

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Taking Stock of Who We Are and What We Have

by Dan Trygg

"Then this shall be a sign for you: you shall eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward."

Isa. 37:30,31

"For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

I Cor. 4:7

"...No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven."

Jn. 3:27

There are two dimensions of growth described in Isaiah 37:31. (1.) There is the largely invisible *downward growth* of a healthy root system that brings in the raw materials of nutrients and water from the soil; and, (2.) there is the processing and utilization of those raw materials in the *upward growth* of the light-gathering, fruit-bearing expressions of life that are visibly seen. This natural process of growth is utilized in this scripture passage as a *parable for human life*. By this, we are encouraged to meditate on life, growth, prosperity and fruitfulness in light of the principles of the natural process of development and maturation we observe around us

We humans have a tendency to inflate ourselves with pride, ...to be pretentious in order to impress others. We hide behind outward appearances in order to be safe from a sense of shame, ...because we fear that if people could see our pain and vulnerability, we would be hurt or embarrassed *even more*, ...or would *most certainly* be rejected. The problem with attempts to cover what is real with a mask is that we become so focused on keeping up the appearance, we lose sight of what is real. In order to appear to have it all together, we hide our hurts and needs from the very people who could help us (Matt. 5:4). Often, we begin to believe our own fabrications. They have become so much of what we are trying to project to others, that we begin to see ourselves that way, too. Or, conversely, we accept the messages of the world around us that tell us we are no good, and we believe that is what is real about us.

In either case, we do not pursue the things that are necessary for us to grow toward health and the maturation of our innate, God-designed potential, ...i.e., we do not put our roots deeper into the soil of truth to get the nutrients we need, or we do not work at processing what comes into our lives in order to put forth new growth, e.g., "...work out your own salvation..." (Phil. 2:12,13)

One of the classic disciplines of the Christian life is meditation. Meditation is a pondering, a mental "chewing of the cud". It can involve the repetitive recall of a scripture passage to become more familiar with its content. As you repeatedly roll the passage around in your mind, often a new awareness will emerge that will bring to light either fresh perceptions of truth, ...or applications of truth, not seen before. A cud-chewing animal repeatedly brings up its food to re-chew, then swallows again to let the unseen process of digestion work on it for a time, then brings it up to re-chew, etc., until it gains the benefit from what it has eaten. Meditation also employs a conscious and an unconscious process. The "chewing" is the conscious repetition, the mental effort involved in familiarization and examination. There is an unseen side to meditation as well. Whether it is the working of our unconscious mind, or the revelation of the Holy Spirit, or some combination thereof, there is more to meditation than what happens during the "chewing time". Insights will often come to us during times totally unrelated to any conscious mental effort. Life events will jog some new thought, or illustrate a principle, or in some way give us a new word picture that is like a key that unlocks our new insight or application.

There are other types of meditation besides "scripture digesting". You can employ similar techniques with many kinds of fodder. You can ruminate on current events to become more in tune with the needs and hurts of others. You can use your imagination to try to understand someone you may be having difficulty with. As you bring this situation repeatedly before God and say, "Lord, what is going on, here?", He may give you insight beyond your first assumptions, and a course of action may become evident as to what you could do to resolve differences in a healthy way. Here again, insight and application are the two desired products of this process. If there is no new insight, then we will probably do what we did before, ...or simply withdraw to avoid a repeat scenario. If there is insight, but no application, then nothing will be changed except my own perspective. Sometimes that is enough, while other situations call us to do more to promote forgiveness and healing.

Another classic Christian discipline within the area of meditation is the practice of emptying ourselves of pride and self-aggrandizement, or any other false self-image, in order to get a clearer picture of ourselves in relation to God and to the world around us. In a world-system built upon competition and accomplishment, we

can pick up an erroneous view of who we actually are. Whether we think we stack up well on the comparison chart, or *not*, we tend to fall into the notion that *what we have on the outside, or what we have accomplished, in some way justifies who we are*. We too easily begin to transfer our blessings from the "thankful to God" column to the "look what I've done" column in our mental accounting of our lives. This attitude can *creep* into our lives, pushing out true graciousness, generosity, and humility, distancing ourselves from others less fortunate. **Or, on the other hand, we may come to believe that we are losers, ...that because we have not done well financially, we are inadequate, incapable, defective, and not worthwhile.** Both assessments, whether prideful or self-debasing, are unhealthy evaluations made from a standard of measure that is a *diabolical diversion*, a false distraction intended to lead us away from recognizing the truth of who we are as children of God. It also keeps us from learning to walk victoriously in what God has made available to us in the Holy Spirit. **This "comparison mentality" has us barking up the wrong tree. As a result, we find ourselves looking for life and accomplishment in all the wrong places.**

