

THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 11: FUEL

1 Timothy 4:4-6, Jeremiah 31:12-14, Selected Texts (NASB)

David Bruce Linn, Pastor-Teacher

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Back when my sons were small boys we took a family vacation to Florida where we stopped by the visitors' center at the Kennedy Space Center. We looked at the exhibits inside and then went outside into an area where actual rockets and parts of rockets were on display. For a while I contented myself with pretending that I was getting sucked into every rocket nozzle and exhaust bell. The boys were young enough to laugh at those antics repeatedly.

Then we came to a small rocket engine with the internals exposed. Partly to amuse myself I went into a pseudo-lecture to my sons on how it worked. I started with the fuel tank, and then explained that a true rocket must have at least one other tank, the oxidizer tank, because there is no air in space. I made my way down the rocket, pointing to the place where the fuel and the oxidizer were fed into a pair of nautilus-shaped manifolds which accelerated the fuel and oxidizer as they were entering the combustion chamber.

By this point I had gathered a fair-sized crowd of Korean tourists who were following my impromptu lecture with great interest as if I may have actually known something. My sons were still listening, so I described the combustion process and how the flow of explosively burning gases was directed and shaped through the nozzle and exhaust bell of the rocket. I had to look it up again for this message but at the time I remembered that the F1 engine upon which so many space shots were based generates about a million and a half foot-pounds of energy. The liquid fuel portion of the Saturn Five rocket uses five of these F1-type engines for about 7-8 million foot-pounds of thrust. You can fly to the moon on power like that.

The key point of rocket engine design is that it must have a supply of both fuel and oxidizer in the correct proportions to work. In today's study I will argue that human beings also have fuel tanks which must be kept filled to power us, and based on the following Scripture I think we have four tanks instead of two to deal with: **"...YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"** (Mark 12:30). It is clear that if God himself commanded us to love him with heart, soul, mind, and strength that these are distinct aspects of our humanity. And although these aspects of mankind are distinguished, they are unified in our persons. The spirit will be separated from the body at death, but in the resurrection everyone gets bodies back, some suited for eternal punishment and some for everlasting joy in God's presence. So the health of our souls cannot truly be separated out, in the end. If any one of these aspects of our beings are neglected or abused all the other parts suffer.

It is helpful to think of these as the four fuel tanks we must keep filled to keep the fire of God burning in our lives. Should we let any or several of these go to zero, we will find ourselves coasting to a stop, wondering where the empowerment of God went. On a personal level, I have found it very easy to focus on a few of these and ignore the others. It is only through years of trying to pay faithful attention to all the parts of me that I have stabilized the roller coaster ride of my early years in Christ.

What we shall see is that God himself--his very person--is the fuel that we are designed to burn by the combination of these four tanks.

HEART AND SPIRIT

The first fuel tank is described by the term "heart." It should be understood as a reference to the spiritual nature of mankind when it is distinguished from soul and mind. It is the part of us that is dead apart from Christ and must be given life by God when we confess our sins and receive the atonement of the cross. Paul wrote about the process of filling this tank to Timothy, his son in the faith: **"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following"** (1 Timothy 4:6). We fill our hearts and spirits by growing in the knowledge of God through the word of God and sound teaching. The text says that we are nourished by these words, trained, or brought up by them. God's word is about him, and we fill our spiritual fuel tank when we take it in.

You can see that the Devil has mounted a direct attack on the ability of believers in Christ to fill up their spiritual fuel tanks by attempting to convince the world that the words of the Bible are of purely human origin and that they do not point to anything real. This disconnection has led many who have trusted in Christ to give up on personal Bible study. But if you do not have the true fuel of God's word to burn in your spirit you will find a substitute. For many today the substitute is an experience or a feeling that they get from participation in particular kinds of worship. It is my personal opinion that even if such Christians show up in church the rocket engine of God has already flamed out in their lives. That's why so many who call themselves evangelicals do not think that killing the babies God has made is wrong and that there are many ways to heaven besides Christ.

