

Spiritual Insights 04 Hosea 6:3

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a good heart, following God's will, and using our gifts and talents to avoid stagnation and grow spiritually.

Duration: 40:00

Scripture: Psalm 32:9, Matthew 5:25, Philippians 2:4

Topics: "Spiritual Insights"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living for others and using our gifts and talents for productive activity. He warns against wallowing in self-pity and encourages Christians to seek opportunities to serve and help others. The preacher also highlights the significance of applying the information we receive, as information without application leads to stagnation. He uses the example of the Dead Sea to illustrate this point. Additionally, he discusses the importance of discerning the guidance of God and waiting for His peace before taking action.

Transcript

...to the obedient heart. Good to know. You say, oh, I don't have a very good mind.

Well, join the club. You don't have to have a very good mind to progress in the things of God. You have to have a very good heart.

You have to have a heart that's determined to follow the Lord. And that's what Hosea says in another verse that really sounds like double talk, but it isn't. Hosea says, then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord.

I think that's the Old Testament equivalent of what we have here. It's found, incidentally, in Hosea 6-3. It says, then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord.

And that means the more you and I follow on to know the Lord, do what he tells us to do, the more we will grow. The more we put into practice what we have been taught. Information plus application leads to multiplication.

It's another way of saying what we have here. Information plus application leads to multiplication. Information without application leads to stagnation.

Of course, a common illustration of that is the Dead Sea, isn't it? The River Jordan flows ceaselessly into the Dead Sea, pouring in all the time, but never goes out. Never goes out. No application, and it leads to stagnation.

Now, this applies equally well. Well, this verse, Luke 19-26, applies equally well to the use of our gifts and talents. A man in the Bible whose pound increased to ten pounds was given rule over ten cities.

The more he had and used what he had, the more he was given. The man who went and buried his pound in the napkin, he lost it. It was taken away from him and given to another.

If we refuse to use, we lose. It shouldn't be hard to remember. If we refuse to use, we lose.

When we fail to use some member of the human body, we lose the power to use it. It atrophies. And this is true in the spiritual life as well.

Constant use means constant development. And if we bury our gift through timidity or laziness, God puts us on the shelf. And he cannot use us.

And so this verse tells me today, obey the scriptures, claim the promises, use your talents, and God will give you more. Unto him that hath, him it shall be given. From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And remember that the word have here doesn't mean mere possession, but it means having and using. Having and putting to good employment what you have been given. Okay, Matthew chapter 5 for the second little sermonette tonight.

Matthew chapter 5 and verse 25. It says here, agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The New American Standard Bible says, the first part of that first verse, it says, make friends quickly with your opponent at law. I think there's a deep spiritual insight in this verse. One of the surface lessons in this verse of scripture is that the Christian should not be prone to engage in lawsuits.

The Christian should not be prone to engage in lawsuits. There's a word in the English language, the word is litigious. Now you can live a very normal life without knowing that word, but that's really what it means.

It means don't be litigious, don't be quick to go to law whenever your nose is out of joint. The natural reaction is to rush to a court of law to seek redress for grievances and damages. But the believer is guided by higher principles.

And I think we'll see this as we go on. Our law courts today are glutted. Glutted, for instance, by malpractice suits.

Glutted by all kinds of damaged suits, accident claims, divorce claims, inheritance claims, and all the rest. You know it very well. In many cases, as far as the world is concerned, this arises from a desire to get rich quick.

People think, oh, I'll just go to law and sue for a million dollars, get a million dollars, and I'll be rich quick. If the New Testament teaches anything, it teaches that the Christian should settle matters by the power of love, rather than by the processes of law. Let me say that again.

The Christian should settle matters by the power of love, not by the processes of law. Someone has said, if you go in for the law, the law will get you. But that's what this verse says.

It says, you won't come out until you've paid the last farthing. If you go in for law, the law will get you, and you'll pay the last penny. A lawyer had a cartoon hanging up in his office.

It was a cartoon of a cow. And the defendant was pulling on the horns of the cow, and the plaintiff was pulling on the tail of the cow, and the lawyer was milking the cow. The lawyer is bound to win.

The lawyer is going to get his fee anyway, but you won't be sure that you'll get anything out of it at all. In 1 Corinthians 6, the Christian is forbidden to go to law against another Christian. No two ways about that.

