

GRACE

GREAT GOOD NEWS!

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2004

Jesus said, "As I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (John 6:57).

The word *nurture* has become tremendously important to me. The ministry God has placed on my heart is the same ministry He places on the heart of each of His children - a *nurturing ministry*. The foundation of all ministries is to nurture the life of Christ IN others who have received Christ and to minister the life of Christ TO those who don't yet know Him personally.

Christians are called to "*go, make disciples*" of Jesus (*Matthew 28:19*). The mission of Christ Life Ministries is to help train Christians to fulfill this calling as they "go" about their daily lives. And the training is really nurturing. When a person is nurtured to experience the indwelling life of Christ and His healing, that person spontaneously shares Christ's life and His hope with others, thereby "making" disciples. Training that is rooted in nurturing the life of Christ results in people being forever transformed. Training that relies only on equipping people with knowledge and abilities can only conform them to temporarily try to live.

With all my heart, I believe our Father yearns for each of His children to know that we are already fully equipped with the life of Christ! Maturing as a disciple is not growing to become more complete, it is being nurtured to joyfully experience the fullness one already has in Christ and to increasingly enjoy His full life through your personality. "*You are complete in Christ*" (*Colossians 2:10*).

LIFE NURTURED THROUGH OBEDIENCE

It is through nurturing that we learn true obedience. Here's a wonderful example of learning obedience for me. *Ephesians 5:23-24a*, is a command for me to obey, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify her.*" I can look at this command (and all commands) in only two ways: law and grace.

From the law perspective, I can try my best to live up to this command. I can attempt to do things for Joy that I think she would like. I can even ask for God's help. However, this perspective presumes that I can understand what the command means in the first place! This reminds me of the Pharisees, the trained religious leaders in Jesus' day, who presumed that they understood what "You shall not murder" means...and they sure were proud (aka, self-righteous) that they had not murdered anyone. And they presumed they could similarly understand ALL of God's commands.

But along comes the lowly man Jesus with no formal training to blow away the Pharisees' perception of obedience, "*You have heard that you shall not murder and that whoever murders is in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment*" (*Matthew 5:21-22*). Jesus points us all to the fact that true obedience is not external, but is a heart issue...and true obedience can only occur when a person has received the very heart of Christ through salvation. "*By grace you have been saved. Through Christ we have received grace...for obedience*" (*Ephesians 2:8, Romans 1:5*).

So, from the grace perspective, my focus is on the life of Christ, not my "good" efforts. By God's grace, *Ephesians 5:23-25a* has become a thanksgiving prayer to nurture me in the life of Christ in me. *Oh Father, thank You for giving precious Joy to me. You are using our sufferings over the past few years to show me that I really do not know how to love Joy as Christ loved the church. Father, that truth is way beyond me. Your love is unfathomable. Thank You for redeeming the times when I have tried to love Joy based on my good, but selfish, human perceptions. Thank You for Your promise to reveal the meaning of this verse as You live through me to love Joy in ways I could never plan. Father, I claim this promise now. Thank you for transforming this **command** into the **promise** of the life of Jesus in me. Thank You for nurturing people to surround Joy and me to nurture us by accepting us just as we are...as You have made us. Continue to heal us in this deepest way. Warmly embrace Joy through me and others. In the Name of Your dear Son Jesus, amen.*

Here is an amazing thought I recently had that surprised me: *Whenever I strive to obey God's commands, I am striving to do something Jesus would not do!* Jesus was not obedient because He tried, but because the life in Him was the Spirit of God! This is so crucial to realize. Yes, Jesus was still 100% God, but He chose to humble Himself to pilgrimage to the cross as a Man. Jesus said in *John 14:10*, "*I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.*" Even people like Moses did not obey by only trying, but only because God put His Spirit upon them. God told Moses, "*My presence will go with you*" (*Exodus 33:14*).

Think about completing this sentence: "When I think of obedience, I think of _____." Is your first response related to your good efforts or is it simply "Jesus"? If you have been tempted to see obedience in terms of your own accomplishments, this might be an opportunity to re-focus your hope on the work and Person of Jesus.

For a wonderful Bible study on "obedience," see www.etsnow.org/articles/obedience1. Also, there is more nurturing on the back! ☺

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LIFE NURTURED THROUGH EVANGELISM

Matthew 28:19 is another command, "Go, make disciples." We can obey this command through evangelism (aka, soul-winning). For me personally, some of my evangelistic attempts have actually been subtly selfish, because my focus was on me...I wanted to feel worthy...I wanted others to affirm my value as a Christian...what others thought about me and how they responded to me was a controlling motivation of my life...I thought it was the right thing to do. And as I focused on myself, I tended to focus on methods to work up courage and to say the right words. Although sometimes I thought about God as a **power** to help me, I often missed experiencing the miracle of Christ as a **Person** manifesting His life through me to reveal His glory and truth to others.

