

## Turning the Crap of Life, Into the Fruit of the Spirit

### Baggage

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#### Life Questions:

What in your life keeps you from being the real person you think God made you to be? What circumstance in your past keeps you held back? What are you using as your reason for not serving the Lord?

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Before I leave the house I have three things with me: phone, wallet and keys. Regardless of where I am going I have those three things with me. They are my baggage of daily living. Like me, I am sure you have a ritual that you go through that entails getting all the things necessary to make your life easier. Maybe you carry a computer, backpack, etc. Regardless you have to have a few things to get through the day.

When I carried a backpack I realized that there was a lot of space inside. Lots of room for the little things I needed. So, rather than make a trip back home I decided to start packing everything I thought I would need for the day. Over time I began to realize that the pack was getting heavier and heavier. No problem. I can just remove a few things. But, what I realized when I looked inside was that I didn't consider anything worth leaving behind. Everything had a use, and I was always concerned that the one time I removed that item I would have a need for it. Over time the pack got so heavy that the straps started to break.

No problem. I will buy a bigger backpack; same problem. So eventually I realized it wasn't poor quality of the backpack, but the amount of material I was dragging around.

Do you feel that weight? Are you dragging around a pack of stuff that you know you don't need? Are you allowing that to weigh you down from the things God has for you?

You see, with this pack, I wasn't able to walk properly. It was so heavy that it over balanced me. When someone would talk to me I would have to studder-foot because of the weight. Shifting back and forth, I am pretty sure they thought I was crazy. But that pack was really heavy. Is yours?

I am so sure that things in my past are things that are going to be a part of me forever. There is no way around it. No matter what I do, it is going to haunt me for the rest of my life, so I pack it in. Over time I find that a backpack just doesn't cut it anymore so I go with one of those suitcases. There is plenty of room for all the things in my life: bad relationships, friends that hurt me, family that bothers me, work that I hate. Everything packs in nicely.

But after a while even that isn't enough. Not a problem. I'll go to Target and get a suitcase that rolls. Oh this is much nicer. There is more room than I could imagine. Hey now I can do some things with my life. I have more room than there're. Then hurt, heartache, pain all come back in and take up that case as well. Eventually, I am left with no room.

And there is a problem. When I try to go places, there isn't enough room to get my suitcase in with me. How can I drag this suitcase down the aisle at church? It's so big. Everyone will want to know what is in it. And if I take it to small group, they will want to help me with it, or suggest that I leave it at home.

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Well, that isn't going to happen. I need this stuff. Ever wonder why people sit alone? They aren't sitting alone. They are surrounded by their suitcases, and their baggage is keeping them company.

You keep buying bigger and bigger bags. Each time you think, this is enough. I will never need another one. But inevitably you do. Eventually, you find that you need a bigger vehicle to take all your baggage around with you. After a while, even that isn't enough. More hurt, more pain and more disappointment all fill up the space I thought I had for doing God's work. Those people, what do they know about me? They aren't any help to me.

Then you realize that you can't take all this stuff anymore. So, what do you do? You stay home. No need to get out anymore. After all, where would I put everything? I can't take this stuff out. People will find out. I have to hide it. And before you know it, your house, car and garage are all full. You even buy a storage unit to store your baggage. Congratulations, you are a baggage hoarder!

And with that there's no need for church. After all, what would they say about me? What would they think about all the baggage I have been carrying? And imagine if they found out what was in that bag? What would they do to me? How would they treat me?

Well, there are people in the bible that had baggage. They had a lot of it. Moses, the guy that lead Israel out of Egypt was a murderer. Wow, can God use a man like that? Seems He did. Elijah, the great prophet of God could be the most polar opposite. After his great victory through God, he was hiding, scared and afraid. These were just some of those with baggage. So how did they deal with it? What did they do? Take Paul for example:

**1. Immediately put it down!**

**Acts 9:20-22**

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

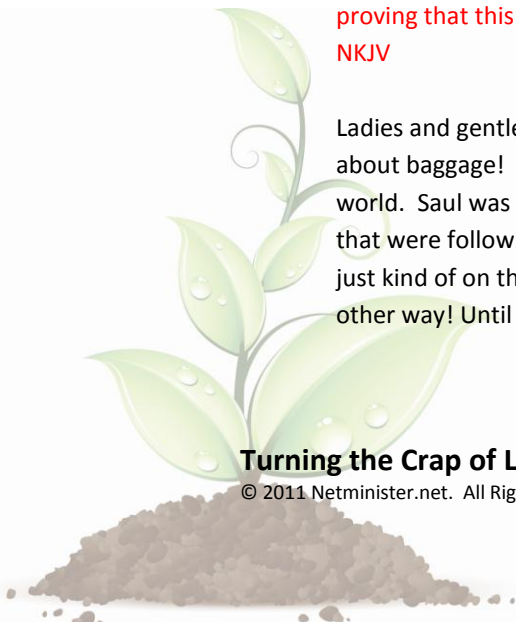
22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

NKJV

Ladies and gentleman, here is Paul, formally known as Saul. You remember Saul right? Boy, talk about baggage! He wasn't just opposed to Jesus, he was actively trying to root Him out of the world. Saul was present when Steven was stoned. He was given authority to persecute those that were following Jesus, even if it meant hunting them down. This wasn't someone who was just kind of on the fence. He was not a good guy. When you saw Saul coming, you went the other way! Until . . .

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On a simple road to a place called Damascus, Jesus had a talk with Saul. In that moment, everything about Saul changed. Not just his physical side, yes he lost his eyesight, but the man was changed. His companions lead him to town where a believer came and prayed for Saul, baggage and all! Imagine that, someone coming to you and knowing what you had done AND he STILL prays for you!

