

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

Settling for Less . . .

Life Questions:

When was the last time you settled for something less than what you wanted? How did that make you feel, today as you think about it, what do you think now? Has there ever been a situation that you settled for less than the best outcome because it was easier than trying harder?

Dude, you need to lower your expectations! Ever heard that? Probably have. Maybe you were the one kindly telling a friend how his efforts to attract a certain woman were going to prove fruitless. Perhaps you are listening to your child paint a dramatic image of their life as a dancer, singer or poet. All the while you are trying to gently guide them into a less demanding place. We like people to settle, because it makes the times we settled seem less stressful.

Ever seen a press conference when a new football coach is hired? As to a man, most will say something along the lines of we will not be perfect but we are going to do our best. Those coaches may be good, but they never achieve greatness. Their efforts are put into going 8 and 6 or 9 and 5. To which the football team may give them even more money. But that team never achieves perfection because they never believed in trying to get there. Instead, they are happy settling for being mediocre, middle of the road.

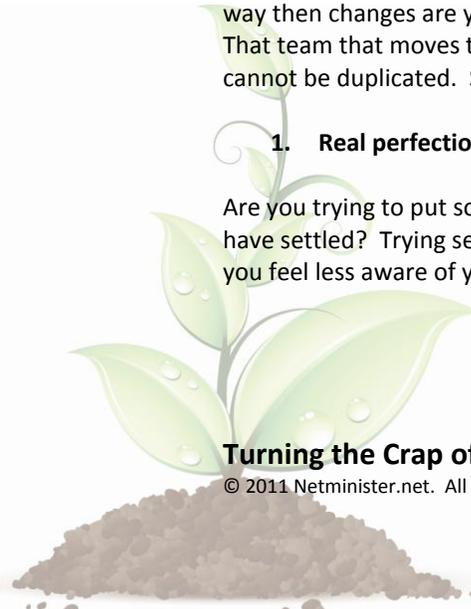
The glory years. Yes we all have them at some point in our life. Our favorite team's period of greatness, whatever level that was. How we can so easily live within that past. Missing what is going on today because of the "I remember when" years. Churches do that just like football teams do. Football teams that once had glory, once were a powerhouse never return until the leadership focuses on bringing it back.

It is not easy, but when a new coach comes into a former powerhouse team, he has to instill within his players the desire to return to glory. Some of those players won't make it. He will send them home. They can go play mediocre for another team, he is seeking out those that desire something more. Do you? Are you seeking God to return to a past glorious time when you could feel His presence within you?

Or perhaps you are striving for that first time. Your team never had a history of greatness, instead it was always a middle of the road, mediocre team. There is not past glory to hang your hat on. If you are this way then changes are you may have given up without even knowing that there is something even greater. That team that moves to perfection, which realizes their dream of being the best that is something that cannot be duplicated. So it is with our life with Christ.

1. Real perfection is only found in Christ

Are you trying to put something in there? Are you trying to fill the void you have in your life because you have settled? Trying sex, drugs, alcohol, money, women, power, men – whatever you can find to make you feel less aware of your settling.



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Misery, we are told, loves company. It is so easy to look at someone else that has settled and be drawn into his approach to life. I mean seriously, look at the house he has, the car he drives, the second or is it the fourth wife he has. But it is all temporary.

Matt 16:26-27

26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

NKJV

Do you know people who have traded their soul for power? I do. I know a man right now that has given up his family, his Savior, everything so that he can be two things: rich and known. That is all he wants. To be rich and to be known. He has settled. Gotten off the road of life, first by pitching his tent, but now he has built his mansion. Here. His treasure is not in heaven, but here on earth.

How many people have settled on the road of life? Just stopped, setup camp for a short time but eventually moved the tent for a house. Made their presence permanent, because this is really as good as it gets. It is easy too, we love to have people settle with us. Hey you don't have time for God, neither do I, come on let's go to the ballgame.

Matt 6:19-21

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

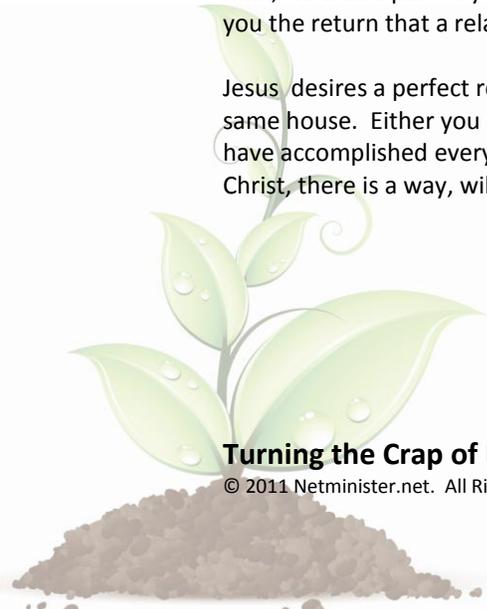
NKJV

Have you ever looked into an old closet, box or hidden area of the house only to find something that looks remarkable valuable. You reach for it only to realize that time has virtually destroyed it. No longer beautiful, it is broken, destroyed.

