

What are your most valuable possessions? Could you ever give them away? Who is so precious you cannot imagine living without? Consider all of the things in your life that you will hang on to with every ounce of being. And what we treasure the most is what we hold on to the tightest.

On the other hand, stuff we don't value should be easy to get rid of, right? There are things we break and don't mind tossing them immediately away, right? If that is so, one might ask why we even had them in the first place.

To carry that a step farther, why do we cling to worthless items like prejudice, fear, or grief. Because we hang onto such worthless feelings we wind up with unintended issues like anger, high blood pressure, or guilt. How often has a relationship been destroyed simply because someone simply refused to admit they had been wrong?

One day Jesus said that no matter how valuable a seed might be, it is useless unless it is thrown into the ground. Seeds guaranteed future life and were as valuable as life itself. But new life will emerge ONLY if a seed is buried in the earth. Everyone knows it is true. Only in such surrender can new life emerge!

Jesus used that image to discuss his own death and resurrection. His mission would be successful only if he were planted in a tomb. Until his life was surrendered to death, we could not harvest of new life he intended from the beginning. In other words, without Good Friday there can be no Easter.

His intent was not only to bury his life but to carry with him all the worthless and broken stuff of our lives, such as grief, guilt, fear, and mortal death. He buried that as well so new life might emerge for you and for me.

In Toledo, one of my favorite members was an old Polish roofer named "Ernie." He looked like a wrestler and was tough as nails. He could shave at 6 am and have a 5 o'clock shadow an hour later. His arms were full of muscle and he was not someone who smiled very often. For some reason, he made it obvious from my first day in the congregation he was not happy I was the pastor.

One day he left work early to come to my office. I couldn't imagine what I had done that would have him even more unhappy with me, and I was a bundle of nerves. He sat down and said, "Pastor, when you came, I hated you. I didn't like the seminary you went to. I was sure you were a young know-it-all, and we were not going to see eye to eye on anything. I see now I was wrong. You were not what I expected. Now, I love you!" He became a good friend!

Think about the irony of the toughest blue-collar guys I ever met in Toledo, who once fell 40 feet down an elevator shaft, and emerged with only a bruised leg, telling a young pastor with long hair, "I love you!" But he buried what he needed to bury, and new life surprised us both!

Whatever we value, we hang on to tightly, and the more valuable something is, the tighter we cling. Although it is counter-intuitive, part of our weakness called "sin" means that we also cling

to what is harmful and depressing. It doesn't make sense, but we do it anyway. Jesus said, why not give it to me instead?

Grace is the surprise which allows whatever we surrender to God's love to be blessed, reshaped, and given a new purpose! What seems impossible to the world (like forgiving AND forgetting) becomes the gift of Jesus' love.

This makes no sense to a broken world. Just read the daily accounts of how people attack, destroy, and hurt each other because they have been hurt. And everyone wonders why nothing ever changes. But that is why we call the Friday of Jesus' death GOOD and can face death with HOPE and PEACE! When we take time to confess what is broken in our lives, we are learning to let go of what is harmful, embarrassing, or what should be buried.

Confession doesn't give God information He doesn't have but is the first step in letting go as a corollary of faith! Anything we hang on to keeps us from having arms open to welcome God, or faithfully engage in forgiving love.

Unresolved guilt, grief, or terrifying fear is no different than a child who can't let go of his favorite binkie, or someone who can't let go of the past. Every broken item in life must be buried for new life to begin, *otherwise sin keeps us distant from God and alone from those around us. Such a surrender is like planting a seed and believing that something new will emerge.*

This is not hiding from, ignoring, or repressing bad memories ... it is FAITH! Whatever you cling to is what defines you! Whatever you won't let go of is what controls you! The surrender of faith doesn't mean I am weak but have learned the strength of letting go. We can only hold on to Jesus if we let go so our arms are open to allow him to embrace us!

Years ago, I visited a close friend in the hospital who was near death. Two doors down my first wife was facing the same reality in her life. Knowing he would soon be in heaven, Leigh said to me, *"Both of us understand that, for us, faith must be real. We can no longer hide or pretend."* He understood what it meant to surrender and do so with the smile and power of faith! And he wanted me to know so that I could learn to let go in the same way!

*"Unless a grain of wheat (an argument, a memory, or "my need") falls into the earth and dies it will remain alone and lifeless ... but if it dies it bears MUCH fruit.* Faith is all about surrender, and it began for us when God surrendered heaven for a manger and the life of Jesus for a tomb. Faith is simply about surrender!