The Greek word translated "disciple" in the Bible just means "student." Whatever you felt about your experience in school, growing in the knowledge of God is the charge and destiny of every believer. If you are not studying God through his word all the time you are simply not a disciple. What is wrong with a Christian who does not find the most fascinating being in the universe worth the time and trouble to study? Francis Schaeffer explained that most people in the West live below what he called the "line of despair." This is a line dividing so-called scientific facts from religious ideas. The scientific facts which by definition cannot tell us about God have been cast as the only truth, and all religious concepts are relegated to the realm of fantasy. If this is the case, then why bother studying the word of God? It's all unreal anyway--so most people think.

People from the West must choose to jump the line of despair by the application of faith and reason using the following logic: Since order does not come from disorder someone had to make the world. If that someone can make the world he can communicate. His communication would by definition be unique--obviously not the mere product of human reflection. The Bible is obviously that communication--over forty authors writing over a millennium and a half, all of whom agree about the One who made everything. This should close the case for all reasonable people.

Once that is understood, then it is time to make a determined commitment to be **"constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine"** as Paul exhorted Timothy. If you won't do that your spiritual fuel tank will be empty, your rocket will flame out, and you will fall to earth.

SOUL AND EMOTIONS

The second fuel tank God made in you is the soul. When contrasted with heart and mind the word "soul" has an emphasis on the emotional nature. The Lord revealed his intention toward our souls in one of Jeremiah's prophecies about the restoration of believing Israel. We could use many Scriptures to show the Lord's desire to fill our souls, but this one shows the connection to the world around us: **"They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, /And they will be radiant over the bounty of the LORD-- /Over the grain and the new wine and the oil, /And over the young of the flock and the herd; /And their life will be like a watered garden, /And they will never languish again. /Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance, /And the young men and the old, together, /For I will turn their mourning into joy /And will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow. /I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance, /And My people will be satisfied with My goodness,' declares the LORD"** (Jeremiah 31:12-14).

This is a powerful picture of the comprehensive nature of God's goodness filling our souls so full that we shout for joy, glow with radiance, and break out with dancing. This precise prophecy concerns the millennial kingdom of Messiah Jesus, but the intention of God is clearly revealed for his people. In that day the world will have been cleansed from the defilements of sin, so those on earth at that time may partake freely of the many blessings God made everywhere in the world. In the mean time God has given us a plan for partaking of his many good gifts: **"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer"** (1 Timothy 4:4-5). If we exert discernment through the word of God and prayer we may gratefully receive anything that does not turn us away from devotion to the Lord.

When we are blessed by the beauty of the night sky full of stars, a gorgeous sunrise, or a work of art or music or architecture, we are actually being blessed by the glory of God, for, as James reminded us: **"Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow"** (James 1:17). This is the key realization to the filling of the fuel tank of our soul. There are opportunities all around us if we will take them. So go out and receive some stuff with gratitude! Stop screening out good things which God has made to be a blessing to you. How sad to go around with a half empty fuel tank because we have rejected some of the good things God has given us! And if somebody else tells you it is wrong to be enjoying a particular thing, let this Scripture be your guide: **"Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil..."** (Romans 14:16). And just imagine how it would impact our outreach for Christ if we all became deliriously satisfied with the goodness of God?

MIND AND INTELLECT

The third fuel tank is the mind or intellect. Again we see, this time from the letter to the Colossians, that God's person is what fills this tank: **"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God..."** (Colossians 1:9-10). Paul the Apostle was effusive as he described God's plan for ever-increasing knowledge of God, wisdom and understanding. No one should be allowed to think

that Christianity causes people to switch off their brains. It should be the opposite according the will of God. Three windows in this text shed light on the matter of knowing.

The first window, "**knowledge**," actually has an intensifier on the front of it in the Greek. It means "higher knowledge," because you and I knew little or nothing of God before he illuminated our hearts and minds. Our minds were designed by God to be fuel tanks filled with the revelation of himself. There is no higher object of study. That is why theology is the queen of the sciences.

The next window is "**wisdom**," which means knowing what to do based on the facts of a situation. Knowledge tells us what the truth is and wisdom tells us what to do about it. This is a lifelong study, and we should greatly esteem the elders among us for the reservoir of wisdom they have gained through long and costly experience. Have you spoken to one of our seniors lately about something that matters? And if you are growing old and full of wisdom, have you made a point to share your wisdom in a kind and winning way?

