

Celebrating Independence in Ojai Valley

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Happy Independence Day everybody! Aaaaah, it was another day of festivities and well wishes as we celebrated the 4th of July in a fashion that, from my experience, is uniquely Ojai Valley. From the pancake breakfast in the morning to our own home town parade, the afternoon in the park, and fireworks at Nordhoff Stadium, it was a day of community coming together to celebrate the blessings we enjoy everyday; FREEDOM.

I really feel that this is one of my favorite days of the year when I just stop to appreciate what we have, both in America and locally here in the Ojai Valley. These freedoms were not "free"; they were bought and paid for with blood. Thank you to all who have sacrificed for our benefit!

There is another type of freedom that many people never know exists; spiritual freedom. This is the kind of freedom I want to talk to you about. You know it is possible to be externally free in that I can select my own calendar, go where I want and do what I want and plan my own life, and still be internally incarcerated. I am talking about not being truly free to live the abundant life, enjoy each day to it's fullest, experience the value of each relationship, and access deep sources of forgiveness, wisdom, inspiration, and healing to overcome every challenge of life.

There seems to be two types of people that I tend to talk to regularly that are, often times, stuck in a spiritual trap where they are bound as a prisoner to their own habits, attitudes, lack of information, or spiritual disconnection to the Source. I see these two categories of people best described as "non-religious people and religious people". OK, now that I have your attention, please allow me to explain.

Self-described "non-religious people", and I disclaim that this is a very big word dangerously tossed about here, tend to stand on their own inner strengths, relational abilities, problem-solving skills, training and education, income producing capacities, lifestyle choices, and philosophical sufficiency. In short, this approach to life is "self-centered".

Another group I am calling "religious people", again a huge term that has myriads of intonations (please allow me to continue without offending), tend to live lives relying upon their religious training and education, spiritual understanding, doctrinal position, statement of faith, theologies, confessions, creeds, and "correctness in what is true". This approach to life is also "self-centered".

Jesus came to set both types of people FREE. He reached out to those who were in internal chains to worldly philosophies and vain lifestyles of self-gratification, broken-hearted and pushed down by the effects of evil in this life and the double-relationship and connection with Him.

Each approach to life seems relatively equal under normal driving conditions. It's not until we are confronted with "road blocks" and forced to go "off-road" that our values are tested. If you are unclear what I am talking about, I want you to consider your deepest wound in your inner life. Is it the way you were treated by someone; betrayal, harsh words, lack of compassion, mistreated,

pushed down, un-forgiven? Maybe you gave your heart and soul into something only to be emotionally abandoned and unappreciated. You do all that you can and someone in your life is never pleased or satisfied. Maybe someone close to you died and you are face-to-face with what many people avoid, death is a reality in this life. How do you handle it? As I said, under normal driving conditions, it doesn't seem to matter whether you drive a Lexus or a Jeep. It seems to really come down to personal preference. When you are forced to go where you didn't plan to go however, under emergency conditions, it matters! You cannot traverse rugged terrain in a luxury sedan, and you cannot face real life issues with trite words that have an air of comfort but lack depth and power.

As we are waving our Red, White, & Blue, and honoring the blood that was shed by the faithful to give us the privileges we enjoy, I want to ask you to consider another sacrifice for freedom done on our behalf, it also was with blood. People sacrificed to give us freedoms in this country, Jesus died to set the world free. And He said "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36) for "the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). This is why the scriptures tell us to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." (Galatians 5:1). May God's grace continually be upon our lives. May God bless America; may God bless the Ojai Valley.

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. This article was published in 2006. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View