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A Lesson on Leanness (November–December 1971)

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Editor's note: H. A. Knecht, a retired business man from the Province of Quebec, appeals for a deeper spiritual life among Christians. We might well lay to heart this lesson on the lack of spiritual vigour.

(2 Samuel 13:4)

"Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" (2 Sam. 13:4). Jonadab did not just say, "Why art thou lean from day to day?" Rather, he asked Amnon, "Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" What makes the question important is that Amnon was the king's son, and being such, there would surely be nothing withheld from him that would be for his benefit. As heir to the throne, the health of the king's son would be of the greatest concern and would be zealously guarded lest anything should detract from his having a healthy, robust, vigorous body. His food would be especially prepared for him and suited to his particular needs in order that he could readily assimilate it and grow to maturity. It would be of the utmost folly for him to be fed with that which would cause him to become lean from day to day, to grow weaker and weaker, and to become unable to function in his kingly capacity when ultimately called upon to reign. This is only common sense and apparent to all of us.

Now, we are the sons not just of a king, but of the King of kings. How is it with us? Are we becoming lean from day to day? The Apostle Peter has said that our heavenly

Father has provided "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). He has saved us, sealed us with His Holy Spirit, given us His Holy Word, cast our lines in pleasant places, and has provided all other things needful for us. Why, then, should we become lean from day to day?

It must grieve our Lord to see any one of His children becoming lean from day to day, since there has been no lack of sustenance provided that we might assimilate it and develop normally. Though we are the King's sons, are we neglecting the spiritual food He has provided for us in His Word? Is what we are feeding on leaving us weaker and weaker, so that ultimately we will be unable to stand and resist the adversary in the day of testing? Is it possible that we find the leeks, the onions, and the garlic of Egypt's enslavement more palatable than the manna supplied by our Father in Heaven?

Or is it possible that we are wholly unconscious of the fact that we are becoming lean from day to day? Or, if we do not know it, does it not alarm us as to the consequence of continuing in such folly? Is there no way, are there no guide lines, to enable us to measure the state of our spiritual health? Are we left alone to aimlessly drift in the dark after we have been saved? Or does the Word of God supply us with the answers? We believe it does.

Some Causes

The Scriptures tell us much about the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. Which one gets the victory is up to us personally, for we have a choice in the matter. The Lord has said "There will always be war with Amalek,"

so the fight will never be over this side of glory. One of the clues to living a victorious Christian life is found in Galatians 5:16, where we read "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." And Galatians 6:7-8 reminds us, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Why, then, should we, being the King's Sons, be lean from day to day? Here are five reasons, any one of which might contribute to our becoming lean.

Neglecting prayer. The beginning of our backsliding can almost with certainty be traced to the time when we left off praying to God. Communion with Him, seeking renewed strength at the beginning of the day, is among the top priorities of our Christian life. We need to pray.

Neglecting to read God's Word. The Word of God is that spiritual food needed by the "new man" in Christ in order that he may grow spiritually. Reading and meditating on the Scriptures are necessary for its assimilation so that we may grow to maturity.

Neglecting the assembly meetings. The words of Hebrews 10:25 exhort us as follows: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The flock needs shepherding and feeding - the whole flock - not just a few of them. If we neglect the regular meetings of the local assembly we need not be surprised if we become spiritual paupers.

Neglecting to keep short accounts with God. In I John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We should confess our failures to God as soon as we are conscious of them. Putting it off until later may well cause us to forget most of them, and then how can they be confessed? Nor can we confess them, as it were, in a bundle. Asking forgiveness for our sins and actually confessing (i.e., naming them) is a very different thing.

Mixing too freely with the world. In I John 2:15 we are exhorted, "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We are saved eternally, if we are saved at all. However, we can and will become just like those who are going down to the Pit if we do not periodically take stock to see how we stand with God and put things right when it is necesary to do so.

Some Things to Avoid

There are three things in our relation with the Holy Spirit that we are told to avoid. First, we are instructed, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). Sin, where tolerated in a Christian's life, destroys spirituality. The Spirit's main work on our behalf is to guide and instruct us in the Word of God, but this ministry is interrupted when He is grieved. He leaves off doing this to plead with us to repent and confess our sins so that we might return to our first love. Where this is neglected, His instruction ceases for the time being and our spiritual progress is stunted as a result. Second, we are exhorted in I Thessalonians 5:19 to "Quench not the

Spirit." How can we quench the Spirit? When we say no to God, it is like throwing water on a fire. We suppress and subdue the Spirit in our unyieldedness to God's known will. Third, we need to avoid limiting the Spirit's ability to use us. This is perhaps the most common failing of all. We get an opportunity for some service for God, but we are too timid to step out. We thus limit the Spirit's ability to use us and we end up doing nothing - and later regret it.

These are but a few things that could make us lean from day to day, and perhaps there are others you yourself know only too well. Beloved, there is an urgent need for revival in our midst; a humbling of ourselves as individuals and as assemblies; a soul-searching to find out why we are so lean, why, as it were, God is hiding His face. Each of us needs to ask himself the question, "Is there anything in my life that is causing God to withhold the blessings I so earnestly need and desire?"

Tell me, "Why art thou, being the King's son, lean from day to day?"