

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 12, 2010

The Importance of Serving in Order to Grow

by Dan Trygg

"...the equipping of the saints [is] for work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ; until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ...[out] from whom *the whole Body*, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, *according to the proper working of each individual part*, causes the growth of *the Body* for the building up of itself in love"

Eph. 4:12,13,16

"...And do not conform (for yourselves) to this age, rather transform (for yourselves) by the renewing of your perception to test-out-by-trial-to-discover what is the beneficial and well-pleasing and fully-grown desire of God. For I say... to think toward sound-thinking, to each one as God has apportioned a measure of faith. For just as in one body we have many members, but all the members do not have the same function, in this manner we, the many, are one Body in Christ, but members one of another."

Rom. 12:2-5

We ourselves mature and develop as we invest in the maturity of others. We discover and learn to utilize our gifts and strengths as we are challenged to respond to the needs we encounter in serving others. Attempting to move others on in their spiritual journey will continually keep us thinking about the need to grow. Inevitably, as we invest in the lives of others, we will find ourselves confronted with new insights applicable to our own lives. We will stretch in new ways, as we attempt to address needs that surface in this process. We will be invigorated by our involvement. No more "couch potato Christianity" for us. We become participants, not passive observers.

Furthermore, taking responsibility for others will also help us stay on track during the spiritual dry times we experience. When our perspective is only as broad as our own lives, it is easy to just give up, or become lethargic, when we encounter the doldrums. We tend to want to just "drift about" until the next "wind" comes along to fill our sails. When we see ourselves as key players in the lives of others who are counting on us, however, we find that we can't afford to wait around in our fatigue, or our "pity party". Out of love, and out of a sense of mature responsibility, we will do what it takes to meet that other person's need. Then if we encounter the doldrums, we won't just "roll over" in despair. We become creative. We contact other "ships" for help, or we may even have to get out the "oars" to keep moving. **We push ourselves to get where we have to go, and do what we need to do, because someone else is counting on us.** A couple of experiences like that, and we begin to look at ways to "motorize our sailboat". We have a purpose that motivates us to live differently, even to the extent of retrofitting our skills and equipment. Somewhere in this process, we shift from being passive and reactive in our approach to life, to becoming proactive.

The same shift takes place when we become parents. We find ourselves doing all kinds of things that we never would have done before, ...just because we are responsible to meet the needs of this little child. We get up in the middle of the night, we change diapers and prepare special foods, we purchase extra specialized furniture and equipment, and we may even take classes or read books on childbirth or child rearing so that we can be more effective. Most of us have no intellectual problem accepting the responsibilities of parenthood, so we make the adjustments that are necessary, even if they are frustrating and painful at times. We hear of neglectful parents, parents who have not fed or clothed their children properly, or who have left them alone and unsupervised for long periods of time, some who have not even bathed or changed the diapers of their children. We are horrified by such behavior, ...such irresponsibility and lack of love.

In a sense, the New Testament teaches that we are to "parent" one another in the Body of Christ. We are to take responsibility to nurture and care for one another as fellow members of the Body (cf. Heb. 12:15; I Cor. 12:20f). In some ways, however, we are often like both the neglectful parent and the neglected child. **Most of us have suffered from neglect, ...a lack of support, loving discipline, and responsible care from our fellow Christians.** Our experience is not at all like what really should be ours in the nurturing environment of Body-life envisioned by the apostle Paul (Eph. 4:12-16). **Most of us also, in varying degrees, have experienced the stunted growth of spiritual malnutrition, the ravages of spiritual disease, and the lack of maturity that results from being left too much to our own devices** (i.e., without proper healthy guidance). For some of us, it has been like the scenario of the kid who grows up in an attic, locked away from the outside world. For others, it may have been more like we were thrown out into the street to "fend for ourselves", at an inappropriate time in our development. **Then again, still others of us were raised in spiritual "home environments" that were too structured, authoritarian, and patronizing. We were never allowed to mature because we were never entrusted with making decisions for ourselves. We were treated as though we would always be children.** Our decisions were made for us. We were told what to do, how to do it, and when it should be done. Our spiritual "leaders", like doting, over-conscientious or controlling parents, would not allow

us to grow and stretch by trial and error. Afraid that we would fail, or that we might get hurt, they hovered over us, doing everything for us, keeping us "at home", for fear that we might get hurt if we went "out to play" in the real world. Though they may have meant well, they reinforced in us a view that we were incompetent and untrustworthy to effectively deal with life as an adult. In the end, they encouraged an unhealthy dependence upon them, and a view of the world as a fearful, dangerous place. In any of the above scenarios, the net result was that **we have not been equipped to deal with life in a healthy, Christ-centered manner. We have not been brought to maturity.** Many of us are still dealing with pretty much the same issues we were ten years ago, with no more tools or practical strategies than we had before. **Clearly, what we have been doing is not working.**

