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A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

“From Allendale To Afghanistan And Back Again: The Power Of Applied Love, III”

So many of you have heard me use my “How Do You Clean A Swimming Pool” analogy over the years that you almost delight in repeating it back to me word for word! But in this continuing installment describing the significant linkage of an injured neighborhood in one of our cities to a broken country in our one world, I must begin with the “Swimming Pool.”

So how do you clean a swimming pool in this twenty-first century age of advanced devices? First, you must know what and how to clean one molecule of H₂O. If you cannot clean one, then you cannot capture the process to clean many. *But knowing how to clean one molecule of H₂O is not enough to enable you to clean the swimming pool!* Indeed! If you had a pool full of do-gooders madly scrubbing molecules, they could clearly point out the statistical success of their efforts. But, the capacity of the dirty water to instantly overwhelm the clean molecule renders the uncoordinated individual efforts fruitless. Despite furious work, the pool remains dirty. So what will work?

Here is what happens. Someone with a brilliance I can scarcely imagine invented a method to move billions of molecules into a reactive process that cleans them from the clinging microscopic particles of dust. It is called “a swimming pool filter.” After cleaning the molecules in a specialized environment, it shoots them out into the pool. The process is of intake, cleansing, and outflow, is so powerful that the filtered water eventually overwhelms the dirty pool and will become so clean that you and I could safely drink the pool water. This is a transformational process. It is real. And it works in tens of thousands of swimming pools across the land.

Of course the dagger of reality stabs us just here. We realize we can clean a swimming pool, that we can accurately assemble a mechanism to do just that. Further, we can describe the process with stunning scientific precision. And by so doing, we are able to replicate the filters for many pools. But we have yet to capture with the same intelligibility and repetitive prowess the cleansing of a human life, or a neighborhood, or the pool of humanity which we know as a nation. With all of our long history of social awareness, why has this challenge been so daunting?

Now when I speak of the cleansing of one human life, I mean the transformation that comes about when one is *changed* from being fundamentally *self-centered* to predominantly *other-centered*. In other words, when a person learns to care for another and then to commit to a life style of caring, that person has been *changed*.

All societal transformation must begin at this molecular level. But there must be more if we are to change society effectively. To do that a replicable process must be conceived and implemented which can begin to enable vast pools of people to move from the life of self to the life of self-within-community. So the question hits us with a smack:

“How can we help a wounded country like Afghanistan if we have not been willing or able to help our own injured neighborhoods here in America?”

Do we possibly have anything to say to that cold query? Yes, I know that there are many shadows in our lives and in our land. They are deep and dark with haunting truths about the collective dysfunction of a society that seems to perfect *means* but loses sight consistently of *meaningful ends*. Yet, despite the darkness, there are profound lights that are emerging. And I believe that answers are beginning to abound all around us. Here is what I see. And here is what I believe that we can say to a world thirsty for an abiding answer.

People can change. People do change. We must start with the reality of that conviction. William James, America’s greatest pragmatic psychologist, in his famous Gifford Lectures of 1901-02 defined the reality of this change as “*the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified, and consciously right, superior and happy. People can and do change*

It follows: People can and do change from fundamental self-centeredness to a life-style of other-centeredness. That is a reality, too. I remember the story of the guy who said with ironic conviction, “I don’t know about water being changed into wine, but at my house all of my beer money has now been changed into a living room full of new furniture!” It’s funny. But on a serious side, we know folks who have changed that dramatically.

Therefore: If people can and do change and that is consistent in human experience and history, then there must be a consistent reality that effects that transformation in the lives of persons. I believe that that Reality is the Presence and Power of Applied Love. (I am sorry that I have to use the descriptive word “applied.” It is quite redundant. Love in and of itself is by its very nature “applied.” But because of the corruption of the use of the term “love” by those who should be about the business of *applying it, but do not, we have found a neo-pharisaism rampant among us. To wit: those who talk most about love, love the least!!*”)

We know that Love changes people. We know that all love (seeking the good of the other as well as one’s own) is God’s love. We did not invent it. And we know that it is expressed best in caring relationships. So...

Finally: The powerful transformative process of love begins when we consciously commit ourselves to live the life of community with others. This community is joined when we can escape the self-centered trap of seeking to BE GOOD and step out to DO GOOD.

Do Good!! It is here that the final mystery is confronted and unfolds. We cannot *Be Good* and we cannot *Do Good* on our own. We, too, must have help in order to be able to help others. We must appropriate *given love* in order to dispense *applied love*. How this happens I hope to share in our next newsletter. But rejoice in this truth: It is happening!!! I can see it all around. Now lets “bottle it!” God bless you all.