

Growing God's People

a journal for teachers and other learners

Quietly Shaping the Kingdom

Angels must have stood in awe, when in that fantastic moment the eternally begotten Son of God took flesh in the womb of Mary. God's reign—the Kingdom—would be announced some 30 years later, and they could feel the crescendo as the drama unfurled.

Years later Jesus was handed the scroll in his hometown synagogue to read Isaiah's words about the coming rule of God's people and closed by saying, "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Those gathered were pleased, and spoke well of him. Then Jesus arrested them with offensive words of judgment. Knowing them well, His words revealed the wickedness of their hearts—deep, inner sanctums where the Kingdom could not take root. They were men longing for power and position.

In seeking God's Kingdom, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and find our soles strangely softened by a journey marked with service. We become more like our Master, and more like the trees transplanted to soil with deep, unending waters (Ps. 1), which yield fruit in season and never lose their green leaves.

We are to love one another, live simple lives of quiet obedience, and use acts of service as manifestations of our faith in Christ. The Church is to be known as a place of transformation, as brothers and sisters serve together in the name of Jesus.

May God lead us in quiet service to be those who are poor, mournful, meek, merciful, pure, peace-making, and persecuted—for ours will be the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 5:2-11).

The Discipline of Service

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When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace.

By Robert Hodge

Did anyone notice?

It wasn't all that big a deal, but it was a little *less than* what we would normally find ourselves doing, and it would be nice if someone said something complimentary.

It would be God-honoring if they would notice what He had just done through us, and smiled or half-winked their pleasure in seeing our service.

And like that we can live our lives of cross-bearing service to our Lord and to the Church—and to our spouse, our children, our friends, and our coworkers.

There is in our walk of faith the ever-present opportunity to embrace the discipline of service, in which God cultivates a perfection that has fed on the rotting decay of our pride.

"Nothing *disciplines* the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing *transforms* the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but screams against hidden service. It strains and

pulls for honor and recognition. It will devise subtle, religiously acceptable means to call attention to the service rendered. If we stoutly refuse to give in to this lust of the flesh, we crucify it. Every time we crucify the flesh, we crucify our pride and arrogance," writes Richard Foster, in his frequently quoted classic, *Celebration of Discipline*.

Jesus' teaching, and His training of the Disciples, affirmed the appropriateness of *authority* within the Church. The gifting and equipping of those leaders whom He trained—and those who follow in their footsteps—provide the spiritual authority necessary for the growth and purity of the Body.

But by His life and through His words, Jesus established a new type of authority—one in which the authority held by the individual speaks almost entirely to their *function* rather than their *position*.

In Mark 9:35, Jesus tells the Twelve (and all of us), "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." In so doing, He warns them away from upward mobility—in their service to God within the ranks of the Body—and leads them toward a life of sacrifice in-keeping with the life that led Him to the cross for us.

A VISION FOR THE CHURCH

The goal of Paul and Timothy's



Service as a discipline, continued.

instruction was love—flowing out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). As teachers, we must have as the goal of our teaching an outpouring of love emanating from a transformed life. Such a pouring-forth of love will manifest itself in ongoing acts of service within the Body.

This calls for a form of teaching that incorporates all of life and goes well beyond teaching that is primarily *cognitive* in nature to a teaching style that focuses on the practices involved in the life of faith. Learners come away from such teaching impacted with their need to conform to a Christ-centered way of life and equipped to think in a Christ-honoring ways about every aspect of their lives.

“The fundamental aim of Christian education in all its forms, varieties, and settings should be that individuals—and indeed whole communities—learn these practices, be drawn into participation in them, learn to do them with increasingly deepened understanding and skill, learn to extend them more broadly and fully in their own lives and into their world, and learn to correct them, strengthen them, and improve them,” writes Craig Dykstra in *growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*.

What would this look like here at Cedar Springs? Older folks in small groups planting flowers around the church, in the early morning hours. Young people rebuilding roofs and painting houses. Yards being mowed and children diapered, and floors waxed and polished. Loud whispering of prayers on behalf of teenagers, young married couples, ministers, and the poor in spirit. The nursery turning away volunteers, and Alan Edick keeping a waiting list of those longing to teach children’s Sunday school.