No two ways about it. A Christian is told to go to wise men and the assembly, and be willing to suffer wrong rather than to go to ungodly judges. But you say, what about a case between a Christian and an unbeliever? Well, I'm not going to say tonight there are no cases where a Christian should go to law against an unbeliever.

But I would say that usually it's better to forego your rights and demonstrate that Christianity makes a difference. Oh, you say that's a hard thing. I know, but whoever said that the Christian life was easy? Generally speaking, it's better for a Christian to forego his rights and to prove to the world that it makes a difference when Christ comes into the light.

It doesn't take divine life to go to law, does it? It doesn't take divine life to go to law. But it does take divine life to commit your cause to the Lord and to use the case as an opportunity to witness. A Christian bought a piece of property, a house, and he started to erect a fence between him and his neighbor.

And his neighbor came over to him in high judgment and said, when you bought that house, you bought a lawsuit. He said, you're putting up that fence five feet over on my property. The Christian said to him, I always knew when I moved here that I would have a fine neighbor, he said.

And he said, so I'll tell you what we do. He said, I'll buy the fence and you put it up where you feel it should be. The fence was never put up.

There was no need for it. That man showed that Christ makes a difference. And he was guided by the power of love rather than by the processes of law.

And I feel that that's a surface insight. I believe there's more in this verse than that. But I believe that the surface meaning of this verse, make friends quickly with your opponent at law.

The Bible is a wonderful book, isn't it? Sometimes these are hard sayings and we resist them in our hearts, and yet God's way is best. Psalm 32 and verse 9. Psalm 32 and verse 9. It says, Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. And most of your modern versions change the last part of that verse.

They say, else they will not come near thee. Not lest they come near thee, but it says if you don't put the bit and the bridle in their mouth, they won't. In other words, they won't do what you want them to do.

They won't come near you. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come, or they won't come near you. Well, I believe that we get some real insight here on the ways of divine guidance.

Now, there's a difference between a horse and a mule. And I believe the horse and the mule typify two different aspects, two different attitudes, two wrong attitudes that you and I can take with regard to the guidance of God. The horse, for instance, is always charging ahead.

You know, it's kind of an impatient sort of a beast, and it's always anxious to go ahead. Not the mule. The mule is always anxious to lag behind, and you can beat it and kick it and do anything else you want to it, and it's just as stubborn as a mule.

Well, it's possible for us to be like that in our dealings with the Lord, where both the horse and the mule have to be controlled by bit and bridle. Now, what the Scriptures teach is that we should be so sensitive to the Lord's will that we don't need His bit and bridle. You say, what is the bit and bridle? Well, I think it's His discipline.

I think God uses circumstances oftentimes, for instance, discipline us when we are not sensitive to His guidance. And I think if we have just a pure desire to do His will all the time, that we can save ourselves a lot of grief in this life, don't you? I think so. So, I'd like to give some suggestions, some rules of thumb tonight to help us in connection with the guidance of God.

A rule of thumb. First of all, when you are seeking the guidance of God, ask God to confirm the guidance in the mouths of two or three witnesses. When you are seeking the will of God, ask the Lord to confirm the guidance in the mouths of two or three witnesses.

Why? Because it says in Matthew 18, verse 16, that in the mouths of two or three witnesses shall everything be established. In other words, if God just gives me one indication of His will, I might miss it. If He gives me two or three, I won't miss it.

It's very, very clear then. You say, what do you mean two or three witnesses? Well, one witness could be a verse of Scripture that stands out to you. One time I was seeking the will of God about a trip overseas, and I was given this verse in the psalm.

It said, Though I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the outermost parts of the earth, even there shall thy hand sustain me, and thy right hand shall uphold me. Now, that might not say anything to you tonight, but to me, at that particular time, it was the voice of God saying, you go, and wherever you go, I'll be there with you. Though I take the wings of the morning, and really when that verse came to me, I thought, what a beautiful description of jet travel, the wings of the morning.

But that's the way I was going to travel, jet travel. The wings of the morning, of course, are the rays of the sun. You know, the sun is just coming up over the horizon, and the rays of the sun are shooting up over the sky fast, too.

That's what it says. Though I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the outermost parts of the earth, even there shall thy hand sustain me, and thy right hand will uphold me. So God can speak to you through a verse of scripture.

He can speak to you through the counsel of other Christians. I've had a Christian say something to me, and he didn't have the foggiest idea of the guidance I was seeking at that time, and yet what he said was used of the Lord. A very wonderful way to show me exactly what the Lord wanted me to do.

Or the Lord can guide us through the converging of circumstances, the marvelous converging of circumstances, things happening in our lives, coming together, the gears meshing, in a way they would never mesh, according to the laws of chance or probability. So that's one rule of thumb that I follow. Ask the Lord to confirm the guidance in the mouths of two or three witnesses.

Show you in two or three different ways that this is his will. Then you can proceed without any doubt. Rule of thumb number two, if you are seeking the guidance of God, and no guidance comes, then God's guidance is for you to stay where you are.

Now that's been very, very helpful to me. In fact, that's a rule of thumb that I'm using at the present time in connection with guidance that I've been seeking. I have been seeking God's guidance in a certain manner, and there has been no guidance.

Well, that's very clear. God's guidance is for me to stay where I am, and I'm quite happy about it. If you're seeking the guidance of God, and no guidance comes, God's guidance is for you to stay where you are.

Somebody has said it this way, darkness about going is light about staying. I tell you, that's been a big help to a lot of people praying about going to the mission field or something like that. Darkness about going is light about staying.

Then number three, wait until the guidance is so clear that to refuse would be positive disobedience. You say, should I do that? Yes, you should do that. You say, but the world is perishing.

You wait until the guidance is so clear that to refuse would be positive disobedience. That's what God told the children of Israel to do as they were marching through the wilderness. He gave them the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and he said, don't you move until you see that pillar move.

That's good, and I shouldn't either. We have the spirit of God. I believe that pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire both speak of the spirit of God, and we have the spirit of God.

We don't see a cloud in the sky, but we have the spirit of God to guide us, and he will guide us if we'll wait. Rule of thumb number four, and I like this. It's very precious to me.

Colossians chapter four, chapter three, verse 15. It says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and that word rule is an interesting word.

I've often pointed out it means monitor or umpire. Let's take that. Everybody's interested in sports.

Let the peace of Christ umpire in your hearts. If God wants you to do something, he'll give you peace about it, and wait till you get that peace in your heart about doing it. So those are some little rules of thumb in discerning the guidance of God, and what it all boils down to is that if we are anxious to know the will of God and to do it, we won't need to feel the bit and bridle of God's discipline.

Be not as the horse or as the mule. They have to be held in with bit and bridle, or they won't do what you want them to do. That's really what the verse is saying.

God doesn't want me to be a horse Christian or a mule Christian either. Okay, let's go back to the New Testament, Philippians chapter two and verse four. Philippians chapter two and verse four.

It says here, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Look not every man on his own things. It says in the New American Standard, Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The key word in Philippians two is the word others. Study the chapter with that key in mind. It will open right up to you.

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented first of all. He lived for others. And then the Apostle Paul in this verse, he says, Oh, I'd just be happy to be poured out as a drink offering on the service and sacrifice of your faith, he said to the Philippians, others.

Timothy. Timothy lived for others. It says in this chapter, Paul said, I have no man like minded, verse 20, who will naturally care for your state.

Timothy lived for others. And Epaphroditus lived for others. He wore himself out in the work of the Lord, serving the people of God, so that he was sick, nigh unto death, and was sorry when they heard that he was sick.

He was others oriented. So should we be. We should live for others, not only because it is right, but because it is for our own good.

It is costly to live for others, but it's more costly not to live for others. And I'll tell you why. Our society is filled with people who live only for themselves.

Really. Our society is filled with people who live only for themselves. Rather than going out to do for others, they sit at home rooting.

They think about every minor ache and pain that they have. And everybody has pains and aches. Nobody is immune from them.

But soon they become hypochondriacs, and they're very willing to give organ recitals at every opportunity. In their loneliness, they complain that nobody cares for them. Nobody takes an interest in them.

And they wallow in self-pity. The more time they have to think, the more depressed they become. And life for them becomes one great introspective night of darkness.

That's what they do. They go off to the doctor, and they start to gulp down enormous quantities of pills and syrups. And none has been invented yet that will cure self-centeredness.

