

TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE 5: SATIFYING YOUR SOUL'S THIRST FOR MORE... *“Offering a Drink to Others”*

Somewhere over the past 4 weeks I remember reading in the Treasures of the Transformed life an interesting illustration that involved the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. I'm not sure it was applied to this week's subject, but I want to do just that. The Sea of Galilee is on the northern edge of the Holy Land, and we remember from numerous events and occasions that Jesus found the place full of fish, and teeming with life. On the other end of the Jordan River, (yes, I did say end) we find another famous body of water, the Dead Sea. I know there are probably technical reasons for the 'deadness' of this body of water, salt and alkali I suppose; but the biggest reason the lake is dead, is that it has no outlet! The fresh water from the Sea of Galilee flows into the Jordan River, which empties into the Dead Sea...and goes nowhere else!

There is a spiritual application. If all the water of God's love, grace, giftedness, and goodness flows into your life, and just stays there...well, I'm afraid the result will be as tragic as the Dead Sea. You see, for a person to be alive, we need an outlet for all that God has and is giving us...and that outlet is service, serving, giving, helping, making a difference, call it what you want, but it means; doing something for God and for someone else. If this is true, and I believe it is; and apparently so do you because you agreed to support the church with your prayers your presence your gifts...and your service; then we better figure out how to become a servant. Or better yet I'd like to help all of us today to better develop a servant's heart. Not much service will get done, because I tell you to do something; but if we allow God to transform our hearts and lives into servant ones; well, then much will get done.

I honestly believe that one of the key ways we can satisfy the thirsting of our souls is by offering a drink to others; and we will joyfully do that as we allow God to develop a servant's heart within us.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A SERVANT'S HEART?

1. BY ENCOUNTERING JESUS

I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served, but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

It does not lie within the natural framework of the human soul to be generous or giving or a servant. But it is one of the most magical transformations that God works in the soul of those who choose to acknowledge God's existence and claim on their humanity; to become willing servants. Jesus left heaven's splendor to become a servant. Jesus conducted the most extensive servant ministry the world had ever experienced to that point, or since in history. He healed the sick, restored blinded eyes, fed the hungry, set prisoners free, touched lepers, raised the dead, calmed the sea, provided counsel, love and correction. The whole of the Gospels are filled with accounts equally dramatic as these of how Jesus served people.

We who would fashion ourselves his followers...must then also be servants. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction in terms, and creates confusion for the world. The place to start developing a servant's heart is at the feet of Jesus. He is our example, our model, our standard, and our power.

One of the disqualifiers that people use to justify their not serving is their lack of ability. As I told my morning class on Wed. God is not near as concerned about your ability as your availability. Would it be helpful to you, motivational for you to know that Jesus will fill in the gaps you can't? Jesus will provide the tools you don't have. Jesus will enable you to do what's necessary, if you are willing to do what's asked.

Some who don't care about serving, don't care about Jesus, and that is the rub. We can claim the name, but disregard the call; to our own demise and end up just like the Dead Sea; full of stagnant water, when all we'd have to do to stay fresh is give some away. Developing a servant's heart begins when we encounter Jesus. You can't encounter him and stay the same; something has to change! John Ed said it this way: "When we are willing to get beyond ourselves and into His strength and His abilities, that's when God's love flows through us and touches the lives of other people."

2. BY ENGAGING IN WILLFUL SELFLESSNESS

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others too. Philippians 2: 3-4

We don't come to this selflessness naturally or easily; it goes against most of what we have been taught in our modern world. But selflessness can be developed, and when it is, provides the foundation upon which a serving life can be built. So how do we engage in willful selflessness? As I've already stated, we study the life of Jesus. But I'd add to that, we study ourselves as well. It helps being raised in a home or environment where living and giving selflessly was practiced, but that is not the only place to find this character quality.

We can develop selflessness by choosing to do so, by learning how to lean on the power of Jesus to remodel our sinful human character into a spiritually giving one. It's not rocket science, and it's not just a matter of choice. It's making an initial choice to allow God to change our nature from selfishness (which is a natural consequence of the fall) into a supernatural character, modeled after Jesus' example, and practiced in the daily routines of our lives.

Following the reading of this chapter; I've tried this week to find a way to serve every person I met as I practiced being a better servant. I've failed most of the time, but I think I might have actually served a neighbor by removing her trash as I left her apartment, as I looked my dentist in the eye and asked genuinely how he was recovering from his bout with the flu, as I engaged one of our young people whom I hurt with unkind words just a week before, as I responded with an offer of help to an email friend, as I cooked soup and did dishes for Wednesday's focus. Many of you did more than these, you just didn't think about it, but we're learning to serve, by growing our selfless giving.

Albert Schweitzer in our book reminds us succinctly of this point: "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found out how to serve." John Ed reminds us: "Service is usually, by its very nature, an act of selflessness."