If we are to get a clear picture of what is real, we must get off the merry-go-round of the world-system in order to get our bearings. This is done through the meditative discipline of detachment and re-collection. This involves the stripping away of *all* external things, ...*all* past accomplishments or failures, ...*all* treasures gained, lost, or foolishly wasted, *in order to get to the core*. **Who am I, really? What are some bottom-line, Biblically-revealed truths about me that lay a solid foundation for my self-understanding?** Are not these the same truths that apply to *every other believer* in Christ? How should that affect *my* relationship to *them*? If that was all I knew about them, how would I treat them? How would I expect to be treated by them? What *is* the big picture, here? **What does it mean that God is my Creator?** Did He make a mistake with me? **What does it mean that He is my Parent?** Does He not want to nurture me, and help me grow up to my full potential? **What does it mean that He is my King?** What expectations does He have of me? What responsibilities does He give me? *Listen for His personal word to you.*

To these theoretical ponderings, add specific observations from your life history. What are some characteristics of *my* personality? Are these *survival techniques* to deal with painful circumstances, or do they reflect who I *really* am? What are strengths that have become evident in my life? What are some weaknesses that I can see? How did I get to where I am today? What would I do differently? What can I do to strengthen areas of weakness? What consequences of past behavior do I live with today? How can I graciously, victoriously, responsibly live with these consequences? What do I need help with? How does God desire to empower me to deal with these things? Are there things I could do to draw more upon His strength? Has He provided people in my life to encourage or assist me? Are there things I am aware that God wants me to do that I am avoiding, or putting off?

Recognize that all of life is tenuous. Our eternal dwelling place is *not* here. We cannot count on our accomplishments to endure, or even our own strength and vitality to continue. Things that appear to us to be very stable and secure can be eroded away over time, or wrested away in a tragic downturn. Possessions, relationships, even our own health and strength are vulnerable to unseen uncertainties, and are not to be taken for granted. **We are not owners or creators of anything. We are only stewards,** entrusted with opportunities, resources, and abilities, for a time. We can put these together in various ways, ...as God gives us wisdom, and as we choose to invest energy..., but *the end result is to be used in service to Him and His Kingdom*. **As stewards, we are responsible to do what is in accordance with the Master's wishes,** what is for the benefit of His household, His affairs, always recognizing that it is not our stuff. It belongs to Him. **Our business is to be taking care of His business.** Sometimes we need to draw back the curtain on this larger perspective to remind ourselves what this is all about, or we get muddled up in our own narrow perspective. **Seeing our stewardship role can often quickly clarify some decisions we face,** ...while others we would easily dismiss become much more significant. Sometimes, because of changes in strength and ability, responsible stewardship even means passing on such work to *others*, because *that* is in the Master's best interest.

Humility. **Humility is seeing yourself as you really are.** No added frills. No window dressing. Warts and all. Limitations and wounds recognized, but potential also clearly understood. **Humility is also seeing clearly what God has given, and being thankful.** "Every good giving and every mature gift (i.e., one that is timely, ripe, ready-for-picking) is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights..." (Jas. 1:17). The Corinthians, in their divisive competitiveness, seem to have forgotten that *it was God* who had given the abilities and the resources they had. Paul quickly reminded them that they had *nothing* that had not been provided to them by Another. "For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). **Everything we have is a gift, a blessing, a provision from the Lord.** It does not "make us something", rather, God shares with us what is His. **He allows us to benefit from these resources, but He has also entrusted them to us to benefit others and further His Kingdom.** "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (I Cor. 1:31).