

A Personal Word for You

Mack McCarter

Over the past few months, I have defined the fundamental problem facing our modern society using the term, “the greatest need.” I have said that the greatest need which confronts us is *not* the need to solve the crime problem, the drug problem, the problem of racism, or the need for jobs or quality education. Those needs present massive problems to us. They are huge! *But they are not the greatest need which we face today.*

No, the most pressing need which we have in our land is the need for *changed people!* We need people who have been changed from being fundamentally *self-centered* to becoming predominately *other-centered* human beings. The all important question is, “How?” How do we succeed in this endeavor to solve the crisis of our time?

No one will deny that there is unfathomable mystery in changing the character of persons. William James, the great genius of pragmatic psychology, delivered his famous Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1902, (The Varieties of Religious Experience.) He spoke these words about the enigma of changed lives, saying that it was “. . .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, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.” He could define the event. But he could not unwrap its mystery.

One night when Nicodemus wrestled with the mystery of a changed life, Jesus said to him, “The wind blows wherever it please. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” There is fundamental mystery inexorably connected to the miracle of a changed life. It is too deep for you and me to probe. And it is too high for us to grasp. I can surely acknowledge that mystery!

So when I say to you that our greatest need is the need for changed human beings, I am not trying to cut the Gordian knot of our present dilemma with a trite swing of an antiquated sword. No! We must have changed lives, but I cannot explain to you the transaction. That is the realm where God and God alone treads with mighty and sovereign stride.

How can a person change from being self-centered? Unless we deal with that issue, then no attempt at reconstructing the foundations will ever be successful. We are born self-centered. It is our fatal flaw. And if we seek to continue to try to put a group of flawed human beings together and expect the product (our society) to be harmonious, then we are most miserably self-deceived. We could do no more round up a group of tug boats and expect them to be miraculously transformed into a battleship! So how do we penetrate the mystery in order to produce what we need the most in America, *changed lives?*

While we cannot solve the mystery of a changed life, we can produce the best conditions necessary for that life to change. I cannot explain the mystery of life. I cannot explain the mystery of life entering a kernel of corn. But that does not stop me from growing corn! *All I need to know is what conditions God has placed here necessary for corn to grow, then meet those conditions!* Now here is the great truth: **If God cares enough about the growth of corn to place conditions for it to grow, how**

much more does God care about the *growth of character*! Conditions do exist to grow other-centered persons once they become reborn from their self-centered state!

What we must do is rigorously apply ourselves to the task of producing the conditions necessary for other-centered lives to grow, prosper, and live harmoniously together. The infrastructure which provided and still provides the most optimum conditions for this to occur is the caring entity known as “the village.”

Now there are a lot of statements being bandied about today concerning “the village.” It looks like it is the new buzz word of the nineties. But the biblical and historical reality of the critical importance of the village as the best soil in which the seed of new life can grow is simply undeniable. It stands as the principal progenitor for the conditions necessary for humans to live together in harmony.

Our premise here at Shreveport Community Renewal holds that there are four conditions necessary for other-centered lives to be nurtured: 1) a strong multi-family support system; 2) an ethical system which has strong demands and prohibitions; 3) a strong system of on-going tradition; and 4) a transforming sense of transcendence which is translated into practical day-to-day living together.

Our confident conviction is that we can produce these conditions in any urban area in America. In effect, we can “re-village-ize” the city by using a dynamic three-pronged strategy. First we must build up a grassroots movement of ordinary people committed in an extraordinary way to care for one another. This is our Mission Team (TM2.) Second, we must utilize a block-by-block plan which trains persons to be the catalyst for caring on their own block. This is our Haven House Plan. And finally, we must give attention to persons living in neighborhoods which need special help because of the oppressive conditions of crime, racism, and drugs. This is our Internal Care Unit Plan (ICU.)

This is the fundamental strategy which SCR is following to produce the conditions necessary for other-centered persons to grow and flourish. It is the most exciting adventure and challenging endeavor to confront all of us in our lifetime! As the days follow, I will detail this strategy for you to see as we walk together down this “road less traveled!” Come and join us on the trip of a lifetime!