

CULTIVATION (17)

There can be little question concerning the importance of balance, so vital in the mechanical, physical, esthetic, and spiritual realms. Faulty balance often results in disintegration; and possible devastation to the surrounding area.

Our self-life is out of balance -- it is all one-sided. Like the universal Tea Party:

"I had a little tea party, One afternoon at three; 'Twas very small, three guests in all, Just I, myself and me. Myself ate up the sandwiches, While I drank up the tea, 'Twas also I who ate the pie And passed the cake to me."

Husbandman that He is, the beginning of God's cultivation of the hungry-hearted believer is downward. Patiently, persistently, and painfully our Father digs down into the recesses of self, more and more fully revealing to us just what we are, and are not, in ourselves. His reason for this preparation is twofold: that the Lord Jesus might be free to manifest Himself in us; and through us for the sake of others -- growing and sharing. "The lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isaiah 58:11).

Each of us must be thoroughly cultivated before He can effectively cultivate others through us. It is not that there will be no service for us until we are spiritually mature, but that most of our service on the way to maturity is for our own development, and not so much that of others. At first the growing believer thinks, and would have others feel, that all his service is effective; but in time he comes to realize that the Lord is not doing so much through him as He is in him. Our Lord always concentrates on the greater need.

"Since the work of God is essentially spiritual, it demands spiritual people for its doing; and the measure of their spirituality will determine the measure of their value to the Lord. Because this is so, in God's mind the servant is more than the work. If we are going to come truly into the hands of God for His purpose, then we shall be dealt with by Him in such a way as to continually increase our spiritual measure. Not our interest in Christian work; our energies, enthusiasm, ambitions, or abilities; nor our academic qualification, or anything that we are in ourselves, but simply our spiritual life is the basis of the beginning and growth of our service to God. Even the work, when we are in it, is used by Him to increase our spiritual measure." --Anon.

"It is a mistake to measure spiritual maturity merely by the presence of gifts. By themselves they are an inadequate basis for a man's lasting influence to God. They may be present and they may be valuable, but the Spirit's object is something far greater -- to form Christ in us through the working of the cross. His goal is to see Christ inwrought in believers. So it is not merely that a man does certain things or speaks certain words, but that he is a

certain kind of man. He himself is what he preaches. Too many want to preach without being the thing themselves, but in the long run it is what we are, and not simply what we do or say, that matters with God; and the difference lies in the formation of Christ within." --W. Nee

We are not saved to serve; we are matured to serve. Only to the extent that cultivation reveals self for what it is are we in position to assist others in their cultivation. We find out everyone else by first finding ourselves out. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Proverbs 27:19). To counter-balance knowledge of self our Father enables us to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

This is not only true concerning general service, but also in the matter of our ministry of intercession. More than anything else the service of prayer for others necessitates a triune understanding: that of our Father, of ourselves, and of others. "Praying for others can only flow from a heart at rest about itself, and knowing the value of the desires which it expresses for another. I could not be true or happy in praying otherwise." --Stoney. Paul wrote that he would 'pray with the spirit -- by the Holy Spirit that is within me -- but I will also pray intelligently -- with my mind and understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15).

So many of us, after having entered into some of the deeper realities of our Lord, seek to immediately pull or push others into this wonderful advancement; and then we wonder why they are so slow to learn, and seemingly apathetic in their understanding and concern. We so easily forget the many fears it took, and by what wandering wilderness ways our Lord had to traverse with us in order to bring us over Jordan and into Canaan. "Moses had all the wisdom of he Egyptians, yet his idea of delivering Israel was to slay an Egyptian! He had to be trained in God's ways, having forty years in Midian, and when he was sent back to Egypt God said for him not to trouble about Israel -- go direct to Pharaoh -- the cause of their chains! God didn't train Israel at the first, but a leader to lead Israel. God seeks to get leaders trained in the knowledge of His ways."

To the extent that we learn how our Father has had to handle us through the years will we understand how He would have us share with others. We must be cultivated to be cultivators. "It is injurious for one believer to be forcing another into 'blessing' which that soul may not be ready for. Forced advance really gives the enemy his opportunity to mislead, for those who try to rush on at the push of others cannot stand alone, nor bear the tests of their assumed positions." --J. P-L.

Then too, in all our service, there is the proper motive to be fully considered. "Work should be regarded less with reference to its immediate results, or as to how it may affect this or that person; the great question is, will it, when sifted in His presence, be acceptable to Him? and this acceptability to Him is my reward: Wherefore we labor that whether present or absent, we may be acceptable to him (2 Corinthians 5:9). One does not enough go forth to work in the joy and strength of one who comes out from his home to run his course. Many

seem to droop because there are no grapes and are not happy unless they are doing. Doing is right enough in itself, but the order ought to be from happiness to work, and not work to be happy. It is from the inner circle, the hive, the heart where Christ reigns, the only green spot, the fond enclosure -- the sanctuary, that one should come forth to work. The quality of one's work depends on the nature of one's rest -- and the rest should be like His own, known and enjoyed with Him. We have but small ideas of how our outward bears the color of our inward, and if our inward is not restful, there cannot be a rest-imparting service, however it may be attempted." --J. B. Stoney

P.S. "The greatest proof of our love for Christ is that we care for those who belong to Him; '...if you love me, feed my sheep.'" --J.B.S.