

Social Media Musings Dec 1-6, 2017 – Forgiveness and the Fruit of Peace



People have been asking me for a weekly digest of my social media writings – for like a few years now – not everyone wants to be on Facebook, understandably. If you subscribe to the blog, you can get these in your email. I never send out anything except

blogs, so don't worry about being spammed incessantly. These writings will be largely about my studies into being an image-bearer and the growing of radical fruit. I will occasionally still post my ancient Near Eastern and First Century studies, but I am still recovering from my November 10 stroke and that's harder to remember and organize than writing about our character as image-bearers, which is easier for me.

Dec 1 – The Peacefulness Project Week #2 – Commitment to Community.

I am a big offender here, just FYI, although I have been committed to the idea of community, am I as committed to the reality? – Not so much. People scare the pee out of me, and throughout the overwhelming majority of my life, I have easily been overtaken by fight/flight responses when a more mature/healthy person would step back and take stock of the situation. It's something I am working on right now – and of course, the way I started was by changing the language I use to talk about others, especially anonymous, hypothetical others who just represent ideas and not actual people.

Like how I would talk about people who do certain things that

I don't like, while maybe not even having anyone in particular in mind, but mocking the idea of them. Right there, when I do that, I destroy the potential for future community for all who see it, to whom it applies, and encourage others in their use of the language as well. I have to learn to talk about certain issues without the scorn, mocking and cheap shots. I have to remember that you can be a worthwhile, valued member of the Body, and disagree, or even be misinformed, without being deficient or unfit to be my brother or sister. I don't have to call a meeting with my snide comments so that we can all point and laugh, instead of trying to build, encourage, and understand. People are never wrong on purpose – sometimes they are right, sometimes they are wrong, sometimes they believed the wrong people who seemed to be right, etc. Didn't we all?

We dehumanize because we do not want community with anyone who makes us feel uncomfortable – that's why a lot of us are out here on social media, screaming and wanting to be heard, but only by people who already agree with us. Our words are meant to recruit likeminded folks. The rest we push away with angry-sounding and judgment-laden rhetoric. We welcome those who are like us, while pretending to teach those who aren't, yet actually doing our best to inform them that they are not welcome until they are already like us. We don't watch our words, or the way we say them – we want to think of ourselves as the welcome wagon, when we really look a lot more like the glue wagon waiting to take poor Boxer out of the way. People don't want to get in if they can smell death on our breath.

We don't preach to include but to exclude – to make sure that the only people who will come near us are the people who prop us up, who give us the illusion that “we” are right and “they” are wrong. This is a recipe for contempt, dehumanization, and war – not for peace. Like it or not, we are called to be peacemakers. We are called to be a light for the lost, not an interrogation lamp in the eyes of those who dare diverge from the path we are on now – who actually may be ahead of us in

many ways but we can't see anything but what we are proud of believing. Our pride of observance in this blinds us to their observance in that.

Yes, pride. We are very proud of those issues that are important to us, the things that we do – it is a common trick of the heart and mind, to elevate our level of observance to become the plumb line for everyone else, while calling anything less “backsliding disobedience” and anything more “legalism.” We don't seek to include, but to exclude. Less observance offends us and more observance is an uncomfortable challenge. We seek to maintain our status quo.

If that exclusion was only based upon matters of willful sin, I could see the point of it, but we are rarely talking about that. No, this is flat out about excluding differences, and the reason is because we are not committed to community, but diametrically opposed to it. If we were committed to community, we would talk with, and not at, each other. We would seek out radical repentance, radical forgiveness, and the reconciliation that our Messiah spoke of. These things cost, they require little deaths. Looking at situations from the perspective of another requires a death. Learning about where a person is at in their walk instead of assuming requires a death. Relationship requires a death – we have to give up a bit of ourselves and accept a bit of someone else. To do that, we have to love them and be committed to peacefulness – especially over the small stuff that too often rattles us, and certainly myself. We need to learn why we over-react, but first we have to accept that we do, in fact, often react in inappropriate ways.

In order to have community, we have to abandon the thought of always being correct, the illusion that we are always reasonable, that we aren't deceived; we have to understand that people who are immature in one area can be lightyears ahead of ourselves in another. I am and you are not individually the bright center of God's universe, but all of

us together are.

