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THE WISDOM OF MOTHER TERWILLIGER

Forty years ago I was pastor of a big Methodist church in Loveland, Colorado, and I was going through a lot of pain. God had rescued me from my terribly backslidden condition - through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and through a deliverance experience. It was like being born-again again, as if I had been in a dark room and suddenly the lights came on. I perceived in a way I can't describe that I had been falling headlong into an evil and a destruction that I was utterly powerless to control, and that the incredible love of my Heavenly Father through the sacrifice of His Son had rescued me. I understood for the first time that there was a literal devil and that the condition of mankind was truly desperate.

I started preaching salvation in that Methodist church with great passion. A great number of people accepted Christ or renewed their commitment to Him. We developed an Evangelism Explosion program, and scores of our people started going out into the community and witnessing to people about Jesus. Over a period of months the attendance and giving in that church doubled. Good job, right? A lot of the members didn't think so, my staff didn't think so (they expressed the opinion that I should see a psychiatrist), and the Bishop and leaders of that conference didn't think so.

It is amazing the way strong emotions can be stirred up in certain churches just by preaching the gospel. People do not want to be told that they need a Savior. That has all sorts of negative connotations: words like sin, salvation, judgment, hell, a bloody cross, and so forth. Many of them had been attending church for 30 or 40 years and had never heard such a thing. They were into positive thinking, self-actualization, and yoga, and didn't like that "fundamentalist" preaching. I poured it on. Their dismay turned to hatred. Their hatred turned into persecution - of me, my wife, and even our children. It was very hard on my gentle wife, Doris. She could not handle rejection, condemnation, and harsh words to us, and especially to our kids. This went on for five years. Looking back, it was not all that bad. We didn't shed any blood, and we were not in danger of imprisonment or martyrdom. We did lose our income and home (a parsonage.) The Bishop, who authored a book denying the atonement, the resurrection of Christ, and the final judgment, finally had enough and forced me out of the Methodist church, which turned out to be a very good thing.

During those five wilderness years of strife and civil war, I met a dear lady called Mother Terwilliger. She was as old as Moses, a prayer warrior, and when I ran out of faith and courage - which was frequently - I would drop by her little house and she would pray and prop me up. I want to share a story about that dear saint:

Mother Terwilliger composed songs that she claimed God gave to her during the night. They were simple little poems and songs, and to be honest I didn't pay any attention to them. But just before she died she told me a story that I don't believe she told another soul.

She said that one night she was awoken at 2:00 AM and heard God tell her to get up, that He had a new song for her. She said, "Oh, God, I'm tired, can't we do this in the morning?" God said, "You don't have to get up, but if you don't you will miss a blessing." So she got up and composed a little song, poem and melody, and put it in her file. Actually, she said she did not compose it, that the words and music came to her from God. A while later she received in the mail a promotion for a big book celebrating the creativity of the older generation, and asking for original poems, songs, stories about personal history, etc. She dug into her file, found the song mentioned above, and sent the poem to the publisher. Some months later she got a letter saying that her poem had been accepted and asking her for \$49.95 for her personal copy of the book. She felt she had been scammed and threw the letter away.

Three years passed, and Mother Terwilliger was watching TBN. They were introducing a French lady, a singer, who was being mightily used by God in many countries. The French lady said she was going to sing a very special song. She said that she had been browsing in a used book store and had found a book by old people, and in the book she found a poem that touched her heart. She meditated on the poem, and God gave her a melody to go with it. And she said that when she sang this song in her meetings there was such an amazing anointing on it that before she finished people were running to the altar to receive Jesus and to receive healing.

Mother Terwilliger said to me, "That was my poem! And God gave that French woman the same melody that He gave me!" Then she said, Glenn, I'm ashamed to tell you what else happened. When I heard that French lady sing that song, I said, "God! She didn't even mention my name!" And God immediately said to her, "I thought you said that I gave you those songs. Now do you want the credit for it?" She felt rebuked and said, "Lord, I don't want any fame for writing those songs. I know that you gave them to me. But my children think I'm a foolish old woman and that my praying and song writing are foolishness, and I just want them to know that this is real." God was silent. But a few years later, at Mother Terwilliger's funeral, I had the opportunity of relating this story to those in attendance, including her children and family. PTL!