The tragic part is that *this is all we have known.* It has been what "normal" looked like to us, based upon our experience, so we think this is the way spiritual parents are to treat their children. As a result, we duplicate the same pattern with our spiritual offspring. If we are leaders, we become the irresponsible, neglectful parents, or those that are over-protective and authoritarian. Many of us still perceive ourselves as incapable, inadequate "losers" who have nothing to offer anyone. We are caught on a treadmill of trying to measure up, while at the same time being denied, or denying ourselves, the very experiences that would be necessary to bring about real maturity. **The dysfunctional "family dynamics" of church life, as we have known them, are passed without question from one generation to another.** If anyone questions our methodology, our answer is, "That's the way we did things when I grew up", and we tend to dismiss the objection on the grounds of our experience. **We tend to not even entertain that there may be a better way.**

Let's take a closer look at what the NT is describing as the ideal spiritual church family. In Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12; I Pet. 4:10; and Eph. 4:11-16, the assumption, **the starting point is that *we all have been given unique abilities by God in order to serve one another.*** The main function of the ministry gifts in Eph. 4:11,12 is to equip and prepare the believers for the work of service. **The shaping, mending, equipping or arranging together of believers is not an end in itself.** Though this process may in itself produce good, healthy, benefits for the people involved, **it is not only for self-development, it is for service.** You see the difference in orientation? In our consumer mindset, we are looking to see what we can immediately get out of our church experience. While we ought to be benefiting from our interaction with other believers, the purpose God had in His mind was that we would be strengthened in our ability to serve one another for Him. What does that mean? **We should be learning skills by which we can help one another grow, mature and become more equipped.** According to these passages, I should grow in personal spiritual/emotional health, discover my personal spiritual abilities, and develop interpersonal skills so that I can, in conjunction with God's Spirit, learn to show love and support, and speak truth and encouragement to my brothers and sisters in Christ, ...to help them grow up into their spiritual capacities and become fully functional as servants, as well. As they, too, take responsibility for their growth, work on their personal well-being, and become active servants devoted to my encouragement and growth, *they* become part of *my* support system. **God's plan is that we would reinforce and strengthen each other by serving one another.** At the same time, as we express ourselves obediently to love and encourage, we will experience the outflow of God's Spirit working in and through us. **We are actually strengthened by serving; we receive vitality from the Lord as we give toward our brothers and sisters.** As we give, it will be given to us (Lk. 6:38). In areas of our spiritual giftedness, this phenomenon will be particularly pronounced. **Thus, serving others becomes a way of self-discovery and self-fulfillment.**

We saw in Eph. 4:12 that **the preparation/equipping of believers is for the purpose of service's (*diakonia*) work.** There is no "the" in the Greek, so there is no particular defined action in mind. Some translate the Greek word, *diakonia*, as "ministry". This definitely dials up religious activities in our 21st century minds, but is that an accurate representation of what this word meant to the original author and recipients of this letter? ***Diakonia* is a word meaning "practical service",** often "to wait upon", "care for", or "attend to someone's needs", such as a domestic servant might do. Although OT Judaism had a deep understanding of service, and highly valued it, especially serving God, the term *diakonia* is never used in the Greek Septuagint translation (LXX) of the OT, so **there was absolutely no religious connotation communicated by this word.** It was strictly practical. Here, it probably means being at the ready to attend to one another's needs, whenever they might become evident. It did not matter what *kind* of need it may be, ...a servant was ready to help with *whatever* came up. In this context, **the preparation of the saints is clearly for the purpose of their "hands on" participation in building up Christ's Body.** This is the work of constructing a healthy, functional Body. **We are not only to serve individuals, we are to serve the group by assembling its parts. Our relationships and interactions serve as the connecting ligaments and the binding glue that holds us together.** We are *all* being trained to help in that process. This is not the work of some professional clergy; it belongs to us all.