We have to want to accept true repentance. We have to want to forgo our desire for revenge. We have to see things from someone else's point of view. We have to learn to let the side issues be side issues. We have to be willing to accept that things which are very important to us will not be of tantamount importance to others. We have to want reconciliation and relationship when safe to have it.

We have to want, as a brother or sister, everyone whom our Messiah wants us to have as a brother or sister. That's a big part of carrying our crosses – that's dying to self and what we want. All of the fruit of the Spirit leads to community, and all the works of the flesh lead to lonely individuality. The social media age has made lonely individuality into a virtue – and we have very much gone along for the ride, like the citizens of Hell in C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*.

Dec 1 – Forgiveness Costs Everything

Reading the third book on forgiveness (NT Wright recommended three as being fairly earthshattering from different vantage points) – L. Gregory Jones's *Embodying Forgiveness*. When it started off, right out of the gate, with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's struggle for forgiveness and repentance in the midst of Nazi Germany, I knew it would pull no punches.

Anyway, the second section of the book is about the evils of "therapeutic" forgiveness – where the hard work of forgiveness and repentance and reconciliation have been replaced by a process through which we slowly work ourselves into feeling good about ourselves, about others, and about being together. Instead of dying to self and doing what Christ did, we want to feel comfortable with the idea of doing what He did, and only then do we do it. But forgiveness is rarely something we are going to feel good about doing, especially when repentance is lacking and justice is absent or far off. Withholding

forgiveness might be the closest we are ever going to get to any sort of condemnation of the person who hurt us, and we don't want to let that power go.

The Cross is a challenge, a painful challenge, to that way of thinking – the way that comes most naturally to us. Yeshua/Jesus suffered the death of a rebel, a traitor, a criminal – a death that has been sanitized in art and movies and books and, most notably, in our minds. His vindication in that will not occur at the end of the age when He judges the “quick and the dead” – His vindication took place when He was resurrected. As He was innocent, it was not right that He should wait any longer than three days. None of us are truly innocent and so we wait until the end of the age and will rise again, and every tear will be wiped away and we will no longer care about the crimes and slights against us in this world. The new world will be more real than this one – I imagine this one will seem to be less than a memory, yet more than a fiction.

Anyway, we tend to not want to forgive, because our hurts are so close to the surface, and we have made them an integral part of our identity, more so than who we are in Messiah. In CS Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, time and time again we come across people who shun eternity with God because they can't bear the thought of a life without their right to hurt, bear grudges, and seek out revenge. I see it all the time in the here and now, and I have certainly been guilty myself.

Anyway, all that is to say – the Sabbath is a taste of the world to come – and dare I add that until we learn to forgive truly, for the right reasons, and not as an act that will simply serve our own needs to feel good – well, there is no Sabbath rest. We don't forgive so that we will feel good – we forgive because we were forgiven. It is the service we owe to our Master. It is not, no matter our suspicions, a service that will go unrewarded. Releasing bitterness, grudges, and a desire for harm and revenge against those who have wronged us

– they are the price we pay for developing better fruit, and good fruit, although painfully produced, is a very great reward indeed. There is nothing more satisfying than better representing our Master, leaving our own flawed, self-righteous character behind and becoming conformed to His. Only when we truly walk in His loving, kind, gentle, merciful and compassionate ways, will we know Sabbath peace. Until then, we are just taking a day off from work.

Dec 2 – The Violence We Do in the Name of Being Right

Just woke up from the strangest dream. In it, I walked up to a young man, covered in blood from some kind of violence, he was sitting down, his body leaning against a wall – he was sobbing, inconsolable. I held him and comforted him a long time, despite the blood, before he finally was able to tell me what was wrong and why he was grieving. His father (or some other male relative) was dead, and in hell, because they had done such and such a terrible sin. I was appalled – because the young man had been burdened with a false belief that such and such was a terrible sin that would bring damnation. I was so happy to be able to relieve him of his burden by explaining the truth to him – his response was to turn on me violently, flip me off, and leave me.