What can we learn from this little story? First, a little review and some new stuff:

- In my last two Newsletters I had a teaching about Good Works and God's Particular Call on Each Life. I said that, **First**, *We are saved by grace through faith, the gift of God, and not by works, so that no one can boast*. (Eph. 2:8) **Second**, *We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*. (Eph. 2:9).
- We are not saved by our good works, but we are saved in order to do good works - those actions we do in love and obedience to God, our new Master. The Bible makes it clear that if a person is not doing actions in love and obedience to God then he is not saved. (Refer to November Newsletter for many Scriptures.)
- (A) God wants us to fall deeply in love with Him, because He is so deeply in love with us. (B) He wants us to grow in maturity as Christians through the normal disciplines of reading and obeying the teachings of the Bible; and through prayer, fellowship and works of service, so that we become disciples, doers, and not just hearers of God's Word. (C) God wants us to grow in maturity to the point that we can "hear" Him as He personally leads us to the unique and individual call on our lives that He has prepared us for. This call may be to one of the multiple "ministries" listed in the New Testament in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, or it may be to some out-of-the-box ministry that is hard to describe.
- When we become Christians, our assignment will be to continue in the work/craft/profession we have been doing (but with a new motivation) unless and until God calls us to something different. Paul writes to new believers: ***Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.*** (1 Cor. 7:17-24) Paul says that even if a man is a slave when called to Christ he should not worry about that, he can serve Christ as a slave, but he should obtain his freedom if possible.
- Many times our "ministry" will be the very work or skill that we love and have been doing. For instance, I know a "horse whisperer" who has used his skill with horses to share Christ in a very effective way with a great number of horse lovers and cowboys in this country and even to have an outreach to Mongolia.
- When God told Moses to build a "tabernacle" (an ornate tent to serve as a church or sanctuary) in the wilderness, listen to the following instructions starting at Exodus 35:30: ***Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri... and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood... And he has given both him and Oholiab, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiders in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, as weavers - all of them master craftsmen and designers, to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary.*** (Where did those two outstanding craftsmen get all that skill, ability and knowledge?)
- I remember a story along this line: A certain Christian leader met the pastor of a struggling little church in a borough of New York. The church was going nowhere and the pastor admitted that he was miserable and hated being a pastor. The leader, Tom, asked him: "What did you do before you became a pastor?" He told him he had been a very successful doctor and surgeon, and that he had used his profession to impact many people for Christ. "Why did you become a pastor?" He said that the leaders in the church where he became a Christian told him that "If you want to be a real Christian, you have to go into the ministry," which meant to them that "You have to become a preacher or a full-time worker in the church!" Annnnh! Bad teaching! Not Biblical! Tom encouraged him to resign as pastor and return to the work as surgeon to which God had called him.
- Another important principle about work is found in the story of David's conflict with the Amalekites who raided David's camp and took captive all the women and children as well as flocks, herds, and livestock. David and 400 of his soldiers pursued the Amalekites, while 200 of David's soldiers were so exhausted that they stayed behind with the baggage. God gave David's troop complete victory over the Amalekites so that they recovered their wives and children and flocks and herds. Some of David's army were classified as "wicked and worthless men" (1 Sam. 30:22) who said that

the spoils should be shared with only those men who went into the battle. ***But David said, My brothers, you shall not do so with what the Lord has given us (Note that he gave God the credit), The share of the man who stayed with the supplies shall be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike. David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.*** And so it is a principle that those who stay with the baggage receive an equal share with those who go into the battle. Everyone is not called to be a missionary, prophet, or evangelist. But everyone is called to share in the work by praying and giving. The saying that goes along with this truth is: "The pay is the same." Remember that Jesus said to His disciples: ***He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water....shall by no means lose his reward.*** (Matt. 10:41-42)

Now, finally, let me return to Mother Terwilliger.

What does her encounter with the Lord teach us? That our "good works," service, ministry, calling, whatever it is, is to be done unto the Lord, for His glory and not our own. Our ministry may be public - preacher, teacher, evangelist, musician, politician, business leader. Or our calling may be private and hidden: designer, stone mason, mechanic, mother and father to a mentally or physically disabled child, foster parents, composer of songs and poems. But whatever work God has given us to do, it is to be done with excellence ***as unto the Lord, and to the glory and praise of God!*** Our constant inclination is to start out with high motives of serving the Lord, but in the event of any success to immediately steal His glory and start to build our own empire. Pastors are especially prone to this temptation, or at least I was, and I got a painful demotion for my efforts.

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that our praying, fasting, and giving were to be done in secret, ***And your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly*** (Matt. 6:4), but that if we do these acts in public, to be seen by men, then that is the only reward we will get! (Matt. 6:5) Note that Jesus says we are working for a reward - from God.
- Someone pointed out that during a worship service, we usually think of the preacher as being the actor, the congregation as the audience, and God as the Coach. But in reality - The congregation are the actors, the preacher is the coach, and God is the audience!

We need to constantly monitor our focus and make certain that our good works, ministry, worship, and service is unto God, for His glory!

Another important insight about our calling follows:

"A MAN CAN RECEIVE ONLY WHAT IS GIVEN HIM FROM HEAVEN"

This is a quotation from John 3:27 when John the Baptist had just been asked why many of his disciples were abandoning him and starting to follow Jesus. It certainly applies to the above teaching about the gifts and calling of God on our lives.

I know some godly men and women who have large churches or ministries that are impacting thousands around the world. I also know some godly men and women who have been ministering for several decades, and their churches or ministries have not grown numerically, even though they have been faithful.

Remember Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14 ff) It was the master who gave to one servant five talents, to another two, and to another one. The servants who were faithful with what they had been entrusted were congratulated by the master: ***Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master!*** The servant who was not faithful with what he had been entrusted with was ***thrown outside, into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** (Matt. 25:30) Yikes! Again, a reminder: We are not saved by our good works, but if we are not doing good works of love and obedience unto God then we have not really been saved! The little epistle of 1 John makes this very clear.

One other point about the service, the ministry, the call of God on our lives:

CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL, NOT FRUITFUL

In his book, The Explicit Gospel, Matt Chandler makes the following point:

"We are not called to be fruitful, we are called to be faithful." God is the only One who can create fruit and who can make us fruitful. If you don't believe that, try making an orange or a banana. Paul writes: *What is Apollos? What is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow...*

(1 Cor. 3:5-9)

Jesus declared, *I am the vine, you are the branches; if a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)

Matt Chandler writes (paraphrase): "In Isaiah 6, God called Isaiah to be a prophet to Israel but told him in advance that most all of the people had hard hearts and that Isaiah's ministry would not be fruitful. In today's church, both Isaiah and Jeremiah would be considered to be utter failures. Moses didn't get to enter the Promised Land. John the Baptist didn't get to see the ministry of Jesus. On and on we could go. We have to be wary of the idea that numeric growth and enthusiastic response are always signs of success. The Bible does not support that. Faithfulness is success; obedience is success. God and only God gives fruit."

IN SUMMARY

Friends, there are no little, insignificant ministries. If we have answered God's call and are being faithful to Him, we are involved in a BIG ministry. Amen?

Think about Mother Terwilliger arising at 2:00 AM one cold morning, hearing words and music in her imagination, and writing down a little song. God chose to make her obedience fruitful, and a French lady singing that song in a number of nations resulted in many thousands of people being saved or healed.

Think about the Sunday School teacher that led a little boy named Billy Graham to Christ. Or about a 12-year old boy in a park in Oregon who invited a long-haired hippie to attend his church, Bayless Conley received Christ as his Savior, and God gave to the world the fruitfulness of the Cottonwood Center in Los Angeles.

We fret if our church or ministry or class doesn't grow, if we don't get the recognition that some of our peers get, if we don't see great numbers of salvations or healings or book sales, or whatever. Let's just take a deep breath and stop it! We are in an adventure far beyond the scope and imagination of man to comprehend. We have been called to the service of the great King, the Creator, the Redeemer of mankind. He personally drafted us into His army, engrafted us into His body. He has prepared us individually and uniquely and placed us in exactly the place where we can be of service to Him, for His glory. He will give great fruitfulness to our obedience, or not, as He wills, and He will give to us an eternal reward for our faithfulness.

Such a deal!

God Bless

Glenn

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