

Taking Out the Trash: Preparation for the Holidays

By Cheryl Chapin, MS

As the Holiday season approaches we end up putting a lot of time and energy into preparations, especially house cleaning. Imagine, after thoroughly cleaning your home, carrying in each hand a huge, heavy, black plastic trash bag. You walk outside and stand at the curb and just watch the garbage truck drive by. You are still left with a strong hold on the bags, unable to let them go. Sounds pretty ridiculous, right?! Think of how high the pile would be if you never let go of the trash. Similarly, we may keep a clutch on trash in our heart and mind: past arguments, misunderstandings, hurts, fears, resentments and unrealistic expectations. These can turn into strong holds in our life and disrupt relationships with God and others.

During this time of year, family relationships seem to be under more duress. Usually we interact with our extended family more often, both Christian and not. Unknowingly, we may bring along our trash, only adding to the pressure. It may then seem like we are entering a war zone rather than a gathering to celebrate our Savior, Jesus Christ's birth. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does." 2 Corinthians 10:3 (NIV) Emotions and old memories can be stirred up - the pleasant as well as the unpleasant.

Check in now. Is it delightful anticipation you are feeling, or are feelings of dread rising up inside of you? This may depend on how your internal trash disposal system has been working. God already has set in place a system for us to use to dispose of our trash:

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NIV)

Take some time for yourself to do some demolition house cleaning of your life. Invite Jesus to go with you to sort the clutter of the closets of your heart and mind. Take captive every thought. Take along two big trash bags, one clear and one black. The clear bag is for the thoughts to keep, that are aligned with the "knowledge of God." These thoughts are congruent with God's thoughts as we find them in the Bible:

"...Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Philippians 4:8 (The Living Bible)

The black trash bag is for thoughts to dump "arguments and every pretension set up against God." Now, you can't see through the black trash bag, which helps maintain this rule: You can't go back in and pull it out again. When your black trash bag is full enough, have Jesus help you pull it out to the curb and throw it in the waiting garbage

truck. Then be filled with peace and joy as you and Jesus watch the truck drive away, getting smaller and smaller, until it shrinks to a tiny speck on the horizon and disappears.

Now you are left with the true clear thoughts that are obedient to Christ. You may notice a positive change in your interactions with loved ones, and share many blessings, instead of strife during this Holiday Season. My prayer is that you may have a blessed Christmas. Acknowledge all that God has done for you, and thank Him for sending His Son, Jesus Christ.

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