(and no, the damning sin wasn't keeping more of Torah, FYI, in the dream, the man covered in blood would be more likely one who felt he was keeping Torah)

I woke up just kinda shaking my head, it was all part of a very intense dream. I know what it was about, considering the season we are in. This young person was broken hearted for his loved ones, but he was covered in blood – and not his own. He believed that a certain thing was so sinful that his loved one/ones were damned – but the crazy thing was that he loved his belief so thoroughly that he was so cruel to the one person who was spending the time to love him and he refused to be comforted as soon as that comfort threatened a belief. He

wanted to be right so badly, even though his belief was based on lies, that he would rather think his loved one/ones damned than reconsider it, or to look at the way the person who told him the truth, treated him.

We would often rather be angry, and do violence, and be “right” than to be at peace, and respond to kindness, and find out we were wrong – especially when we have been wrong before and would rather die with the illusion of being a martyr in the right than another flawed human, doomed to being wrong in both small and large ways, for the rest of our lives.

If the cost of being right is to do violence to others, verbally or physically, – we need to seriously re-evaluate whether or not we are just wrong in a different way than we used to be. Verbal blood on our hands is only moderately less offensive than physical blood on our hands – and if Yeshua/Jesus says the lust of the eyes is adultery the same as physical, which He does, then we cannot afford to be a verbally violent people on social media any more than we would consent to be physically violent people in person.

Dec 2 – “Invisible Cats” and C. S. Lewis

CS Lewis, in writing back in 1960 about The Four Loves – one of which is friendship – he was talking about the assault on male friendship at the time, when it was becoming more and more uncommon for two men to be friends in the mad rush of society and the inherent distrust of two men being “that close” without it really being homosexual in nature.

The argument was that, even the complete lack of proof of homosexual interest was, in fact, proof of homosexual interest. Lewis speaks of the infuriating nature of trying to prove that something that isn't true, actually isn't true. In other words, disproving a negative. It is easy to prove a positive. Here is the proof, here is the paper trail, voila! It is proved. But what about things with no proof, and which

only appear to be true, yet lack any concrete evidence? Here is Lewis's description of the problem:

"This very lack of evidence is thus treated as evidence; the absence of smoke proves that fire is very carefully hidden. Yes – if it exists at all. But we must first prove its existence. Otherwise, we are arguing like a man who should say, "If there was an invisible cat in that chair, the chair would look empty; but the chair does look empty; therefore there is an invisible cat in it." ... A belief in invisible cats cannot perhaps be logically disproved, but it tells us a good deal about those who hold it."

We need to search our own beliefs for signs of invisible cats, and ask ourselves whether we have the right to judge others simply because they have an empty chair in their possession.

In other words, just because something seems obvious to us, does not make it true. We're really not that smart or discerning.

Dec 3 – Frustration and the Sin of Mocking

So, been having insomnia ever since the day God told me to give up mocking people. I mean, I had probably already eliminated 95% of it from my life, but for the last 12 days, the mocking has been desperately seeking out new ways to happen. Weird stuff, I tell ya, things no one would consider to be mocking, but are. It's been case after case of, "No, we aren't going to do that!"

CS Lewis, in *The Four Loves*, which I talked about yesterday – he was being brutally honest about how much pleasure it brings people – me, him, everyone, to retaliate and be nasty, to be filled with resentment, to be the long-suffering and sainted martyr – and I was thinking about how sneaky our (my) brains are. So, I stopped the mocking on paper in public, but then in private it is harder, and then you give it up in private but then the mind is like a playground – and so self-righteously

well hidden. You have to keep learning its tricks and adapting. And then you force yourself to stop thinking mocking thoughts and they come up with other creative ways of emerging – hence my insomnia.

So, last night I was thinking about a situation that should have been over years ago, but rears its head every once in a while – nope, not even going to say more than that – okay anyway. So I was thinking, and my thoughts would go along this path, leading me to a snarky comment and had to cut it off, and then along they come from another angle, had to cut them off that way too. After about five long go-arounds with this, I just stopped and had it out with myself. “Oh my gosh, will you just stop?” And it was like, “I can’t, I am SO frustrated!” Bingo.

I can’t think of a single time where I have ever mocked anyone where it wasn’t actually grounded in frustration. Frustration, of course, easily morphs into the works of the flesh of Galatians 5, and can only be overcome by the Fruit of the Spirit – especially my weakest one – patience. Joy used to be my weakest, but miraculously is now one of the stronger ones. PATIENCE, Ugh.

But I want them to agree with me and if they don’t... MOCK.