The third window on knowledge is called "**understanding**." Understanding is from a Greek word which pictures the way that things connect together. Making intellectual leaps and connections is one of the great joys of the mind. There is even a series on public television called Connections which focuses on connecting things from seemingly separate areas of study such as history, science, philosophy, religion, mathematics, and architecture.

The Bible is the primary content of our intellectual journey because it is God's unique, chosen means to communicate about himself to us. If we have not applied ourselves to that, we will be ignorant no matter what else we study. But that is not to be the end of the filling of our minds. The word of God becomes for those who study it a lens by which to study everything else on earth! All kinds of knowledge may be profitable if we receive them with discernment to be sure that they are in harmony with the Bible. In that way we discover the connections between the Bible and all the things in God's world, and we fill the fuel tank of our minds.

STRENGTH AND BODY

The fourth fuel tank is "**strength**" which could be a reference to the will except when heart, mind, and soul are already in the context as they are here. In this context it describes our earthly energies which are located in the bodies which God gave us. Once again, the primary thing which fills this fuel tank is God and his holiness, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "**Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body**" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

If you are a believer your body does not belong to you because it has been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. The first application of the command to "**glorify God in your body**" is to avoid defilements like sexual immorality and gluttony. But glorifying God is more of a positive than a negative thing, so we should seek to fulfill God's purposes for our bodies.

We should eat wisely and stay reasonably fit for the kingdom. Paul said he disciplined his body and so should we. We should refuse to accept the world's view that appearance is what matters, and yet take sensible care of our persons. We need to be good managers of our energies so that we do not burn out and so that we can expend those energies faithfully in the glorification of God.

Scotsman Eric Liddell won the 1924 Olympic gold medal in the 400 meter race and a bronze in the 200. He famously refused to run on a Sunday out of respect for God. He is quoted as saying: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure." After the Olympics he went to China as a missionary, back to where he was born. He ran some races there as well. He was placed in an internment camp during World War II after sending his family home. He died there of a brain tumor, having served the Lord to the end. In the last days of his life, he thought he was having a nervous breakdown, but it was his body that was failing with the cancer, not his mind or soul. See how the parts are all linked? When the fuel tank of his bodily strength began to run out due to illness it affected his mind and emotions.

Dr. Albert Simpson, founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, had a life testimony that, although he had a weak heart in the physical realm, the life of Christ in his inner man became the power for his body. He labored long into the night to write commentaries, publish a missionary magazine, prepare sermons, organize evangelistic, missionary and deeper life conferences, and run an exploding movement of God. Before the moment when he entered the experience of the Christ life he came to the point of collapse. But in a way that was more complex than a straightforward physical healing, he appropriated the divine life of Christ bubbling up from within by faith as all he needed for life and ministry. And thus he ministered with remarkable zeal and effectiveness for many decades. He discovered that even the physical fuel tank was designed to be filled by the very person of God in Christ.

People are not compartmentalized. The rocket engine of God driving our lives has four fuel tanks, and we must pay attention to them all to keep from flaming out. Are you primarily burning God in each one as you should? What does the gauge say on the four fuel tanks of your life? Have you allowed any of them to run dangerously low? Ask God for wisdom in this matter. He has promised to guide you if you ask. **"...YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH."** This verse is not only the charter of our daily walk with the Lord, but it is also a plan for God's blessing.

Pray: Fill my tanks, Lord—every one. May I walk with you in wisdom, in the life which is found only in you. Teach me to do this, O my Father, for the glory of your name.

If you have never asked Christ to apply the atonement of the cross to your sins, you have fuel tanks empty of the very thing they were designed to hold: God himself. *Pray: Lord Jesus, I am a hollow man or woman. I have tried to burn every other thing in my fuel tanks than you. Forgive me for this foolishness. I confess that I need cleansing by the blood of Christ. I need the life that only you can give when you live in me. Please make my heart your home, Lord. Amen.*

[clip is the NASA footage of the *Apollo 13* launch, 2:40 min.]