

Under Good Teaching...

Douglas Thomas

I was tormented by the Holy Spirit with a phrase for about 4 years. I heard someone say it, but could not believe it. I had been taught that speaking in absolutes was not wise unless referring to Jesus. The phrase was, "Under good teaching, you may learn a lot, but you won't grow a lot."

How could it be true that it was not possible to grow in some environment, especially one where there was good teaching? No. It was an easy to assess situation.

Months later, the phrase came back into my mind, even though I was not wondering if it was true, nor was I considering the subject that caused me to hear it the first time. I found myself passing back through the same process of deciding that it could not be true, wondering why I was doing so. I was quite convinced, so why was I wondering?

Again and again for years I heard the phrase in my mind. It no longer sounded like it was spoken by the first voice I heard say it. Now it was sounding like the voice I attribute to the Spirit of God when I believe that I am hearing Him. Becoming convinced that it might be the Lord trying to make me able to believe it, I considered again and again the possibility of it being true. No, it was too absolute. How could it not be possible? Maybe not automatic, maybe not likely, but not possible? No.

At this time, I was studying piano with a very skilled concert pianist. I had a job that required much overtime to be worked, and was involved in several ministries, a few of which I was completely responsible for. Many weeks went by with 15 minutes or less of rehearsal time spent at a piano by the time the next teaching session arrived. This was not a problem, in one way. My instructor was very knowledgeable of both music theory and instrumental technique. If I could not advance to the next lesson because of my lack of practice, we would talk theory. I learned something every week.

One day I believe that the Spirit of the Lord said to me that haunting phrase once again; "Under good teaching, you may learn a lot, but you won't grow a lot."

"Why do I continue to wonder about something I am convinced about, Lord?" I prayed.

I was so surprised by the sudden sense that it made that I do not remember whether I heard the answer or it just instantly made sense. The sense that it made was based on my lack of discipline at my piano. I was learning something every week, but I was not becoming a pianist. I was gaining knowledge, but I was not increasing in skill. It was not possible to grow as a pianist without exercise, which I was not experiencing. I was under great teaching, but it was not possible to grow in that environment. I could only grow by practicing what I was being taught, and the environment for that was not the teacher's studio.

I changed the way I considered the several times of worship leadership I was responsible for. On Wednesday night, at the boarding home where we led the residents in hosting the presence of Jesus through worship and prayer and teaching or testifying, I was practicing what I would be using as worship music at our home on Friday night when the house congregation that met with us gathered. Actually, though, at our home on Friday night, I was practicing for the Monday night meeting at another boarding home. Really, on Monday nights there I was practicing for the Wednesday night meeting that alternated with the other Wednesday night boarding home meeting. We were in two different homes on Wednesdays; one this week, the other the next. That Wednesday, I was practicing for the Friday night gathering at our house for that week. After a year or three of that, I had learned how to translate lead sheets and song books into sounds of music that were vehicles for worship and celebration.

Now I understood the phrase perfectly in the context it was originally presented. In a congregational meeting, I may learn a lot under good teaching. Whether I do or not depends on whether the teaching is actually good, on my attention span, my interest in being taught, and my memory or ability to take notes. I will not, however, become anything or do anything simply by having knowledge. Unless I am also able to access an additional environment in which I can exercise, work, do, be challenged, gain character, see things change as I influence them, I will not grow.

When the first celebration of Pentecost arrived after the resurrection of Jesus, the believers who were present were empowered. They soon realized that the old model of a priesthood class of people was replaced in the new Ekklesia of Christ by an empowerment of each Believer. When ordained to a ministry of delivering groceries, Stephen and Philip became miracle workers and evangelists. They were walking in supernatural levels of understanding, miracles, and evangelism. Philip was driven out of

Jerusalem with all the believers except the apostles (Acts 8). The ministry of the people of Jesus was spread throughout the whole of them.

The description that can be inferred from Paul's first letter to the congregations at Corinth (chapters 11-14) is that he expected believers to meet in homes over meals and for everyone to exercise their spiritual gifts to build up the Body (Ephesians 4). No priestly caste, no clergy, no ministry at all, including leadership, that was not identified and empowered by spiritual gifts. The Body of Christ, being built up in love by each member doing their part.

