**Knowing Christ: A Ministering Heart**

Life is full of choices. Some are easy. Karen, what’s your favorite brand and flavor of ice cream? Some choices are more difficult. Several years ago we ran into a family friend and found out that her mid-20s daughter had been working as an architect - **in China**! She had made a 2 year commitment. She couldn’t afford to come home; Mom and Dad couldn’t afford to visit. Talk about a difficult decision! The Chinese had totally different standards for what was expected on the job, too. She worked 7 days a week – 18 hours a day! But she wasn’t just there for the work experience and she was, by no means, there for the pay! She chose to have a big heart, a ministering heart – she boldly shared her faith in an atheistic society.

As Christians we must often choose between two very different courses. We must choose to have a big heart or a little heart. The safest way to go is with a small heart because it minimizes our sorrows. When you cultivate a small heart you minimize entangling relationships and carefully avoid elevated and noble ideas that might otherwise provide you with a host of afflictions.

Cultivate deafness, and you will be saved from the discords of life. Cultivate blindness, and you will not see the ugly. Cultivate a cold heart, and you will not feel the pain of others around you.

It’s a universal truth that to get through life with a minimum of trouble all you have to do is reduce the compass of your heart but there is another way.

Cultivating a **big** heart opens ourselves to others and we become susceptible to a gamut of sorrows that a small heart knows nothing about. When we enlarge our purpose, we increase our vulnerability.

Retired pastor and author, R. Kent Hughes writes: A sentence in the diary of James Gilmour, pioneer missionary to Mongolia, written late in his life, must have been written in blood. *“In the shape of converts, I have seen no results. I have not, as far as I am aware, seen anyone who even wanted to be a Christian.”*

Painful words… Contrast now those words with what he wrote when he first arrived:

*“Several huts in sight! When shall I be able to speak to the people? O Lord suggest by the Spirit how I should come among them and guide me in gaining the language, and in preparing myself to teach the life and love of Christ Jesus.”*

James Gilmour would never have written those later…lines if he had not decided to go for it all in his service for Christ. In fact, there is a very real sense in which James Gilmour’s being in this position was his fault because he had decided to follow Jesus!”

That was all I could find on what Hughes had to say concerning Gilmore but I dug a little more and here is what I found.

Gilmore arrived in Mongolia on May 18, 1870 and even with the struggle he had he did not give up. He labored tirelessly seeing no results for his efforts for many years but he stayed the course. His diligence finally bore fruit with his first convert on March 1, 1884 – almost 14 years after his arrival!

When Gilmore died at the age of 47, Rev. G. Owen, another missionary to China, spoke at his memorial service in Peking and said, “*If anyone asks, ‘would it not have been better if Mr. Gilmour had taken more care of himself and lived long?’ I would answer, ‘I don’t know. His life was beautiful and I would not alter it if I could. A few years of such service as he gave to Christ are worth a hundred years of humdrum toil. We need the inspiration of such a life as his.’*”

Enlarge your heart, cultivating a ministering spirit **will** enlarge the potential for pain. But will you serve Christ and others…or yourself? Little hearts, though safe and protected, never contribute anything. No one benefits from restricted sympathies and limited vision.

On the other hand, ministering hearts, though incredibly vulnerable, are also the hearts that experience the most joy and leave their imprint on the world. Cultivate deafness, and you will never hear the discords of life, but neither will you hear the glorious strains of Christ’s life symphony. Cultivate blindness, and you will never see the ugly, but neither will you see the beauty of God’s creation. Cultivate a small heart, and you may have smooth sailing, but you will never experience the winds of the Holy Spirit in your sails as you minister to others.

The story of Jesus and the woman at the well in *John 4* gives us insight into the ministering heart.

This message is so important because it is about **me** personally, it’s about **you** personally and it is about the mission of this church. It is critical that we keep the mission of the church out in the forefront because so many have been affected by a misguided church culture.

Subconsciously many are tempted to think that church is “all about me.” We gather and hopefully gain something from seeing other Christians but the church really has only one calling - **make disciples!**

The church and individual Christians often make the mission of the church about themselves because it is a **whole** lot easier to minister **within** the walls than it is **outside** the walls. It is a whole lot easier to deal with one another in here then it is to deal with the problems of a sin entrenched world and culture. Yet Jesus clearly calls us with conviction to **go** in the pursuit of the mission.

Having said that here is an example of what ministry looks like from a story about Jesus Christ.

**A Ministering Heart is a Tired Heart:**

**It Is Motivated**

**Read *John 4:3-8***

*3So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. 4He had to go through Samaria on the way. 5Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6Jacob’s well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. 7Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” 8He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.*

When we become Christians it means that we are signing on for a life that reflects the life of our Lord. In the 3 years of Jesus’ ministry on earth he hardly had a moment to Himself. The disciples were constantly asking Him questions and were about as needy as everybody else in the crowds that flocked to hear Him and see the miracles. Occasionally Jesus got away alone to the mountain or somewhere, even at night, to pray and find renewal.

When Jesus sat down at this well it is quite possible that He sat and just closed His eyes for a little rest. He was alone when a woman came to draw water. He had a choice just like we do every day of our lives. He could have stood up and moved away to continue His rest or He could engage her in conversation even though He was weary.

**A ministering heart will still minister even at the edge of its capacity.** Oswald Sanders said, *“The world is run by tired [people].”* Annie Ortlund said, *“Nowhere in the Bible are we told to slow down and take it easy.”*

The best sermons are preached by tired people. Third world areas are being evangelized by tired missionaries. Show me a successful youth and children’s ministry and I will show you some tired men and women.

I’m not advocating never taking time off to rest but I do believe that we are in the people business and people will wear you out because the needs never stop coming.