But God in His grace reveals that all methods have been put to death on the cross! We can rest in this truth...we can rest in Christ alone! I believe with all my heart that I do not need power to share the gospel...(hang with me here ☺!)...I need the presence of Christ through my weakness! Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). What freedom it is to realize that even through my quivering voice and shaking knees I can manifest the very glory of Christ!

One approach to evangelism is to present the "plan of salvation" on a tract or by memorizing Scriptures. This is a wonderful instrument when used in the context of this very helpful insight from Adrian Rogers, "No person has ever been saved by a plan of salvation, but only by the Man of salvation." I really like that. Yes, there are many great evangelistic instruments, but ultimately salvation is an encounter with the living God in the Person of Jesus Christ...Christ is first **revealed**..."Look to Me and be saved" (*Isaiah 45:22*)...and then **received**..."But as many has received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (*John 1:12*). A Christian can witness (reveal) the life of Christ to everyone he or she encounters...this is a miracle of God in a Christian. A Christian cannot enable another person to receive Christ...this is the miracle of God in the other person.

Stephen Olford is a grand ol' pastor who nurtured me through lectures one week a year for 8 years at Luther Rice Seminary. I attended the seminary not to obtain a degree, but to be nurtured in the life of Christ (by God's grace, I did receive a Masters of Divinity degree in 1998). Dr. Olford has written in his book, *The Secret of Soul-Winning*, "To try to copy Jesus in soul-winning is to fail miserably; for His thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are His ways our ways. Only as we believe in Him and allow Him to flow through us by His Spirit will men and women, whom He is drawing to Himself, respond. The Lord Jesus is the only successful Soul-Winner, and it is only when He is in complete control of my life that I can hope to share in the fruit of His labors."

Thank you, Father, for loving me...and if I never again witness to a single soul...if I never again crack my Bible...if I never again breathe another prayer...You would still infinitely love me! Your pure acceptance of me frees me from the bondage of focusing on what I do and compels me to gaze upon Christ and what He has done! Gazing upon His glory transforms me to experience Your nurturing me to genuinely and abundantly witness, read the Bible, and pray...and to genuinely do ALL the things You have wired me to love (watching fireworks with Joy each Fall from our secret place on a hill, laughing with friends, talking with Mama, climbing a mountain with my nephews, studying the comedy of Dick Van Dyke, jogging in leaves, walking in snow, developing engineering solutions at work, writing, etc) ...all as fruit of the Life in me...no longer a burden, but a delight...all nurtured through Your faithful love. In Jesus' love, amen.

LIFE NURTURED THROUGH HOPE

It is becoming clearer to realize that the boys at the Boys Home of the South typically come from starved environments with little or no nurturing. These boys are so precious to fellowship with and to feed nurturing truths to. Their precious lives also nurture the compassion of Christ in each of us who volunteer to lead chapel services each Tuesday evening.

We recently asked the boys to complete this sentence, "I hope _____." I wish you could have heard their heart-felt responses! "I hope to go home...I hope to go to heaven...I hope my mom gets better...I hope I can complete school...I hope to be free one day...I hope to get a job...etc." This was an opportunity to nurture the boys by telling them that their hopes are God-given desires, and that God promises to fulfill their hopes in His perfect ways...ultimately through Jesus living through their precious lives.

The movie *Shawshank Redemption* is about an innocent boy who finds hope through prison. Here is the best line from the whole movie: "Hope is a good thing -- maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies." *Christ Jesus IS our hope (1 Timothy 1:1).*

I spend countless hours preparing this newsletter not only to mail it out to over 200 families, but mainly because this newsletter is one of many instruments God uses to nurture me. I would prepare this newsletter even if I did not mail it out. I hope some part of this newsletter (and enclosed Scripture booklet) might be used to nurture you wherever God, in His love and grace, has you.

I've been given several more opportunities for nurturing truths with individuals for 1 to 2 hours on a weekly basis. I taught a 10-hour GraceLife Conference Hendersonville, NC with for eight precious people October 1-2. On October 8, I was nurtured at a conference in Charlotte, NC with friends of similar discipling ministries (see www.aelm.org).

I will be hosting a GraceLife Conference in Simpsonville, SC November 12-13.

GRACE NOTE (by Oswald Chambers)

Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished.

We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.