So then they go off to the psychiatrist or the psychologist to find relief from the boredom and weariness of life. And my Bible tells me that the best therapy for a person like that is a life of service for others. There are shut-ins to be visited.

There are senior citizens who need a friend. Plenty of hospitals welcome volunteer help. There are people to be cheered by just a little word.

You know, it's a nice thing for every one of us when we wake up in the morning to determine to show some kindness that day. Some word of cheer or encouragement or some compliment along the way. There are missionaries all over the world who would welcome a letter.

And it really helps to send a little greenery too to brighten up the scenery. There are souls to be saved. There are saints to be cheered along and to be taught.

Really, there's no reason for anyone to be bored in a world like ours, is there? No reason for anyone to be bored. There's plenty to do to fill one's life with productive activity. On the one hand, you have these people who are sitting at home, as I say, wallowing in self-pity, and there are other Christian people who are out looking for day-stretchers.

They want longer days to accomplish all that they can do for others. Well, I listen to the radio and it says over the radio, advertising Time magazine, it says, Time makes everything more interesting, including yourself. Well, I want to tell you something, living for others makes everything more interesting, including yourself.

Others? Yes, Lord, others. Let this my motto be, help me to live for others that I may live like thee. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Okay, back to Luke, chapter 15. Luke, chapter 15, to the well-known story of the prodigal son. What I'm going to say here might be shocking to some of you, but I really believe it is scriptural.

It says, The son said to the father, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Before I get to the spiritual insight here, I just should stop to say that thanks to a lot of the sociological teaching, psychiatric and psychological teaching today, where children are told that their parents are to blame for all their troubles, this verse has been changed somewhat to read, Father, you have sinned against heaven and are no more worthy to be called my father. A lot of young people have that attitude today, but that isn't what it said.

This is the prodigal returning, and he says, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Now, there's a spiritual insight, and that is this, The father did not forgive that son till he returned repentant. It is wrong to forgive a rebel until he repents.

And some of the worst mistakes that parents have ever made have been made in this realm. It is not righteous to administer forgiveness until first there is repentance. If you'll turn forward to Luke 17.3, the very next chapter, it says, Luke 17.3, Take heed to yourselves if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

Not if he doesn't repent. If he repents, forgive him. Now, as I read the story of the prodigal son, he's down there in the far country, he wishes he had some of the husks to eat that the swine were eating, and no man gave him to eat.

He went down, down, down, till he reached bottom. What did the father do? Did the father go down to Western Union and cable some money to him? The Bible doesn't say that he did that. The father waited until God got that young man where God wanted him to be.

And I want to tell you something tonight, dear friends. If the father had cabled help to him, he would have been hindering the work of God in that boy's life. He really would have.

And that's a hard thing for parents to stand by and watch their children come down to the dregs, dregs, dregs. It's a hard thing to do, but it's the scriptural thing to do. Just the same, the son had to come to the end of himself.

He had to come to the breaking point. And as soon as he came to the husks, the sooner he broke. And so the father had to commit him to the Lord and wait for the crisis of extremity.

Some of us here tonight know this by personal experience. We know it by experience in our own lives. Get away from the Lord.

And well-meaning friends might try to short-circuit God's dealings with us. It's a great mistake. A great mistake.

One of the hardest things for parents to do is to watch God's dealing in the life of the rebel. The natural thing to do is to bail him out. But when you bail him out, all you succeed in doing is prolonging the agony.

Spurgeon said, the truest love to those who err is not to fraternize with them in their error, but to be faithful to Jesus in all things. I think that's a spiritual insight. The truest love to those who err is not to fraternize with them in their error, but to be faithful to Jesus in all things.

We have a very vivid illustration of this in the Bible. And that's the illustration of David and Absalom in the Old Testament. David is the king, and he has a son, and this son has sinned, and David brings him back unrepentant.

No sign of repentance. Absalom's a rebel. And there's no sorrow for the sin that he's committed.

Before long, Absalom is winning the hearts of the people. He's plotting a revolt against his own father. Finally, he drives David from Jerusalem, and Absalom is anointed king in his place.

He kicks his own father out of the throne. And then he sets out with his army to destroy David. How do you like that? What was David's mistake? He brought back his own son unrepentant.

That was his mistake. And now, Absalom is there with the army, and he's out to kill his own father. And David was really not acting on scriptural grounds.

