**Exploring: Helping others with Next Steps**

**Are we really making a difference?**

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

**The great challenge in ministry is when we feel we are not making any difference at all.** We labor, work, plan, organize, delegate, preach, teach, volunteer, create, and a host of other things. We can do this for years and years, and then suddenly we are told by someone they are leaving the church to go somewhere else because they are not getting fed. Even worse is the person who walks away from their faith. They don’t become an evil person or anything like that, but they are quite satisfied not pursuing their faith. Some even “become atheists” and have no time for God anymore. Really?! All that work and this is the result?

**The great fear in ministry is feeling God is not making a difference in someone’s life.** The other side of the coin is asking people a very poignant question, “What is the Lord doing in your life?” only to be met with the “deer in the headlights” look and no concrete story how they are experiencing God in real life. They have been involved in the church, helped run programs, volunteered for special projects, and even helped with leadership roles, but they do not talk about personally experiencing God. In fact, when they talk about how God works, it is always external to themselves. They talk about how God has been “working” in circumstances, situations or in serendipitous events. There does not seem to be any “working out their salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12-13). We invest in people and their Christianity seems to amount to nothing more than moralism and being a nice person. There are never any discussions of spiritual conversations with lost people and they may never had shared the gospel.

**The great anxiety of ministry is that I don’t see the Spirit making any difference in my own life.** We can be doing so many things for God that we have little awareness of God’s work in us. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says we are “being transformed” into the image of the Lord. But there are many who have been Christians for years and seem to be pretty much the same person they were years ago. They might be a little nicer, but few seem to reflect huge differences that show they’re becoming like Jesus.

So what are we left with?

**Personal growth is always built around relationship with Christ**. Attending church, participating in programs, volunteering, or serving are all good and maybe occasions to deepen faith, but not a guarantee of growth. Too many people assume that attending or participating in these things is being a “good Christian” but provide no assurance of personal transformation. Unless I am rooted in my relationship with Christ and walking in the Spirit of God, none of these “activities” can guarantee growth. The greater danger is when a church becomes fixated on protecting programs, structures, and traditions because there is some assumption that keeping these things keeps the church “spiritual” when all that people are doing is protecting their own personal preferences. The danger is that this usually destroys personal growth, it does not sustain it.

**Personal growth is about experiencing the power of the personal presence of Christ in us**. Human beings look at outward appearance, God looks at the heart. The moment we treat our salvation as a set of rules, regulations, and obligations we start slipping away from the personal presence of Christ in us. Again, growth is about relationship first and foremost, not responsibilities that we do for Christ.

**Personal growth often hinges with how they picture their relationship with God**. If a person has a bad picture of God, we are going to have problems growing. For example, some have a picture in their mind that God is a concierge who exists to serve us rather than “He is Lord, and I am to be serving Him.” If that is messed up, then I might not think I am the one that needs to change but God is the one who need to keep making changes to make my life better. If a person’s theology is bad, then growth will be an elusive and frustrating concept that is not at work in their personal life.

**Personal growth is the work of the Holy Spirit**. We cannot manufacture growth. Only the Spirit can transform us into the image of the glory of the Lord. Personal growth in my life is not someone else’s responsibility nor is it their fault. We like to blame others or circumstances when our lives are out of spiritual alignment with Christ. The fact is, we are responsible for growing in Christ. People can invest in us, teach us, encourage us, guide us, coach us, and so on, but if I do not humbly receive that investment and allow the Spirit of God to change my values and priorities, then nothing will change.

In His grace,

Brad Little