

The State of Your Lake?

I invite you to use your imagination this morning and to imagine a lake, a little lake, and entertain the notion that that little lake represents you. So actually we are talking about maybe 80 or so little lakes, one for each person gathered in this house of worship today. Jesus said in John 7:38 "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Now, since I know how some of you think, I want to make it clear that this word is not talking about going to the bathroom. What Jesus is talking about here is a spiritual flow; divine, life-giving, energy, flowing from our lives to nourish every one and everything who or that comes in contact with us. John 7:39 says, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. . . ."

Imagine your life as a lake. The next thing I want you to picture is this: What is the state of your spiritual lake this morning? Are you full of the Holy Spirit and giving life to all around you or is the level of God's life within you so low that there is nothing flowing out? Or, is your lake polluted, so that what flows out of you is a harmful, poisonous, stream? What is the state of your lake?

I want us all to understand that it is God's desire that each of us have a full lake and one overflowing with living water to nourish others. Jesus says again in John 7:38: "*Whoever believes in me, (Say, "whoever" "believes in me.") as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow (Say, "will flow"), from within him.*" So, the question many of us will need to deal with this morning, is this: "Why isn't the living water of Jesus flowing out of my lake, and how do I get it flowing?" And the question for others may be: "What do I need to do to keep it flowing?"

My answer begins with another question for you: "How do regular lakes get filled?" Think about Raystown or Glendale or Canoe Creek; how do these lakes get filled? That's right. There are two main ways the lakes get filled. There is rain and snow that fall directly onto the surface of the lake. And there are the streams or tributaries which flow into the lake. That is also true of you and me and our spiritual life lakes. Some things just come down from above directly. A warm sunny day in the middle of January in Pennsylvania adds to my lake. Seeing a deer, a flock of turkeys or a Pileated woodpecker in my back yard adds to my

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lake. A good meal, blossoms in springtime, a clear star-lit night, pictures of my grandchildren, the encouragement of a friend, come as spiritual rain and raise the level of my lake. There are things like this that add to the level of your lakes too. They are like rain to a natural lake. We don't have much or any control over any of them, but they add to our lakes.

But the thing we need to recognize here is that rain hitting the surface of the lake is not enough to sustain a full and over flowing lake. It is the various streams and tributaries that run into the lakes that are mostly responsible for keeping the lakes full and overflowing. And, if we desire the spiritual lakes of our lives to be full and overflowing, we need to pay attention to the streams flowing into us and make sure that these stream are flowing freely. What are the major streams?

Some years ago, when I served on the Conference Commission on Church Renewal, one of the other commission members identified three main streams that feed our spiritual lakes. There is the Truth stream, the devotional stream, and the Wisdom stream. Let's look at each of the main streams that feed our lakes.

First there is the truth stream. What we are talking about here is knowledge drawn from the revelation given in God's Word. It is knowing what God has said about Himself and about us in the Bible. It is understanding the basic teachings and doctrine discovered in Scripture. John 7:38 says, "*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*" Notice the phrase, "*as the Scripture has said.*" It is not enough to say we believe in Jesus; we need to believe in Jesus in the way that the Scripture outlines belief. II Timothy 3:16 tells us, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*"

Stop and think about that for a moment this morning. What is your Biblical IQ and what are you doing to improve it? The living water in our spiritual lakes will never be raised to the overflow level without adequate knowledge of the word of God.

Besides that, incorrect understandings and misinterpretations of Scripture can actually diminish the spiritual life within us and hinder any productive overflow. Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth*

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shall set you free." In order for the living water to flow out of us freely we need to pay attention to the truth stream.

