

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 28, 2008

Taking the Narrow Pathway

by Dan Trygg

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares Yahweh, “plans for well-being and not for misery, to give you a future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I am confident... that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6

“Yahweh commanded us to obey all these decrees and to respect Yahweh our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as is the case today.”

Deuteronomy 6:24

“O taste and see that Yahweh is good; how blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him!”

Psalms 34:8

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one coming to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

Hebrews 11:6

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Matthew 7:13-14

The turning of a new year is a good time for reflection. Where was I a year ago? What was going on in my life then? What changes have transpired in the past year? **If we know God, then there should be movement in our lives. God is relentlessly working in our lives to bring to completion His good plan for us** (Phil. 1:6). In a general sense, this involves making our lives to display His character and glory. Specifically and personally, He works to mature us, equip us to do His will, and gives us opportunities to serve His Kingdom purposes through acts of service.

God's ways are best. They will bring the greatest blessing and benefit to and through our lives. **But, His ways are not like our ways** (Isa. 55:8,9). **He does not always work as we might expect**, or look at things as we do. This is where trusting God can be difficult, because sometimes it appears He has abandoned us, or that He is making the way unreasonably hard, or that He is leading us in a direction that seems to be bringing us down, rather than helping us. **He challenges us to face things we don't want to face, ...to work through things we would rather avoid.** He calls us to give up things that were valuable or pleasurable to us, so that we might know Him better and discover His will for our lives. God will not be mocked, or “played” as if He were a fool. If we want His blessings, we have to conform to His ways. **But the Christian life is not just about cleaning up our act, and getting our lives in order.** No. God not only calls us to face things we don't want to face, and give up things we once thought were valuable, He also prompts and directs us to step out to do things we would have never thought we would do. He gives us assignments, sends us on missions, calls us to serve, pushes us to step out into new things, requires us to take risks and stretch in new ways. **The Christian life is not just about giving things up; it is about taking up new things. It is not just about ceasing to do evil; it is about learning to do good.** It is not just about avoiding certain people, places or activities; it is about pursuing new activities, which will bring us into relationship with new people in new places.

Do you believe God has good plans for you? Do you believe He has plans to bring about a positive and fruitful future? Then you must trust Him. **Trust is spelled “o-b-e-y”.** **Do you believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? If you really believed that, what would you do? Of course, you would diligently seek Him!!** Notice that the verse does not just say that He will reward those who go to church, or occasionally pray or read their Bible. No. He will reward those who are serious about finding *Him*. **What does “diligently” mean? It implies an expenditure of consistent and strong effort, ...being earnest and serious about it, and being willing to put forth energy, time and work.** What are we to be seeking *for*? What is to be the highest good? It is not the *rewards* God might give along the way to those who are putting forth the effort to pursue Him. No. The ultimate goal is *knowing God Himself*, and doing His will. He is the rewarder of those who seek *Him*. He does not promise to be the rewarder of those who seek *rewards*. He does not promise to be a rewarder of those who are *religious*. He promises to bless those who honestly are seeking *Him*. Notice that David did not say, “Taste and see that religious activities are good.” No. He said, “Taste and see that *the Lord, Yahweh*, is good.” Spiritual disciplines are not the end in themselves. They are means to an end. **The goal is knowing God, discerning His voice, being empowered to do His will. God will reward those who spend time and effort in pursuing Him.** Insights and breakthroughs will come to those pressing on after God, but *He Himself is the goal*. Knowing Him and doing His will are what we are pursuing.

That said, however, there *are* blessings and stability that come to those who choose to line their lives up with the counsel of God in even simple outward matters. Remember that the Hebrew word *Torah*, which is usually translated as “law”, actually meant “instruction”. **The Bible is God's instruction book about life.** In the passage from Deuteronomy 6, Moses said that **God gave His people the teachings, statutes and decrees for their benefit**, so

