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THE REAL AUTHOR OF "USE-IT-OR-LOSE-IT"

Back in the late 1970's a number of people started a movement of promoting more physical exercise for maintaining good health. One of the very early proponents, Dr. Kenneth Cooper who had conducted extensive research on over 5,000 people in the US Air Force back in the 1960's, promoted the term "aerobic exercise" via a number of books that he authored. Other people quickly followed suit in promoting more exercise, and the jogging revolution was born.

When I started jogging in the early 1980's I very quickly became familiar with the expression "use it or lose it", which expression started to appear fairly regularly in literature that promoted aerobic exercises like jogging and running. The idea behind this saying was that in order to maintain physical fitness we need to continue to exercise regularly, or else we will lose that fitness.

Over the past 30 years or so this expression "use it or lose it" has been applied in many other contexts as well, ranging from encouraging employees to make use of their employer's "flexible spending accounts for healthcare" (FSA's) and of neurologists applying this expression to the plasticity of the human brain all the way across the spectrum to economists applying this expression to financial matters of economic development.

Yes, this has become a fairly well-known and much used expression.

But this expression "use it or lose it" is not an invention of the past few decades. It predates its modern popularity by a long shot. It in fact goes all the way back to the time when God created Adam and Eve, and even before then. God Himself is the author of the very real principle "use it or lose it".

THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST

We are all familiar with the parable of the talents, which parable Matthew recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. The main point about the servant who had received only one talent (Matthew 25:15) is that this servant did not in any way use the one talent he had been given (Matthew 25:18); he buried it in the earth. Later this servant justified his actions by claiming that he was afraid to make use of the talent that had been entrusted to him (Matthew 25:25).

God's response to this man's fearful attitude was to call the man wicked and lazy (Matthew 25:26). After in verse 27 stating what this servant should have done, Jesus Christ then said the following:

Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. (Matthew 25:28)

This is the principle of "use it or lose it". This servant hadn't made use of the one talent he had been given, and therefore he lost it. At the same time the servant who had made the greatest use of the talents that had been entrusted to him was rewarded with a bonus talent.

In this parable Jesus Christ very clearly applied the principle of "if you don't use it then you will lose it" to the development of godly character and the opportunity for salvation.

Let's now also look at the somewhat similar parable of the pounds recorded in Luke 19.

In the parable of the pounds every servant was given one pound. The notable point about the one

servant who brought back without any increase the one pound he had been given (Luke 19:20) is that he too had not in any way used the one pound; he had kept it hidden in a napkin (same verse). And as in the other parable, so this servant likewise justified his behavior by claiming that he feared God (Luke 19:21).

God's response to this servant is in essence the same as God's response to the corresponding servant in the parable of the talents: God calls this man a wicked servant (Luke 19:22). And after in verse 23 stating what this servant should have done, God then said:

And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (Luke 19:24)

Again, this is a case of "use it or lose it". By his own admission this servant had made no attempt to use the pound he had been given, and therefore he lost it. And again the extra pound was then given to the servant who had made the greatest use of what had been entrusted to him.

So in these two parables we actually have examples for two corollary principles. These two principles are:

- 1) Use it or lose it.
- 2) If we do use it, then we will receive more.

Both of these principles were established by God at the same time. God set up His whole creation in such a way that these two principles apply in very many different situations and circumstances that impact on our lives. So let's now take a closer look at these things.

GOD'S VIEW vs. SATAN'S VIEW

Let's go back to the time when God created all the angels. At that time God also created the angel who later became Satan, and Satan originally represented the pinnacle of created wisdom and beauty. As God said in Ezekiel 28:

Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. (Ezekiel 28:12)

Let's note what God is telling us in this verse.

The Hebrew verb "chatham", here translated as "you seal up", refers to "making something secure". This verb requires an object, the thing that is made secure. The Hebrew word "tokniyt", here translated as "the sum", refers to "the measure" or "the structure". So in this Hebrew text the expression translated as "you seal up the sum" means: God secured for you the greatest possible measure in the things that will be mentioned.

The next two expressions spell out precisely the areas in which God gave Satan the greatest possible measure for any created spirit being.

The expression "full of wisdom" means that God gave to Satan more wisdom than to any other angel. It was the absolute maximum of wisdom that God could give to any created being.

The Hebrew word "kaliyl" translated as "perfect" in the expression "perfect in beauty" refers to "totality". So the expression "perfect in beauty" means that God gave Satan the greatest possible beauty for any created spirit being.

So in Ezekiel 28:12 God tells us that originally Satan was the absolute pinnacle of all the spirit beings that God had created. At the time of his creation Satan had the greatest degree of wisdom and the highest standard of beauty amongst all the spirit beings that God had created.

It goes without saying that God had extremely high hopes for Satan's future. That's why God had endowed Satan to such a high degree with these specific two attributes. God gave Satan the best possible start to an immortal existence.

But, as we know, Satan still had to be tested by God. And in the process of that testing period Satan became extremely proud and arrogant because of his great beauty and wisdom. And so God tells us:

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. (Ezekiel 28:17)

So here God refines the "use it or lose it" principle. It is not enough to just "use it"; the important thing is "to use it the right way". To use anything the wrong way is to misuse it; and both misuse and non-use result in "losing it"!

No matter how enormously profound the gifts were, which God originally gave to Satan, they were all given with the premise of "use it the right way or lose it". And because Satan misused his wisdom, therefore he lost both his wisdom and his beauty!

The expression "you have corrupted your wisdom" is another way of saying that Satan had LOST his prior wisdom. And along with losing his prior wisdom Satan also lost the beauty he used to have. At present Satan is devoid of both wisdom and beauty! And presently his exertion of power relies overwhelmingly on deception.

He must deceive human beings into believing that he, Satan, is still a powerful spirit being with fantastic wisdom and beauty. If his true state was fully understood by all human beings, then Satan would lose most of his hold over human beings, which hold relies almost totally on the power of persuasion. Satan's temptations consist of persuading us human beings to sin, even against our own better judgment.

Yet when Jesus Christ returns and Satan is taken by the scruff of the neck (Revelation 20:2) and locked away for 1000 years, people will "narrowly look upon Satan and say: is this the man that made the earth to tremble?" (Isaiah 14:16).

The expression "they look narrowly" means that they look with incredulity because it is hard to imagine how such a pathetic individual, as Satan really is when openly exposed, could have caused so much damage. We have had a very close parallel for this in the past century. If people were to see Adolf Hitler as he really was, they would likewise say: how on earth could this pathetic excuse for a man have caused so much destruction and devastation during the 1930's and 40's? The point is that Satan himself and also those human beings that he places in positions of power rely very, very heavily on deception to maintain their power. Deception is a hallmark for people who have been placed in positions of power by Satan.

Concerning Isaiah 14:16, at that stage people will see neither wisdom nor beauty in Satan; they will only see an undesirable and unpleasant appearance that has been severely disfigured by resentment and bitterness and hostility and a consuming frustrated anger. Yes, harboring the wrong attitudes will adversely change a spirit being's appearance! That's what it did for Satan!

Satan's present state powerfully illustrates the principle of "use it (the right way) or lose it", which principle God implemented at the very start of His creation.

Now to make this clear:

Satan hates this principle of use it or lose it! From Satan's perspective it simply isn't fair to give something to somebody and then, if we don't like how they use it, to again take it away. Satan endorses the belief that once something is yours, then it is yours permanently and unconditionally, and you don't have to ever give account to anybody for how you use the things that are yours. That's how all of us also see it, isn't it?

How do I know that Satan endorses this view? That's easy. All we have to do is look at Satan's invention of trading, as recorded in Ezekiel 28:16-18. The whole concept of trading and of buying and selling is predicated on the premise that what is yours is yours unconditionally, and it is yours permanently! So IF you want to trade what is yours for something that currently belongs to someone else, THEN you are certainly free to do so.

Now IF the things that are yours are ONLY CONDITIONALLY yours, based on using those things correctly before God, THEN you couldn't possibly trade them away, since God might at some point take those things from you, if you ever use them in the wrong way.

This is really what is meant by God owning everything! The ramifications of this concept and perspective are huge. Notice what God said to Job:

Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine. (Job 41:11)

Now either this statement made by God Himself is true or it is not true! So what is it? If it is true, then we cannot possibly sell or trade away things that belong to God. But if we don't believe that this statement is true, then what else do we believe is not true?

Now Job 41:11 is one more statement that should make clear that during the millennium when God in the person of Jesus Christ will be ruling this earth, then there cannot possibly be something called "money". How could anybody during the millennium possibly make a profit from things that really belong to God? And the parables of the talents and the pounds make clear that God's ownership never ceases, even when it seems like we have full control over certain things of value. God always reserves the right to take back anything from anybody, because God permanently owns everything.

So Satan wants us human beings to believe that the things we own right now are really ours and nobody else has the right to tell us how we must use them.