It was a bigger shock to the leaders that gentiles were being included in the Body of Jesus without becoming Jews than that each Believer had a gift from the Spirit and a ministry or work to accomplish with it (Acts 15).

It is debatable, but I am convinced historically that this model of ministry was destroyed by a demon worshiper named Constantine. He reportedly had a vision on the eve of a very important battle of a cross in the sky and the words, "In hoc signo vinces" ("conquer by this sign"). He had crosses painted on the shields of his soldiers. When they easily won the battle that had caused serious fear of loss, Constantine determined that Christ was a good luck charm and was to be honored as such. He and Licinius, another of the four tetrarchs ruling the Roman Empire at the time, subsequently wrote an edict that made it legal to practice worship of Jesus. The order (Edict of Milan) also gave freedom to anyone who lived in their ½ of the Roman Empire to worship any god they wanted to worship, with the stated hope that all the gods would bring benefit to the Empire.

Being the master of finance, war, law, et cetera, of his quarter of the Roman Empire, Constantine was naturally also the master of religion. That was no problem as long as it was only affecting religion, but the Body of Christ was not a religion. It was the family of a King from Heaven. It was a life-giving force from His Kingdom that was invading the earth and demolishing religion and idolatry and witchcraft and disease and anything else in its way. Not understanding that fact, Constantine proceeded to control his new religion just as he had controlled his previous religions. He was the financier of the temples and their employees, the priests. This priestly caste was hired to do the "holy" work in the "holy" buildings on the "holy" days. The "laity" caste stood around and watched the show. This design for governance of the people of Jesus replaced the

design Jesus had ordained, which was to use people with various Spiritual gifts to lead each Ekklesia in each place where a congregation had been birthed.

The church of Rome had its beginning in this hysterectomy that was performed on the Bride of the King of Heaven. The supernatural leadership of the King of Heaven over His people in the earth was prevented from continuing. In a pace that seems painfully slow, the Lord of the Kingdom of Heaven has been restoring the ministries of pastor, teacher, evangelist, then prophet, then lately apostle, to serve His people. Now, with the equipping team described in Ephesians chapter 4 to accomplish it, He is raising the ministry of the saints. They are being taught that they should each be serving God, doing the works Jesus did, and even greater works. They should be teaching others, evangelizing unbelievers, healing the sick, prophesying, and everything else. The five leadership gifts exist to equip all of the believers for all the Kingdom works.

They will not gain the skills that are needed to accomplish those ministries in rows looking at the back of each other's heads. They may learn a lot sitting in those sanctified class rooms, but they *cannot grow* there. In order to grow, they must practice. They must spend time at the task in the environment where that work is needed. That might be a street, a store, a home, a prison, a hospital, a homeless shelter, the internet, maybe even a bar.

Two questions seem to me to be properly posed, based on these facts.

One is for leaders to consider, the other is for followers.

1) How intentional is our provision of environments in which the Saints can be equipped for ministry?

2) Am I spending time practicing in the environment where my ministry can be done?

Leaders, are you equipping the Saints you have influence with and responsibility for to discover their ordained ministries and gain skills to accomplish them? Are you part of the continuing ministry of the hater of the Kingdom of God: the illegal hysterectomy being performed on the King's Bride, or are you helping her prepare every member of her body to be alive and capable of contributing their share of the work (Ephesians 4:16)?

Saints, are you being equipped to excel in your ministry? Are you taking responsibility for finding the place of equipping if your leaders are not fulfilling their responsibility of providing it? If they are not doing what they are ordained to, they will be disciplined. If you are not, you will be, too.

It is clear in the Book that you have been purpose-fully placed in the Body of Christ (John 15:16, 1 Corinthians 12:18). Just because your leaders are not surrendered to the intent of the Lord of the harvest, you are not free from your responsibility. You have been chosen with purpose. You have been placed in the Body with purpose. You have been placed in a family, a community, a place of business or other workplace, a nation, etc, with purpose. He wants you to know it and fulfil it, so He is not going to make its discovery difficult. Ask Him for direction and help.

Determine that if the congregation you are related to is not equipping you for ministry that you will find some place that will do it. You may not have to leave the congregation to grow. If you do have to leave it to grow, leave it. You are not leaving Jesus. Follow Him to the accomplishment of the deeds that will prompt Him to declare that your work as a servant of His was "Well done..."