

## Lesson Ten

**Gratitude – Use the berries (His blessings) wisely, do not waste.**

**Recognize and appreciate all He did to provide for you, Taste and see that He is Good.**

I feel like a kid at Christmas! I've just returned from berry picking and I can hardly decide what to make first. Should it be blackberry dumplings? Syrup for pancakes or ice cream is quick and easy to prepare. How about blackberry cobbler? Whatever I decide, the one thing I know is that no berry will go to waste. After my immediate blackberry mania has been satisfied, I begin making preparations to preserve the berries leftover. If I have enough berries and time, I make jam. If there are only a few cups remaining or time is short, I freeze them. After so much expectation and discomfort, I take any steps necessary to ensure a single berry is not squandered. I also take the time to enjoy the deliciousness of what the Lord has provided. The anticipation has made the ultimate fulfillment of successful berry picking so much sweeter. I have a new appreciation for all God provides.

Judges 13-16 relate the events of Samson's life which had great potential, that was not completely fulfilled. Vengeance, greed, betrayal and violence are throughout the story. The Lord used Samson to confront the Philistines through an ill-conceived marriage to an untrustworthy woman. This set the stage for his entire life. The Philistines spent every waking moment trying to destroy Samson. Whenever I read these chapters, I find myself longing to see the good Samson accomplished. The only clue is given in Judges 15:20, "Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines." Although he killed many

Philistines, he did not free Israel from their bondage. With his great strength and God's commission of his life, I've always felt that he could have accomplished so much more.

Waste in our society seems to have become a hobby. When I was growing up, I was taught that waste, **any** waste, was sinful. You cleaned your plate and saved empty containers that could be re-used. Tonight's dinner leftovers were tomorrow's lunch. You didn't wear your good school clothes outside to play in and old clothes were re-purposed for other family members or dolls or even to create new things such as purses, pillow cases, or placemats. Coffee grounds and egg shells were saved to put in the garden. If something broke, you didn't throw it away and buy a new one. You found a way to repair it. I can remember helping my grandfather re-web lawn chairs – who does that nowadays? You found efficient ways to accomplish more in the same amount of time by combining tasks, planning errand trips so there was no back-tracking and writing the grocery list in the order the items were arranged in the store so you didn't waste time going back and forth among the aisles. Oh and our new habits of “just hanging out, wasting time”? Yeah, that would **never** have flown. Unless it was raining or you had a fever of a 104, the TV was off all day. It was only after dinner when it was time to relax and start getting ready for bed that the TV, commonly referred to as “that idiot box,” came on for a few hours. Of course we only had three channels back then and no VCRs or DVDs, so I guess I didn't really feel deprived. There wasn't that much on anyway.

What causes us to waste? Sometimes, it's just a lack of planning. I forget to write something on my list and have to go back for it later. I'm trying something new and I make

mistakes. I get lazy in my old age and just decide that it's more trouble than it's worth to mend an old shirt and I don't think anyone else would want it either. We all have instances where we just don't think something has a further use, or we didn't like our meal and it isn't worth carrying home, or we just need to take a break and lay around for a few hours. It's when this behavior becomes habitual that we need to ask ourselves why and make some changes.

The important thing to remember is that rest and rejuvenation of our body and spirit is not laziness or a waste of time. Our finite bodies require it! So even though the Lord brings people into our path every day that need our help, it doesn't mean He expects us to take on everyone's problems. We have a limited amount of resources and need to prayerfully seek His guidance in the best way to use these resources. We need to prioritize effectively while being realistic about our limitations. Jesus forgives the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane by saying, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41). As I shared earlier, I have had to face this in my own life when overextending myself by impulsively volunteering without considering the time commitment required. Once we determine that our current commitments do not allow for us to accept further responsibility, we need to be firm in our decision. Those whom we have helped in the past may just assume that we will continue to help as before. We need to address this early on to avoid more stress, confusion and hard feelings than necessary.

Why does God provide blackberries in the first place? After all, variety in our diets isn't really necessary to sustain us, God proved this by only providing Manna for the Israelites for

forty years. God does want us to feel joy and pleasure in this life. He provides the beauty of a sunset, the pleasing scent of roses, and the best blessing of all, the emotion of love. Can you imagine a life of suffering each and every day with no hope of relief? There are many Christians around the world who suffer persecution and misery all their lives. While God provides strength and endurance for the tasks He has set out for us, He also knows what fragile creatures we are. He remembers that we are made from dust (Psalm 103:13-14). We are weak and fearful and require His constant reassurances. Since He knows us so well, He also knows that we need encouragement. Sometimes the encouragement needs to be physical and tangible – our loving spouse, an excited pet anxious to see us, or the sincere smile from a stranger. Even the occasional blackberry can be a reminder of His faithfulness and provisions, not just to sustain us in the bare minimum requirement, but abundantly!

Dear sister, Jesus' plans for us are to bless us and prosper us. To enable us to be a light to the rest of the dark and weary world, a beacon to those hurting. I thank you for beginning your journey toward Him. By tearing off your chains of bondage and learning to trust Him and His ways, you commit yourself to serving Him in gratitude and love. You acknowledge His free gift of salvation and experience the joy of knowing your future in eternity is secure with Him, no matter the struggles we may endure here. Train yourself to see the world through a heavenly perspective and remember we are only visitors here.

## **Assessment and Further Thought**

Can you identify areas of your life where you are consistently wasteful? Why do you believe this is the case?

Are there steps you can take to reduce waste in your life?

Do you regularly take time to rest and rejuvenate yourself? If so, share some of your experiences. For example, you and your spouse watch a sunset at least once a week.

What particular blessings the Lord provides do you enjoy the most?

## Verses for study and encouragement

**Psalm 34:8** - Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

**Colossians 4:5** – Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

**Psalm 81:10** - I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

**Ephesians 5:15-17** – Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

**Proverbs 6:6-11** - Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest— and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.

Thought to remember: What if you woke up tomorrow with only the things you thanked God for today?

## **Prayer time**

Dear Jesus, open my eyes to the areas of my life where I am unnecessarily wasteful and show me ways to improve. Help me to develop an “attitude of gratitude” in all aspects of my life and to recognize Your hand and blessings every day. Grant me discernment to determine when I am being lazy and when I am restoring myself. Give me wisdom to decide how to prioritize and use the resources, including my time, in a manner that pleases and glorifies You. Help me to determine my boundaries and gracefully, but firmly, enforce them when needed. Amen

## **Additional items for prayer**