Satan's system, as revealed in Ezekiel chapter 28, is based on ownership being unconditional! Once something is yours, then it is yours unconditionally and nobody has the right to take it from you or to tell you how you must use it. In Satan's system ownership is an end in itself, and therefore the acquisition of "things" is also an end in itself. And you and I along with all other people around us basically accept that premise as proper and correct, don't we? This is, after all, Satan's world!

God's system, on the other hand, is based on all our ownership of anything and everything we might have always being conditional. It is always conditional on us using the things we own, and using them the right way! If we don't use them at all, or if we use them the wrong way, then they will be taken away from us by God. This applies to everything: to wealth and to health, to looks and to skills and abilities. NOTHING is ever unconditionally ours! In God's system ownership is never an end in itself; ownership

is always only a means for making use of something in a way that is pleasing to God. With God the “use it or lose it” principle is always implied in everything that God may give to us, and I really mean “everything”!

It is only for God Himself that ownership is unconditional. God owns everything unconditionally, including every single atom anywhere in the universe! THAT IS WHY Satan’s invention of trading recorded back there in Ezekiel 28 was a challenge to God’s ownership of His entire creation. That is why trading is irreconcilable with God’s way of life; trading assumes the premise that God does NOT really own everything.

It would be good for us to grasp that ownership of everything will always remain with God the Father, and that will never change! When we understand this point correctly, then we can grasp what God means when He tells us that we will “inherit all things” (see Revelation 21:7).

WHAT IS MEANT BY “INHERITING ALL THINGS”?

You know what Revelation 21:7 says, right?

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Revelation 21:7)

Now I submit to you that your understanding of “an inheritance” is based on Satan’s whole system for this present world over which he rules as a “god” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The most significant aspect of an inheritance in our present world is that the previous owner renounces all claims to the things that comprise the inheritance. The original owner has forfeited all claims to the things that went to the inheritor, basically because the original owner has died. The inheritor is in effect in supreme control over all the things he inherited, a fact that Solomon lamented greatly in Ecclesiastes 2:19. That’s how it works in our world.

BUT THAT’S NOT HOW AN INHERITANCE WORKS WITH GOD!

Try to understand the following point: with God an inheritance never, never involves a change in ownership of anything! The heirs of God do NOT become “the owners” of anything! God will always remain the sole “owner” of everything in existence anywhere! It is Satan who wants you to believe that an inheritance will confer ownership to you. But just because that happens to be the way it works in this present dispensation, because of death, does not mean that that is the way it works in the presence of God.

Here is the answer:

With God “inheriting” means: full access TO USE the things that are inherited, possibly even unlimited or unrestricted use of the things that are inherited. But the actual ownership of the things we will inherit from God will always remain with God. There is no such thing as “joint ownership” with God! Joint use, yes, but not joint ownership. God will always retain full control over everything that we will “inherit” from God. With God inheritance conveys the right of usage, but without conferring ownership or absolute control over something. That’s basically what the two parables show us!

Don’t make the mistake of interpreting the word “inheritance” from Satan’s perspective. It is Satan who wanted to wrest OWNERSHIP of everything away from God, and Satan’s invention of the concept of buying and selling was the start in that direction. God had given Satan access to USE a major chunk of real estate in this universe (i.e. this planet Earth), but God had not given Satan ownership of this Earth. And Satan wanted ownership as well; the mere use of this planet Earth was not enough for Satan.

For any being other than God Himself ownership appeals to vanity! Ownership implies that I can do with this what I want to do, and I don't even have to give account to God for what I do with the things I own. Ownership would in effect make us equal to God in the sense that: God can decide to do what He wants to do with the things He owns, and WE can decide to do what we want to do with the things we own. But we are NOT equal to God! God owns everything, including us!

The inheritance of God ties in very closely with the concept of use it or lose it. Consider what Jesus Christ said in Matthew 5:5.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

What this means is that the meek will get to live on the New Earth in the New Heaven, and they will have the inherited privilege of free usage of the New Earth. Don't forget that all those inheritors in God's Family will be God's people and God the Father will STILL be "their God" (Revelation 21:3). Being "their God" implies not only that God continues to be the owner of that New Earth, but also that God will continue to be THEIR owner. God will OWN His entire Family. It will be HIS Family! Beware of presuming ownership of anything in the Family of God.

And all of us in that Family will eagerly and joyfully embrace those terms. Ownership wouldn't add one iota to our ability to enjoy our existence in the presence of God. When God freely gives us access to unrestricted use of everything He has created, then ownership is not an issue in our ability to enjoy our existence in God's presence. Ownership is in the mind, and it was Satan's mind that craved ownership of everything. It is the mind that is affected by perception of ownership.

Understand that those who will become members of God's Family will never receive ownership of anything. What they will receive as an inheritance from God is access to freely use the whole creation, which will continue to be owned by God.

Now let's take a closer look at a specific application of the concept of "use it or lose it".

DEVELOPING THE HUMAN POTENTIAL

In recent years there have been tremendous advances in the study of neurology. Scientists now know far more about the human brain and how it develops and functions than they did 30 and more years ago. Earlier I mentioned in passing that neurologists now also apply the expression "use it or lose it" to the plasticity of the human brain, a concept commonly referred to as neuroplasticity. Let's take a closer look at this matter.

Since the early 1900's it had been assumed that the brains of adult human beings cannot generate any new nerve cells (i.e. new neurons). If nerve cells in the adult brain die, then they can never be replaced, was the belief. Now the nervous system in our bodies is divided into two major parts: first there is the central nervous system, which consists of the brain and the spinal cord. The second part is known as the peripheral nervous system, where nerve fibers from the spinal cord go to every part of the body. Think of the central nervous system (CNS) as the command center for the body, and the peripheral nervous system (PNS) as being responsible for bringing messages to the brain from every part of the body and then also relaying messages from the brain back to the muscles, glands and organs throughout the body.

In neurology the ability of any tissue to regenerate and to change is described by the word "plastic". So in this article when I use the words "plastic" and "plasticity" I do not mean the stuff plastic bags and plastic containers are made of. In this context here I will use these words with the meaning this word "plastic" has in the term "neuroplasticity", which is "the ability of the human brain to change as a result of experiences", i.e. to increase both memory and intelligence due to experiences, and to adapt

somewhat to changing needs.

So while it was always understood that the PNS is plastic (i.e. damaged and destroyed cells in the PNS can be regenerated), it was believed that the CNS lacked plasticity (i.e. that cells destroyed in the CNS could not be restored).

Recent research, spearheaded by researchers like Drs. Michael Merzenich, Paul Bach-y-Rita, Edward Taub, V.S. Ramachandran and many others, has demonstrated repeatedly that the CNS is also plastic, i.e. the CNS is also capable of making changes as a result of experiences.

I discuss the development of the human brain in more detail in a longer article I am also currently writing, entitled "Godly Child-Rearing: Part 2". It would be helpful to also read that article in conjunction with this one. Here we'll just focus on some of the implications of this understanding, as they illustrate the "use it or lose it" principle.

In the first three years of life phenomenal growth and development take place in the human brain. During that period of time, and for a few years beyond that time, the brain has a staggering potential to learn almost anything, ranging from the ability to reproduce the distinctive sounds inherent in any language that is spoken anywhere, to the ability to grasp complicated scientific and mathematical processes, to the ability to learn skills as divergent as playing various musical instruments and playing various sports and performing various skilled handicrafts.

But then the use it or lose it principle comes into play.

Many of the brain's potential abilities will be lost if they are not used before a certain point in time. A simple example involves the ability to learn a second language. When small children are exposed to two or more languages spoken by native speakers (e.g. a baby of French parents is regularly exposed to French and English and Dutch and Spanish during the first six years of life), then those small children have the ability to learn all those languages without a foreign accent. In other words, our French baby will learn to speak French like a Frenchman, English like an Englishman, Dutch like a Dutchman and Spanish like a Spaniard. The small child's brain will learn to reproduce all the sounds in each language just like the native speaker, with no hint whatsoever of a French accent when the child is speaking English or Dutch or Spanish.

But around age 11 or 12 years something is lost.

Thus when this French child is only exposed to native speakers of English and Dutch and Spanish at age 14 years, for example, then the child can still learn to speak all of these languages fluently. BUT then, with very few exceptions, the child will almost always retain a French accent when speaking English or Dutch or Spanish.

The ability to reproduce some distinctive sounds found in other languages will have been lost by the time the child has become a teenager. This is very much like the Ephraimites in the days of Jephthah not being able to pronounce the word "shibboleth" the way this word was pronounced by people in the other tribes of Israel (see Judges 12:5-6); by adulthood the Ephraimites had lost that ability.

So God has created the human brain in such a way that what we don't use of our original potential we will lose. The recently discovered understanding about neuroplasticity means that SOME skills or abilities can be acquired even after that potential was thought to have been lost because of non-use in the pre-teenage years. However, while neuroplasticity does mean that our brains can still acquire many things in later life, it does have certain limitations, and it cannot restore 100% of the potential that the child's brain had in the pre-teenage years.

