

Discipline of Ministry

For those of us who claim the name of Christ we have two choices. To try and survive by avoiding the troubles of life. We see that all around us as people try to isolate themselves and store up supplies just in case this virus gets out of control. We don't even give a thought to our fellow humans and the effect that hoarding has on them. It's all about me! People simply do not even want to consider that Christ calls us to a higher and nobler standard. To love other as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

This choice will cause a deafness that keeps us from hearing the cries of others and the voice of Christ. It will cause a blindness that keeps us from seeing our culture as growing more and more self-centered. If you want to just get through life this deaf and blind model is for you. You can minimize your hopes and dreams for a better life for future generations (Your children and grandchildren) and join the small hearted people of our culture.

The other possibility is to enlarge your heart through Christian ministry. To be open to the Holy Spirit and understand the role of Christian love in our world. This love that is patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not disrespectful, not self-seeking, not easily angered, forgiving, hates evil, is truthful, protective, trusting, hopeful and steadfast (1Cor. 13). Of course, this love comes at a cost, and your vulnerability will increase.

We know that our choices have an impact on our family, our culture, our church and most important ourselves. When we choose to be self-serving it can be safe and comfortable but is that all there is to life. Does being self-serving ever contribute to anything of value? I don't think so! On the other hand, hearts that have embraced the disciplines of ministry-though they are vulnerable-are also the hearts which possess the most joy and leave their heartprint on the world.

R. Kent Hughes in his book "Disciplines of a Godly Man" makes a profound statement:

Cultivate deafness and we will never hear discord, but neither will we hear the glorious strains of a great symphony. Cultivate blindness and we will never see ugliness, but we also will never see the beauty of God's creation. Or, to put this in terms of our common experience, never play baseball and you will never strike out, but you will also never hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth with bases loaded to when the game! Never ride a surfboard and you will never experience the joy of the perfect wave.

When Sam was 6 years old, I experienced this principle. I got a call from Newburg Park and Recreation Department with a problem. They had filled up all the soccer teams and there were a bunch of boys (including Sam) that would not be able to play soccer unless I would be willing to coach a team. I was a full time college student, full time purchasing agent, and national competitor in track and now I am the coach of under 8 soccer team made up of all the kids that were not assigned to a team (and because teams could retain players) and had not played organized soccer before. Just for the record I had never played soccer and knew nothing about the sport. That first season we lost, all our matches, with one tie. But, miracle of miracles, because we retained our players the next year I had a team of experienced players that I knew and that knew me and we were the best team in our division, winning all our games with one tie.

Had I never coached soccer I would have never known the humility of being the league's doormat, but I would have never experienced the joy of our players being the winningest team in our division.

Being safe may afford a life of ease, but you will never know the power of the Holy Spirit at work and the exhilaration of being used by God. Safe people are never heroes and totally miss their purpose in life, to love God and each other.

In this moment in time there is an urgent need for caring hearts which are committed to Christian ministry. If so, the Biblical account of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well because it showcases Jesus' own discipline of ministry, which we are to imitate as believers.

It is in this story that we have Jesus who had just finished baptizing believers in Judea and decided to return to Galilee by way of Samaria which brought Him to the ancient town of Sychar. In Sychar at Jacob's well Jesus pauses to rest at about the sixth hour (John 4:6). It was lunch time, so Jesus and His disciples were in town to purchase some food.

Jesus was exhausted, He had been ministering to multitudes of people, His disciples and traveled on dirty dusty roads. He even said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 89:20). He was tired, mentally fatigued and physically drained, totally exhausted. So, Jesus laid down to rest.

He was probably enjoying the warmth of the sun on his face and a moment of quiet rest. I think He mostly had his eyes closed when He heard someone approaching. When He looked up, He saw the Samaritan woman coming to get water. Jesus could have just pretended to be asleep and paid no attention to her, but not Jesus! Our Lord in His great compassion mustered up enough strength to minister to her needs. We like Christ need to be willing to reach out in times like these, to check on our neighbors, provide emotional support to those who are afraid and spiritual answers to the down-trodden.

Our best work is done when we are weak, when we know, without a doubt, that it is God at work because we in our own power are too weak to go on.

Our church is a place where tired people empowered by God can do the work of ministry. Brothers and Sisters, we must understand that we will never do great things for God without the willingness to extend ourselves for the sake of the gospel even when we are totally exhausted.

The apostle Paul said, "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you" (1 Thessalonians 2:9). This work ethic is a prominent part of Paul's ministry. "I labored and toiled," he told the Corinthians, "and have often gone without sleep..." (2 Con. 11:27).

Discipline of ministry required a willingness to move beyond our comfort zones, to be vulnerable, make costly commitment.

Jesus also, through the story of the Samaritan woman, illustrates how we need to reach beyond our comfort zone, to cross difficult barriers and take the Gospel to all people. "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (Something Jewish men did not do – talk to a woman especially a Samaritan woman) The Samaritan woman said to him, "you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (vv.7-9).

Here Jesus demonstrates that the Church of Jesus Christ has no ethnic or social or economic or psychological barriers. The Early Christian Church was comprised of Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, men and women and they all met together at one table as one family in Christ.

Finally, to do ministry we need to have perspective. God brings people into our lives that we might communicate the Gospel, in Christ there are no relational accidents. Our steps are ordered by the Lord (Ps 37:23) and people who come our way are a divine appointment.