that those who follow them would do well in life and escape the disasters that often come upon the foolish. God told Joshua that if he would learn, meditate on, and practice the wisdom of God's *Torah*, then he would become effective and prosperous in life. People who stop wasting their lives on drunkenness and carousing, and begin to invest their time and money more constructively will begin to experience the blessings that come from wiser choices. Those who take heed to God's counsel regarding putting off anger, and learning to talk through issues respectfully, will benefit from more honest, healthy and peaceful relationships. Those who learn to humbly accept correction and counsel will benefit from the insights of others. **There are countless gems of wise counsel that will benefit those who give heed to God's instruction and implement it in their lives.** Again, however, the blessings come only to those who actually make changes, to those who put God's counsel into practice. *Talking the talk, without walking the walk, will not bring blessing.* In fact, it is a sure way to bring God's judgment. He would rather that we made *no claim* to knowing Him, than to say that we do, and be living lives of hypocrisy (Rev. 3:15,16). God is very tolerant of people who stumble and struggle, but He is very intolerant of those who want to play a religious game. Hypocrisy gives an occasion to the enemies of the Lord to speak evil of His name and His people. It dishonors Him.

Make no mistake, we can't have the old way and the new way at the same time. It is one or the other, not both. We must choose to follow God, and reap the benefits that come from that relationship, that calling, that destiny, ...or we *will* diverge from Him, His way, His plan, and His intended destiny for us. We will miss out on what He had for us. If you have tasted something of God's blessings in this past year, let me assure you that "you ain't seen nothin' yet". He is life, vitality and joy. No wonder that David wrote, "in Your presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forever at Your right hand" (Psa. 16:11). In the same verse, he wrote, "You will make known to me *the path of life*". **Jesus spoke of two divergent pathways to travel through life and into eternity.** There is a wide gate that opens to a broad and spacious roadway leading away to destruction. There is also a narrow gate through which one can enter upon a constrictive pathway that leads one away toward life. This is like a fork in the road, except the narrow gate is apparently somewhat hidden, because "few are those who find it". **Both paths lead the person away from where they currently are. We can't stay where we are. We are moving along in time.** We will either move down the broad and spacious path, or we will purposefully choose to find and press through the narrow gate and work our way along the constrictive path. **The broad way is comfortable. It does not require any change or growth on our part. We seem to be able to go down this road along with others.** We *seem* to be just going along with the crowd, but we are, in reality, still choosing our individual path. *We are responsible for the choices that will determine our destiny.* No one is forcing us to go with them. We do so willingly. **By contrast, the narrow gate and constrictive path highlights the individual nature of our decision and our spiritual journey. People can only enter the pathway one at a time.** Each person must make a conscious decision on their own. **Furthermore, the constrictive way is not comfortable.** The word picture is like a path that is heavily overgrown with brush. You can still make out the path, but you have to push through the bushes and branches to make your way through. It requires determination and effort to make progress. As we push our way through, however, we become stronger. **The faith, determination and obedience which propels us to make the effort to struggle forward is rewarded with increased growth and strength,** so that we become able to more easily progress as we go. As our strength increases, we can handle more strenuous tests. The old level of resistance is not difficult to wade through, anymore. There are other obstacles, however, that get in our way. At times, the brush seems thicker, or there may be other hardships to deal with (Acts 14:22). **Each new challenge, when met with faith, obedience and determination, adds to our understanding of God, of spiritual warfare, and of how life in Christ works.** Each challenge, when overcome, adds to our strength.

As you move into this coming year, it is important to evaluate and understand why you are where you are today. **Have you experienced blessings and growth from God in the past year? Have you handled the grace of God with respect and responsibility, or have you squandered or wasted the blessings He has given to you?** Have you been seeking Him for the gifts from His hand, or do you *really* want to know *Him* for who He is? Do you serve Him out of genuine love, or do you come to church because you want to impress other people, or because you want more of the tangible blessings which He has given to you? Are you seeking His hand, or His face? Do you want the gifts, or do you want to know and serve the Giver? **If you feel like you are not in as good a place with God as you have been in the past, do you know why not?** Is there some unfinished business between you and God that is blocking your progress? Have you slipped back into old behaviors, or given up on goals you felt God had led you to in the past? **Confess openly to God what you see to be the problem, and ask Him for help.** Philippians 2:13 says, "...it is God that is inworking among y'all, both the desire to do His will, as well as the ability or strength to carry it out." In the coming year, expect great things from God, and prepare to stretch, grow and obey in new ways, larger than in the past.