

Reflecting God's Image Outside of Eden

February 2024

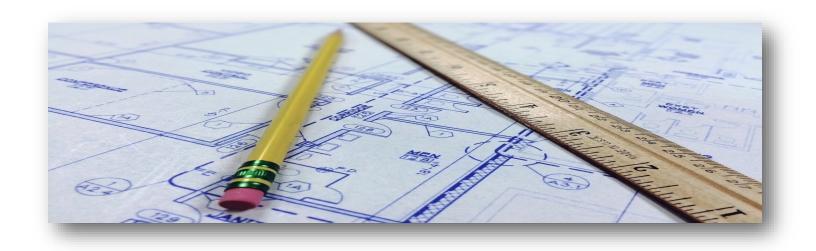
"A TEENAGED CHURCH"

By Ruben Constante, Jr.

OUR WRITING TEAM SHARES
THEIR TAKE ON LEADERSHIP

This month:





February 2024, Volume 6, Issue 2

Blueprints of fers a bold message of original intent, which is that plan, purpose, and design God has inscribed into the heart of His men and women.

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Blueprints For Living Ministries, Inc. was birthed out of a preaching firestorm that occurred in "God's Country" (aka Hondo, TX) in 2011. Led by Jason Cole and Ruben Constante, Jr., this preaching revival stirred hundreds of men to seek God's will and purpose for their lives.

Two years later, Ruben created this ministry's newsletter, called *Blueprints*, which would become its first outreach platform.

By 2015, Ruben finalized this ministry's current curriculum, which is neatly organized into five blueprints. During those four years, God had initiated Ruben through a rigorous testing and refining process, which placed him in several crises

of faith. These trial periods became pivotal moments in which he learned to cultivate God's design for his life.

Blueprints For Living Ministries, Inc. now stands as a clear voice in a world that has erased and redefined God's blueprint for humanity. What began as a few sermons from behind a prison pulpit is now a team of dedicated men who are driven to impart spiritual and secular education that promotes positive change and personal growth and development.

It is a call for a return to original intent.



Five Blueprints For Living

- 1. The Blueprint of God's Image
- 2. The Blueprint of Gender Design
- 3. The Blueprint of Marriage
- 4. The Blueprint of the Church
- 5. The Blueprint of Discipleship



PILLARS OF TRUTH

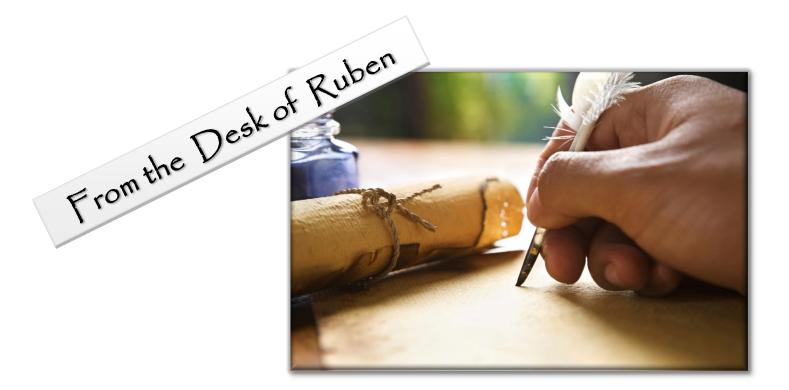
Because Blueprints For Living Ministries, Inc. is dedicated to standing on and proclaiming God's original intent for life, we center our worldview on the only standard which reveals original intent: the Holy Bible.

Aside from affirming the Nicene and Apostle's creed, we adhere to the Reformed positions of the Christian faith, those doctrines which the reformers believed were central to Christianity. We stand alongside Martin Luther, who boldly refused to recant the clear teachings of Scripture. Therefore, we stand on the Five *Solas* of the Protestant Reformation:

- 1. Sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone"): The Bible is our highest authority.
- 2. Sola Fide ("faith alone"): We are saved through faith alone in Christ Jesus.
- 3. Sola Gratia ("grace alone"): We are saved by the grace of God alone.
- 4. Solus Christus ("Christ alone"): Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King.
- 5. Soli Deo Gloria ("to the glory of God alone"): We live for the glory of God alone.

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You would never mix bleach with water and be ok with drinking it as if it was pure water.

The same should be true for that which is sacred. If God has called something right, it is right. If He has called it wrong, it is wrong.

This month we will look at a few things regarding the misunderstandings and outright distortions of God's love. Because we have been shaped and conditioned by a world that is bent on erasing the moral boundaries of God's law, the topic of love is especially one that must be addressed.

I would never let Justin define for himself what he thought was right, and in like manner God does not allow us to redefine what we think love should be. Contrary to popular belief, love is not love.

Love is what God says it is.

Ruben Constantes Jr.





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The first Valentine was posted around 1806. Almost one billion Valentine's Day cards are sent each year on or near February 14 with females purchasing 85% of the cards. This is second only to the number of Christmas cards sent.

The history is somewhat murky as to how Valentine's Day has come to be what we now know and celebrate. Saint Valentine served in third-century Rome. Emperor Claudius decided that single men made better soldiers. Therefore, Claudius banned soldiers from being married. One version of the story is that Valentine continued to perform the weddings of young soldiers who were in love, and Claudius had Valentine imprisoned. While imprisoned, Valentine reportedly fell in love with the jailer's daughter. Valentine sent her a card and signed it, "Love, your Valentine." Another version is that Valentine defied Claudius by helping Christians escape the torture of the Romans.

Valentine died in approximately A.D. 270. Others claim the church may have decided to celebrate in

mid-February to "Christianize" the pagan Roman celebration Lupercalia. The first Valentine sent in the United States was in the 1840's by Esther Howgald. Most of us enjoy "spoiling" a loved one on Valentine's Day. Sending gifts and cards conveys love, affection, and friendship.

There is no biblical reason why Christians should not celebrate Valentine's Day by giving their loved ones flowers, candy and/or cards. As with celebrating any holiday, the decision should be between the individual and God. Some people feel very strongly that observing any secular holiday is wrong, while others see it as harmless. The important thing to remember is that celebrating or not celebrating holidays should not be a cause for pride or division among Christians.



Thinking of You

Michelle Regino

Heaven knows no difference between Sunday morning and Wednesday afternoon. God longs to speak as clearly in the workplace as he does in the sanctuary. He longs to be worshiped when we sit at the dinner table and not just when we come to His communion table. You may go days without thinking of Him, but there's never a moment when He's not thinking of you.

Knowing this we understand Paul's rigorous goal: "We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ" (2 Cor.10:5). We can fathom why he urges us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), "be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12) and "let heaven fill your thoughts" (Col. 4:2).



Philippians 4:6



If it is of God, it will honor Him.

If it is of God, it will abide by His word.

If it is of God, it will reflect His image.

Conversely, if it is not of God, it will dishonor Him.

If it is not of God, it will not abide by His word.

If it is not of God, it will not reflect His image.

IT WILL REFLECT YOURS.





In battle a sword could be used to cut, pierce, and block the sword of the enemy. What we fail to realize that *every* one of us is in a battle, whether we acknowledge it or not. Since we are at war with the satanic and evil forces of this world, we need to know how to handle the Word properly. Only then will it be an effective defense against the enemy. Your sword, the one given to you by the Holy Spirit, is the word of God. The Holy Spirit keeps the word of God intact, and alive in us. It has remained true and sustained through the ages. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit.

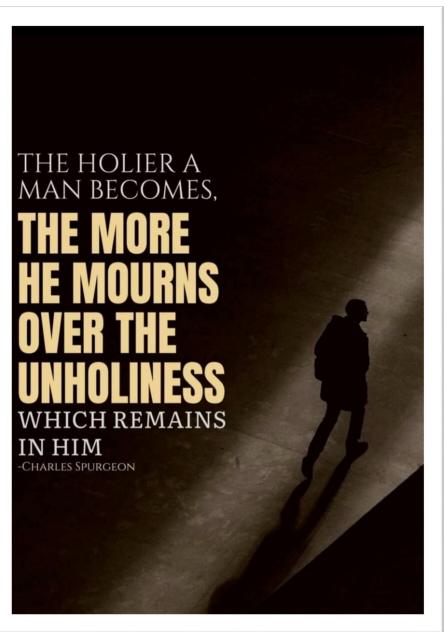
Ephesians 6:17 tells us to put on "the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Hebrews 4:12 also says that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Lastly, 2 Timothy 3:16 even tells us that "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,

for reproof, for correction, and for training in right-eousness."

In our day-to-day lives we need to know how to combat demonic thoughts cast our way. In fact, Scripture shows us just how to do so. In the book of Matthew, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw Yourself down. For it is written: He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift You up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me. Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Likewise, we should strive to use the word of God in our own lives. We fail to remember that the word of God is the bread of Life, our source of nourishment, granted to guide us in our combat against the Devil. We underestimate the Bible to our own peril. Treat it as fully God-breathed and you will find yourself appreciating it more. Remember it, meditate on it, read it regularly and daily. The more you know the word of God, the better able you are to apply it to your life. It becomes more and more valuable the more time you spend with it.







A doctor gave me a test recently that showed I'm allergic to five different kinds of pollen. He told me he could fix my allergies by letting him inject me with small doses of the things I'm allergic to. Little by little I'd develop resistance to it. Sure enough, after eight months of getting those shots, my allergies hardly even bother me anymore!

I think that's a great picture of how we overcome the fear that holds us back from living a full life. Fear doesn't just go away, in fact, ignoring it just causes it to grow bigger in the darkness. We have to identify what is making us afraid. We have to name it. Oftentimes, just naming your fear aloud causes it to lose much of its power. When we move forward with wisdom, we can face the things we fear.

We conquer fear by choosing to expose ourselves to the things we fear, in small doses. We take small steps toward it. Little by little, as God walks with us through it, we gain more confidence. The fear may never go away completely, but it loses its grip on us.

You may remember how nervous driving made you feel, at first. But the more you did it, the more confident you became. Faith is confidence. It's confidence in God's promises and ability to sustain you, even when you are afraid.

And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrew 11:6)

You don't need a lot of faith when the sun is shining, and unicorns are prancing in the fields around you. No, faith is a function of uncertainty – when you don't know what's ahead and you can only see one step at a time. Faith builds as you take one scary step at a time. Little by little, your faith gets stronger, and you experience God's faithfulness.

You will never defeat fear by simply hiding and hoping it will go away. Prayer will give you guidance about how to take wise steps toward your fear – so keep praying!

You only beat fear by faithfully exposing yourself to the thing you fear in small doses. Life doesn't get easier, but we are able to get stronger and more confident in God's love - even in the darkest of times. We can only experience that level of confidence when we take steps forward in spite of our fear.

God's love drives out our fear, especially when we faithfully move toward the thing we fear with wisdom and confidence in his love.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. - 1 John 4:18



"WHEN I AM AFRAID, I WILL TRUST IN YOU."

Psalm 56:3



In this second episode, we discuss how sometimes we forget that church life is no different than real life and that hurt people hurt people. But we also secretly serve in church ministries in an effort to conceal a deeper pain. And that when wounded people wound other people.

"Reflecting Him"

A Blueprints for Living Ministries, Inc. podcast

Blueprints for Living Ministries, Inc. is dedicated to teaching men and women God's design for life. With this new podcast called "Reflecting Him," we share hope, encouragement, direction, and purpose to a world that is set on defacing God's image and deifying man's. We echo John the Baptist's words in believing that Jesus must increase and we must decrease. In short, our goal is reflect God's image outside of Eden.



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When people are bent on taking you out, they will move heaven and earth to do it. No amount of generosity on your part will stop them.

For even our Lord, the embodiment of Grace and Truth, could not restrain the wickedness of peoples' hearts, of those who took pleasure in darkness.

Think about that: Grace and Truth.

Not only does Truth offend, but so does Grace. The grace of God as manifested in the life and works of Jesus Christ was just as agitating as the Truth of His message.

The Gospel of Mark chapter 3 records it well. Jesus was the paragon of love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. He was God in the flesh! He was the personification of Grace.