Look back on the positive moments in your life, how many of them are associated with some-thing, rather than somewhere. I began to realize with my daughter that she doesn't remember the really cool things we have given her, she tends to remember the times we are together.

While I cannot give her anything she wants in the world, I can give her what she desires, my time. Me. That is what your Heavenly Father desires of you. There really is not anything else that He could want from you except to know you. He wants more than anything to have a relationship with you. That means time, He wants part of your time. Nothing else in the world, not school, not secrets of life – nothing gives you the return that a relationship with Christ provides.

Jesus desires a perfect relationship with us. Perfection and settling are two things that don't live in the same house. Either you are one or the other. If you want to settle, stop reading right now, congrats, you have accomplished everything that you wanted to not accomplish. But if you want to know perfection in Christ, there is a way, will you like it? Probably not, however, in the end, the reward is insurmountable.



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2. You have to work to be perfect. Perfection never settles

Phil 3:12-13

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.¹³

NKJV

I hate exercise. Though I must admit, I don't know many that love it. Some endure it, many try to do it, but only a very few really love it. Those weirdos as I like to call them, get a benefit in their health, their ability and their overall lifestyle. We all know it. You read about how exercise does a body good. But, gosh it is a real pain to do.

Take getting ready for a race. You start practicing, you lose a little weight, you feel good. As time goes on you push yourself harder you feel even better. More weight loss. Over time you start to feel better than you have ever felt before. Then one morning you find a wonderful excuse not to exercise. Maybe it was legitimate. The next morning, you waiver a little bit. Maybe you do a shorter workout. Over time, you look back one day to realize that you have stopped. No race for you. But you do need bigger pants.

Working out is easy, exercising everyday as you should, that is tough. You need encouragement, because results are never immediate. They take time. But it is the effort in the end where it pays off the most.

Here Paul tells us that he hasn't achieved it, but he is pressing onward that he can lay hold of the perfection that Christ has before him. Just because he will never achieve it doesn't mean that he is not working with all his might to get to it. Why? Why would someone work their entire life for a goal that is completely unachievable? Because it is the life lived that is the reward! When we lose that, then it is easy to settle.

You are looking for a perfect church and it isn't out there. Ask any pastor about issues in your church and you will almost assuredly be given this wonderful nugget of nonsense. Why nonsense? Are there really perfect churches? Of course not but how many of us have settled at church because it is easier than pressing on for more out of our relationship with God, through our church? It is a lot easier to sit down, you don't have a problem with anyone when you settle, besides those people that refuse to settle eventually wear themselves out and leave. So you can just wait it out.

And why do we settle at church? Because we settle at home. I am too busy to read my bible, too busy to go to church, too busy to help in that activity. Then you are settling for the least from the One that provides the greatest in return. When we lose that desire, it is because we have lost the ability to see the value of what Christ has done for us.

Phil 3:14

14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

NKJV

What prizes are you pressing for? Money, fame, power? All will be gone. Someone is always at the ready to snatch those things away from us. Beauty? As we age, time takes that away from even the most amazingly beautiful people. Why do you think plastic surgeons makes so much? Because they can add life to our beauty, but eventually even their skills come up short. The only prize that doesn't diminish, cannot be taken away, is the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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Like exercise, you have to be disciplined with growing in God's word. Sometimes there is an immediate response, but for the most part it is a steady learning. Takes time, effort, discipline and commitment – things that show us that we value what the end-result is. Do you value growing in Christ? Growing your relationship with Him? What are you going to give up to do it? What is less valuable than your relationship with Christ? Might want to re-evaluate, re-examine where you are.

3. Perfection Is Difficult, It Requires a Commitment

Matt 7:13-14

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

NKJV

You have to make a choice to not settle. See settling is easy. There is not much easier than just stopping. But there is a problem with that effort, it stops our journey. Jesus is telling His disciples that there are two paths, only two.

One path leads to destruction, there are a lot of people on it. Not only are there a lot of people on it, but the path is wide and broad. Have you ever been in a city and walked past a dark, tight alleyway thinking, that is not a place to be in at night? That is not the case here. This path is wide, it looks good, easy to navigate, there is plenty of company already on it, so you would never be alone, except that this path will take you to a place you do not want to go.

To the contrary, the path that leads to life is narrow. Not only is it narrow, but it is also difficult. Do you hear that word, difficult. It is not easy. Why? If it were easy it would not be a life devoted to Christ. In this world, we are told that we will have trouble. Trouble comes because we are continuing on a narrow and difficult road.

