



Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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Chapel Service, Philadelphia Eagles October 16, 2011

Note: CNE President Robert L. Woodson, Sr. was asked to conduct the October 16 Sunday morning chapel service for members of the Philadelphia Eagles Football Team, who were in Washington, DC where they would play the Washington Redskins that afternoon. This was his message:

My belief in Christ was not something that came from a mystical description. I didn't really understand what that meant. When I first heard about Christ it didn't really resonate. I am more evidence-based. But I took notice when I saw the evidence of what He could do.

My life changed when I saw a sermon in action:

Leon Watkins was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings as a tackle around 1957 or 58. When it came time for him to show up for practice, he was too drunk to appear. He returned to Los Angeles in shame. But with the help of his wife, he accepted Christ into his life. Leon found himself in a low-income, gang and drug-infested neighborhood located at 62nd and Pico Streets in South Central Los Angeles when Christ spoke to him. The neighborhood was infested with graffiti; the gangs had the small businessmen terrorized and forced them to leave food and other things on the steps for them.

What Leon did was make a bunch of posters that said "Wanted," with the name of the gang leader on it and his own telephone number. He got a call and arranged a meeting in a small alley. Dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, he walked unarmed as two cars full of gang members pulled up, their weapons showing. The leader, a notorious youth named Quake, got out and said, "I heard you are looking for me. What do you want?" Leon replied, "I want to talk to you about your life."

The two sat on trash cans and talked for two hours. Within a week, Leon had Quake and his gang coming to him for Bible study, and the predators became protectors of the neighborhood.

I asked Leon how he managed to do this. He opened his Bible and began to read me the Gospel. I became a believer and I went on to see other stories of transformation acted out before my eyes. Later I would call him and he would refer me to verses in the Bible to understand what I was seeing. The path was opened to me to see that the message of the Gospel was not just mystical, it offered practical counsel.

One of the central teachings of the Bible is humility—there are stories everywhere of those who were called to put the interests of others before their own. The Good Samaritan, who ignored race, class, and his own safety to help a man in distress. There are many others.

I want to share the benefit of my experience that might help you deepen your walk as you move to your future. In many ways, your challenge is greater than those who have failed. Failure is easier to overcome than success. People who are successful are faced with greater temptations to stray because they begin to believe that their success is totally due to what they themselves have done. For example, a world-renowned botanist and her husband were picnicking in the woods and saw some mushrooms. Because of her confidence in her own knowledge, she told her husband that they were safe. He declined to eat them, saying he just wasn't sure. Several months later she died of liver failure as a result. Another example is that of Sonny Bono, the singer, U.S. Congressman, and expert skier. Also confident of his own skill, he was not afraid to take extreme risks, and also lost his life.

This is not to discount all the incredible hard work you put into your conditioning and your skills. But as Rev. Timothy Keller says, you can believe you are your own God. He wrote a book about this entitled "Counterfeit Gods, the Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power." Idolatry is more than just the worship of physical idols; it also means elevating money, success, your talent, and anything else that you can't live without that has become your God,

Keller writes about eight billionaires around the world who have taken their own lives when they lost their fortunes with the collapse of the empire of Bernie Maddox. They defined themselves by what they owned. He also talks about a man who had come to Christ several years before he lost his money—he ended up saying that he was happier than he had ever been.

Even the love of your children above the love of God is idolatry. As a father, I had to pass that test. When I lost my son, I felt like taking my life. I had to answer His question, "Do you love him more than you love Me? He is one son, and you have many sons to serve." At my son's memorial service, there were cabinet ministers, White House officials, and hundreds of friends. Among them were about 20 young men, former gang members and drug dealers, who had been transformed through the work done by our organization. They watched me to see if I could pass that test, and they beamed the message to me to keep strong.

Throughout the Bible, heroes are broken people. God uses broken people because if they were not broken, everyone could believe that they accomplished what they did without God. All setbacks, disappointments, and challenges, and losses, are God's way of testing us.

The story of Joseph in Genesis is an example:

Joseph was an arrogant young man, favored by his father and dressed better than his brothers. God gave him a gift of vision, but he used it for himself, bragging that he saw his brothers bowing down to him. So God took him on a long journey of brokenness.

Joseph never whined or complained. He never lost his faith in God. He always performed at the top of his game—as a servant, or as a prisoner. When the servants of Pharaoh betrayed him, he remained faithful to his God. When Pharaoh asked him if he could interpret dreams, Joseph said no, God does and I am His instrument. The Lord had cleansed him of his self-importance and arrogance, and therefore God could use him. God then elevated him so that he could feed the world.

You have lived a life of success. That is why you are here today. But have you lived a life of significance? Success relates to what you do for yourself. Living a life of significance is what role you play in serving someone else.

You are in that situation, if you see yourself as a child of God. You need to know the difference between success and significance. Test yourself by writing your own obituary. Would it say that “he left three Mercedes and a Ferrari, a five-acre estate in Buck's County, and two Super Bowl rings?” Would that be it?

Or would you want it to acknowledge your accomplishments along with your success? Could you say “I saw someone hungry and fed him; I helped guide 20 young men and women who were on the way to prison but are now on their way to college?” How would you want your life to be told?

Just as with your success you are able to have a savings account, you can have a savings account for significance. Just as you put aside savings that will assure comfort in the future, you can store up acts of significance. They will carry you further than any money you can accumulate.