3. BY EXPLORING YOUR PASSIONS

*In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak with **as much faith as God has given you**. If your gift is serving others, serve them **well**. If you are a teacher, teach **well**. If your gift is to encourage others, be **encouraging**. If it is giving, give **generously**. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility **seriously**. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it **gladly**. Romans 12:6-8*

I loved many of the quotes found in the margins of our book this week, but none more than this one: "To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?" Katherine Graham. We don't often equate serving with FUN, but it is. You ought to see your kids get off the bus the first day in Bolivia; they can't wait to get to work. Now, it's another story on the 5th or 6th day, but that first day, I could ask the kids to move bricks all day and it would be "fun". Serving God can be fun, when we serve out of our giftedness in areas we are passionate about.

What are you passionate about? What things in your life get you out of bed in the morning?

Some people looking at Wally might think he's only passionate about drinking free coffee at McDonalds, but I'd guess even he might be surprised it has more to do with daily connecting with friends. Some people looking at Jodi might think that playing the piano is her passion; but looking deeper we might find that it's connecting with friends, and providing an example for Derrick and Alyssa to follow, that might be motivating her, to serve God with, while thanking God for, her obvious talents. Some people looking at Darla teaching our children for years every weekend, plus teaching them daily every week at Shiloh; might surmise that she's passionate about teaching or passionate about children; and we might be surprised that her real passion is Jesus, and teaching children about Jesus is what drives her life! I could go on and on. What are you passionate about?

Well, I hope whatever it is, you and God can find a way to channel that passion to make a difference in someone's life. You know I'm passionate about golf, and I thank God that He and I have found a way to use that tool to reach a group of guys from 1st and McCabe UMC every Wed night; and a group of guys not from this church at men's league; and another group of guys once a year at a camp in the hills where men come to learn about golf, yes, but also learn about God, and share their lives together.

4. BY EXAMINING THE NEEDS

You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. Mark 14:7

There are many needs out there, and in here, and we can't meet them all, but we must be meeting some of them. Albert Einstein once stated: "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing." As followers of Jesus, we cannot allow this to be true of us.

We need to use what we have learned so far to decide what needs we will endeavor to meet. We need to be involved in the things that matter to Jesus.

We need to be practicing our selflessness by serving someone who has no means of repaying our kindnesses. We must restrict our service to the things that we are passionate about, we don't have time to do it all, so why not serve in the areas that are most necessary, and most helpful. The older I get the less tolerant I am of wasting my time with things that don't really matter. I'm finding the ability to prioritize the needs that I encounter to be hard, but necessary. You likely will too.

We can't over analyze each situation, sometimes we have to act immediately. It's then that we simply react out of love, the best we can; prayerfully trusting that God knows best. We give our gifts and our service to God; what the recipients do with those acts and gifts is between them and God.

5. BY EXPERIMENTING WITH VARIOUS MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

The whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. Ephesians 4: 15-16

It was Rick Warren who first taught me that it's easier to figure out your spiritual gift while actively engaged in a ministry than trying and praying to discern your gift; before you begin a ministry. I agree. I hope I've done a good job giving you all permission to experiment with different ministries within the church. But don't limit your ministry to these walls. Your regular work can be a ministry if you make it that. Work at the hospital or Salvation Army or Ruth Meiers house or Bismarck State or Bismarck High or a hundred other places is ministry, if you wish to make it such. Just know that if you authentically belong to Jesus, if his love fills your heart, if his gifts enrich your life, then anything done in His spirit and in His name is ministry.

That being said, there is one more permission I wish to grant you and one favor I wish to ask of you. If you see a need, and feel you have gifts to meet that need, and can find at least one other person to help you accomplish that ministry, then just go do it! You don't need permission from the board.

If you want the Church to sanction your ministry or want money to support your ministry then we will need to talk, but please, be free to do what God is calling you to do. Don't do it alone, and don't expect anyone else to do it for you – just go do it!

The favor. Don't wait to be asked. Most of you know what ministry goes on in this church, and most of you know hundreds that happen across this community. It is so hard to continually ask people to help. Why not “serve” one of those ministries by just showing up, or just volunteering without being asked, and expecting no reward in return? You may find you don't like that ministry; then go try another. You may find exactly where you are created to serve, but we'll never know unless you volunteer.

I guess what I'm really touting is this: I believe our church must develop a “Whatever it Takes Mentality” when it comes to serving God, God's church, and God's people outside the church. The whatever it takes mentality is developed as we willfully:

-set aside whatever we think of ourselves,

-set aside whatever we think others think of us,

-step up to do whatever God asks us to do.

Each of the last two messages have ended with a quote about becoming more like Jesus, that wasn't planned, just one of those ‘coincidences’. Well I have another today:

“Service does cost us greatly. It costs us our time. It may cost us our pride. It may even cost us financially. All that, and the person we're serving may not care. The thing is, it's not really about affecting that person anyway. It's about allowing the service to affect us. When we're willing to serve others – especially those who don't appear to deserve it – we become more like Jesus.” John Ed Mathison And less like the Dead Sea!

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