Thus English-speaking adults, who were not during their early childhood exposed to these foreign languages, cannot learn to speak languages as diverse as Cantonese and Xhosa and Afrikaans and Hungarian without a noticeable accent, not to mention learning more commonly encountered Western European languages like German, French and Spanish. They can certainly learn to speak all these languages with great proficiency, but usually not without a distinct accent.

What this should tell us is this:

God created us human beings with a staggering potential, far beyond what any human being, including King Solomon in ancient Israel, has ever attained to. The most brilliant minds, from King Solomon to Isaac Newton to Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison, have never developed and utilized more than a small portion of that potential, and the rest of us have developed and utilized even less of that potential. This ties in with the huge number of synaptic connections in the brain that are pruned away after about age 12 years, a process that I discuss in more detail in the article on child-rearing.

So the “use it or lose it” principle affects us in many different areas.

1) In early childhood every child has an enormous potential for intellectual development. When that is not utilized within the first ten years or so then much of it is lost for ever. The responsibility here is with the parents; we as parents have to provide the appropriate learning environment and circumstances for our children to develop their minds.

2) Any skills we don't use regularly we will lose to some degree. The greatest pianists and gymnasts and ice-skaters, etc. have to practice very regularly, or they will lose a certain degree of their skills. Any skill we develop to a very high level is only ours as long as we use that skill very regularly, though if we use that skill occasionally, then we are usually still able to retain that skill, but at a lower level.

3) Attributes like good health and beauty in youth are only ours if we make the effort to maintain them by the way we live our lives, following a healthy lifestyle, etc. As Solomon wrote at the end of the Book of Proverbs: “beauty is vain” (Proverbs 31:30). The Hebrew word here translated as “vain” is “hebel”, which means “a breath” or “a vapor”. In other words, Solomon wasn't really talking about “vanity” as we think of it; Solomon was really pointing out that beauty in human beings is only temporary, like a vapor. To maintain beauty and to maintain good health requires effort. Use it or lose it.

4) In all these things God in effect says to us: alright, I'll get you going, but then you yourself become responsible for maintaining and further developing the things I have given you.

5) It is not surprising that Satan presents inactivity as the greatest possible reward. “Take it easy” is Satan's slogan for mankind. The ultimate reward Satan holds out to people is that they should reward themselves by lying passively on some beach or some luxury ocean liner, without a thing to do. That is supposed to be a highly enjoyable activity. Yuk! And retirement is that phase of our lives when we can finally “do nothing at all”, just sit on some couch all day, or sit on our deck watching the world go by. That's what Satan has palmed off on humanity as the ultimate enjoyment.

And we don't realize that what we don't use we lose, steadily and inexorably. Inactivity is a way of impoverishing our own lives and discarding our potential, you know, like burying our one pound or our one talent.

But there is one more application of this principle, and this involves a far more serious matter.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR SALVATION: USE IT OR LOSE IT!

God devised a plan to grant salvation in His Family to as many human beings as would actively seek a

part in God's Family. God expects human beings to "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God" (Philippians 3:14). We need to demonstrate our desire to receive the free gift of immortal life in the presence of God. Nobody will get into God's Family on some passive ticket.

You understand that God has devised a plan where a small number of people are offered the opportunity to be in the first resurrection, while most people will end up in the second resurrection, to then receive their opportunity to still have a part in God's Kingdom.

What all of us in God's Church today need to understand very clearly about the opportunity for salvation that God has extended to us, is this:

We either use it, or we will certainly lose it!

Nobody will get into God's Kingdom on cruise control. As the Apostle Peter tells us, we need to be diligent, by putting forth great effort, to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). But many of us are not really doing this, are we? Many of us are trying to cruise into God's Kingdom, which "cruising" is composed of Sabbath keeping and Holy Day keeping and tithing and not eating unclean meats. By doing these things we think we are "okay" before God. But many of us don't perceive any need to actively seek regular contact with God through personal prayer, Bible study and occasional fasting. We are cruising along just fine, thank you.

The road into God's Kingdom is very narrow and hard to find (Matthew 7:14), and nobody will ever find it on cruise control.

God has opened our eyes, and God has given us an understanding of His laws and His plan of salvation. God has given all of us "one pound". It is up to us to make good use of that "one pound" (or talent), because if we don't, then it will surely be taken away from us. And those who will have their "pound" taken from them will respond with "weeping and gnashing of teeth", just like in Matthew 22:13.

God has presented to us whose eyes He has opened the opportunity for salvation in His Kingdom on a use it or lose it basis. The choice is ours.

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