Yet even Grace is offensive to those who abide in darkness.

The lesson for us? That even God's grace

working in you and through you will elicit murderous hate and contempt from those who love darkness.

Grace offends, and there's nothing you can do to stop it.

NO MAN
WAS EVER
MORE LOVING
THAN JESUS
CHRIST. YET EVEN
HIS LOVE
MADE PEOPLE
ANGRY.
-R.C. SPROUL



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In an effort to motivate our readers and encourage their personal walks of faith, we will feature this new section called "Leadership Corner" and provide quotes and proverbial sayings, along with a brief message from someone in our writing team.





Leader's Corner



Chosen by the pack.

When leaders are focused on servanthood, they deliver a people ready to protect and persevere for their village. To be a leader is a privilege, not a right. To lead others is to accept responsibility of the path those you lead will follow.

You cannot choose for them, but providing the right tools and guidance is the majority of the battle. The rest is showing up for your people. A leader is willing to take up their cross and follow the one who leads us all in the name of the Holy One, Jesus Christ. (Brittany Gray)





A leader is someone who leads by example. One who stands on the front lines and leads according to Scripture. Not a perfect person but always at their very best. With the love of Christ



in their heart and by the help of the Holy Ghost, amen. May we always pray for our leaders and learn to lead ourselves by the God. Spirit of

A follower.

We all need direction. We all need an example to follow. To be an effective leader, one must first learn how to follow. Only then will they be in a position to understand perspective. As Christian leaders, we follow the example of Jesus and the will of the Father. (Michael Peer)



A leader is one who unselfishly is willing to utilize all his strengths, talents, resources and, yes, his very own life, for the benefit of others while not expecting recognition for what he knows it was given to him by grace.

A leader only wishes to please the One who calls him to be such!! (Guillermo Quinones, Jr.)





When Brother Puber p

When Brother Ruben presented this question to me, the first thought that came to my heart and mind was, "Servant."

I have personally never seen myself as a leader, at least not in the understanding of the secular world. Biblical leadership is one of servitude. In Scripture we witness Jesus not only provide us with the blueprint for servitude, but we see repeated scriptural examples of being a servant towards one another (e.g., John 13:14,15; Philippians 2:4; 1 John 4:19; Ephesians 2:10; Acts 20:35; and so many more).

The leadership of Jesus was one of submission, love, being gentle, one that extended mercy and grace, and one that built man according to God's original design and purpose.

As I was being discipled, the men that poured into my life led me by serving. I was able to see first-hand how they gave of themselves, of their own emotions, mind, heart, and spirit. It was the heart of a servant that allowed them to be transparent, to be able to listen so well and extend mercy and grace towards me.

From my own personal experience, I know that I cannot lead without having the heart of a servant. Leadership without this heart will be led by pride, arrogance and unable to listen to the spirit of those at their side.

I know that we think that to lead one must show strength, an uncompromising stand and ability to be fierce. Yet it is in the calm of servitude that one is surrendered to Christ and allows the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead them. The book of Proverbs alerts us that pride comes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18).

A leader is a lover of the Image and purpose of God in each individual He created. A leader understands that what is placed before him is to glorify God, to please God and fulfill God's will

I will end with this quote by Robert K. Green-leaf, "The great leader is seen as the servant first." (Israel Noe Garza)



A special thanks to these faithful ministries and organizations who make our classes possible!



As we enter the month of love, it's worth our time to glance at the different forms of "love" that ex-

It's especially important, since as Christians, it is our duty to love, but our love must be defined by the Word, not by the world (cf. Phil. 1:9).

In short, the love of God is the essence of who He is (cf. 1 Jn. 4:4); therefore, everything He does is from a divine love that surpasses human comprehension.

8 Different Types of Love

According to the Ancient Greeks

- 1. Eros or Erotic Love
- 2. Philia or Affectionate Love
 - 3. **Storge** or Familiar Love
 - 4. Ludus or Playful Love
 - 5. Mania or Obsessive Love
 - 6. Pragma or Enduring Love
 - 7. Philautia or Self-Love
 - 8. Agape or Selfless Love



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Teenagers are a funny bunch.

Freshly out of the My Little Pony-Cocomelon-Trolls-and-Lego phase, they are ready to take on the world of romance and defy any form of parental oversight. They're quick to bark at any adult who dares tell them to watch out and be careful. From the ages of 13 to 17, their razor-sharp reason is on full display as we parents watch them jump from one puppy-love to another.

Teenagers are connoisseurs of love.

As the stepparent of one, I am amazed at how much our little Ava thinks she's got this whole thing figured out. And to sprinkle a little more genius in her life, she is totally engulfed in the pronoun madness that has somehow taken half the world by storm, with each gender-confused person switching their personal pronoun as much as they swipe through their Instagram page.

But the confusion doesn't end there.

Much of the cultural shift that has rocked the world has now spilled over into many churches, creating an earthquake of moral ambiguity that has stained the image of God. The Bride of Christ is no longer a pure and undefiled body. She is contaminated with the confusion of the world. Mega churches, Ted talk pastors, and trendy preachers are beguiling many into believing that God's will is inherently designed to bless us beyond what the mind can imagine or what the eye can see.

The Bride is a teenager, confused about love.

"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9) When we read something like this—if we're reading it with a biblical mindset—we see how vastly different the world is from the Church regarding love. Where we

"With an under-developed prefrontal cortex, a teenager's decision-making is less likely to successfully weigh outcomes, form judgments and control impulses and emotions. At the same time, they have a fairly well-developed nucleus accumbens (the area of the brain that seeks pleasure and reward). Throw in hormones and we have the perfect recipe for immediate gratification, thrill seeking, and impulse behaviors far outweighing careful consideration of potential consequences. As a result, teens are more susceptible to becoming addicted to nicotine, drugs, and cellphone use and engaging in rebellious and risky behaviors."

Judith Johnson, "Teens Addicted to Social Media"

know that love cannot tolerate sin, the world says love can embrace it. Where we know that love is married to holiness, the world says love is centered on happiness.

But a godly love must hate that which defiles it.

You cannot develop an affinity for the cancer that is destroying your body. Likewise, you cannot embrace a love that is gangrene to the soul. The problem many church folks grapple with is the same thing our little Ava struggles with, and it's this idea that to love means to be nice and allow anything to be whatever it wants, because to *not* do so would be to break what Voddie Baucham calls the 11th Commandment: Thou shall be nice.

But a biblical love is only seen as judgement to those who reject the image of God. The irony is thick when the Bride of Christ is rejecting the Husband she is supposed to reflect. If the church is to ever reclaim its integrity as a holy Bride she must risk being "mean" to others; she must say no to the cultural madness that has taken countless homes captive; she must return to the Truth.

Biblical love does not concern itself with the need to be accepted—like a teenager is. Biblical love is not centered on the need to accumulate as many likes as it can—like a teenager is. Biblical love is not a wishy-washy-feel-good-dowhatever-I-want adventure that is characteristic of—you guessed it—a teenager.

The love we are called to adopt is one that loves what is good and hates what is evil. And lest we misunderstand what it means to hate what is evil, recall Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden; recall the Flood; recall the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; recall the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

Recall the Cross.

Recall that God's love demands a reckoning for all that opposes His.

Did God sit motionless as we remained mired in sin and plagued by death? No! For God so loved the world, that He died to redeem it from the death grip of sin. For God so loved the world that He died to make a way for us to return to Him. The point here and for this month is to remind you that love is not a romantic quest. Love is a redemptive journey.

Unless you're still thinking like a teenager.

■

Teens struggle for a sense of autonomy, have a penchant for romanticizing life, and are cemented in their need for acceptance and approval.

IS THE CHURCH KNOWN FOR THIS AS WELL?





Compassion is often hailed as a virtue, a quality that defines our humanity and fosters empathy and kindness. However, in the shadows of this noble emotion lies a complex and often misunderstood phenomenon known as toxic compassion. This paradoxical concept challenges our conventional understanding of empathy and raises questions about the potential harm that excessive compassion can inflict on both individuals and society.

