

Dear Friends,



The other night we were seated around the dinner table when the subject of lightning came up. One of the boys who moved onto the farm this August told the story of standing in his family's front yard when two bolts of lightning came and struck on either side of his feet. Everyone looked at him and the question was asked "*is this true*"? The reason for such a quick interrogation is because this young man spends a great deal of time lying. He replied, "of course it is true". The next question was "who else witnessed this event?" His reply: "God". We then asked to whom did he go following such a trauma. His reply: "God" (much like the little child in Sunday School who when asked "what sits in a tree and eats nuts and has a long bushy tail"?, answered "Jesus" figuring He is the answer to all questions in church.... this young man tries to give answers that seem to fit the situation. After all you can never go wrong with an answer like God).

I have read how banks often hire an ex con to help examine the facility for any loopholes of safecracking. After all nobody knows all of the dark underpasses of such devious activity as one who has worn the t shirt. Such the situation at our dinner table because right across from this young man sat one who is now on his fourth year on the farm who told some of the biggest tales his first year with us. His most famous was upon returning from Christmas break. He told us his grandfather had been hit and killed by a train as he was crossing the track. Could we please pray for his grieving family? We did so with sincere petition. When I called the family to offer our condolences and see how we could help, I was quite surprised to find this was all a lie. This was just one of many, many creative tales.

It is not easy living in community with one who operates from deception. Not only is relationship blocked, but an exorbitant amount of energy is drained from others. Over these 12 years of living with teens, of the 250 or so who have been residents at New Direction Farm, a good 25% have been what would be characterized as chronic liars. Those who lean toward this tendency usually, as well, tend to take that which does not belong to them which adds

yet another flat note to community harmony. Much of a day, initially, seems consumed with policing the behavior rather than enjoying relationship. We have come to refer to this problem as a “fortressed heart”.

We use the chess man in the plexiglass case as a visual aid of one with a fortressed heart. You can see the person and the person can see you but in between is a wall.



Those who come to the farm with such a heart tend to: be totally self-absorbed, lack a sense of community membership (one of the first indications of this is the first meal when food is passed around family style. While there may be 10 or so people seated around the table this individual will shovel out onto their plate at least 4 or so portions. When we ask them to look around the table and count how many other people

would be sharing that food they give a blank look in return); lying and stealing would also fall into this category of lack of community sense since each of these breaks fellowship. This individual will often interrupt conversation; will leave clothing at various places all over the farm (the most comical was when one of the boys got too hot in the winter so stripped off his long underwear in the backyard leaving them where he left them). Authority figures carry a negative connotation for these individuals who operate from “I am the master of my life.” The most prominent and driving voice is their own. The concept of conversation being two way is moot. The precept of yielding to a voice of authority is foreign. Actually this teen often will take license to make executive decisions. Such as the time one of the girls thought it would be a good idea to bring a new calf down to the bottom of the pasture where, in her mind, it would be safer and warmer (by the grace of God she was not trampled by the distraught mother).

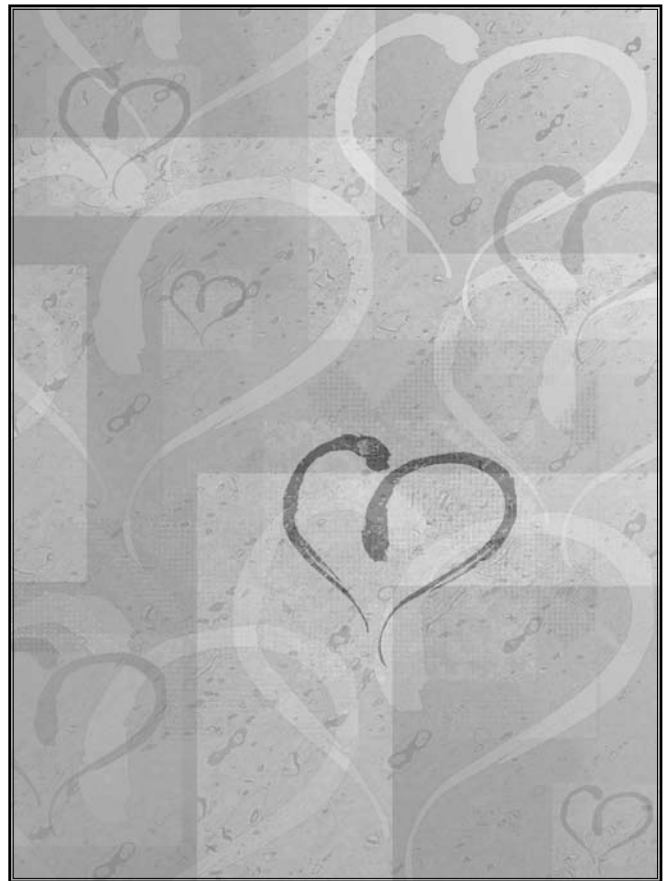
Jesus described such an individual as a sheep without a shepherd. “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to His disciples, “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matthew 9:35-38 Those words “with compassion” hit me right in the heart the other morning as I was, in a disgruntled mood, grumbling about once again having one with a fortressed heart suck the life out of this farm. If you have ever been around a sheep without a caretaker they spend a lot of time running and hiding, snatching whatever they might be able to grab to eat along the way. They cannot be at rest because they do not feel safe. We live according to what we believe. One with a fortressed heart does not live according to the precept of yielding to a voice that is directive because in his mindset this equates with “bondage”. What eventually happens is that one becomes a slave to his desires rather than enjoying the beauty of relationship.