If you are wondering which road you are on, there is a simple solution: if you have no trouble in this world, it is safe to say you are on the broad road. Get off before it is too late!

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

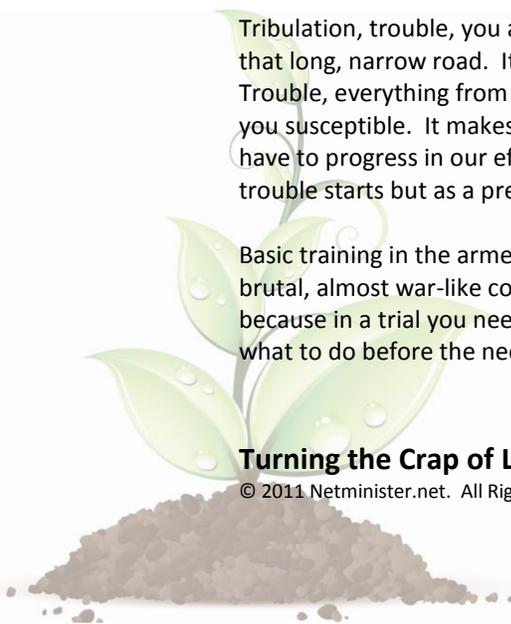
NKJV

Tribulation, trouble, you are going to have it. There is no getting around it. Satan is coming after you on that long, narrow road. It is going to be a problem, everyday you will have to prepare yourself for it. Trouble, everything from sickness, death, financial trouble, it is coming. You see being on that road makes you susceptible. It makes you vulnerable. That is why a relationship with Christ is so important, why we have to progress in our efforts, we have to spend time in God's word, prayer time. Not just when the trouble starts but as a preparation, ahead of time.

Basic training in the armed services is meant to do one thing, break you down. Training is meant to be brutal, almost war-like conditions. Why? Because the drill instructor is mean? Maybe, but mostly because in a trial you need to know how to react BEFORE it begins. You need to have the ability to know what to do before the need arises.

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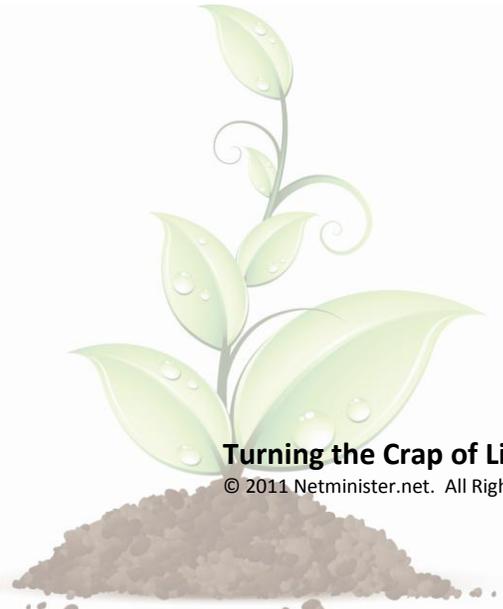
In advanced military training, such as SEALs and special forces, training is done under incredible brutal circumstances with the added caveat of keeping up with all those that are taking the training with you. In other words, not only are you being trained, but you are being trained to keep an eye out so that you never leave a comrade behind on the battlefield. Imagine that in your life. Do you train yourself to be ready so that when a problem comes you have been so immersed in God's word that it doesn't matter how dry the desert, you are still soaking wet? Do you realize when a brother or sister in Christ has fallen out? Are you watching around you to see?

When we realize that it is not just ourself going through a trial, that others are hurting on this difficult road, we can either be encouraged and help them or become bitter and discouraged to the point of either settling where we are or even worse, going down the other path.

Jesus never settled, so why should we? Jesus endured the cross, the shame the humiliation, all for you and I. He never settled. Neither should we. If you are, then it is time to tear down the dwelling you have built, take up your belonging, and don't forget your cross. And we need to follow Him down that narrow path. How do you do that? You stop settling for the best the world is offering and you press for the goal of His calling on your life. Expect more, demand more from yourself, your church and your life!

Final Analysis:

Take a look around you for a moment. Not a physical look, but a spiritual look. What do you spend your time on? Baseball, basketball, football or some other event? Five years down the road, what will you have? Ten? Twenty? When some finally dressed fellow pronounces you passed from this world, what will people remember you for? Will it be the dad that screamed like a banshee at the little league game or will it be as the man that never settled. Settling isn't for a child of God. He never wants anything but the very best for you. Are you striving to see the very best or have you settled? Are you willing to give up what you have, that place on the side of the road of life to get back out on the dusty trail again, narrow and difficult as it is to see the perfection. Will Jesus be able to tell you that you pressed on for the prize of His calling? If not, what else is there? What are you holding onto? Please tell me what is so important that you would give up the greatest relationship ever for it?



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