How are you doing with the truth stream. Are you reading the Bible on a daily basis? Are you studying Scripture with others in Sunday School or in a Bible Study? Are you making any effort, taking any steps to increase your knowledge and understanding of God's revealed word? Do you know enough to distinguish between truth and falsehood? Would you say, "**raising my knowledge" "of the word of God" "will raise the level" "of my spiritual lake."**

First there is the truth stream, we need to make sure that the truth stream is not dammed up, or polluted, and that God's word is flowing freely into our hearts and minds on a regular basis. A second main stream that contributes to the level of living water in our lakes, is what may be called the devotional stream. Flowing in with this stream are such things as prayer, fasting, Communion, solitude, worshiping alone and with others, intimate fellowship, meditation, keeping a spiritual journal; this is Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, sitting at the feet of Jesus. This is Moses stepping aside to listen to the voice from the burning bush. This is Peter receiving a vision in the middle of his mid-day prayer time.

The spiritual or devotional stream is entered when we seek the Lord and seek to remain strongly and vitally connected to Him. Here we remember Jesus' illustration of the vine and the branches and remind ourselves that unless a branch remains connected to the vine it will not produce fruit. As Jesus said, "*without me you can do nothing.*" What steps are you taking to remain connected to Jesus? Are you praying every day and throughout the day? Do you take any time for quiet reflection? Do you worship when you are alone? Do you allow your heart to worship when you participate in the worship services of our church or are you just an observer along for the ride? The level of Living water in our spiritual lakes will not reach overflow without an abundant contribution from the devotional stream. Would you say, "**believing in Jesus," "means seeking Him" "until we are intimately connected" "with Jesus." "Without Him" "we can do nothing."**

If our spiritual lakes are to be full and overflowing, we need to pay attention to the truth stream and to the devotional stream. The third stream is the wisdom stream, and this is an easy one to underestimate

the importance of and to overlook the need for. But, the wisdom stream is absolutely necessary for us to keep Living water flowing out from us to others.

A definition for wisdom, as I am using it this morning, is “practical know-how,” especially as it relates to putting God’s word into practice and in getting along with other people. For example, Jesus said, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” That is wisdom. Jesus said, “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” This also speaks to how we relate to other people. According to Mark 9:50, Jesus said, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Once again Jesus is talking about wisdom, being wise in our dealings with each other and with those outside the family of God, practicing a wisdom that leads to peace with one another. Paul says in Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” This is wisdom.

Wisdom also relates to how well or poorly we manage our money, our time, and our health. Wisdom relates to how we present ourselves in the workplace and at school, how we keep our homes. Wisdom relates to how we keep ourselves pure morally. All of these are wisdom issues and each one has the potential to greatly effect the level of living water in our Spiritual lakes. These things will most certainly drain the life out of our lakes and ruin the effectiveness of our witness if they are not handled well. Proverbs 4:5-7 say, “Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. . .” Verse 12 adds, “When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble.”

The question here is how do we get wisdom? It seems to me that the key words to gaining wisdom are humility and listening. The writer of Proverbs tells us to listen to Godly parents and mentors. James tells us to “be slow to speak and quick to listen.” James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

James 3:13-18 give us further insight into the kind of wisdom we need to keep our spiritual lakes full and overflowing. James says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them

show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

If you are fairly well informed about the word of God, and are filled with devotional passion, but find yourself being misunderstood or rejected on a regular basis, it could be a wisdom issue. Humble yourself. Seek and listen carefully to the counsel from mature believers. Slow down and ask God to guide you. Make sure you understand how your words and actions will look and sound to others before you proceed. Would you say, “**for our spiritual lakes**” “**to be full and over flowing,**” “**we need wisdom.**” “**Lord Jesus,**” “**add knowledge to our passion**” “**& wisdom to our knowledge.**”

Let me ask you again, what is the state of your spiritual lake? If it’s not full and overflowing, what’s missing? Which stream flowing into it is most blocked? Take a walk up each stream and look for whatever it is that is hindering the flow. Confess and turn from sin. Ask the Lord to help you clear the channel. Again, Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” How much is that true of you this morning? What will you do to increase the flow?

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John 7:37-39

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