

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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## Mess-making, Messes, Messy-Messengers and the Mess of Ministry

An "Oldie, but a Goodie" from 08/04/2001, Reworked for Today, by Dan Trygg

"Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and truth; who keeps steadfast love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Exodus 34:6,7

"For consider your calling, brothers and sisters, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many well-born; rather the foolish things of the world God has chosen in order that He might shame-down the wise, and the powerless of the world God has chosen in order that He might shame-down the mighty, and the insignificant (lit. 'un-familied') of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things not being, in order that He might nullify the things being, so that not any flesh might boast before God." I Cor. 1:26-29

The other day, I was having a conversation with someone about the sin and faults of King David. We were looking at how his lie to Ahimelech the High Priest at Nob had ultimately led to the death of all the priests in that city (85 in all), as well as their wives, children and animals, on the orders of King Saul. From there, our discussion moved to the larger picture of David's life. **David was described as a "man after God's own heart" (I Sam. 13:14), yet he was a polygamist, a liar, an adulterer, a murderer, and an abuser of power. How can we put this together, and relate it to us today?** Specifically, **how does this relate to people initiating ministry groups when their lives are not necessarily "mature" or "in order"?** Well, there are huge lessons that come from David's life, and the lives of the other great heroes and examples of the faith from the OT and church history, which are very relevant and important for us to consider.

**(1.) Mess-making.** The first lesson to note is how so many of these people were guilty of making a mess in their lives through sin and weakness. **All the great heroes of the faith were sinners.** That is important to see, because it exposes the lie that a person has to reach a certain level of righteousness before God will use them. No. Apparently, that is not a big consideration to God. **The reason I refer to sin as "mess-making" is because, although it may be forgiven, the consequences of sin do not just disappear.** So, when we read about the selfish choices of David, or any other Bible personage, we need to be aware that *they were no different than we are*, sinners by nature *and* by choice. Many Bible stories document the weaknesses and faults of these men and women so that we *can* see that **they were mess-making people just like we are.** This is meant to encourage us to see that **if God could use them, He can use us, too** (cf. Rom. 15:4). This reflects the patient, long-suffering, gracious side of God, the part of Him that reaches out to the fallen, defiled, and broken, and brushes us off, heals us and restores us.

**(2.) Messes.** Sin is like knocking over a glass of water. Once the water is out of the glass, you can't get all of it back into the glass. The table is still wet, and possibly so are some other things. Sometimes things will just dry off, and the damage will be minimal, ...only a bad memory. Sometimes, however, the damage is irreversible. *It is just a fact of life.* **Sin makes a mess, and forgiveness does not remove all of the mess.** Not only does it create a break in our fellowship with God, and impedes our relationship with Him (Isa. 59:2; Psa. 66:18), **but sin often sets in motion consequences which cannot be easily turned back** without great cost, ...if *at all*. God has created a world which reflects His justice. He will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. Sin can be forgiven, but the consequences, like the water from the spilled glass, continue to spread. This is as much a part of God's nature as is His steadfast love. These consequences can range from lost opportunities, spent resources, hurt relationships, damaged emotional or physical health for yourself or others, loss of reputation, complications which God never intended for you (but which now must be dealt with responsibly), loss of innocence (with a resulting deeper vulnerability toward temptation), and even demonic infestation. **God makes no promises to remove all the consequences of sin simply at our bidding.** The Biblical record does not whitewash any of the faults of the people it describes, nor does it gloss over the consequences of their actions. David's actions haunted him for the rest of his days. What are we to learn from this? ...That it is OK to do stuff like they did? No. It is clear that there are consequences here in this life which come as a result of our sin. God is a God who *will* punish evildoers. He *will* visit the iniquity of the guilty upon him and his family for three or four generations. He will *not* hold the guilty unpunished. That is the justice side of things, the horrible reality of sin. **There is no avoiding consequences. Sometimes it may appear that people "get away" with things, but they don't entirely,** ...and God promises that there *will be* a complete accounting and payment for sin on judgment day. We all have our own "mess", the consequences of our poor choices. Some of this mess we can clean up and remove over a relatively short period of time, some of it may take longer, and require more of us to set straight, and some aspects of our "mess" will never be repaired in this life. That is reality.

