

Shift from Transactions to Transformation

*“O man, send your treasure on, send it ahead into heaven,
or else your God-given souls will be buried in the earth.
God comes from the depth of the earth—
the soul, from the highest heaven.*

*Clearly it is better to carry the gold to where the soul resides
than to bury the soul in the mine of the gold.*

*That is why God orders those who will serve in his army
here below to fight as men stripped of concern for riches
and unencumbered by anything.*

To these he has granted the privilege of reigning in heaven.”¹

☞ *Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-450)* ☞

In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel rebukes King Saul for not listening to God before going to war with the Amalekites. Starting at verse 20, Saul replies to Samuel,

“But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said, “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

Remember that Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites and not bring anything back. But Saul thought he had a better plan. He decided to bring back the very best of the livestock and flocks, sacrifice some to God, and keep the rest to add to his own herds and flocks. So, after disobeying God, he returned, believing that he could appease God by sacrificing a few of the best animals to Him.

Samuel would have none of it. He rebuked Saul, saying, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying

the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

To obey is better than sacrifice. Hold that thought for a minute and let’s look at Hosea chapter 6 starting at verse 6, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there.” Hosea is calling out to the children of Israel saying, “God is tired of sacrifices, He is not looking for sacrifices, He wants mercy.”

Finally, let’s turn to the great text from the first chapter of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah continues on the same theme, starting at verse 10,

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ‘The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough burnt offerings of the rams and the fat of fattened animals, I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths, and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.’

What does this have to do with the journey from transaction to transformation? I believe that throughout Scripture, God is constantly calling us to examine the outward work that we do in relation to the heart we have in doing that work. The children of Israel were doing

the right things. They were carrying out rituals just as God had called them to do. God set up the Levitical priesthood, the temple, the sacrificial system, and His people were going through the outward motions just as instructed. However, their hearts were far from God. Saul assumed wrongly that a simple external act of sacrifice would atone for his disobedience. Hosea lamented that, among the children of Israel, burnt offerings had been substituted for an acknowledgment of God. They were doing right techniques, they were practicing things that worked, but their hearts were somewhere else. And God grew tired of it.

In the New Testament we find the same disconnect between hearts and hands. Consider the story of Mary and Martha. Jesus comes to visit Bethany. Martha gets busy in the kitchen, *doing* all the right things. Mary forsakes the doing and goes to sit at Jesus' feet, and Martha is not happy. Mary is not *doing* the work she is supposed to do. She appears to be wasting her time sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His words. Yet Jesus commends Mary for making the better choice.

From nearly fifty years combined working with ministries, we have concluded that we, like Martha, are *doing* ourselves to death. Every single one of you reading this can *do* yourself to the point of exhaustion, burnout, discouragement and despair. There is enough to do in your ministry to totally consume you and spit you out. Do you agree? And yet many of you are being pressured to do still more because more money needs to be raised. There is more financial pressure on ministries today, which means we have got to be asking more, talking to more givers, securing more gifts, getting our president in front of people more often, involving our board more, and on and on. Am I on the right track? We are all feeling it, and it is all about *doing*.

More than any other area of ministry today, we are measured in this work by what we do. The *development* department makes its reports using charts and graphs. We talk about our work in terms of dollar

goals, percentages of participation, average gifts and pledge totals. From thermometers in lobbies to annual reports mailed to our entire databases, everybody knows exactly if we are successful or not. Ours is a highly measurable profession where we are evaluated almost solely on what we do and how much we raise. There is something fundamentally wrong with this picture.

Think back to our image of the sower; it is as if we are being asked to both sow *and* make things grow. We are responsible for not only planting seed and watering, but also for the crop and the harvest. Indeed, in this understanding of our work, the image of the sower is inadequate. Organizations want harvesters, believing that we control the crops. Paraphrasing Paul, we have built our fundraising programs on the belief that “the president plants, the volunteers water, and the development department brings the increase.” Where is God in this? Where indeed!

To change this way of thinking requires nothing short of a revolution. And the movement we spoke of is the thunder in the distance alerting us that revolution is coming.

This brings us to three fundamental statements about this journey and our role as sowers. First, *God is primarily concerned with who we are rather than what we do.* That is a life-changing statement. God is passionate about you becoming a more deeply committed child of God, because He knows that as you become more like Christ, your life will be transformed from the inside out.

If you believe this statement, let’s look at how well that priority is reflected in your daily schedule. Does your work life reflect God’s priority of forming and shaping you to be a child of God that you might do the work of the Kingdom? How about your devotional life? How much time are you spending intimately in the Word of God, in prayer, in devotion? In what ways do you make yourself available daily for God to take you on the journey of the transformation of your heart?