God has called us to serve one another, and serving in the name of Jesus becomes a discipline of grace. To embrace the discipline of service is to submit yourself to a process of self-denial that *guarantees* results. You will die to self and become more like Christ, who Himself came to serve.

May God give us a renewed vision of a life transformed—fired up and kept warm with our eyes transfixed on the Lover of our souls, our Lord and Savior, who served the Father in love and serves us still today with compassion and grace.



Teaching and Learning God’s Way

Divine Encounter

By T.M. Moore

I can’t help but feel that Jacob gets a bad rap much of the time. He is scorned for “deceiving” first his brother, Esau, and then his father, Isaac. Guilty as charged in the last instance—but not without some qualification—although not in the former. Esau knew full well what he was trading away. That

birthright was rightfully Jacob’s; it took the ruse concocted by his mom to ensure that dad would go along with the deal.

Jacob wasn’t all that bad a fellow, no more, at least, than many of the people he met in lifelike Laban, for instance. Jacob was a man of God, a man committed to serving God and realizing the full blessing of the covenant passed down to him by his father (Gn. 27.27-29). As he fled his home and brother for safety back among Rebekah’s family, Jacob must surely have wondered where the blessing of the Lord was in all this trouble. He would find out in a divine encounter at a place called Luz.

Imagine the uncertainty, fear, and sadness that must have filled Jacob as he laid his head on that crude stone pillow (Gn. 28.11). Would he ever see his home again? Would Esau come after him? Would his mother’s people receive him? Would he die trying to get to safety? He must have slept fitfully—for a while.

But then came that tremendous vision of the ladder

bridging earth and heaven, with angels of God going up and down on it! Then the voice of God Himself, speaking to confirm the promises of His covenant, and to inform Jacob that he would surely return to his home again! Jacob awoke and instantly recognized that he was in the presence of the Lord and had had an encounter with the deity. He named the place where he met God, Bethel, the House of God, and vowed to serve God faithfully and to give a tenth of all his possessions as a sacrifice to Him.

This encounter with God was just one more step in the learning process for Jacob. But it was the most important step, for it sealed his commitment to serve the Lord and seek the fullness of His covenant. Such learning only comes from being assured of having met the Lord of glory. Our students will not make life commitments to serve God because they have heard entertaining Bible stories, memorized lots of Scripture, or seen a Power Point presentation of the book of Romans. If they are to learn in life-changing ways, we must lead them into encounters with the living God, both in our teaching and as we encourage them in the practice of spiritual disciplines. In Jacob’s day God often used dreams to make Himself known; yet more means of revelation are available to us.

Our role as teachers is to develop in our students the use of those avenues of revelation that God employs to make Himself known. We must exercise our students in reading and studying God’s Word, in studying the book of creation, in prayer and solitude, fasting and singing, and all the other disciplines of grace. Only as they diligent apply themselves to such practices can they expect to have the kind of encounter that leads to lifelong commitments to serve God.

Our daily diet of scripture changes us, making us more like the One of whom all scripture speaks.

Lewis gives us food for thought in this simple poem and issues a call to obedient reading and meditation. Consider the eternal growth that comes through the working of the Holy Spirit as we are instructed in and through the Word.

On a Theme From Nicolas of Cusa

When soul and body feed, one sees
Their differing physiologies.
Firmness of apple, fluted shape
Of celery, or tight-skinned grape
I grind and mangle when I eat,
Then in dark, salt, internal heat,
Annihilate their natures by
The very act that makes them I.

But when the soul partakes of good
Or truth, which are her savoury food,
By some far subtler chemistry
It is not they that change, but she,
Who feels them enter with the state
Of conquerors her opened gate,
Or, mirror-like, digests their ray
By turning luminous as they.

