

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Well Done!

by Dan Trygg

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master’.”

Matthew 25:21

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 2:15

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

2 Timothy 2:2

The other night, I had the privilege of gathering with a handful of other people to “pray out” one of our brothers, Ricardo Wade, who is moving to Chicago. We spent a couple of hours with him, reminiscing concerning past experiences we had shared with him, *recounting how much we have seen him grow and expressing our appreciation for the impact he has had on each of us*. Some of the guys have known him from childhood. They knew him as a scrapper and a hellion. They knew of his years using and selling drugs, his womanizing, his skirmishes with the law, and his repeated trips to jail and prison. **It didn’t look like much positive was going to come of his life. God intervened, however, and Ricardo became a new creation in Christ.**

Eleven years ago, while he was still on house arrest, with an ankle bracelet around his leg, two of those guys began to go visit him for Bible study. As the three of them studied, shared and prayed, they began to get a larger vision and burden for men who were lost. **They wanted to form a support group to help men become better men, ...better husbands, better fathers, better friends, ...better followers of Jesus Christ. Even though he could hardly read, somehow Ricardo became the driving force and impetus of this fledgling ministry.** He drew upon some of his experiences in AA and NA to develop and foster an atmosphere of sharing and support that helped men feel that they could come and share their struggles. Each week, God seemed to supernaturally guide the meeting.

God brought me into this fellowship about eight years ago. They were meeting at the Perkins restaurant near my home. They noticed me studying my Bible there, and invited me to join them. **I was with them for several years, and had the opportunity to disciple Ricardo and one of the other men.** He has been one of those men who are *hungry for God*, and are willing to do whatever it takes to grow. He has bugged me relentlessly for my study sheets and writings. Consequently, he has read more of them than almost anyone else! **Ricardo was known as a “Word-doggie”, because he had a passion to study and understand the Bible.** I was able to give him practical tools to help him become a better Bible student, and he was faithful to utilize them. **It has been wonderful to see his life transform before our eyes, as he regularly invested in reading, studying and applying God’s Word to his life.**

As I said, **Ricardo could barely read when I first met him.** When he would, he would pause over almost every word, as he tried to sound it out in his head. **He misread and mispronounced words. It was almost painful to endure, as he struggled to make it through the passage.** And, it was awkwardly slow. His courage and determination, however, silenced any frustration any of us may have felt. **We respected his willingness to expose to us an area of frustration and vulnerability in his life, ...and we deeply respected his persistent pursuit of truth.** We could all see that this was not comfortable or easy for *him*, either! **He began to carry a pocket dictionary with him, so he could look up words he did not know. He also began to listen to audio recordings of the Bible to hear how to pronounce the names of people and places mentioned in the text. Most importantly, he kept at it.** He read *daily* at home, and he pushed himself to *read aloud* in public, ...because *God was giving him things to share*, and he was not going to let that difficulty in reading keep him from speaking of what God was showing him. He also knew that if he kept at it, he would get better, ...and he *did*!

I talked with him about how there is an *intended meaning* in the text. It was our job to uncover what God *meant to communicate* to the original readers and hearers. **The job of a good Bible interpreter is to discover what God meant in the original setting, and then to explain it in our modern day language, so we can understand and apply it to our lives today.** Three steps: discover, explain and apply. There *is* a correct understanding to be uncovered. Ricardo could see how so many people, ...pastors and laypeople alike..., were guilty of *spiritualizing*, of finding obscure or “hidden meanings” in the text. Often these interpretations did not stand up as accurately representing what the passage was really saying. This methodology was used to justify someone’s selfish agenda or religious understanding under the guise of “this is what the Bible says”, when it *wasn’t what the Bible was really saying, at all!*