We all need sowers to help us, and we all need to be sowing in the lives of others. One truth must guide us here. We cannot sow if we are not growing. Spiritually stagnated people have empty seed bags. As followers of Christ, we must be growing daily so that our seed bags will be full. As those entrusted with the calling to raise money for God's work, we must be faithful sowers of good seed in the lives of our co-workers, our volunteers and our givers.

The second statement that flows from the first one is this: *God is primarily concerned with our being before our doing.* As mentioned, we are doing ourselves to death. Very few people could be accused of spending so much time developing their characters as children of God that they aren't doing anything for the Kingdom. In fact, I don't know anybody guilty of spending too much time *being* with God. People who spend an inordinate amount of time developing their hearts and characters as children of God are *doing* some pretty amazing things. They are people in balance; people who prioritize *being* before *doing*.

How do you find that balance in a job that is measured solely by *doing*? That is the challenge we face, and we must fight that battle first on a personal level. Restoring the balance between *being* and *doing* is the most critical responsibility of any worker in God's Kingdom. The enemy will deceive us into thinking that God desires our *doing* first, even at the expense of our *being*.

I served as a seminary president for five years. One story that deeply troubled me was hearing that students considered their seminary years as among the spiritually driest times of their lives. It seemed impossible, surrounded by libraries full of classics of the faith, professors who were deeply mature and committed followers of Christ, and a curriculum that led them through the best thinking on the Christian faith and life. Their explanation was simple and disturbing: their focus for four years was on *doing* at the expense of *being*. They worked so hard to do the work of learning about God, about the church, and about ministry that they crowded out all time for being with God Himself. How many pastors, ministry leaders

and, yes, development officers have the same regret? How many of us enter each day with empty seed bags? Once again, we cannot sow what we do not have, and what replenishes our seed bags is not our doing but our being; our availability to the Holy Spirit to move us to deeper faith, richer fellowship and greater understanding. Apart from the Spirit working in us in our quiet, intimate, and surrendered moments with God, we will cease to be sowers.

Maintaining this balance will also likely require you to fight this battle in your place of work. In a system that expects a harvester, you may have to do battle in your institution to be allowed to maintain the role of the sower. What does that balance look like to you in your personal life, your family life, your marriage and your work life? Is your “*being*” being sacrificed on the altar of deadlines and performance? It is important to reprioritize *being* and *doing* and begin to pray over it, seeking God’s help and guidance to reclaim it and maintain it in every area of your life. Only then can you sow good seed in the lives of those you love.

The third statement is the conclusion that flows from the previous two, that *God is primarily concerned with the transformation of our hearts rather than the transaction of our business*. So let me ask you:

- *What does this process of transformation look like in your journey?*
- *In your life, what is most in need of being changed and transformed?*
- *When you think about God calling you on a journey from transaction and doing to transformation and being, where do you see Him working in that transformation?*

You can’t lead others on that journey if you’re not on that journey yourself. Herein lies one of the greatest hypocrisies in the Kingdom of God: people who are poor personal stewards trying to do development work in the name of Jesus. We have spiritually stagnant people in charge of a ministry of seed sowing. We have transactional people developing plans and strategies for a work of ministry that is wholly transformational.

So the question is how does all of this affect the way you conduct your fundraising work? How much differently would you look at the people from whom you solicit funds if your call as a Christian development person is to enter into their journey and be used by God to sow good seed into their lives? This good seed is God's instrument to help transform every one of our supporters into more godly stewards.

This insight was a paradigm shift for me. When I realized that my primary calling as a development person was to be used by God to cultivate hearts to be rich toward Him, everything I did changed. My prayer life changed. I no longer prayed, "Dear God, please help me be successful in raising money from Mr. and Mrs. Smith." My new prayer was, "Dear God, help me discern how You want to use me as an instrument in their journey to become more godly stewards." And I found that if I followed God's lead and allowed myself to be used by God for this purpose, spiritual growth happened in their lives *and* in mine. Through their changed hearts, God supplied all of our need according to His glorious riches!

God blesses the seed we sow. As people become more godly stewards, they give more freely, more joyfully and more sacrificially. But it is still a journey. The recent recession has provided us with an unprecedented window of opportunity. Seldom have we been given a greater opportunity to walk that path with our supporters. Many of them are deeply concerned, even scared. They have seen a decrease in the value of the assets God entrusted to them, and many have lost jobs or had significant reductions in work. They are asking questions. They are looking for people who care about them, and if we come alongside them and understand we are called to make that journey with them, we can minister in unprecedented ways.

For this and so many other reasons, it is critical that we understand the ministry nature of our job. The move from transaction to transformation is God's work, but we are His hands and feet. We are sowers, so our seed bags must be full.