**(3.) Messy-Messengers.** Since all of us have our "mess", our spilled water that needs to be cleaned up, it should come as no surprise to us that those of us who are called to minister as evangelists, shepherds, teachers and disciplers often find ourselves with a "mess" that needs resolution. The nature, condition and history of our "mess" can serve to discredit us, or it can serve to give us credibility, if it testifies of the power to change. In any case, so-called "**ministers**" **are not immune from having the consequences of their actions impeding their way, any more than anyone else.** The other message that clearly comes from the Bible stories is that **God works *with and through* flawed, broken, and imperfect people.** He *did*, He *can*, and He *will*. **The good news is that when we mess up, our life or our usefulness to God is *not* over.** That is God's wonderful grace. In all fairness, we ought to immediately be put to death upon our departure from His commands. Of course, *none of us* would be here, ...but God would be perfectly just and holy to do so. **It is God's great love and compassion which motivates His grace and forbearance, and He does not throw us away as worthless junk when we mess up.** The *consequences* do not go away, but *neither do the gifts and callings of God.* They are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). What does that mean? Does it mean that people can sin without any consequences, or without diminishing their usefulness in this world? No. But it does mean that **God's grace can overcome sin and cause a repentant person to rise above their brokenness to become a useful, godly person.** Does that mean that people can continue in sin, and expect God to protect them from its consequences? No. Moses warned, "Be sure your sin *will* find you out" (Num. 32:23). We see that *relentlessly* played out in the Biblical record.

**The fact that imperfect people are starting ministry meetings does not mean that they've somehow "arrived"**, ...that they are good, solid examples of what a Christian should look like in every way, ...or that they should even be followed in every part of their lives (cf. Heb. 13:7). The message they are proclaiming is "Follow Jesus!" I can't find anything wrong with *that*. **They haven't "arrived", ...in many ways they are just beginning.** Like Paul, we *all* must be "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, and press on toward the goal" (Phil. 3:13,14). In order to run the race set before us effectively, we must "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). This implies **there is a process of coming into conformity with God's standard and heart for our lives, as well as cleaning up past "messes". All of this takes time, but,** like Israel coming out of Egypt at the exodus, **we don't always have time to wait before we respond to God's call** (Ex. 12:29-34). **When He calls, the time to go is now!** I was "starting meetings" when I was 18 years old, ...and, in many ways, I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing! I hadn't even *been* to a Bible study, and here I was *teaching* one!

For an example from the Bible, **when we first read about Timothy (Acts 16), he was "well spoken of" by the brethren in two separate towns, ten miles apart!** We are not told the details of what Timothy was doing, or what the report was that Paul heard, but we know that **when Paul heard of Timothy's faith, lifestyle and work, he wanted Timothy on his team,** and we know that shortly afterwards he was comfortable leaving Timothy behind to instruct new believers (17:14). I think that **Timothy must have had an effective ministry in these two towns** (Paul must have heard more than simply his relatives saying, "O, Timothy is such a nice young man"). **Paul heard that he was zealous** (*walking* the 10 miles back and forth to maintain ministry groups of some kind in *both* places), **and that he was a sound teacher.** Paul liked what he saw and heard enough that he snatched up Timothy, added him to his ministry team, and put him to work doing his ministry, with only a brief amount of time together. Now, **was Timothy a "minister"?** **Not in the sense we tend to think of.** He had not gone to a seminary (They wouldn't be invented for another *nine centuries!*), nor was he an "elder" (He was too young!). **Nevertheless, he was actively doing the work of ministry!** Was he *commissioned* by some church board or body to do this? Probably not. **He just was led to do it, and he stepped up to the plate to follow that leading. His qualifications were (1.) that he was acquainted with the Scriptures,** having learned them from his mother and grandmother (II Tim.1:5; 3:15-17); **(2.) he was willing to go out of his way to serve God; and (3.) he was working in the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Beyond that, the fruits of his efforts spoke for themselves.** They were recognizable *to others*, who spoke of them to Paul.

**(4.) The Mess of Ministry.** Messy, mess-making minister-messengers must mess with the mess of ministry to messy, mess-making "ministrees". In other words, **people in ministry,** wherever they may be in their own process of dealing with the consequences and patterns of sin in their own lives, **are called to serve, help, teach, admonish and encourage other broken people to follow Jesus, in spite of all the struggles and baggage of their lives.** Part of discipling and maturing others is to *bring the practices and consequences of living in darkness into the light of God's truth,* and helping people *come to grips* with *their* habits and baggage, so that *they will submit every portion of their being* to God, dedicating themselves to His service. True freedom is found nowhere else. *Messes hidden in the darkness will still fester and stink.* Sowing to the flesh *will* reap rottenness; but sowing to the Spirit *will* produce life and peace (Gal. 6:8). **Part of the healing/renewing process is walking alongside of people in their mess, ...and in their clean-up process..., helping them to find hope, experience grace and discover freedom.**