Toxic compassion can be described as an unhealthy and unbalanced manifestation of empathy. While genuine compassion involves understanding and alleviating the suffering of others, toxic compassion takes it to an extreme, often at the expense of one's well-being. It is characterized by an

overwhelming desire to help, fix, or rescue others, even when it is not in the best interest of either party.

Identifying toxic compassion involves recognizing certain signs and symptoms. Individuals driven by toxic compassion may neglect their own needs and boundaries, sacrificing personal well-being in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of others. This can lead to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a compromised mental health.

One of the key aspects of toxic compassion is the erosion of personal boundaries. Those afflicted by this phenomenon may find themselves constantly overextending to help others, disregarding their own limits. The inability to set healthy boundaries can result in strained relationships and an overall diminished quality of life.

Toxic compassion may also manifest as enabling behavior. In an attempt to shield others from discomfort or consequences, individuals might inadvertently perpetuate harmful patterns. This can be observed in relationships, where the desire

to protect loved ones from pain leads to enabling destructive behaviors.

While compassion is a cornerstone of healthy relationships, toxic compassion can have detrimental effects. Unbalanced dynamics may emerge, with one person shouldering the burden of the other's issues. Over time, this can lead to resentment, frustration, and a breakdown in communication.

Toxic compassion is not limited to individual interactions; it can also manifest on a societal level. The tendency to prioritize immediate relief over long-term solutions may hinder progress and contribute to the perpetuation of systemic issues. Understanding the balance between empathy and practical problem-solving is crucial for addressing societal challenges effectively.

Recognizing toxic compassion is the first step toward fostering a healthier relationship with empathy. Emphasizing the importance of self-compassion, setting clear boundaries, and promoting resilience are essential components of navigating the path to a more balanced and sustainable form of compassion.

Toxic compassion serves as a reminder that even the most virtuous qualities can have a dark side. By understanding the signs and implications of toxic compassion, individuals and society can work towards cultivating a more balanced and sustainable approach to empathy—one that fosters genuine connection without sacrificing personal well-being.

The article you just read, titled "Toxic Compassion" was generated by a "chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched on November 30, 2022"

(Wikipedia, "Chat GPT").

All I did was ask it, "Write me an article on the subject of toxic compassion," and it produced what you just read in 7 seconds.

The GPT stands for Generative Pre-Trained Transformer) and reminds me how insanely advanced modern technology is becoming. When you are released you will encounter tons of new things that your incarcerated mind won't be able to fully comprehend.

Take your time.

The worst thing you can do when you get out is try to keep up with the world. You can't. You shouldn't.

You better not.

Just relax. Focus on your reentry and on abiding by God's design for your life.

-Ruben





The Aftermath of Ministry

Ruben Constante, Jr.

Christian service isn't supposed to stink.

Yet sometimes we offer God and others an unpleasant scent with many of our Christian works. Many years ago during my time in the Struggle I witnessed how easy it is to ruin a good work. It occurred during lunch hour at the prison inmate dining room. As inmates were exiting the dining area, they were leaving their emptied food trays on a table near the scullery slot hole where empty trays are supposed to be dropped off. However, because the trays weren't being deposited properly, a mess was being created on the table.

That's when two Christian leaders who do not work for the food service department took on the task before them, volunteering their service to pick up all the trays and feed them into the scullery slot hole. What a great Christian duty, I thought, watching those two men work together to clean the mess others were leaving behind.

However, I noticed that one of them was throwing on the floor the liquid inside the used cups, intentionally pouring out water and fruit punch all over the floor, in a hurry to collect all the dishware. The effects were immediate, as gallons of liquid were dispersed all throughout the floor, creating a slip hazard for inmates exiting the dining area. A

disgruntled food service worker grabbed a squeegee and began to clean up the mess the Christian leaders were leaving behind.

Ironically, my Christian brothers were cleaning up tables while simultaneously making a complete mess on the floor! In that instant, I saw a clear picture of how sometimes our Christian service can do more harm than good. What we often intend to be a sweet-smelling aroma can quickly become a noxious stench.

THE MEANING OF SERVICE

"Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor" (Ecc. 10:10).

