

PREPARATION (5)

Once we know His eternal plan and purpose for us, plus His method of preparation and process to that end, there is rest and confidence. Now it so happens that God's basic ingredient for growth is need. Without personal needs, we would get nowhere in our Christian life. The reason our Father creates and allows needs in our lives is to turn us from all that is outside of Christ, centering us in Him alone. "Not I, but Christ."

For both our growth and service it is all-essential that we see and understand this principle, which J. B. Stoney sets forth in a sentence: "The soul never imbibes the truth in living power but as it requires it." As for our growth, needs cause us to reach out and appropriate by faith, from our Lord Jesus, that which we require. And in the matter of service, in witnessing and helping others, we must watch and wait for the hungry, the needy heart, if there is to be abiding fruit. Again Mr. Stoney says, "The true value of anything is known only when it is wanted." Mr. Darby makes this double clear by writing, "Wisdom and philosophy never found out God; He makes Himself known to us through our needs; necessity finds Him out. I doubt much if we have ever learned anything solidly except we have learnt it thus."

In this light, our needs are invaluable! We must face up to the fact that without spiritual hunger, we cannot feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. From our personal experience, Matthew 5:6 should mean much to every one of us -- "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." All too often believers are exhorted and even pressured to grow before there is an acute awareness of need, before there is true spiritual hunger. And, sad to say, in most instances when there is real heart-hunger, very little spiritual food is offered. One of the main reasons for so much evangelistic effort and personal work coming to little or nothing is that truths are forced upon the "victim" to be saved before he is aware that he is lost. The work will soon come to naught unless an overpowering conviction of sin causes the lost to reach out with the grip of personal faith, and find their need fully met in the Savior.

Watchman Nee puts first things first in saying, "The Lord does not set us here first of all to preach, or to do any work for Him. The first thing for which He sets us here is to create hunger in others. No true work will ever begin without a sense of need being created. We cannot inject that into others; we cannot drive people to be hungry. That hunger is to be created, and that hunger can be created only through those who carry the impressions of God."

In preparation, there is a tearing down before there can be a building up. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up" (Hosea 6:1). This applies to both growth and service. J. C. Metcalfe faithfully writes: "It is more than comforting to realize that it is those who have plumbed the depths of failure to whom God invariably gives the call to shepherd others. This is not a call given to the gifted, the highly trained, or the polished as such.

"Without a bitter experience of their own inadequacy and poverty they are quite unfitted to bear the burden of spiritual ministry. It takes a man who has discovered something of the measures of his own weakness to be patient with the foibles of others. Such a man also has a first-hand knowledge of the loving care of the Chief Shepherd, and His ability to heal one who has come humbly to trust in Him and Him alone. Therefore he does not easily despair of others, but looks beyond sinfulness, willfulness, and stupidity, to the might of unchanging love. The Lord Jesus does not give the charge, 'Be a shepherd to My lambs ... to My sheep,' on hearing Peter's self-confident affirmation of undying loyalty, but He gives it after he has utterly failed to keep his vows and has wept bitterly in the streets of Jerusalem."

Yes, there is going to be deep, thorough, and long preparation if there is to be reality; if our life is to be Christ-centered, our walk controlled by the Holy Spirit, and our service glorifying to God. Sooner or later the Holy Spirit begins to make us aware of our basic problem as believers -- the infinite difference between self and Christ. "There are other laborers besides those who are seeking for pardon -- for justification. There are laborers for sanctification -- after personal holiness -- after riddance of the power of the old Adam; and to such, as well as to those who are seeking after salvation, Christ promises, with this great 'I will' (Matthew 11:28-30). It is highly possible for a man, after having found justifying rest in Christ, to enter upon a state of deep need as regards sanctifying rest. We think we shall not go far wrong if we say that this has been the experience of almost every believer that has ever lived." --P. B. Power

Much of His preparation in our lives consists of setting up this struggle -- our seeing self for what it is, and then attempting to get free from its evil power and influence. For there is no hope of consistent abiding in the Lord Jesus as long as we are under the dominion of the self-life, in which "dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18a). "Not in babyhood are we able to continually abide in His presence, regardless of our surroundings and that which we are doing. Not when we serve Him with intermittent zeal does our own soul grow and thrive; not when we are indifferent are we watered from the presence of the Lord. It is after we have been subdued, refined, and chastened; when love of self and the world is gone, that we learn to abide in touch with Him at all times, and in all places or surroundings." --MacIlravy

The value of both the struggle to free ourselves from the old Adam-life, and the equally fruitless efforts to experience the new Adam-life, the Christ-life, is to finally realize that it is utterly futile. Our personal, heart-breaking failure in every phase of our Christian life is our Father's preparation for His success on our behalf. This negative processing of His, finally brings us into His positive promise of Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." His "good work" in us is begun through failure, and this includes our strongest points, which continues on into His success, by His performance, and not ours. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). There is no question but

that we all began in sheer grace, and we must continue and arrive on the very same basis:
"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Galatians 5:1).

Charles Trumbull said, "The effortless life is not the will-less life. We use our will to believe, to receive, but not to exert effort in trying to accomplish what only God can do. Our hope for victory over sin is not 'Christ plus my efforts,' but 'Christ plus my receiving.' To receive victory from Him is to believe His Word that solely by His grace He is, this moment, freeing us from the dominion of sin. And to believe on Him in this way is to recognize that He is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves." We learned this principle at the time of our spiritual birth, and it seems that most of us have to learn it all over again for our spiritual growth and service. Fear not, dear friend; just hold firm to the fact of His purpose for you in Christ, and He will faithfully take you step by step into all the necessary preparation -- He will do it. Once you are sure of the purpose, you can be equally positive of the preparation. Simply remember that Romans 8:28 and 29 go together, and thank Him for Philippians 1:6."

"The Lord is glorified in a people whose heart is set at any cost, by any road, upon the goal which is God himself. A man who is thus minded says, 'By any road!' Here is a very difficult road, a road beset by enemies, but the passionate desire for the goal will hold him steadfast in the way. It is the man who lacks the yearning to know Him that will easily be turned aside. Along that road the Man Christ Jesus has already gone before, and at every point has overcome for us. We have not climb up; we are to be brought through in the train of His triumph. Every enemy has been met; every foe has been overcome; there remains nothing that has not been put potentially beneath His feet, and there remains nothing in this universe that is able to overcome the least child of God who has taken the hand of the Lord and said: 'Lord, bring me through to the place where Thou art, in virtue of the blood which Thou hast already taken through in victory.' There is great glory to the Lord in a quiet, confident walk in a day of adversity, a day of dread, when things about us are shaking and trembling." --G.P.