

PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on Being a Disciple, Part 2.

Last month I spoke about the background of this outline of a disciple of Christ:

AN ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ:

- 1. Is involved in regular Christian service to others;**
- 2. Is a student in a regular Bible School, Sunday School, or other learning environment with a teacher or mentor;**
- 3. Is a regular in corporate worship and private prayer;**
- 4. Is looking for and working with pre-Christians and new Christians to be a mentor for them.**

Now I want to focus on the first of these: being involved in Christian service. A word we use a lot in the church, "ministry," is another word for service.

When I say Christian service, I don't just mean missionary work overseas; though that is one form of ministry. I would define Christian service as any work of a Christian that is serving the needs of someone else. So that includes financial help, counseling others, teaching others, caring for a sick parent or friend, caring for a special needs child, volunteering at a place that is providing a service to others, and several other things. I suppose one way to look at it is to consider Jesus' words:

"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me. ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of Mine, you did for Me."

Matthew 25:35-36, 40 (NIV)

In addition we can look at service or ministry as being local or global. On the one hand, we have people in need all around us, sometimes in direct contact with us, or at least within our community. On the other hand, it is possible for us to become so narrow-minded that we forget that there are needs all over the world, and we *can* help. Though there is intense suffering and need immediately around us, there are other places torn by war, famine, flood, earthquake, and unavailable water. While we can't be as hands-on with global needs, we can give from our surplus and occasionally take trips to make a difference all around the world. Our church tradition, along with many others, has sought a balance between meeting local needs and global needs.

A fair question to ask yourself is this: How is my life today benefitting someone else? There are many ways to add value to someone else's life, even with a phone call or a postcard. And yet we know that there are many persons who will not only go through a day, but even a week or a month without doing anything for anyone else. I suspect that people in that situation will feel a sense of emptiness, without a clear sense of why. We were made to give to others.

For most of us, I don't believe I have to convince you that your life should include some service to others; I would bet that you would agree. Also, we know that people who approach life with a sense of gratitude and generosity live with less stress, and tend to live longer, happier lives. So why is it that we don't all do this?

We need to begin with a first step. My reason for writing this is first to remind us that this is a need. We can get caught up in routines and unhealthy habits in life. Especially after the shutdown in 2020, most of us cut back for a time on helping others. We need to do a self-check, at least on occasion. The idea of worship every week was born of the idea that we need to review our faith and life at least on a weekly basis; for the early church it was daily:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...

Acts 2:46 (NIV)

How does one start? First, take an inventory of your time. What am I doing now in service to others? For some of us, there is not much more we can do. For most of us, we can do much more. The ministries of our church are one place to volunteer your time, but there are many more ministries throughout our community, and more ministries we as a church could be doing. Pray that God will make you aware of needs He is calling you to address.

And while you pray about how God is to use you for others, volunteer your time. You will sense where God's Spirit is leading you as you are actively around people of need. Choose to start somewhere, understanding that the Spirit might lead you somewhere else.

And, yes, take an inventory of your money. Many of us are in a tight spot financially much of the time. And yet, an examination of our spending will likely reveal that beyond our required expenses there is some that we can choose to save, spend on ourselves, or give to others. Just a few months ago, a homeless man who came to the church lunch found that he had a place to stay for about three days. He then gave me 20-dollar bill and said, "*Give it to someone who needs it more.*" Likewise, we can lead a more generous life.

This is one point in our weekly (or daily) self-inventory. To address this area might be just what your spiritual life needs. Next month I will look at another point.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen".