

Lesson Two: Assume Formlessness

“When I am without form, the enemy cannot discern me. If I am silent, the enemy cannot hear me. Thus I hold the fate of my enemy in my hands” - Sun Tzu, Art of War

I just reread *Art of War*, and the passage where Sun Tzu talks about being formless really stood out to me. For those of you who do not know what the *Art of War* entails, let me explain very quickly. This book was penned by Sun Tzu in the late 5th century BC and is considered one of the greatest military strategies ever written. Sun Tzu dominated his opponents in just about every aspect: physically & mentally.

When he was preparing his warriors for their battles in the 5th century BC, he stressed to them that the only way they were going to evade the enemy was by not being predictable & not playing into the hands of the enemy. In fact, he creates the analogy of his warriors moving like ‘water’. In this sense, it did not matter what obstacle was in the way of flowing water – trees, logs, rocks, people, animals – water would work its way around and not be clotted up. It would continue forward. In essence, formlessness makes one unshakable & in war, it almost solidifies victory. Although Sun Tzu makes this illusion to physical battles that might take place, I believe that this principle is extremely valid when we begin to talk about our mental battle.

Every day we all have to fight a mental battle with ourselves & a lot of times our opponents can come in all different shapes and sizes. This can come in the form of anxiety from a new job, a choice that forces us between two undesirable outcomes, envy of others' success, etc. The list could continue forever. These enemies do not inherently march forward at us with swords or rifles, but they constantly erode our minds with negative thoughts.

“I’m not enough.”

“Life has to go this way or I’m going to be upset.”

“I’m never going to be able to stop this habit.”

Sound familiar? Yeah, me too. Our rigid way of thinking gives our enemies a fixed target that makes it easy for the enemy to pinpoint weakness. However, if we take on formlessness, we become extremely flexible. Instead of pushing away anxiety, we can take mental steps to acknowledge it and move through it. Like water, we can find a path around what blocks us.

The Bible echoes this principle in its own way. Paul writes, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* in Romans 12:2. Conformity in our ways is rigid, but living accordingly to Christ’s purpose allows God’s spirit to shape us and maneuver through our problems. In fact, even Jesus practiced formlessness. Some days, he preached loudly in large crowds. Other days, he quietly prayed to the Lord. He was never locked into one mode, but always moved wisely, unshakable in identity yet flexible in approach. He was

often challenged by the high priests, Pharisees, and other antagonists – but he always kept them on their toes, creating a sense of FORMLESSNESS.

The principle of formlessness isn't about us straying away from our core identity – although that is often something that the devil tries to tell us. It is about refusing to allow our external pressures to dictate how we live our day-to-day lives. Think about it... Which type of water gets infected by nasty bacteria & algae? Running water or Still water?

Still water becomes stagnant. It becomes nasty, murky, and overrun by disease. Why? Because it has no flow. It's not adaptable. It has nowhere to run. In the same way, when our minds or our spirits become fixed and rigid, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the "bacteria" of fear, resentment, bitterness, and sin.

Contrast this with running water. Running water stays fresh. It flows around rocks and bends around the terrain. The motion of running water is what keeps it pure. Likewise, when we can adopt formlessness, we can remain spiritually fresh. This allows us not to get trapped thinking about one situation, one mistake, or one failure. Doing this allows us to leave any negative thoughts in the past. We adapt. We become stronger. We push diseases away from our lives. This allows us to stay mentally healthy, just as running water can evade algae & bacteria.

When plans fall apart, we don't need to collapse with them. When opposition rises up, we don't have to meet it with equal force—we can flow around it, redirecting our energy in a way that still carries us forward. This is where true strength lies: not in being immovable, but in being unstoppable.

Sun Tzu's principles remind us that unpredictability gives us power. It allows us to evade our enemies (anxiety, lust, fear, envy, etc) by keeping them on their toes. Enemies thrive on knowing our responses, expectations, and habits — but flexibility gives us greater leverage to conquer our enemies in any way that they come at us. Jesus himself modeled this: He did not always heal in the same way, speak to the same type of crowd, or respond to challenges with a predictable script. He embodied formlessness with perfect wisdom, yet always stayed rooted in the Father's will.

If we can learn to adopt this approach – anchored in identity, yet fluid in approach – then no obstacle, enemy, or inner thought can have the power to stop us. God does not ask us to be rigid or formulaic; He asks us to be faithful. Faith is alive, breathing, and responsive. It allows us to step into uncertainty with confidence that God's Spirit is shaping the path, even when we cannot see it. Bend – but don't break. We may change shape, but we will never lose who we are through Christ. Assume Formlessness.

THANK YOU AND SEE YOU NEXT WEEK - TY