



FILLING OUR SOUL'S RESERVOIR AFRESH

Despite having used a computer for decades, I don't seem to have an ounce of tech savvy. Over the years I have learned just enough to be functional in my day-to-day writing and correspondence. However, the moment my computer deals me an unexpected snafu, my frustration meter jumps to the red zone in a heartbeat.

Although the glitch may be minor and resolved without much ado, in the moment it is like a dam bursts, releasing a hidden reservoir of ill-will toward my computer specifically, and technology in general. This reservoir seems to be a place where the memory of all past technological problems is stored, always ready to gush forth. Instead of keeping calm and carrying on, I become stymied as I mutter undeserved epithets at my inanimate techno foe.

Of course, quite often the problem is operator error. Yet my computer takes the brunt of my frustration, all because I maintain this reservoir of ill-will instead of draining it. This can happen when we maintain a reservoir of ill-will toward people and situations, too.

Too often we retain a collection of past conflicts, hurtful comments, betrayals, and other negative experiences, which can gush forth into a current situation with unexpected force. When that happens, we do well to examine what's behind those floodgates, to seek God's healing from those experiences, and to mine the Bible's counsel on how to drain that reservoir and refill it with better things.

An overreaction to an unintended slight, to an offhand political remark, or to an ambiguous text message reveals unfinished business in our souls, which our spiritual enemy the devil uses to diminish, distress, and depress us, and to disrupt our relationships (John 10:10a). This creates a murky mess that easily taints present interactions with past pain. A wise friend, pastor, or counselor can help us wade into that mire in order to examine our toxic backlog.

When we discern the contents of our reservoir of ill-will, we do well to take it before our loving God, who is eminently able and always eager to uplift us, heal our pain, and refresh our perspective (Psalm 103). As we do this, through prayer and meditation on the truth of the Holy Scriptures, He brings things into his clarifying light, dispersing the darkness we may be harboring as He restores our souls (Psalm 23:3). This process takes time and continual returning to the One who can drain our ill-will, de-center our egos, and refract our point of view through his lens of pure love.

But if we leave the reservoir empty, old habits and emotional scar tissue can invite a refill of hostility (Matthew 12:43-45). So it is good to be intentional about refilling it with grace and goodness -- Christ's Living Water -- so *that* is what flows from us in a pressured moment, instead of vitriol (John 7:38). This comes by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we ingest and digest the word of God (Ezekiel 3:1-3; Mathew 4:4; Timothy 3:16).

The Bible's book of Proverbs is a rich handbook for learning to drain ill-will and replace it with love (meaning, willing the good of the other). In Proverbs we learn that "He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it" (Proverbs 11:27). It is there we see that "A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult", and that "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:16, 18).

As we practice these and other proverbs, and weave other biblical wisdom into our lives, we purge our soul's reservoir and refill it with abundant life, to serve God's purposes: "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the Master of the house, ready for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux