

Life Can Be Messy

When we have children, we look into their innocent faces and dare to dream only about the good things...milestones, smiles and laughter. But when Dinah Monahan's daughter, Whitney, was just three years old, she discovered that her little daughter had been raped and molested by a 12-year-old neighborhood boy.

She says, *"For the first time in my life, I was faced with something that was so big, so horrible, so unthinkable that I couldn't take it in. My emotions were tumbling over each other faster than I could identify them. I felt:*

- *Guilt, anger*
- *Betrayal*
- *Sadness*
- *Loss*
- *Failure*
- *Helplessness*
- *A desire to die*
- *A desire to kill*
- *Overriding them all was hatred.*

She says, *"I felt the seed of hatred plant itself firmly in my heart and begin to flourish."* These are understandable feelings for something so horrible! But Dinah knew that as a Christian, she should not be feeling this way.

How can you forgive people for the horrible things they do to you?

For Dinah, *"The path to forgiveness would take, not effort or striving on her part, but rather surrender."*

Maybe your life was also messy; experiences of neglect, abandonment and/or abuse. This series is about an honest relationship with God and ourselves. It is about becoming unshackled from the lies of the past.

Offering Our Worst to God

Many Christians, while well meaning, place a terrible yoke upon women. Often, this bondage comes from those in leadership positions within the Church. Ministers need to keep their churches running smoothly. To do this, they need willing bodies. And so, unintentionally, they equate performance with spirituality. They challenge us to strive to become all that we can for God. *Give God our best translates into attending church and singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, etc., and we will be rewarded.*

But God doesn't want our best—He wants our worst.

As Jesus did so many times in His ministry, He made it very clear that performance without a pure heart is worthless to God. The condition of our hearts is what counts. *Without even realizing it, many of us do good works so we can come to God and, like the Pharisee, attempt to impress Him with our offerings while we shield our hearts from His touch.*

Cleaning House

I liken our hearts to a house. On the outside it is beautiful. It is whitewashed to a sparkling brilliance. Everyone who passes by admires it. But inside, it is shambles. The floorboards are rotted. The walls are filled with gaping holes. The ceiling is falling in, and the stench of rotting garbage is overwhelming.

Our hearts are often like this house. We look so good on the outside. We are involved in our women's group at church. We sing in the choir and teach Sunday school. We respond dutifully when called upon for service. *God doesn't want or need any of the wonderful things we do.*

I am not suggesting that God doesn't use what we do. Or that what we do is not important to the Church. But God wants our hearts first (the dirty inside, not the spiffy outside), and then these other things will follow in their proper order.

In the Bible, King David prayed:

"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:16–17).

Most of us have lots of rot and garbage in our hearts. We just never get up the courage or feel the need to examine ourselves. Instead, we simply apply another coat of paint to the outside of the house and hope nobody looks inside. And then we righteously point our finger at those with the same flaw, hoping that by doing so, ours will go unnoticed.

We fool ourselves into thinking we are really performing for God, but He is not impressed. Neither, however, is He surprised by what is inside our house. In fact, He knows every rotten feeling we have, every bitterness, every hatred, every vile thought and secret behavior. He knows them, and He wants them.

Pray this to surrender: "Lord, I want to hate. I want to hurt. I can't fix it. I can't change it. I can't overcome it. I can only surrender it to you. Take my hatred and replace it with YOUR forgiveness."

God's forgiveness is infinite and all-encompassing.

Scriptures:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing far off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" Christ went on to say, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10–14).

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God can "raise up rocks to sing his praises" (Luke 19:40).