But I am right and I need them to know it... MOCK.

But other people might listen to them and not me... MOCK.

I have to discredit them... MOCK.

They aren’t listening to/believing me... MOCK.

They aren’t taking my word for this... MOCK.

WHOA they are on my territory and I feel threatened... MOCK.

My personal favorite:

They are mocking me and so they have it coming.. MOCKx10.

Basic self-control means I don't do it on the outside, but if I don't stop doing it on the inside as well – I am just like one of those blind Pharisees that Yeshua/Jesus and the Talmud speaks of, who would cover their eyes and run into a wall or fall into a ditch to avoid lusting over a beautiful woman. Well, self-control also means I don't do it on the inside – but for that to happen, it has to be paired with a love, kindness, and gentleness that are genuine enough that I don't want to do it either. Loving our neighbor as ourselves – are many things more hateful to us than being mocked publicly, or privately, or even in someone else's thoughts, being made a public spectacle of, a figure of contempt and ridicule? Has anyone ever won you over to their side by mocking you, even subtly? Or if you saw it in their eyes or body language? Or even suspected it over the internet? No, as I realized last week – we only mock the people we have written off for exclusion, the ones we are so frustrated with that we don't want them unless they come groveling on bloodstained hands and knees in worshipful adoration that we were, after all, correct. Mocking is a violent thing, really, we just don't have to carry around any weapon but the tongue.

Giving up mocking has revealed deep recesses of contempt and hatred in me – I was venting off steam by letting off a little here and there, especially when no one could hear. Now that the vent has been plugged up, it's a choice between facing the bad fruit or exploding and doing great damage to the Kingdom.

It isn't about me. On the Cross, I was forgiven so much more than mocking, by the One who was mocked, beaten, falsely accused, and executed in perfect innocence. Do I have frustrations? Yeah, more than some but not as much as a multitude. What I don't have, is a greater cause for offense against anyone than my King has – and He has been patient with me. After 19 years as a believer, He should not still be dealing with these things in me so graciously, but he does. I

guess I can pull up my big girl panties and follow His example of patient, kind, forgiveness, and non-retaliation. And if I can't, then I need to be willing to be able to.

Oh yeah – anyone ever notice the one thing Yeshua didn't do after the resurrection? He didn't go around Jerusalem killing and mocking the people who did Him wrong. Just wow. You don't want to know what shameful things I would have done in His place...

December 4 – Musing on L. Gregory Jones's Embodying Forgiveness

Until we recognize that sin is enmeshed in the very fabric of our lives, that it is not only external but internal, not simply what is done but what is imagined, we will forever be caught up in the illusion that sin is simply something that is done to us, and not an active force in the world that we all, as a community, have to learn to deal with. Only when that is accomplished, will we be able to forgive for the witness of the Cross, repent for the furtherance of the Kingdom, and reconcile with our neighbors for the sake of healing a sadly neglected Body – one suffering from all too many self-inflicted wounds.

If, however, our end goal is not a reconciled Body, but instead justice for ourselves, and healing for only ourselves, then we will forever be at odds with a Kingdom inaugurated at the foot of the Cross. The One who died on it did not do so in order to nurse His own wounds, get Himself justice, or to be healed – He did it for us, not one or a few, but all of us together.

December 5 – Hostage Takers – Those Who Rule Through Unforgiveness

Hostage Takers

Far too often, what stands in the way of forgiveness is the

unreasonable demand that the sin should never have happened in the first place (as if to say – unless you go back in time and keep it from happening, there can be no forgiveness!). Even in the case of misunderstandings and perceived slights, or accidents, a person becomes so incensed that they were put upon (even if only in their minds) that they gleefully hold the other person hostage for life. They set unreasonable standards, and force everyone to live in perpetual slavery to their unforgiveness – but after every reasonable attempt has been made to communicate and mediate, and, in the case of real guilt, when true regret, repentance, and restitution are in effect, a person must come to realize that they are forgiven by God, that undoing their sin (or misunderstanding, perceived slight or accident) is impossible, and that they can and must move on and continue to grow in grace – regardless of whether their victim (real or imagined) desires to set them free or not. There has to be life after sin (and so there definitely must be life after misunderstandings and accidents) whether all parties involved like it or not. If not, then we proclaim ourselves dead in our own sins and the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah – well, we proclaim it to be of no real effect.

