

All in the Serve

by Paul E. Hamilton

But Jesus called the disciples together and said:

"You know that foreign rulers like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over everyone they rule. But don't act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be the slave of the rest. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people."

- Matthew 20:25-28 (Contemporary English Version)

I remember that day like it was yesterday. It was about twelve years ago, and our family attended a very small church in Cahokia, Illinois. Jamie and I were part of the lay leadership there, and the pastor had just returned from a church growth seminar. The pastor had called a meeting of all the leadership to pass on what he had learned concerning church growth. As we sat listening in our chairs, the pastor began to share with us that he had been going about church growth all wrong. He proclaimed that he had learned that as our pastor, he had to stop being a shepherd and start being a rancher. As my mind began to flash the "tilt sign", he expounded that as long as he saw himself as a lowly shepherd that his "ranch" would never grow. He went on to say that in order to bring growth, he had to be the rancher, CEO, and manager of his ranch/corporation. Needless to say, it was shortly after hearing this baloney that our family left that church.

Unfortunately, I wish I could tell you that our former pastor's new found idea was a fluke and a rarity, but it is not. Just moments ago, I did a subject search on Christianbooks.com and came up with 726 books on church growth. Not all of them are bad, in fact, I own some of them. But, there are some ideas represented out there that are wrong. Jesus stated clearly in His Word that we are to be servants. Jesus called Himself the Great Shepherd, not the Great Pa Cartwright of the Bonanza Ranch Church. God never intended for pastors to be CEO's of large corporations or for us to treat the church as a business. God called us to be servants, evangelists, missionaries, teachers, and helpers.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

- James 1:27

“Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”

- Isaiah 1:17

“He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

- Micah 6:8

These Scriptures do not tell me that I am to run a business and aim to build a dynasty or a ranch. What it tells me is that I must help those who are hurting. It tells me that I have to help those who can't help me in return. It tells me that I am called to serve. It tells me that I am to lower the hurting to the feet of Jesus and empower people to find a dignity and self worth that is only found in Christ. (Our revised church mission statement)

This is what we are hoping to do with our new outreaches. With our Bread of Life Outreach food pantry, we want it to become so much more than just handing out food. Any food pantry, Christian or non-christian, can hand out food. What we want to do is help people find a better way of life. We want to introduce them to our Family Empowerment Programs where they will learn how to budget and save their money. We want to give them encouragement and incentives to save money and keep on track financially. We want to help parents learn to minister to their children and let them know that even though they may not be wealthy, that they can live productive lives. We want to help people get a hand up instead of just a hand out. We cannot do these things and not get dirty “in the fields with the sheep”. We cannot hide in our “ranches” and hope that the people will come to us. We have to go out into the fields and serve, not expect to be served!

What can you do to help? Pray, give, serve, and pray some more. First, we need your prayers. Life in the “field” is hard. I have been spending time walking around my neighborhood praying and looking for a new location. This past month alone, I found and attempted to contact four abandoned building owners regarding use of their property.

Unfortunately, not one of them responded to my requests to talk with them about our situation. You see, many of these building owners are waiting in the wings waiting for a developer to come, and sweep their property up for millions and millions of dollars. In the meantime, our community becomes littered with derelict and abandoned buildings that serve no purpose to anyone. They are an eyesore to those who have to look at it everyday. I know I've said it again and again, but our current facility (a garage) on Northrup Avenue is tiny and we are packed to the ceiling . We desperately need a new place and we need to pray that God will direct us to the right place, here in our neighborhood. Secondly, we need to increase the finances coming in to Hole in the Roof. Obtaining and moving into a bigger place will mean increased utilities and costs. We also are more than likely going to have to pay an increased rent, in comparison to the present rental cost.

If you are not already giving to Hole in the Roof, please consider giving just \$20.00 a month. If 10 people would commit to giving just \$20.00 a month, we would more than double what we bring in currently. Thirdly, we could always use volunteers. Right now, our Bread of Life Outreach is open Monday nights from 6 - 7 p.m. and Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to Noon. On Monday evenings, we could use a few volunteers to help process and shelve food items. If you would like to volunteer, please contact our ministry office. Lastly, we could use even more prayers. As I said already, this kind of mission is hard and lonely and prayer always helps. Don't be afraid to get dirty in the field while serving. Though it is hard, it is always rewarding.