Recently my mother gave me a beautiful cut glass prism which sits on the windowsill above the kitchen sink. This morning the sun is shining and each cut of the prism is catching a bit of that light, casting a small round rainbow of color. There are tiny, circular rainbows all over the kitchen floor.



As Christians we are called to be salt and light to share the good news of the gospel. When in my disgruntled mood I, certainly, was not feeling any love toward this young man. My thinking was “when will he connect the dots that this is not a community centered around him?” In my mind he had become as one of those blimps we see in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade; difference being his image was not bringing a smile to my face or lightness to my heart. It was when I accepted “he is who he is” and pivoted my thinking to “Christ is Who He is and greater is He within me than this young man” that the disdain in my heart was converted to compassion. You see as long as my thinking was stuck on “when he changes then.....” that had become an idol.

As you can imagine this is quite rigorous work up here on the mountain. We cannot change a heart. Only God can. We are simply called to be faithful in our walk with Christ, to love these teens which means setting reasonable boundaries which require responsibility and expectations, to read the Word of God with them and to pray with and for them. Meanwhile we help the parents along the same path. There are times in which each family member needs to work through to that point of acceptance of “what is” in order for the family to move on. This can only come through forgiveness which imputes release to God. A number of years ago when we were stuck as a family and I was spinning my wheels with “this should not be happening” I believe the Lord gave me the word “is”. “This is happening and until that is accepted there can be no movement forward.” God is the great I AM, not only the God of the present (is) but the past and the future. We are



told to give thanks in all things: “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5: 20. This comes from a passage which speaks of our call to be imitators of God, as dearly loved children and to live a life of love. To be very careful how we live not as unwise but wise making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. We can either believe that the purpose of difficult people in our lives is for us to bring them to rightness (to fix them) or we can surrender to the truth that God works multidimensionally in every circumstance. It is just as much what God wants to address in my heart as it is in the heart of the deceitful young man who lives in my home.

I have watched over these years as the men and boys have “reclaimed” fallow land up here on the mountain. When we first purchased the farm the main crop was weeds and thistles. It has taken quite some elbow grease using sling blades to bring the pastures back to grazing land for the livestock. I guess in many ways this is what is occurring in the lives of these young men and their families: territory is being reclaimed for the kingdom of God. At the desk of the young man who is having difficulty telling the truth is a piece of wood which was woodburned by another young man a few years back.

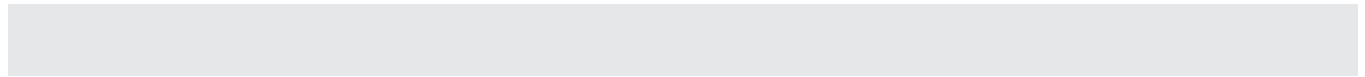
It says "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." Psalm 119:32 To see one pivot from running according to their own way to following Christ out of love and the freedom that accompanies that makes it all worth the effort we must tenaciously give. The young man at the dinner table, the former teller of whoppers whose tales will go down in the history of the farm as some of the greatest?..... he is now a walking testimony of a heart set free. I used to have people pray for me just to face another day of living in the same home with this young man and now I delight to spend time with him.

On behalf of the many who have received residential care as well as those who come to the farm for counseling.... Thank you for the part you are playing in setting hearts free.

God Bless You

Handwritten signatures of Bright and Dave in cursive script.

All of us at New Direction Farm



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