

Prologue: *A Tupperware Party*

Some years back, I was invited to an unusual party. One of our church ladies became involved with Tupperware, exploring every avenue for throwing parties and making sales. One idea was for her husband to host a party for the single men, as they too needed Tupperware. So there we were, seven men and the Tupperware lady. She had courage, we were on good behavior, and I think she even got a decent order.

For one of the party games we were given a sealed envelope and at the go signal were to open it, remove a needle and thread, and thread the needle. Needless to say, even threading needles was an affair of fierce and lusty competition in a roomful of men and one of the men was soon proclaimed winner and given his prize. Then she told us the contest had a second and even better prize. We were to find our original envelope and the prize went to whoever did the neatest job opening it.

The other men may have forgotten the game, but it speaks to me of our Christian walk, how we strive to get ahead, get what we want, or just get done with a few things, yet ever and again the things that are important are not urgent, and the urgent things are seldom of eternal consequence. When we stand before God on that final day it will make a difference how many lives, ripped up, cast aside, or wadded into a little ball we left behind in our mad dash to get to wherever we thought we were going. In the end it will be people, what we have done for them or to them, that will determine the deepest and best aspects of our heavenly reward.

Not all rewards are in heaven. A man who can gain the world and lose his soul can also do the same thing and lose friends, or worse, never make any. Much is said of our need for friends, yet it's hard telling whether we're gaining or losing. Some have gained ground, yet society as a whole becomes more unlivable every day. Our church experience works against us. Busy schedules, lofty goals and ceaseless activity force us to make hard decisions. What's the best call? I would like to answer a few of those questions this side of Heaven, while the pieces are in hand and I can still adjust my course.

Another memory from those days and that church- the pastor taught on Servanthood. We had a contingent of newly saved, fired up young men itching for a chance to do something. What happened if the pastor identified any need as an *opportunity to serve*? Stampede! Out of the way or get trampled. Of course, the less glamorous opportunities soon lost their luster and became needy again, but such is life!

No doubt God loved it, although we were slow to get the real heart of the servant. Nevertheless, we were moving in a better direction. The true goal of course, is to identify our own *opportunities* and pursue them even if we have an audience of one, that is, God. The real servant will meet needs quietly, without needing fanfare, realizing his reward comes from Heaven.

A heart of service frees us. We are only called to do what we are only called to do. The world overflows with hurting people. We meet some needs, but not all. Once free to serve, we hear the voice of God direct us. That protects us from all manner of false guilt and other bad motivation. Manipulation plays on fear, guilt, or greed. Such things don't have to be part of our lives.

Some people give nothing without a direct return in sight. They play the system, exploit church politics and make religious noises while scheming for gain or position. They are often first at the finish line, needle in hand and reaching for the prize. They generally get what they want and gloat over it. Some of those they trampled stare in shock at how such a thing could be in "God's House".

But the day is coming when God might say, "Well done, but this is what the real prize is for..." In the meantime, it's possible to love, accept, smile, and admonish, if we can only understand a little more of God, and some of the many sides to His wisdom. For we're God's creation, just as the Church is God's creation, and both are subject to the vagaries and contradictions of the flesh. Being in a physical body is a contradiction for we're first and last spirit beings. But here we are, let's make the most of it.

This book is about people. Not just any people, but the 'Ekklesia', the ones God called out of the world to become His church. The Bible speaks of rightly discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:29). From the passage in Corinthians we discover this to be a life or death matter. I choose life. I even desire to grow and prosper. That's where it gets complicated. For you see, there are two complete and contradictory sets of rules...

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