

*Dear Friends,*

*Life Lessons from the Owings' Household:*

Today, I couldn't help but write from my heart, it's one of those times around here. I want to share my heart with you about my own human struggle with stress, expectations and performance. We all face at least one of these items every week and possibly every day. The pressures we face in life cause major stress in our physical and emotional beings. I counsel people weekly that are facing unbelievable heartache and stress.

How do you deal with stress, expectations, and performance? There are so many options to choose from: medication, anger, stuffing, ignoring, prayer, or seeking help, just to name a few. According to countless medical journals, stress is the number one affliction that causes physical and mental illness. Many times we become fixated on a particular situation in our lives. The fixation, not the actual situation, becomes the catalyst for the anxiety, pressure or stress that manifests itself in our lives. When this happens, our minds consciously or sub-consciously freeze on the issue, and the loop begins. Around and around we go, where it stops no one knows. The Bible nailed it when it said, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he becomes." We chew on these thoughts over and over again. We begin to define ourselves and our lives based on the stress or performance rather than the truth. Jesus said quite boldly that truth will set us free. Then why don't I feel free right now?

I recently had a situation that caused me to be painfully looped into an emotional stress for someone I love dearly. My son has been diagnosed with IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) and acid reflux. He now has to watch everything he eats to make sure that he doesn't irritate the lining of his stomach and intestines. By the way, it seems that everything on the planet irritates them...severely. He has undergone stomach scopes, upper and lower GI's and other procedures with acrostics and names I can't even spell.

While talking with my son's doctor, she said something that really hit me. She said, "Outside of food choices, the second item that causes flare ups for those that have IBS is stress." We have a peaceful and loving home. So, what in the world would he be stressed about? As we continued our conversation with the doctor, she said some kids put so much pressure on themselves to perform well in every area of their lives that they begin to place unhealthy expectations on themselves. Whether or not this is true for my son, I'm not sure; but as a dad, it broke my heart.

As we drove home, I can't explain it, but it felt as if I was weeping from the inside out for my son. I am proud of him and have told him so everyday that he has been alive. Leslie and I couldn't be any more pleased with him. So why is he putting so much pressure on himself in school, sports and other areas of his life to perform? Does he believe that's what I expect? Does he believe his acceptance from others is dependent on his performance? What's the measuring for

performance? Who makes the rules? Bottom line, he is 14 years old and learning first hand a deep, deep truth that I am not sure I have fully learned. I do know that this is not my heart for him, and I am even more confident it is not God's desire for us.

It has become clear that expectations of ourselves or others will eat us up from the inside out. For many of us it doesn't matter how much the Father speaks of His love for us, we must receive and believe it for ourselves. Faith in Father's love and acceptance is what we desperately need!

Are we all suffering from self imposed conditional love and performance?

Conditional love (performance/expectations) imposed by self is a dead end collision with disappointment. Disappointment then becomes the gateway for the lies of the enemy to set up a stronghold in our minds and rob us from the Father's love. "Perception is reality" is a common statement made in our world. Sadly, this is true. The lie can become a counterfeit truth, if we believe it. Are there lies that you have believed as truth? I guess that's why they call it deception. A deceived person does not know he or she is deceived until the truth sets them free. I long for the truth to shine in all of the rooms of my soul.

In the Christian community, we preach, teach and talk about excellence, Godly principles, and character all of the time. It seems to me we are focused on becoming something, rather than receiving who we already are and what we already have. Jesus said it was finished when He died on the cross. He gave His life so that we could experience the abundant life that He promised. We must receive all of what Jesus died for, so we can truly experience life!

It seems that we are trying to find and follow formulas (law) to receive God's love. The word of God tells us that it is by grace that we have been saved. Grace is defined as unmerited favor, which means it was a gift received, not earned. God the Father never had an expectation for us to work for our salvation, nor the abundant life. Yet many, if not most of us, are struggling with expectations from others or ourselves; paddling our legs off, trying to achieve acceptance and to be loved. Sure we have received our salvation, but I fear that we stopped there. Is salvation the only thing Jesus came to give us? What about peace, our identity in Christ, sonship, favor, love and the sweet gift of the Holy Spirit?

His death, burial and resurrection are not just about our eternity after this life. They are about our lives, in this world!

Lest we think this is a new problem in the body of Christ, look at Galatians and the Apostle Paul's words to this church. "You foolish Galatians! Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" Galatians 3:1-3

Performance, stress and expectations are a deadly trio designed to kill our joy and rob us of our rightful inheritance as sons and daughters of God. Let me encourage you today to spend time

with the Lord and ask Him where and how the enemy is using this tactic in your life. The Father desperately desires to give you truth; truth that will set you free!

Together, our family is on a mission to kill unhealthy expectations. My children have become my greatest teacher in knowing and receiving the love of Christ. I know that God longs for us to receive His deep and unconditional love for us. We really are free to be whom He created us to be! Are you ready to receive it?

Thank you for your friendship to ElevateHim Ministries and the various outreaches that we are involved in. We pray that somehow we have been able to give back to you and your family today.

Elevating Jesus...one life at a time,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marc Owings', with a long, sweeping underline.

Marc Owings

P.S. Your support is greatly appreciated! Please continue to do all that you can do to help the various ministry outreaches of ElevateHim. *Together we are making a difference for HIS Kingdom.*