So there's the intro.

I think everyone has one or more hostage-takers in their life – I will discuss three kinds. I have a few of them and ran into two of them again this week. One has imagined slights against me that he has been nursing for years on other people's social media walls. Despite engaging with him in conversation on a few cases to try and resolve it, he is ear-deep in bitterness because – well, because I refused to do what he told me to. A complete stranger told me to do something that was unreasonable, and I ignored the advice. For the past couple of years he has held me hostage – kinda, I mean, he goes around accusing me and I, having done everything I can to resolve the issue, just ignore him. The point is that

he thinks I sinned against him, and he can't/won't let it go and spends his time telling everyone who will listen and allow it, that he has the goods on me, that I am an unrepentant sinner! It is sad, but people do this and others enable it by listening, What it is, is outside of my control – I can either engage him and agree to negotiate endlessly with a hostage-taker, or just let him be – I choose the latter as I cannot control him, cannot reason with him, and even mediation proved meaningless. The mediator, a mutual friend, rebuked him very hard and that quieted him for a while but he is at it again – attempting to hold me hostage but, in truth, he is the hostage. His accusations are without merit, and so I am only his hostage if I chose to live in the shadow of those accusations, which I don't. I imagine he spends a lot of time thinking about me, whereas – well, unless he has just pulled one of his stunts again – I don't think of him at all, and when I do, my only recourse is to pray for him. This kind of hostage taker can influence others with their accusations, but they can only influence us if we allow it. We cannot take on the burden of feeling like we can alter people who don't want to be altered. Period.

The other kind of hostage taker is an oddball – not the person, I don't know them personally, but the way they seek to hold hostage is rather odd. You see, this is someone who accuses me of anonymous crimes, but when approached will give me no details of who I have committed said crimes against, or when, or exactly what happened. They just make accusations to those who will listen. I knew someone like this in High School – best friend one day and then hating me enough to wage a four-year bullying war the next – literally overnight. I still, to this day, have no idea what happened. But she held me hostage to her suspicions, whatever they were. She was able to make my life very miserable, she was holding me hostage for sins that I may or may not have committed – but she held the power to keep me from clearing up any misunderstanding, or from repenting, by not telling me what I had done. This is

very much a power-play. This sort of hostage taker wants to hate forever and wants there to be no resolution, so they arrest without charges. This is actually the sort of situation that the Magna Carta was written to avoid – a person must be told why they have been arrested and what they are under suspicion for. A person cannot be imprisoned without knowing why. But keeping someone imprisoned without having to charge them is a very useful thing – no one can prove they are innocent or prove that the accuser is mistaken. Again, once all efforts to communicate have been exhausted, we have to wash our hands of the affair. We cannot control people like this, and cannot burden ourselves with thoughts like, “If only I had done something different.” We can’t play their game by spending fruitless hours wondering what we have done – if it were really that bad, we would have figured it out already. If folks want to be wronged and the object of persecution, there is nothing we can do to change that desire.

The third kind. Oh boy, I am going to tell you a heartbreaking story. I was at a wedding once, by accident. I used to go around ministering with a team of people, about 15 years ago. We showed up at a home church group to find a wedding happening, and one of the people with me was expected to officiate because he was legally able to. After the wedding, we had Bible study. It couldn’t have been more awkward. The maid of honor was the most beaten down woman you could imagine, but she had found God and was desperately trying to change her life – imagine the shock of everyone when the Bride talked about her hopes for her new marriage, only to call her maid of honor a “four-time loser.” Yes, she had been divorced four times – it obviously was nothing she was proud of, but this dear saint was trying. She was trying with all her heart to turn her life around – only to have a best friend who was a hostage taker. The bride was keeping her maid of honor captive to past sins – always reminding, dragging her back to the scene of the crime, showing her the evidence, and never letting her forget about it. The bride wasn’t even the victim

of the sins of her friend, she was just disgusted by them and elevating herself above such things. The maid of honor had repented of her past life, was struggling to find a new one, but she was not able to move forward because she allowed people to drag her back.

Anyway, hostage takers make me ill. Hostage takers are about one thing – the power over life and death of those around them. Hostage takers are accusers of the brethren. Hostage takers can't stand repentance, restoration, or reconciliation. Hostage takers love the thought (even secretly) that those who offend them will burn in hell. No amount of change is enough, no amount of repentance, no reconciliation possible. It becomes such an addictive thrill, the ability to ruthlessly condemn, that they themselves become prisoners to it. They, who hold everyone else captive to their bitterness and offense, become powerless against it. They are offended because they live in a prison of offense, they are bitter because that is the existence they fashioned for others. They poison everything, and they are anti-Kingdom. They want the anti-fruits of enmity, dissensions, divisions, strife, outbursts of anger, jealousy, envy – they want to ruin all who offend them. They become blinded by the works of the flesh – they may not be out doing drugs and going to orgies, but they are murders in their hearts, and carry those murders out with their tongues slowly, over time, like a cat toying with a half-dead mouse. They desire the condemnation of those around them – they won't believe that the person who has offended them (whether real or imagined offenses) can suffer enough.

It is a horrible prison that they dwell in, with the torturer, and that they keep (or attempt to keep) others in. If you are at the mercy of a hostage taker in your everyday life, there is a book I want to recommend, because living with a hostage taker actually warps our ability to see clearly. Henry S Cloud's *Changes that Heal* – I read it years ago and it is a wonderful book. Just remember that abusers, like hostage-

takers, abuse by setting the rules for everyone else to live by – but it is a violation of their role as image-bearer because they do not rule and reign mercifully and forgivingly as Messiah shows us, but according to the works of the evil one that we see in Galatians 5:19-21.

Dec 6 – A Dream about those Drive-by Critics

That pernicious Iv

I thought I would be writing about the opposite of what I wrote about yesterday – those people in our lives who continually transgress and feel as though forgiveness and automatic reconciliation is something they are entitled to – but that will have to wait as I had an interesting dream about someone called Iv. No, I don't know anyone by that name lol.

It's the only dream I have ever had about a social media thread. Someone, no idea who – could have been me for all I know, posted something and then people commented. I remember my friend Ken was one of them. After a bunch of comments, I was getting ready to respond when Iv's comment comes up. It has nothing to do with the original post, at all, it is actually a point by point critique of all the comments that came before it! Her critique of me was actually something about my being barren, hardly pertinent to the discussion. I think it might have been some sort of totally inappropriate and ridiculous medical advice or some condescending reason for my barrenness that had no footing in reality. Unlike Lady Gaga, I actually was born this way lol.

Anyway, whatever comment was forthcoming, I was about to let Iv have it. Her response to the post was completely inappropriate – she was only there as a drive-by corrector, to show off her superior knowledge, to be everyone's teacher, everyone's personal unholy spirit. I would formulate comment after comment, only to erase them. There was no right way to respond to her, only more and less bad ones. People like this

tend to think that the world NEEDS their input, that their cleverness and knowledge (which are generally pretty shallow) are a gift to the world that MUST be shared. They see everything that needs to be corrected, and they must correct. They may not know much, but what they know (or think they know), they seek out ways to disseminate as widely as possible. Problem is, these people are often martyrs in their own minds – they fervently believe that their going around correcting everyone and sticking their nose into everything is an act of love when really, it's just an act of needing to insert oneself into the lives of others.

I used to do it, take my word for it. If something was “wrong” it was my duty as a superior being to deal with it. The more I grew, however, and the more knowledge I gained – well, in the first case I came to understand how badly I was damaging people with my constant nitpicking over things they were not yet able to change or overcome; the log in my own eye was so bad that I couldn't see that truth clearly. In the second case, I was really only interested in correcting everyone when I knew very little – as long as I only knew topics A, B, and C at a shallow level, I could zoom in on those and look for people to correct. Once I knew things at a level that couldn't be corrected in a comment, I increasingly had to give it up; good thing too – I didn't really know enough to correct people correctly anyway on my pet issues.

So – weird dream – no resolution. There was no good response that I ever came up with. No matter my response, the critic would have finagled a way to win, even if it was just through their illusion of martyrdom. Some people we just can't win with, there are only varying degrees of losing – unless we take advantage of the unfriend option and limit comments to friends. If you have one of these in your family, I recommend the same author as yesterday – Henry S Cloud, who has awesome books on setting boundaries and getting free of toxic influences in our lives.

