

**POISONED WELL, OR SPRING OF LIFE?**  
**A Devotional Meditation from**  
**Genesis 1:28, Deuteronomy 30:19; Jeremiah 2:13, 17:5-8; John 4:13-14**  
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Frank Sinatra's only directing credit happened to be one of the World War II movies that made a significant impression on me as a child. His 1965 film, *None But the Brave*, has its shortcomings (as the critics pointed out), but it was groundbreaking in its depiction of American and Japanese fighting men finding reason to suspend their hostility and build relationships based on their shared humanity.

The story takes place in 1944 as the war against Japan is entering its final phases. A transport plane carrying a platoon of American Marines crashes on a remote Pacific island where a small group of Japanese soldiers has been stranded. The commanders of both units soon realize that they have nothing to gain by fighting, but might each benefit if they cooperate. They agree to a truce, with the Japanese permitting the Americans to have access to the island's only source of fresh water, and the Americans sending their medic (played by Sinatra) to treat a badly wounded Japanese soldier. Over the next several days, the truce gives the warriors on both sides opportunities to interact. They learn that they share a common humanity that transcends their differences in language, culture, and national loyalty. In the absence of conflict, they begin to understand the importance of focusing on the substance of life rather than the ways of death.



*In None But the Brave, Japanese and American warriors find a way to suspend their hostility and work together to sustain life. ([Warner Brothers 1965 Lobby Card](#), imaged by [Heritage Auctions](#).)*

When a typhoon threatens to destroy the island's spring of fresh water, the men work together to build barriers that shield the spring from the storm surge. In other words, they make a deliberate choice to sustain life rather than administer death. It is a choice they must make together because they need the combined strength of both units to prevent the seawater from poisoning the spring.

If only the movie had ended there, but sadly it could not. The wider world with its raging conflicts inevitably reinserted itself in the tiny island theater where this experiment in true humanity played out. The Marines found a way to get their radio working and call for help, so when a rescue ship arrived, they and their Japanese counterparts had to choose whether to continue in their newfound brotherhood, or resume their customary enmity. The choice that time was not for life. Men who so recently had cooperated to preserve the life-sustaining water they all needed turned their weapons on each other. Only five men, none of them Japanese, survived to be rescued.

Why does it always have to end that way? That's a question our Creator has been asking us ever since the first conflict between brothers resulted in the imposition of death rather than the sustainment of life. If Cain could not find a way to set aside his hostility toward his brother Abel, what hope do we have? Cain and Abel were not encumbered by the many ways we have found to divide ourselves over the millennia, but still they had a disagreement, and in the heat of the moment Cain deemed his own satisfaction more important than his brother's life.

It may be that this story is too familiar to us. We're supposed to be appalled at this account of the first shedding of innocent blood, but are we? Our human story says otherwise. Rather than turn in horror from Cain's life-robbing choice, we tend to applaud and repeat it. God said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), but instead we prefer to be barren and divide. He said, "So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants" (Deuteronomy 30:19), but we have placed a higher value on choosing and causing death.

What happened? And how do we fix it?

Jeremiah tells us what happened.

My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me—the spring of living water—and they dug their own cisterns—cracked cisterns that hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13 TLV)

It really is as simple as that. There is only one Source of life – living water, Jeremiah says – and that is our Creator. Our consistent choices, however, have caused us to drift away from the Source and develop substitutes we proclaim as improvements on the Living Water He freely offers.

Think about those substitutes for a moment. What have we put forth as causes so great that they are worth sacrificing our own lives and the lives of others? Here are a few:

- Personal honor
- Social justice
- Religion
- Science
- Patriotism
- Race
- Politics
- Color
- Wealth
- Worldview
- Animal welfare
- Creed and doctrine

None of these things is evil in itself. The problem is that we tend to use them to gain advantage over others – even such a fleeting advantage as favorable public opinion. None of these things sustains life, but we have made them the measure of our lives. That's how we have forsaken our Lifegiving Creator. Then we have used these things to

find meaning in a life that, apart from the Creator, has no meaning. That's how we have dug cracked cisterns that can never hold the living water we need to survive.

So how do we fix it? Jeremiah explains that as well:

Thus says *ADONAI*: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, and depends on flesh as his arm, and whose heart turns from *ADONAI*. For he will be like a bush in the desert. He cannot see goodness when it comes, but will dwell in parched places in the wilderness—a salt land where no one lives.

Blessed is the one who trusts in *ADONAI*, whose confidence is in *ADONAI*. For he will be like a tree planted by the waters, spreading out its roots by a stream. It has no fear when heat comes, but its leaves will be green. It does not worry in a year of drought, nor depart from yielding fruit. (Jeremiah 17:5-8 TLV)

It's as simple as trusting the Lord our Creator and learning His ways.

That is the simple answer, but doing it is the hard part. We've found it increasingly more difficult through 6,000 years of recorded human history. Instead of making the effort to choose life and uphold the Kingdom of our God, we have chosen alternatives that uphold the kingdoms of this world. We choose to be offended rather than emphasize the common humanity our Creator bestowed on us.

It would be much better to let offense fall to the ground and forgive others when they offend us or wound us, however lightly or grievously. That's the beginning of learning to love others as we love ourselves. But again, walking this out is more difficult than talking about it. Maybe the question is not whether we're willing to be humble and forgive, but whether we're willing to set down everything we hold precious –our lives, our honor, our wealth, our status in society, and maybe even our loved ones – so that we can drink from the cistern of living water and help keep it from being poisoned by the toxic storms of life.

Maybe this is what our Messiah meant when He said:

Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty. The water that I give him will become a fountain of water within him, springing up to eternal life!" (John 4:13-14 TLV)

The water He gives us is what His Father, our Creator, has always offered freely to everyone who asks. Through the ages, we have sipped daintily at the living water of the Kingdom of Heaven. Maybe it's time to plunge into it and invite others to join us. But then, that first requires the courage to walk away from our own broken cisterns.