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Christian perspectives

I took advantage of this past long weekend to visit a friend in another city. I enjoy our friendship and it was great to spend time with her. As we sat in her kitchen over tea, my eye travelled to the top of the baseboard heater that was covered in a thick layer of dust. I immediately rebuked myself for being critical and turned my focus back to our conversation. It wasn't long before I spotted other things that could use a cleaning, like the stove top and counter. Again, I rebuked myself and fought the instinct to grab a cloth and start wiping. I love my friend and didn't want to her to feel like I was scrutinizing her housework. Besides, I reminded myself, my place was probably just as dirty, if not worse.

When I got back home the next day, I unpacked my things and sat down at the piano to try and find a hymn that was running through my head. I picked up the hymnal and realized how much dust was behind the music stand. I remembered my friend, sighed, and went to find the dustcloth.

As I gave my housework some long overdue attention, I pondered the spiritual parallel to my attitude regarding my friend's housekeeping. How easy it is for us to spot the sin in other people's lives and react with criticism. The words of Jesus came to my mind, ?Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ?Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.? (Matthew 7:3-5). This passage is about judging, and speaks of the spiritual principle that what we see in another person's life that is irritating us is the same sin God sees in us. He expects us to first go to Him and clean up our own life instead of focusing on what's wrong in our brother or sister's life.

I noted some other things as I was cleaning that gave me even more insight into Jesus' words. I went in to clean the bathroom, and the sun was pouring through the window. The white blinds were actually not very white at all. They were dusty, spotted and needed a good scrubbing. I wipe these down often, and most of the time they look clean. But when the bright light is on them, I see that they aren't very clean at all. How often do I ignore sin in my life that's ?not that bad' and worry only about cleaning up the surface so I look good? When I bring my heart into the bright light of the Son, only then do I recognize how truly in need I am of cleansing from my sin.

I continued to mull over the verses, and spent some time thinking about what was bothering me in other people that I God was trying to show me in my own life. As I confessed and prayed for complete cleansing, I turned my prayers away from myself and my ?plank' and prayed for those in whom I had recognized a ?speck'. It struck me that Jesus isn't saying that we must deal with the plank in our own eye and forget about our brother with the speck. He's saying that we must deal with the plank-sin in our own eye first, and then we can see so that we can remove the speck-sin from our brother's eye. I must admit, this bothers me quite a bit. After I have been critical of someone and God has rebuked me, I don't feel like I have any business going to them about their sin. And yet, that is what Jesus says we are to do. In humility, with our own sin cleansed and gone, we can ?see clearly' to go to that person. In love, and with assurance that all hint of the critical spirit has been washed away, we are to go to the person and gently point out their sin. Even though I've done this in the past, I'm still reluctant to do it; however, I know that God has used it to guide people back to Him. In His timing, His strength, and His words it can bring healing to a soul in need. There is great power in the humility that is willing to say, ?I have had to deal with this same sin.? Following God's leading and the prompting of the Holy Spirit can have eternal rewards.

Maybe God's Spirit is nudging you as you read this. I know He used my time of cleaning to show me things I would otherwise have continued to ignore. If He's speaking to you, don't delay. Allow Him to shine His light on your life and come to Him with a willingness to obey.?

By Ann McCallum, Executive Director Highlands Youth for Christ