

## Massive help for messy hearts

Well one of the things I'm sure many of us are finding during this time is God graciously exposing what's in our hearts as things are stripped away and we see more of the reality of what is there. Clearly the things God is revealing in each of us will not be the same, but for all of us as a church this is a timely opportunity for us to be growing in Christlikeness as we come to God in repentance and faith.

When we read the New Testament we can't miss the fact that as God's people we are called to love one another in response to and as an overflow of Jesus' great love for us:-

Jesus said "A new commandment I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John Ch13 v34+35

We know that as brothers and sisters in Christ we will be wanting to express Christ like love in all sorts of ways, not least by offering and giving practical help, assistance and support where we can. But I have been struck, as I have looked at my own heart, to see how naturally I find it much easier to offer and give help to others than I do to receive it! I have found it helpful to spend some time reflecting on what that tendency, that I know some of you share too, may be saying about our hearts and offer these brief thoughts to you now to reflect on:-

- 1.) When someone asks me what I need and I say 'I'm ok thanks, I don't need anything' it sounds humble (I don't want to bother you) and that may well be true in some cases, but if I only ever say 'I don't need anything' to everyone who reaches out to me, then the likelihood is that what appears at first to be humility is actually pride. Of course, I wouldn't articulate it like this but my actions are in fact saying to others in the body 'You need me, but I don't need you!'

It has been beautiful to see first-hand, members of the church family asking for and receiving help humbly, graciously and gratefully in recent days and this has been a wonderful model to me and a precious reminder that as God's people we're not independent and self-sufficient, we're not meant to be!

- 2.) If I consistently and repeatedly say to others in the church family that I don't need anything I'm forgetting my Identity and I am denying the gospel. I like to think I am strong, capable and in control but the truth is I am not. That is what Christ is like! Rather I am needy, weak, broken and totally dependent on Christ and the other members of his body, of which I am a part. When help is offered to me and I say I don't need anything I am not being honest with myself or my brother or sister in Christ. The fact is I may not need any shopping doing, but it's certainly not true to say I don't need anything! There is so much that I always do need, so much more than just practical help...I need heart help! The sad reality is I'd be happy for others in the church family to know if I had a messy house, but am not so happy for others to know I have a messy heart!

It's easy to read the New Testament letters as if they're just written to me but it makes a huge difference to our understanding when we remember they are written to churches not individuals and they are teaching, warning, encouraging and equipping God's people so they will grow corporately. We are not on our own, we need each other, and wonderfully the Lord has given us each other...to be a massive help to our messy hearts!

So...what do I need?

It's been good to spend some time thinking through that question and what an honest and helpful answer to it might be...

I need brothers and sisters to walk with me and pray for me and with me in my weakness, fear, anxiety, doubts, struggles and failures, which I need to be open and honest about with some. I need some who will help me to not just focus on my circumstances but on what's going on in my heart, who will ask me questions that help me see what lies my heart is telling me and what truths it's not believing. I need some who love me enough to gently and graciously challenge me and ask me about particular sins and struggles, about how I use my money and how I use my time, who will point me to Christ and the grace, help and hope that is found in him alone. I need some who will keep pointing me to God's word and reminding me that I really do have all I need in Christ. I need some to ask me about and encourage me in my Bible reading and prayer, to be asking me who I'm sharing my life and the gospel with and to be encouraging me in my personal evangelism. I need encouragement to keep seeing my current circumstances in the light of eternity and to be remembering God's big picture Kingdom plans and purposes.

And wonderfully I have the great privilege and joy of being able to walk with some in the church family in this way too!

- 3.) When I say I don't need anything from others in the body I am denying them the blessing of serving and loving me and also preventing us from growing closer as God's people by walking together, sharing our lives openly and speaking truth into each other's lives . Not being honest and real in our relationships keeps people at arm's length and communicates to others in the church family the idea that that is how we should behave. The more dependent we are on each other, the more that will encourage others in the church family to do the same. That right mutual dependence will also model to the world that we're not strong and don't have it all together. We are weak and needy, but we have a wonderfully powerful, gracious, loving and compassionate Lord and Saviour and we are his disciples who are totally dependent on him as we seek to follow him together, often limping along, but with our arms firmly linked!

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