



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

Spring Cleaning!

Bob's Perspective:

Not long ago, I watched an episode of the Beverly Hillbillies entitled, *The Old Folks Home*. In the opening scene, we see a complaining Jethro carrying a grandfather clock on his back down the long winding staircase. Granny, while admonishing him for being lazy, yelps a reminder that it's time for spring cleaning and he still has 31 more rooms to go – bringing all the furnishings out of the house so they can “air out.” Her intent is to totally empty the mansion, clean it from top to bottom, and then refill it with freshly aired furnishings.

What better time than spring to open the windows and let the fresh air in and let the stale air out? In programs that Mary and I present, we often begin with an exercise called, “emptying the cup.” The idea is that we need to empty ourselves so that we have room to be filled. Nature illustrates this concept in the cycle of the seasons. In Spring we see nature fresh and growing. Summer moves in to bring productivity and enjoyment. Autumn is a time when nature begins to wind down, and Winter brings dormition. In the same vein, this can be viewed as a metaphor in our personal lives. From time to time, it might be a good idea to take inventory. What are we doing that's lifegiving, what parts of our lives are stagnant, and what elements are detrimental to quality living?

Taking a good hard look inside is not an easy thing to do. For many, emptying all 32 rooms of the mansion at one time could be overwhelming. Rather than delving right into the inventory, we may instead ask ourselves some questions:

- Am I growing and moving forward, or am I just settling for the status quo (or even less)?
- Am I truly happy in my life? Granted, no one's life is perfect, but in general terms am I content?
- What in my life could be better with just a little injection of energy? What is something that was great at one point and is now running out of steam – but with a little effort could be great again?
- What (if anything) in my life is (or is on the way to becoming) detrimental to my happiness?

This last question needs to be examined with great care. Is this detriment something that is within the realm of our control? If so, we have the choice as to whether we do something about it or turn our head and look the other way. Conversely, the detriment may be out of the realm of our control, in



which case we resign ourselves to “take the bad with the good.” The key is to be sure that the examination of the detriment is a dispassionate and realistic observation. There is a significant difference between things that can’t be controlled and things we choose not to control.

As we’ve said in previous blogs, being happy and fulfilled is a decision that we all have the power to make. While we can’t always control situations, we can control how we choose to react to them. By and large, the only limits we have are the limits we place on ourselves. However, this concept sometimes gets blurred in the heat of the event. The bottom line is that we need to be cautious so as not to excuse our way out of happiness.

As many know, I’m a longtime fan of Bob Ross. He was the host of a PBS program called “The Joy of Painting.” Although he died back in the late 1990’s, his show is still one of the most watched PBS shows to date. On many occasions Bob Ross would say, “Talent is a pursued interest. Anything that you’re willing to practice, you can do.” In the same way, when we take the time and effort to pursue happiness, we’ll be happy.

Here's to Spring Cleaning!

Mary’s Perspective:

Ever since Bob and I started talking about this topic, I have noticed an interesting juxtaposition. There are a number of people in my life who are struggling right now, but in different ways. Some feel like they are going through the motions, tending to the immediate needs, putting their dreams on hold until they can just get past this “thing” – whether that is a project at work, or a class at school, or an upcoming surgery, or reaching a certain money threshold. Somehow, life will be better when they can pursue their dreams, after they get past this stumbling block. Except they feel like they are drowning in the mundane, barely treading water until this “thing” passes, and it seems like there is always another thing to replace the current one, meaning they never quite get to the point where they can pursue the dream or passion.

Another group of friends are similarly struggling, but their challenges have to do more with identifying the dream. They, too, feel like they are going through the motions of life, waiting for the next step. However, they have not defined the next step, or the dream, or the passion project, so they keep treading water until they somehow figure out when they’re at the next step. In both cases, the drudgery of daily life has become a burden or a hindrance to happiness.



I agree with Bob that we can't always control the situation, but we can control how we react. I also believe a lot has to do with mindset in how we approach situations. Consider this example: I want to feel healthier (or lose some weight, or lower my cholesterol, or pick your intent). I know that the best way to accomplish this goal is to make healthier eating choices. However, I hate eating healthy. I love chocolate and chips – ooh, and chocolate chips! – and eating healthy is a burden. Perhaps I'll make a couple of smarter food choices this week grudgingly, but I know this is a short-term solution, because once I reach my goal, I can go back to eating "real food." With this mindset, do I really have a chance at accomplishing my goal?

Hopefully, you recognize that a critical component in this example is reframing my thinking. If I am convinced before I start that I don't like any healthy choices, then I am not likely to try new foods nor enjoy options that I might actually like. I'm done before I start. If I feel like I'm drowning trying to just get one more thing done before I can really accomplish my dreams, then I'm not likely to ever get to my dreams. I'm done before I start.

To reiterate, the challenge of spring cleaning – be it physically in your home, or mentally in your life plan – is two-fold. First, one needs to clear out the "stuff" and evaluate it. Then, one needs to choose what is necessary, what is valuable, what is life-giving, what promotes the dream, and what is a detriment. Do I really need all those towels that have accumulated in my linen closet, or are they taking up valuable space that might be better used in other ways? I have somehow managed to collect a lot of purses, though I rarely carry one. Does the pile of purses bring me joy? Or does it look like clutter that frustrates me?

It's easy to be dispassionate with towels and purses, but perhaps more challenging to be dispassionate about items closer to the heart, be they sentimental photos or retirement goals. I can be the queen of making excuses, so this blog may be intended for me as much as it is for you. I do think it is a worthwhile exercise, to methodically evaluate parts of life (both physical and mental) and make sure that what is kept supports the ultimate goal of being healthy, happy, and whole.

Need some more suggestions? We've often written in terms of the spokes on a bicycle tire. First, define your spokes: work, relationships, faith life, eating choices, exercise, household tasks, physical environment, hobbies, etc. These are the parts of you that



support the whole. Then, component by component, do some soul searching. Is your job mentally fulfilling, financially supporting the other facets of life, engaging and peaceful? What parts of work could be adjusted, approached differently, perhaps removed or re-visited?

The physical environment spoke may take a while, because, as we age, many of us tend to accumulate things. For whatever reason, my sock drawer is stuffed. I guess I've unwittingly bought new packs of socks without purging the old ones until the drawerful has passed capacity limits. It's not like purging my sock drawer really requires a lot of brain power – it's just taking the time to do it. And yet, my sock drawer remains stuffed. As dumb as this sounds, that's one tiny piece of clutter in my brain that can be released, to make room for better occupants (fresh ideas, peaceful thoughts – not more socks).

Once we've taken the time to clean out the clutter, or as we are in the process of decluttering, we need to take the time to consider the dream, plan, goals and interests. I've spoken to a number of friends recently who are contemplating retirement, but don't know what they're going to do once they retire. They recognize that a happy retirement often includes regular activities and social interactions, but they don't have many outside interests or hobbies. Developing those interests and relationships is a critical part of the spring-cleaning process.

When you take the time to do some soul searching, do you find that you're a little stagnant? Have you let the mundane routine take over the life-giving parts? Are you treading water today in the hopes it will get better tomorrow? Or are you laying the foundation now for that better tomorrow? In a week, Christians will celebrate Easter – a time of new life and rebirth. Perhaps part of your Easter season can include a spring cleaning not just of your physical environment, but of your mental space. How will you journey on the path toward happy, healthy, and whole?

Enough for now...I'm going to go purge my sock drawer.