He said to his men, now if you come across the boy, deal kindly with him. And Joab, in one of those bursts of insight that he had, greater than David, thought better of it than when he came across Absalom. And the insight that I find here is parents who are willing to see God reduce the rebel to life in a pig pen are often spared a greater sorrow.

I tell you, there's more psychology bound up in this Bible than you can get in all the textbooks in psychology today. Let me say that again. Parents who are willing to see God reduce the rebel to life in a pig pen are often spared a greater sorrow.

Okay. Perhaps we have time for one more. John chapter 3 and verse 8. John chapter 3 and verse 8. And you're very familiar with these words.

They simply say the spirit bloweth where it listeth or where he listeth. The wind bloweth where it listeth. That's the spirit, of course.

The wind bloweth where it listeth. John 3, 8. The spiritual insight is this. The spirit of God is sovereign.

I like this. The sovereignty of the spirit of God. The spirit of God does as he pleases.

And he's very unpredictable. I think this is important for us to know in the Christian life. You cannot pour the spirit of God into a mold.

You cannot put him in a straitjacket. All our attempts to do that are frustrated. I'm sure you have noticed that most of the types of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament are fluid.

Wind. Water. Fire.

Oil. And we had cloud a little while ago, didn't we? The cloud, the pillar of cloud. Wind, water, oil.

It's very hard to control those things. I mean, try to hold them in your hand and see what happens. That's what we try to do.

We try to bind the spirit of God and, as I say, put him in a straitjacket and it just won't work. He will never do anything that's morally wrong, but he'll do a lot of things that will surprise us. He reserves the right to act in exceptional and unconventional ways.

For instance, God has given headship to the man and a position of subordination to the woman, and yet in the Old Testament he raised up Deborah to be a judge in Israel. How do you figure that one out? Well, it wasn't wrong for him to do it, but it was unconventional. It was exceptional.

And in days of declension, the Holy Spirit commits things to happen that wouldn't ordinarily happen. You remember how David, when he was in exile, he went and he ate the showbread, that it wasn't lawful for anyone but the priest to eat. The spirit of God is sovereign.

Don't try to sense him in. People say, well, now in the book of Acts you have a very definite method of evangelism here. Everything fits a certain pattern.

Oh, really? I don't think it does. I don't think you find any evangelistic pattern in the book of Acts. I think it's the spirit of God working in a sovereign way.

You'd think the spirit of God would always work where the big crowds were, wouldn't you? Philip here is preaching in Samaria and having a great revival, and God takes him away to preach to one Ethiopian eunuch. The spirit of God. Unpredictable.

Unconventional. The textbooks wouldn't say to do that. The textbooks wouldn't say, lead a big revival and go to one man.

No, no, no. The crowds are important, not with the spirit of God. But he went to that one man and that man was an Ethiopian and that man went back to Ethiopia and Ethiopia is one of the few countries in the world that's had a consistent Christian testimony since that day.

There's still a lot of Christians in Ethiopia. And maybe that Ethiopian eunuch was the one who carried the gospel back to Ethiopia. In our own day, we mustn't try to bind the Holy Spirit of God.

He is not bound by our traditions. And the Holy Spirit has a way of protesting against formalism and ritualism and deadness of every kind by raising up new movements. And my insight is this.

Be open to the sovereign movings of the Holy Spirit and don't sit on the sidelines criticizing. The Spirit of God is sovereign. And he passes by deadness.

He loves life and fervency and enthusiasm. And if he won't find it among us, he'll find it somewhere else. And we can't stop it.

But I want to be open to the moving, the sovereign moving of the Spirit of God in my life. The wind bloweth where it listeth. Shall we look to the Lord in closing prayer.

Father, we just pray that you'll write these lessons upon our hearts. We've been reminded about our responsibility to use what you give us in our study of the Word of God to obey what we read there. And Father, we pray that we might indeed do that very thing.

We pray too that we might be open to the movings of the Spirit of God. That we might not in our lives be as the horse or the mule that have to be held in by the bit and bridle of circumstances. That we might be ever sensitive to your wonderful leading.

Help us, Lord, to show that Christ makes a difference by the power of love and not by the processes of law as we've been reminded tonight. We do pray. We just commit ourselves to you.

Help us to be the men and women of God that you would have us to be. We ask it of the Savior's name.

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