The Christian community (wherever it is found) is designed to represent the resurrected Lord. It is our duty to literally be His hands and feet and to continue the service He began during his earthly ministry. The apostle Paul called us "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20), a fitting term for a people whose "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

Yet, as I observed that day in the chow hall, sometimes we misrepresent our Lord and reveal to a dying world more "folly" than we do "wisdom and honor." Reflecting on the many times I myself have left behind a mess with my own public ministry, I prayed: How does Christian service defeat its very purpose? Why do we end up offering You a foul odor, Lord? Below are three reasons I discovered in prayer.

1. We don't understand the nature of Christian service.

The story of Martha and Mary illustrates this point very clearly (Lk. 10:38-42). Sisters by birth, both loved Jesus very much and served Him unreserved-



ly. However, Martha misunderstood what it truly meant to serve Jesus, and, as the story reveals, she was filled with chronic stress and anxiety.

Her victim stance reveals that she misunderstood what it meant to serve Jesus. She mistakenly believed that hard work proved she loved the Lord, yet Jesus lovingly rebuked her for not knowing the heart of true worship.

Today, we see many Martha's filling leadership roles and sitting on church committees. Whatever the service may be, when we fail to grasp the nature of Christian service, we're bound to make a mess. We'll become upset and frustrated and easily annoyed by those who "just sit around and do nothing," yet the reality may be that we are using Christian service to mask a deeper pain.

2. We're in a hurry.

It's easy to interpret speed with productivity. Modern forms of communication, for example, show us exactly why we can view Christian service through that same paradigm. Living in a hypersonic, social media-centered world, we can fall victim for the need for speed. However, Scripture often warns us against hastiness.



In 1 Samuel 13:8-12, for example, we see how King Saul's hurriedness resulted in a lot of trouble. He had

just been

coronated as king, and Samuel had told him, "You shall go down before me to Gilga; surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and *show what you should do*" (v. 8, emphasis mine).

Sadly, king Saul didn't wait. He had just received his new ministry role, and in haste he overstepped his boundaries and served in a capacity reserved for someone else. (Plus, peer pressure got the best of him as he feared the people!) The result of his hasty service produced a big mess. Many of us do the same, because we think "working for the Lord" allows the means of Christian service to justify its end. We think production is the same as effectiveness. It's not.

3. We're trying to prove something.

Everyone wants to be loved. We all want to be valued and feel appreciated. This often translates into a false sense of Christian duty to serve in some official capacity at our local church.

A good example of this is seen in Peter's impulsive desire to defend Jesus as recorded in John 18:2-11. Jesus was about to be arrested, and Peter swung his sword



in a murderous attempt to defend the Lord. He sincerely believed he could prove his love for the Lord by "going to bat" for Him. However, dying for the Lord doesn't mean fighting for Him.

Ask yourself: How many times have I jumped onto the stage of service simply to show others how much I love God? How many times have I gone out of my way to ensure others see how much I've changed and am not the same old person?

If we are driven by such attitudes, we can be sure our Christian service is a shallow effort of charity, driven more by the need to stroke our ego than to praise our Lord.

* * * * * * *

The apostle Paul wrote about the natural man not understanding the spiritual things of God (1 Cor. 2:14), and when we misunderstand the nature of Christian service or when we're in a hurry or when we're trying to prove ourselves to someone, we demonstrate a carnal mindset. We've convinced ourselves sacrifice is better than obedience, rather than it being vice versa (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22), and we've forgotten that true Christian service is motivated by redemptive love.

Redemptive love is yielded and submitted. It's surrendered. It isn't driven by a need to be seen or "validated" but is rather fueled by a firm conviction in the truth of God's Word. It won't be in a hurry to work but in a hurry to wait.

If we embrace this attitude and allow it to prompt our service to the Lord, we will begin to understand that "working for God" is really all about waiting for Him. We don't "work" for God, anyway—He works in us and through us! When we work for Him, we will leave a mess in our wake. When we allow *Him* to work through us, He will leave a message.

So, are you a mess or a message?



The Story of Martha and Mary

Luke 10:38-42

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.'

And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."



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