—C.S. Lewis

Featured Book

TITLE: *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*

AUTHOR : *Timothy J. Keller*



Reviewed by Kathy Smith

Have you ever seen an announcement in *Take Note* for community outreach to the poor and hurting and thought, “Mercy is not my gift, that is for someone else”? Perhaps you have always wanted to reach out to the hurting but didn’t know just exactly how to get started.

Dr. Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in New York, and a former professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, offers deep insight and solid down-to-earth information spelling out specific details in every phase of the ministry of mercy in his book *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of The Jericho Road*.

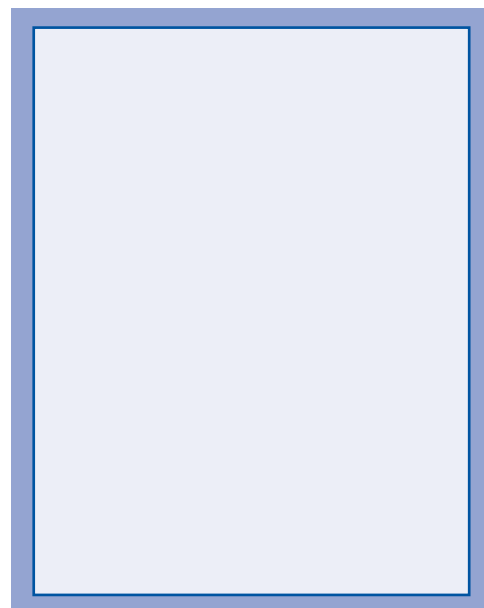
Keller opens his book with the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Everyone is familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho. We travel down similar roads every day that are full of hurting, sick, troubled people. Many of us do indeed live on these roads. The data show that there are many people in need, with ever-deepening needs, and that the needy are a diverse group. The church of Jesus Christ must squarely face its responsibility for the neighbors lying in the road. We are reminded of the words of Jesus, “Anyone in need is our neighbor.”

Keller persuasively explains through scripture how every believer is a minister of mercy and how mercy ministry is not an option but rather a mandate of Christ.

After giving a Biblical defense for compassion, Keller details exactly how lay people can motivate, mobilize, and manage others in the church to meet the needs of those that suffer from physical, social, spiritual, and financial problems. He also points out how we can do the following: overcome our fears; meet the cost of meeting needs; work with the limits of time and resources; handle the tension between the freedom and dignity of recipients and the conditions that must sometimes be imposed; and, choose between needs within the church and those beyond.

Perhaps one of the most important statements Keller makes in this book is, “We must integrate evangelism with mercy ministries and provide follow-up strategies that will incorporate new believers from our mercy ministries into the church.”

Ministries of Mercy is one of the best of its kind. This is a great tool to be used by CU’s small groups, reading circles or any group wanting to grow deeper in their faith and service.



Preparing to Teach

Biblical Interpretation

Luke 16: 5-7

So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

This is an enigmatic parable. Jesus commends a dishonest manager for acting shrewdly and says to the disciples: "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."

We gain an understanding of Jesus' view of money, and we also learn about "open doors" for ministry. The **debtors** in this story have needs, and the manager seizes upon the opportunity to serve them *and* accomplish his own goal.

The goal of this exercise will be to discover how being a servant in the workplace/home/church/community involves discerning the needs, and then bringing the values of God's Kingdom to bear on the lives of those indebted to sin. When we do this, the One who came to serve is seen in our actions, and salvation is announced through us.



1

WORD STUDY

See what you can learn about this passage from a survey of the following verses:

manager/steward

Luke 12:42
1 Corinthians 4:1-2
Colossians 1:25
Titus 1:7
1 Peter 4:10

debtor

Matthew 18:21-35
Luke 7:41-43
Colossians 2:13-15



What does *debt* symbolize?

Their is rich treasure of imagery wrapped up in the word debt. Using a theological dictionary, or the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, explore the word-picture of the debtor and his family.

2

Debt in two dimensions...

Where is God preparing an open door for ministry by creating needs in the lives of coworkers, family...?

In each individual, seek discernment from the Spirit as to the spiritual needs of each person.

3



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation