

New Life Family Matters

July 2007

Loving the people of the US Gulf Coast –June 2007

“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. ⁸The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love - so you can't know him if you don't love. ⁹This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. ¹⁰This is the kind of love we are talking about - not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. ¹¹My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. ¹²No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us - perfect love!”

The Message 1 John 4:7-12

Fifteen tired, but excited men and women from New Life, and from the Foursquare Church of Damascus, MD, sat on an assortment of chairs and sofas in a semi circle listening to an orientation briefing by the leader of the Salvation Army Disaster Relief Team, “Our team -here at Volunteer Village, is tasked with serving you so that you can serve those in the greater Biloxi, MS, area that cannot help themselves.” As I looked at our group during this short presentation, I was inwardly moved by their willingness to “give-it-up” for the sake of folks we had never met before. I sensed our Master’s pleasure and also His empowering grace for the week of physical labor ahead of us. We were tired, but willing and excited.

Volunteer Village was a former High School sports complex complete with massive, twin concrete and cement block seating structures complete with offices, locker rooms, kitchens and food service areas. The Salvation Army purchased this complex from the city of Biloxi, two weeks before Katrina hit for the purpose of creating a youth outreach center. It was now modified into a busy complex that housed dozens of volunteers in “bunk” style sleeping quarters, shower rooms, dining and meeting areas, and warehouse space for building materials.

Staffed with members of the Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Americorps, and Compassion First Ministries, along with dozens of long and short-term volunteers –to say that it was a busy place –well, that would be an understatement.

My experience has taught me that a “mission trip” is as much about the work God does in one’s heart as it is about the work He does through our hands. One of the lessons He has taught me is to prepare myself for, and to participate in these adventures with an attentive and listening heart. Although we knew we would be participating in devotional times with the entire group, I asked our team leader, Kelvin Anderson to arrange for us to have a devotional time with just our group from Frederick and Damascus. Four men were asked to prepare a lesson that focused our attention on the subject of serving. I want to briefly share from my notes the focal points of three

lessons (the fourth was to be presented by Ben Wehling, but due to a number of factors he didn't get to present his lesson –thanks for being ready, Ben!).

Gene Cregger taught on our first night from Luke 10:38-42. “We are here to serve the folks of Biloxi (like Martha), but the most important thing we are here for is to worship the Master and to respond to Him (like Mary). Three attitudes of the heart will reveal whether our service to the folks of Biloxi will be expressions of worship: a cheerful heart, a servant's heart, and a grateful heart.”

Todd Watkins taught on Tuesday night about our hearts as wineskins from Luke 5:36-39. “Are our hearts flexible?” Often times, “home-town” thinking about who Jesus is creeps into our lives making us inflexible – we don't allow God to change our thinking about Jesus [we develop a know-it-all attitude]. We should constantly ask ourselves, “do I deep down, want God to break through in my life?”

Wednesday is known as “hump day” in America as the day of the week that divides our work-week into “uphill” and “downhill” portions. Wednesday provides the motivation to continue on because “the weekend is coming.” Although we as Christ followers believe that Sunday is the first day of the week and not the last, we are still subject to physical limitations and usually by Wednesday of a 5 day mission trip, everyone is starting to show signs of being a little tired. After another long day of service in high temperatures and humidity, and another great meal, I was ready for some down time, but we had scheduled our devotional time for 7:30, and so I reminded myself that I committed to be attentive and to listen for the voice of the Master.

Although everyone was physically spent (I might be speaking only for myself☺) we gathered outside, sitting on the first couple of rows of benches in this massive (for high school complexes) stadium. Tom Gilbert's lesson grabbed our attention by asking us this question, “Why does it always have to be me?” I smiled to myself as I heard this knowing that everyone of us has asked ourselves (or maybe God) this question. Tom's follow up statement to this question was another arrow into the heart, “This question is usually connected to a bad attitude.” Everyone laughed and smiled as we all related. After breaking down his question and expounding on it word-for-word, he closed with this statement, “Remember what you are asking and maybe, you'll just have to be quiet and work for your real Master.”

Once again we came home deeply moved by the devastation we saw with our eyes, the gratitude we sensed from those we served, the amazing stories of rescue by our Master's hand, and the still small voice of our Master speaking to us, “by your works of love for one another, will they come to know my love for them. Well done my good and faithful servant.”

Well done Team New Life, well done!

Pastor Dave