

BE092307  
Clean Sweep  
Week 3 – The Sell Pile

Now by this time, week 3 of our Clean Sweeping, you should have most of the major activities that consume your time identified. You should have them roughly categorized as things that pretty much HAVE to get done to keep life going (those are your COMMUNITY activities) and things that are UNIQUELY yours to do because your gifted, passionate, or BOTH gifted and passionate to do them.

Then you've spent some time alone with God in prayer and reflection and you've imagined your life without each and every one of these activities. In your imagination, you've SWEPT them out of your life and placed all of them on a big tarp, just like they do with all the junk they pull out of people's homes on the show.

Then you took a hard look at the pile and you began to pull out the things that serve as a barrier between you and God. Stuff that needs to be TOSSED. These include outright SIN, you know the big obvious stuff that's just hard to admit. You even received two lists right out of the Bible that you can compare a particular activity to, and see if it just automatically needs to be tossed: The lists were Galatians 5:19-21 and the 10 commandments. We also took a look at empty religious activity and talked about how to identify it, and ...TOSS it.

So, our first sort is done, at least on paper. We should now have a pretty solid handle on the stuff that needs to go.

But it's at this stage of a CLEAN Sweep that the realization that life is STILL cluttered hits. You've cleaned out all the refuse, and you still can't believe how much STUFF fills up your life. You're still left with a list of chores and hobbies that aren't IDOLS and they aren't OTHER kinds of SIN. They're not hollow religious activities...they're authentic, fun, life giving, or at the very least necessary. So what's a person to do!?

Well in the real life show: They SELL some stuff. The parallel we've drawn between the Clean Sweep Show and the internal Clean Sweeping we're doing here requires a little creativity: but follow me:

Let's say you've cleaned out your family room, and you've tossed all the old magazines, the junk mail that you keep SAYING you'll sort through and the broken record player, but you're still left with the hockey gear that you haven't used in 10 years, the books you've finished reading and the clothes that don't fit you anymore. Now, you simply can't see how keeping this stuff around makes any sense...you gave up hockey...you've already READ the books, and even if you put all that weight back on so that the old clothes fit again, they're already farther out of style than skinny ties and high water pants...

But at the same time...you recognize there is some value (timed) in these things, there's something REDEEMABLE in them. So when it comes to redeeming value out of stuff...what

do you do? That's right you sell it. You exchange your stuff for a certain number of THESE, and then you can take THESE and exchange them for something of REAL value.

See, it's easy to do this with STUFF in our society because we have an agreed to exchange method: it's currency.

But if there ISN'T an agreed to currency? Well it's a mess. There's an episode of the Twilight Zone that illustrates it perfectly....

In the future, a bar of gold isn't even worth a drink of water. That's the problem with our internal lives. We don't have a common currency that allows us to establish a value for something compared to something else.

Really, what is one hour of your time working in Kreek Kids compared to one hour of your time spent in prayer? What is 200 bucks spent on a special evening to let your wife know how loved she is compared to 200 bucks sent to starving children in Africa? How many hungry people have to be fed to equal one skeptic brought to Christ? Or maybe it's the other way around...how many people have to be brought to Christ to equal just one person who is saved from starvation? How many Bible verses memorized will earn you a night at the movies? How many movies for an evening with friends?

It SEEMS like nonsense doesn't it? How can you compare the value of time spent with your children to money spent on your elderly parents? How do you compare time in solitude seeking God's transforming power with time spent laughing and crying and being close with your brother's and sisters in Christ? How can you compare time spent in a seminary class with time spent in an alley praying with a homeless man?

You can't... Unless you have a common currency that measures the value of one thing against another.

Let me illustrate: Ever been to Chuck E Cheese's? It's an elaborate economy! You give the clerk some "real money", say \$20 and you get tokens for playing video games. You put a couple of tokens in a game and play for three minutes, and depending on your score, the machine then dispenses paper tickets. So over the course of the 2 longest hours of YOUR LIFE...you play all these different games, depositing all 20 bucks worth of tokens, and each time receive what seems to be an arbitrary number of paper tickets until you're tokens are gone and you have a handful of say, 100 tickets. Now what? Well you go to the Chuck E. Cheese "store" where you can trade your tickets for quality merchandise!

Kazoo? 20 tickets. Rubber snake? 50. Hershey bar, 75. Giant stuffed animal, 2000 tickets.

See how the economy works? You endured two hours of whining, crying shouting whirring flashing, clanging sticky, pizza encrusted mayhem, and now for your 20 bucks you're going to get a plastic kazoo. A rubber snake and 1/2 a Hershey bar?!

Friends, as you examine the activities in your life, think about each activity being worth a certain amount of paper tickets. At the end of your work day, your handed a certain number of tickets. At the end of your evening in front of the boob tube, you get a different number. After small group still another handful of tickets. After doing your chores, after wrapping a gift for your Aunt Macy, after changing the oil in the lawn mower, after posting a bulletin on My Space...you're handed some tickets.

What are you going to convert them to? What will you REDEEM with these tickets?

If we go back to our key verse for the Clean Sweep series, Paul tells us what He chose to buy with HIS tickets: But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Paul has a handful of paper tickets that he knows are WORTHLESS unless he redeems them for a currency that is actually WORTH something. Beginning in verse 3, Paul describes how he got all his tickets: If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

He's come to realize that ALL his religious activity, all his obedience to the law, his pedigree amounts to NOTHING if not redeemed into knowing Christ.

Here it is AC3, write it down: the last 10 minutes have all been leading to this: If you have TOSSED SIN and you have stuff left over, you have to ask yourself if it's redeemable for KNOWING CHRIST.

If you walk out of Chuck E Cheese with even ONE of those paper tickets – it's worthless. You can't redeem it anywhere else.

And if you walk out of your job, your ministry activity, your Bible study or THIS CHURCH SERVICE without having redeemed that activity for KNOWING CHRIST...then it's wasted.

Let me say it again. If you walk away from a vacation, a movie, making love to your spouse, eating a meal, or reading a comic book without having REDEEMED that activity for the purpose of knowing Christ – you wasted it. It's clutter and it's taking up space.

Here are some real world examples: A good portion of you have jobs, that you frankly don't like. It's just a way to put bread on the table. You HAVE to do it, so it's a COMMUNITY activity. Some of you might even HATE your jobs; but if you can't find a way to KNOW CHRIST in that job, if you can't REDEEM it for the Kingdom, then...all the effort, all your enduring is being wasted. It's profiting you in no real way. You're no different than a non-Christian in the same job. In some ways your WORSE off! The non-Christian gets to the end of HIS shift with the same number of paper tickets as you...but he's got taverns, and

prostitutes, and shiny new toys and any number of distractions he can spend HIS tickets on.  
But you, the Christ follower...you just have a handful of useless paper tickets.

Some of you are in struggling marriages. You might be thinking how easy it would be to TOSS it. Well you can't. With a few very specific exceptions, tossing a marriage is a SIN...so you MUST redeem it.

But you're thinking, "Fine. I'm just going to endure it. We'll get by. We'll keep God off our backs by not divorcing, but that's about all I can muster right now." Well friend, if you can't find a way to KNOW CHRIST in your marriage...to REDEEM your marriage for Christ...then BEING married doesn't matter. God will be as unimpressed and the Kingdom will be just as un-moved as it was by Paul's legalistic righteousness.

Some of you are struggling to find your place in a ministry, but nothing seems to fit. Some of you are feeling under-appreciated where you ARE serving, or seriously questioning some aspect of church life. Friend – if you don't find a way to REDEEM your church life, if you can't KNOW JESUS SOMEHOW in what you're doing...you're wasting your time and God's grace.

And guess what...Serving others and being in community are not OPTIONAL activities. There's no TOSSING your involvement in the body of Christ – so you better figure out how you're going to redeem it, how you're going to KNOW CHRIST through it.

Remember we talked about this last week – you don't measure the value of an activity based on how much work it might be, or whether it causes pain, or provides satisfaction.

We measure the value of a thing based on whether it advances the kingdom of God around us and IN us.

What value is contained WITHIN that job you hate? How much Kingdom potential is in there when it comes to learning to live with less, learning to be patient, kind and self-controlled? How about in terms of being the only source of light in a dark place? Now it's looking a little different isn't it? Now it's not just a job you hate: it's Kingdom potential.

It's not just a pile of old hockey gear at a garage sale – it's 25 dollars in cash!

I was talking with an Allen Creeker about last week's Clean Sweep service. He's just recently stepped into a new ministry opportunity. He's good at it. There's a need for it, he's enjoying it, but go figure, he listened to the message, and he put this new ministry out on the tarp to be sorted. And as he looked at it, as he evaluated whether it should be tossed...he saw that it met one of the criteria for tossing a religious activity: He was doing it to gain approval from people. People would slap him on the back and say WOW! You're good...and guess what he likes that! So he's motivated to do more.

Now does that mean this useful, fulfilling and excellent ministry should definitely be tossed?

Not necessarily. Why? Because to whatever extent his motives might be mixed (and ALL of us have mixed motives) his ministry is HIGHLY REDEEMABLE!

First of all it's needed, he's good at it AND he's passionate...but secondly (and best) he's opened himself up to God's transforming power by Clean Sweeping it – there's now great potential to KNOW CHRIST! In fact it's already happened...is HAPPEN - ING right now as he seeks God and brings before Him his need for approval. He's now asking questions like, God – do you love me if I don't do this? God, how much desire for approval is TOO much? Jesus, how did you model this for me in your life? Where can I find help in the scriptures? How can I purify my motives and still do this thing that moves the Kingdom forward? How can I share these learnings with others?