To guard against this, I encouraged Ricardo to go *broader* and *deeper*. The first three principles of good Bible interpretation are: **Context, context and context.** I encouraged Ricardo to attempt to get the big picture. Pick up an easy-to-read paraphrase of the Bible and read it, cover to cover, until you become familiar with the basic message, the overview. Getting to know the character and dealings of God throughout the Bible helps us to pick up when someone suggests something that is *inconsistent with this larger understanding* of who God is and how He works. **Secondly, whenever you study a particular passage, read the paragraphs immediately before and immediately after the verse in question, to attempt to grasp the flow of what is being addressed in the passage.** That will help you guard against *reading things into* a verse that do not fit the passage. **We are *not* to lift the language out of a context to use it to say something we want.** When we do that, we are *misrepresenting* what God has actually said, and misuse the surface language of the verse to say something He never truly intended. **A third suggestion I gave to Ricardo was to make use of Bible dictionaries and commentaries to dig under the surface a bit.** Through these tools, you can gain some understanding into the culture of the day, or go deeper into the meaning and significance of Bible words and terminology. Ricardo picked up a pocket-sized Bible dictionary. He also purchased a copy of Manners and Customs of the Bible, which he spent quite a bit of time in. He also began to consult a single volume Bible commentary I referred to him, when he wanted to dig a little deeper.

As they say, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”, and **the making of a man or woman of God, or a skillful Bible student and interpreter doesn’t happen overnight, either.** BUT, Ricardo responded to the challenge, and began to work with this new understanding. He read and studied more purposefully. He read for the big picture. He looked into the historical background and the cultural setting of the Bible writers. **If he was a “Word-doggie” before, he really became one, now.** He became convinced that there *was* one correct interpretation of each passage. If not, then there is no objective basis for assessing when one is “accurately handling the word of truth”. **His goal was to discover what God originally meant, and faithfully teach that.** He understood that, as a Bible teacher, he was given a stewardship from God to accurately interpret and teach the Word as God intended. And, as Paul said, “it is *required* of stewards that they be trustworthy”. He was responsible before God for this, and would someday have to give an account for how he handled God’s Word. **He applied himself diligently to learn how to become a good Bible student and interpreter.** As the King James’ version puts it, he *studied* to show himself approved unto God, as a workman who does *not* need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

He tried to monitor the interpretive methods of other people in the group, and would often challenge them, if they were misreading a passage. (Some people didn’t *like* this, but in spite of many disagreements and “sparks” along the way, many of these guys also began to become more careful and astute students of the Bible. The “clashing swords” of conflict may not be comfortable, ...and sometimes people may even be *offended* or *hurt* in the exchange..., but, *if they keep coming back*, the clashing and scraping will often lead to healthy sharpening and shaping of the thinking, character and skills of the “combatants” – Proverbs 27:17.) **At first, his interpersonal skills were a little lacking.** Some of the guys in the group were from the street, and arguments quickly escalated to near violence. Often, when Ricardo got frustrated, he would suddenly get up and leave the table, to cool off. **Eventually, things got better, and he could handle a little conflict without “swords flashing”.**

From the beginning, Ricardo has been a “doer of the Word” (Jas. 1:22-25). **He was quick to implement what he thought God was revealing to him.** He was quick to serve. At church, he volunteered to be an usher. He shoveled snow, and helped to clean and maintain the building. Later, he helped provide places for the We Care group to meet. He regularly would help with setup and cleanup for these meetings. He gave people rides. He was generous in helping people in need, even taking people in on a short-term basis to space he rented. He was willing to be bold and radical for the Kingdom with the things God provided for him, if he thought it was the Lord’s leading. In the last few years, he purchased, fixed up and gave away scores of bikes to kids in his apartment complex, all as a way of expressing the love of Jesus. He hoped to build a bridge to share the Gospel through these acts of service. **He also was involved in ministering the Word to others from the earliest days of his Christian experience.** He was excited about Jesus, and **he testified about his faith to whoever would listen.** He spoke at the mission. He got involved in street witnessing. Then, when the We Care Men’s Ministry began meeting, he moderated the group, which often meant that **he brought a message or devotional teaching each week.** He followed up with the guys, giving each one a phone call every week. In the last few years, he was able to preach at the Boys Totem Town, a correctional facility for young men. He was very effective and well-liked there. He and Tanya started a church in their home on Saturday evenings, which met for several years. **Lately, he has begun to zero-in on those who would be “faithful men”, people who are willing to invest seriously in their walk with Christ, live radically for Him, and pass on the message to others.** **Ricardo has been such a man.** As he goes to Chicago, he goes as an equipped, Kingdom minded, Christ-centered, seasoned veteran. I am confident that he will hit the ground running, and it won’t take long before he is at the center of reaching and discipling others for Christ. **Jesus said that those who have been faithful in the “few things” He has entrusted them with, will be given even greater opportunities.** I can’t wait to see what God and Ricardo do in Chicago!