But what was Saul's, now Paul's response? Was it no I can never be a preacher after what I have done? Sorry, I am not allowed to do those things because I was bad in the past. Don't you see my baggage? Don't you people see the loads of stuff I am dragging along with me? Here I have changed my life, isn't that enough? Isn't being saved enough? I have changed. I'm better now so I will just sit and wait. Isn't that often our response? Oh, at least he has been saved. It is enough for us because of our baggage. Was it enough for Paul? Most certainly not! And it isn't for you either.

He didn't just want to tell a few friends about Jesus. NO. He went immediately to the Synagogue. The original word for immediately means as in that moment. Imagine someone getting saved with the horrible baggage of Paul suddenly starting to preach!

Hold on there tiger! Now just hang on a minute. You need to do other things first, right? This wasn't Paul's approach. He immediately changed. How about you? God has saved you. Why are you still holding that bag in your hand? Aren't you using it more as a shield against doing God's work? It didn't stop Paul. He dropped it. Notice if you read on, the people wanted to hand it back to him. Some even wanted to kill him.

Do you have people trying to hand you back the baggage you have dropped off? Someone running down the road hollering at you, "Stop! I have your bag!". People remind you how someone with your checkered past probably should consider other areas of work? **DON'T TAKE THAT BAG BACK!**

When Paul began to teach, he wasn't teaching a small group. Imagine if someone like Osama Bin Ladin had been to Damascus? How would the world react? What would we say? And how would we react if he was even better than Billy Graham at preaching!? This is pretty close. Paul didn't just do an okay job, he astonished those around him. Here was someone throwing his baggage down and running to the arms of Jesus.

Ever seen service people coming home? They get off the plane with a bag(s) in their hand. But when they see their family or loved ones, what do they do? That bag hits the ground! Forget this bag, I am going for what is most important. That is how Jesus is with you. Will you respond that way for Him? Will you immediately drop your baggage and run to Him? Paul did and look what Jesus did with this guy Paul who said he was the worst of us all. Imagine what He can do with you. Drop that baggage.



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## 2. Learn, it doesn't happen overnight

### Phil 4:11-13

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

NKJV

Late night commercials promise you can lose weight without diet or exercise; that you can be rich without risking your own money; and that you can fix dinner in under 5 minutes all for \$19.95. It is amazing. Too bad it isn't the case. You want to lose weight, guess what: you have to reduce calories and burn more than you have taken in. It is simple. But it is also learned.

Paul tells us, he has had to learn to be content. It is a process. I know what you are doing right now. You dropped your baggage, but you are looking at it, missing it. Thinking how nice it would be to hold it just one more time. Just one more time, that is all I want. Right? Wrong!

Paul is learning. It's a process. That word process implies an action of effort. He has to try. And that means that somedays it is easy. Being content to leave that baggage is easy on days when everything is going great. Your spouse is happy, work is great, and money is flowing in. But when things aren't great, we have a tendency to finger the handle of the baggage again, just to get a feel for it. Because inside that baggage are all the excuses, all the denials, all the things that people will expect from us. All we have to do is grab the bag. People are offering to help us with it.

Ever been around someone hurt in the past? That baggage is always a way to keep people at bay in the future. But when we immediately lose it, we have to learn to let people in. We have to practice.

Imagine a professional athlete who doesn't practice. How good will that person be after a while? How much skill honing will happen over time? Eventually, that athlete's ability to perform will decline. So too will ours if we keep going back to those heavy bags. They weigh us down, torture our minds and break down our bodies. We have to learn to let go.

You need two things when you are learning. First, it you need time and second, you need Christ. We have to give ourselves time to learn. We have to put effort into learning. Have to spend time practicing. For a Christian, that practice time is time spent in God's word and prayer. If we don't do that, when problems come, someone will hand you back that baggage in an instant. Is



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that what you want? Of course not! Take time now, before the game, to sharpen your skills, to hone your craft and to learn His word.

Can you do it alone? Nope. I know I cannot. I really want to go back to those bags and onto them again. For all the bad things inside, at least I understand. I don't always understand how to be strengthened through Christ.

Without practice, I will never know. How do people deal with severe problems in their lives? You look at them and wonder, yet what you are seeing is Christ working through them. Having a life that Christ strengthens means exercising that spiritual muscle, just as any athlete would. Working out, if you will, with Jesus.

But Paul tells us he has gone through good and bad times to learn that skill. He grew his spiritual muscle with Jesus by going through the situations together. To you and me, that means dealing with painful memories, past failings and times when we have been hurt. That only comes through a commitment of time and effort. Are you expecting to gain that muscle with only 5 minutes a day? Bad news, if you can't lose weight that way, you can't strengthen that spiritual muscle that way either. You have to learn it and that takes time, it doesn't happen overnight.

#### **Final Thought:**

So you are sitting there now. Is there baggage around you? What are you going to do with it? Seems like all it is good for is weighing you down. Why don't you put it away. Just drop it. Let it go. People will try to give it back to you. Just refuse. Satan hates when you refuse, and so do a lot of people. I wonder if they know who they are siding with? Hum. And once you put it down, learn to live without it. It isn't going to happen right away. There isn't going to be a moment of no more but a life learning to leave it. People will see that in you. They will respond to your change. Once that weight is gone you may even be surprised at yourself. Imagine a life without baggage. Learning to live free. That is the goal of Christ in your life, freedom through him. If Paul can do it, so can you. I am praying for you now to let that baggage go forever, and learn to live without it.



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