Do you see it now? It's redeemable! Church, the truth is: I wish EVERYONE of you would struggle like this with your ministries! I applaud this man for what he's doing because his PURPOSE is clear: to KNOW CHRIST.

My friend already knew that God's will for his life includes death to self, and service to others.

It's because he already knew this, that he was questioning in the FIRST PLACE! So his question wasn't "God is this your will for my life...he knew it was!" His question was, "God, how is what I'm doing redeemable for the Kingdom?"

Do you see the difference?

McManus said "if we would just stop and open the scriptures and open up our hearts, we would find enough of God's will to fill our entire day."

Paul didn't know for sure WHERE he was to go, but he knew WHY he was to go, and so the WHERE didn't really matter. He knew what his PURPOSE for living was; and God's purposes can be fulfilled in ANY setting.

What was that purpose again? Paul names it EXPLICITLY two separate times in our Clean Sweep Passage, and IMPLICITLY SIX times. The EXPLICIT will be in RED the IMPLICIT in BLUE. Read the whole passage out loud with me, but keep in mind Paul's PURPOSE...his WHY not his HOW:

7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And guess what friends...Paul got his wish; 2 Corinthians 11:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty

lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Was Paul whining? No. He was boasting! Do you see why? With his PURPOSE in mind, Paul's time in prison was not something to simply be endured; it's was REDEEMED for the sake of knowing Christ!

He learned to EMBRACE the beatings and persecutions; why? Because he likes that sort of thing? NO! Because they were REDEEMABLE for his life's PURPOSE.

Is it possible that you're dead end job might be redeemable then? How about your marriage? Your ministry? Is it possible that God might have a way to fulfill your life's PURPOSE of being like Christ in that setting?

You'll never extract enough money or satisfaction from a JOB! I don't care what you do! But you CAN extract the potential to become like Jesus from ANY job.

Friends we must change our perception of what makes an activity valuable from what that activity produces, to what that activity produces in us. Does it produce Christ? Then it is redeemable.

Don't think, "I'm going to TOSS it cause it's hard, it's inconvenient."

Thank God that Paul didn't think like that. Thank God the leaders of the second century church didn't think like that as they were thrown to the lions. Thank God that the Reformers, the Puritans and poor street preachers didn't think like that. That abolitionists and evangelists didn't think like that. That Gilbert Bilezekian and Bill Hybels and Steve Wile didn't think like that...cause if ANY ONE of them had lost sight of their WHY and got wrapped around the axle of how HARD their job was, or how hungry or poor or under resourced they were...I never would have met Jesus. If were still alive today, I would be Hell bound.

Who will be thanking God that you chose to REDEEM a circumstance in your life for the purpose of being like Jesus?

Allen Creek, today is the day that you take some of the dead weight in your life, the handful of useless paper tickets and you redeem them. Sell some of the tings that clutter your heart and mind, and in exchange you receive the most valuable thing possible.

Take the ticket you were given when you came in and hold it in your hand. Close your eyes now, and I want you to imagine a carnival scene. Noise, flashing lights, calliope music in the

background, the smell of sawdust, hot dogs and popcorn fill the air. Throngs of people moving to and fro, laughing, eating cotton candy.

Now picture yourself as a 7 year old child making your way up to the biggest, shiniest booth on the midway. The array of goodies and prizes in the booth is overwhelming! It towers above your little three foot frame as you look up in awe. There are stuffed animals, candy, and all manner of inflatable toys. Brightly colored flags and posters, giant balloons, noise makers and neon glow sticks. There are t-shirts and bouncy balls, games and pranks, things you have never seen before or even imagined, and you stand before this immense display holding a single paper ticket that says "Admit One" and has a number printed on it. You hold the winning raffle ticket in your sweaty, trembling little hand. You look at it and you can't believe that this little scrap of paper is worth your choice of ANYTHING in that huge display of goodies. All you have to do is redeem it. If you leave the carnival with it...it will become scrap paper. You can't buy anything at the regular store with it. It's worthless unless you spend it right here. And as you hold that ticket and contemplate that irony, you notice something out of place in the jumble of brightly colored plastic knick knacks and toys.

A pair of sandals. They're not new. They are in fact well worn. They're not even your size. They're meant for a grown up. Your little feet would look ridiculous in them. But there they are, lonely and almost un-noticeable amongst all the other things. Clearly, you are not the first raffle winner to stand here with a choice...but clearly no one else has chosen the tired leather sandals before, because they're still here. It would seem no one else wanted them compared to all the other prizes available...but you're drawn to them. You see something eternal in them, something much deeper than any piece of plastic or shiny metal; any cheap toy that you KNOW in you're heart will break long before you've had a chance to enjoy it.

You can't take your eyes off those sandals, You can't get your mind off the man who you know wore them. And you could have them. You could hold them, learn to walk in them, come to know HIM...and all you need to do is hand over that ticket.