don't ever come back to me and speak evil of that teacher who has dedicated her life to put some wonderful things in your head. Instead, come back to me the next time and say, pray with me that I might be like Jesus in all the trials in my life so that others also might find my dear Savior." Teach your son to say, "It's me, it's (always) me, standing in the need of prayer."

Blaming others also leads to resentment, and when that sets in, the seeds of bitterness are likely to follow. With that, you will not only have a spiritual leak in your bathtub, but the bottom of the tub will fall out altogether. Confess, repent, seek restoration, and get filled up with God.

3. Don't Start Something Unless You Plan to Finish It.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him" (Luke 14:28–29 NIV).

Notice that the ones who start something and do not finish it will be ridiculed, mocked, and jeered at. Yes, the word ridiculed comes from the word ridiculous. Christians become ridiculous when they do not fulfill their commitments—when they start a prayer life but do not finish it, when they start family devotions but do not continue in them, or when they start being faithful to church but they become skippers. Whenever such is the case, we have ridiculous Christians, and when such people congregate, we have ridiculous Christianity. We become a laughing-stock. We become the focus of people's jokes. Are you a disciple of Jesus, or is your whole life nothing but a joke to unbelievers? How can the church win the world, how can it have a spiritual impact on others when the life of her members consists of building foundations without ever putting up a tower?

Oh, shame on us. We are a people great for starting things but despicable in the finishing business. How many have started a diet and not persevered in it? How many have started an exercise program and not continued in it? How many have started piano lessons but have not continued in them? How many have allowed their children to start something exciting in a moment of inspiration only to let them stop when endurance has become too great of a challenge? How many have started prayer meeting but soon after have quit attending? How many have disciplined themselves financially, soon only to become financially irresponsible again? How many have started Bible reading but have stopped? How many have been serving the church for awhile only to leave and run after other things? How many foundations have you laid? How many concrete slabs have you poured in your life? Is your life nothing but concrete slabs, or can you point to a few or a number of towers finished? What are we leaving behind for our children if we have not taught them that, by the grace of God, towers can be and must be finished and commitments can be fulfilled?

What kind of spiritual leaks do we create when we do not finish what we start? We should from now on pray and wait upon God before we start on anything. And then, when God reveals something, let us start it and stay with it until it is finished. Then we will be able to say at our last breath with the apostle Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

4. Say What You Mean, and Mean What You Say.

"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

More promises are made and broken by church people than by any other group I know of. "I will start family devotions..." "I will start being faithful in prayer meetings..." "Pastor, I will never leave you..." "Call me any time you need help..." "I will see you in church on Sunday..."

An old saying is, "A man is only as good as his word." Men of virtue, character, and integrity do not speak anything they do not mean. They are not promise-breakers but promise-keepers.

Oh, yes, this is another spiritual leak that cannot be plugged by all the Bible reading, praying, and good deeds in the world. Isn't one of the characteristics of godliness trustworthiness? Where would we be if God did not keep his word? All his promises would fall through. We could expect nothing certain from God. The righteous could not expect to see heaven, the wicked would have no reason to fear hell. Saying what we mean and meaning what we say are two of the strongest components for building character.

God cannot and he will not work through promise-breakers. His life will not be found in them. His power cannot operate through them, no matter how much they pray and serve the church.

Do you remember two of the perfect men in biblical history: Noah and Job? They did not have a wide open faucet to run into their spiritual bathtubs like we do. They had fewer spiritual aids. They lived before "Christ in you" and before the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Their faucets were only dripping, but because they had no leaks in the bottom, they were filled up and overflowing with God. For most of us to gain spiritual ground year after year, the cure is not so much in getting more but simply in keeping what we get by plugging up the leaks.

So, before you seek more experiences with God, or read more of those "life-changing" books, before you spend more time in prayer, serving the church, reading the Bible, and running to those great "spiritual-enrichment" seminars, look at the bottom of your Christian life, stop making excuses, stop blaming others, stop complaining, stop starting without finishing, and stop saying what you don't mean. Plug these leaks, and you will be surprised what your spiritual life will be like next year.