**A ministering heart is a working heart.** The apostle Paul was constantly working to bring people to faith in Christ and encouraging them to be authentic followers of Christ.

***1 Thessalonians 2:9*** *“Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”*

And if you will remember our Epistle Lesson from 2nd Corinthians earlier, Paul held back nothing from his labors for the Lord and His Kingdom.

Reformer Martin Luther said he worked so hard he literally fell into bed at night. Dwight Moody’s bedtime prayer more than once was, *“Lord, I am tired. Amen”* John Wesley rode sixty to seventy miles by horseback and, on average, preached three sermons a day. **A ministering heart is a tired heart: It is motivated.**

We also see that **A Ministering Heart Overcomes Barriers: It Is Merciful**

**Read *John 4:7-9***

*7Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” 8He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.*

*9The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”*

There was hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans going back centuries. In 721 BC the Assyrians swept through the Northern Kingdom of Israel and took them captive. While in Assyria many of the Jews intermarried with Assyrians. In 587 BC, Babylon conquered southern Judah and took many Jews to Babylon but there was no intermarriage. So when they returned home the southern Jews despised the northern Jews because they had intermarried and the hatred went both ways. Jewish Rabbis said, *“Let not man eat the bread of the Samaritans, for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine flesh.”* A popular prayer of the day said, *“And Lord, do not remember the Samaritans in the resurrection.”*

Jesus sure crossed the line. He not only crossed the racial line but he also crossed the gender line. Strict rabbis forbade other rabbis to greet women in public. Jesus not only spoke to this woman but asked to use the woman’s drinking utensil and so became defiled. This was a radical departure from the accepted practice of racial hatred and discrimination.

When Jesus spoke these words, *“Please give me a drink,”* the civilized world of that time was cleft by deep gulfs of separation - language, religion, national animosities and gender, split the world into fragments. The learned and the ignorant, the slave and his master, barbarians and Greeks, men and women, stood on opposite sides of that great gulf.

It was into this world that Christ’s Gospel came. All who had been separated by that great chasm clasped hands, sat down at one table, and felt themselves all as one in Christ Jesus. They were ready to break all barriers. The world looked at early Christians and accused them of sorcery and conspiracy because they could not understand.

One of the greatest glories of authentic Christianity is the ability of the gospel of Christ to cross barriers.

The words of Martin Luther King, Jr. written from a Birmingham jail on April 16, 1963 spoke to the church of his day and to the church of today, as well.

*I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?…Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"*

*Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.*

*There was a time when the church was very powerful - in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators."' But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent - and often even vocal - sanction of things as they are.*

*But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for [our day]. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.*

*Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ecclesia and the hope of the world.*

Jesus Christ sees no barriers within His creation. We are equal. We are all created in His image and a ministering heart will know that and let nothing stand in the way of ministry.

**A Ministering Heart Sees God’s Hand in Relationships and Circumstances: It Is Missional**

*4He had to go through Samaria on the way. John 4:4*

The KJV says that Jesus told his disciples, *“I* **must need** *to go through Samaria.”* (emphasis mine)

One pastor wrote of taking some young people 250 miles across the Mojave Desert to share their faith with people that didn’t know anything about God. He said when they got there; they couldn’t find a place to camp. They drove up and down that stretch near Parker Arizona, trying to find a place, and it was getting dark. Finally they found a place to pitch a tent - right next to five boys who eventually were led to accept Christ as their Savior. Three of them are in the ministry today. In the midst of his frustration this pastor came to understand that his frustration and inconvenience was a prelude to God’s sovereign appointment.

Pastor and author, Stuart Briscoe shared a story from his days at Capernwray Bible School in England. He left his wife the car one day but had accidentally taken the keys. After a couple of hours his wife, Jill, borrowed another car, and as she drove down the road she saw some girls hitchhiking, so she picked them up. They turned out to be three German girls visiting England. She persuaded these girls to come with her to a conference for German Christian young people and one of them heard the message of Christ and became a Christian.

This young lady’s story, as told by Stuart, is this: She was a theological student in Germany. She had come under the influence of some teaching that, instead of leading her closer to God had filled her with much doubt and confusion. She had delivered an ultimatum to the God whose existence she was starting to doubt. She told God that if He was there he should show himself to her in some way and He must do this within three months. If He didn’t, she told Him, *“I’ll quit my schooling, quit theology, quit religion, and I think I’m going to quit living because there is nothing to live for.”* After explaining this, she turned to his wife with great emotion and said, *“The three months end today.”*

God appointments happen every day in the lives of Christians. But the question is; do we have the eyes to see them? Do we have ears to hear His voice gently nudging us to get involved in the human need? A ministering heart and a ministering church will minister when they are weary. A Christ-like heart will cross racial, socio-economic and any other boundaries drawn by humanity to separate others from the message of Jesus Christ. We are to be mission driven in everything we do as a church and as Christians. To do this will mean that we love like Jesus.

In C.S. Lewis’ book, ***The Four Loves*** p21, he writes: *“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one… Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket…of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers…of love is Hell.”*

Cultivate deafness, and you will never hear the discords of life, but neither will you hear the glorious strains of Christ’s life symphony. Cultivate blindness, and you will never see the ugly, but neither will you see the beauty of God’s creation. Cultivate a small heart, and you may have smooth sailing, but you will never experience the winds of the Holy Spirit in your sails as you minister to others.

By Wes Humble, March 7, 2010, Newark Church of the Nazarene, Newark , Ohio

***Sermon:* Knowing Christ: A Ministering Heart**

**A Ministering Heart…**

**…is a Tired Heart: It Is Motivated**

*John 4:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28*

**…Overcomes Barriers: It Is Merciful** *John 4:7-9*

**…Sees God’s Hand in Relationships and Circumstances: It Is Missional** *John 4:4*