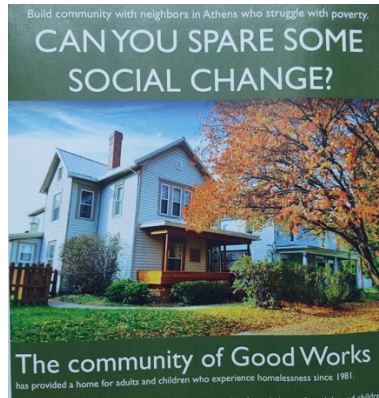


Spring 2022 short essays
Keith Wasserman



Posted on 4/26/22

Obligation and Hospitality

Something in me resists feeling obligated. I know this often depends upon the circumstances and also the people who are obligating us; and whether we were prepared or if this was unexpected. This could be an area of my life that is not fully redeemed. Or it could also be an opportunity I have been culturally “trained” to miss.

I find, however that there are instances in the New Testament (See Luke 10 and Matthew 10) where Jesus PLANS for his followers to obligate others. Yes, I said Jesus plans for his followers to obligate others. I think this is culturally taboo, at least in our culture.

In one instance, Jesus sends his disciples out and gives them instructions and a list of what not to take with them on their journey. This ultimately obligates strangers to care for them. I sense there is something about Mideastern hospitality at work here. He told his followers as he sent them to ‘take nothing’ on their journey, but to ask to stay at different homes and expect their hosts to provide them with food and shelter. Hmm. Who does this kind of thing in our culture? Ah... I think I know.

Wasn't Jesus telling his disciples to place themselves in a situation where others will feel obligated to host them and provide food for them? OR, was this a normal part of the first century culture? Maybe obligation isn't really what it appears. Maybe obligation is an invitation and an opportunity? But shouldn't we prepare or be prepared for the invitation (from God) for unexpected opportunities to host and provide for someone? Sometimes I fear that our lives are way too busy, way too scheduled and lack the kind of margin needed for spontaneous welcome. Think about this: when was the last time you hosted a stranger overnight? It is as if we have been trained to fear strangers, not welcome them.

I know that when someone obligates me to provide them with food and shelter, there is some resistance in me. But what if Jesus really did send them? In Hebrews 13:1-2, we learn that some people who provided unexpected hospitality – the word obligated is not used -- have welcomed angels without knowing it. Wouldn't most of us want to host an Angel?

Am I missing an opportunity, an invitation from God? Maybe obligation and hospitality are interconnected.



Posted on 4/21

BEAUTY AND HEALING

I pray for healing every day in my own life and also for others. Sometimes, I close my eyes and picture myself touching the hem of Jesus garment (Matthew 14:36) and receiving healing. I am aware that brokenness remains in me. I desire and pray for MORE healing. I have several favorite scriptures on healing and I like to hear people tell stories about their physical, emotional, mental and historical healings. I especially like to hear stories where relationships are healed. The Good Works community has 4 questions we invite people to consider before they make a commitment to join us. Question 4 is: Can I get healing here too?

Recently, I have begun to wonder if being in and around beauty brings healing. As I sat by the ocean recently, I wondered how the waves might bring healing into my life. I don't mean to imply I can measure this, but I do think there is something my spirit longs for, and even experiences which my mind doesn't always understand or comprehend.

When I sit in the beauty of creation, I watch, listen and rest. Somehow, I think I can place myself in a creation-space to receive healing. I also think that long periods of time where I am at peace without stress bring me healing too. I've been told that doctors bring healing and I do want to believe that. I think I've developed a phobia of the medical industrial complex. I could tell stories. I bet some of you have stories. But I digress. It is healing that I long for both mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually as my daily diet. I am aware that there are things in our lives we must learn to avoid or stop doing if we want healing but that is a reflection for another day.

Some healing comes through knowing truth and being set free; some comes through meditating on scripture, some through physical touch, some through the voices of those who love me. And there is always healing available for me when I am in presence of God.

I'm on a journey, a mission and I don't see a day in my future on this side when I will stop seeking healing. I recently heard a wise person say "you have heard it said that hurt people hurt people, but the truth is that healed people heal people". I really like that. I think our journey of healing is not always for us alone, but also for the sake of others whose lives we are connected to.



Posted on 4/20/22

HOMELESSNESS AND CHANGE

I had the opportunity to speak to a group of about 20 Pastors recently. As I was leaving, one of them asked me "How many of those you serve in your shelter change?" Interesting question.

Actually, I found it difficult to provide him with a short answer. My first thought was 'what do you mean by change'? I kind of thought he was asking about how many get jobs and live beyond their recovery, open their lives to Christ and leave the world of

homelessness. It's reasonable that someone might want to know the statistics on how many people change, but it is very subjective and feels hard for me to speak to. At the Good Works Timothy House, we do know how many inquiries and phone interviews we have, how many people come for a pre-admit interview, how many stay with us, and how long they stay. We do keep other stats too. It is really hard, however to measure how anyone's life changes. I said hard but not impossible. It is also hard to keep track of what happens to many of the people who leave us, and what kind of housing they end up in.

The question remains: are we seeing changes in people's lives and what kind of change are we seeing? What do we hope for and what structures have we developed to help bring about change while reinforcing dignity, respect and different measures of ownership?

Some people transition well into their own places, others move into housing with friends. For most people we serve, there are very few places they can afford even working full time on minimum wage. When you are at the bottom, even a car payment (including insurance) is about \$300.00+ a month for a decent used car. A growing number of landlords in our area no longer take HUD. They don't say why, but I suspect it may have something to do with the fact that HUD will not pay the landlords market value and most rental property in a student neighborhood can provide a LOT more money than HUD will pay. I'm sure there are other reasons. Most of those who leave The Timothy House find it difficult to afford any housing inside the city. And so, they have to find transportation, plan to walk a lot or they need to be on the bus route. Transportation continues to be the #1 problem separating urban poverty from rural poverty making rural poverty worse. Most of the jobs people get while they are staying with us are in the city. This is not a new problem, but it has become much more expensive to live in our city; indeed, most cities. Wages have gone up. There are more jobs now, but the cost of rental housing is moving higher too. There are very few rentals available for "low income" (whatever that means). There are vouchers and dwellings for subsidized housing, but the waiting list is long. There are also many eligibility requirements for these, only one of which is income. Years ago, one of the Good Works WALKS focused on housing and the director of our local HUD office helped us lead the Housing WALK. He handed out mock applications at the WALK to demonstrate what it was like. As people turned in their applications, he assured them that housing would be available in TWO YEARS.

I wanted to say to the Pastor that the situation of how many people change is complex, and that I needed more time to talk through the complexities. We certainly have HOPE for people and we pray for them and we invite them into community, listen and inform them of opportunities for them to grow, but they must have ownership for decisions which will impact their lives.

I do know this: I am one person who has changed. The people who come to Good Works have change me. The relationships I form with those we care for are impacting me. Today I spent time listening to several presentations by Jayakumar Christian, a leader with World Vision in India. He said this: "In our model of transformation, if the

agent of transformation is not continually transformed, our model lacks integrity”. I like that. I’m still thinking about that.



MOVED

I often pray I can be moved by desperation. I know that this could feel like a negative thing for many of us – we don’t want to become desperate—and most of us don’t do well with people who act in desperate ways. Nevertheless, I am asking God that I would be moved by desperation. I think that there is a difference between a concern for others... .. and being moved.

Desperation + Intentionality (planning) + Wisdom + Faith (which is spelled R.I.S.K) = Hope and Healing (at least in the story below). As I have read books and listened to lectures (sermons) over many years, I am still not sure how much information itself moves me. People move us.

When people we know are in desperate situations, this should move us. When people we know have friends in desperate situations, this too should move us. I see desperation as something deep, something from the Holy Spirit; something like directed compassion. In some ways, I want to hear the LORD says “let’s roll”. I desire this. I want my own feelings on behalf of others, to move me to offer aid to people.

And I want to do this with other people; not by myself.

It is hard to discern the many voices coming through email, text messages, video media, radio, TV, etc.. It is hard to discern what is information and what should move me to action. Most of the time, I need some perspective in order to consider my responsibility and to make a plan. And I need to consult with someone.

I see an example of this in the New Testament’s Gospel of Mark. In chapter 2, four men were moved by what I think is their desperate desire to get their friend to Jesus. I suspect they heard Jesus was in town and was healing people. At some point they had to organize, physically pick up their friend and bring him by foot to Jesus (and people

are heavy when you carry them). No one knows how far they walked or even if they had to persuade their friend to be carried. When they arrived, maybe they saw that the line was long and the sun was going down. And so, one of them got an idea. That person had to persuade three others to do something he had never done before, and they had never done. I think it was their desperation to see their friend healed by Jesus which moved these men to do something crazy; at least crazy in their culture. In the end, their friend received far more than anyone could have conceived of.

Can you imagine this? They got up on the roof of the house and lowered their friend through the roof. They had to be organized and it took all four of them. They had to endure the voices of those who watched. And they had to wonder.... What would Jesus do? Would he welcome them? Would he rebuke them? In the end, they saw their friend healed and heard Jesus say that his sins were forgiven. "What is easier" Jesus said. Hmm.

What moves you?



I HAVE NEVER HAD A BURDEN FOR THE HOMELESS.

I know people who have a burden, and I don't have what they have. I do have a continual concern for my neighbors who are vulnerable, feel excluded, experiencing forms of oppression, and struggling with poverty. I continue to have a strong desire to create and maintain structures (wineskins) which address the physical, social and spiritual needs of my neighbors who struggle with poverty. As I try to understand myself, I see people without homes as some of the neighbors God has "put on my plate" to love and serve.

What we do at Good Works is not perfect. We are always thinking about and talking about ways to improve what we do. But what we do IS limited by our capacity. This is just reality. We can have an extraordinary vision but we must live in between the boundaries of the GW's community capacity. I have learned over the years that when

serving people as an organization, we should promise less and deliver more when possible. And we should always keep our word.

Together, we have found persevering grace to love and serve people in ways that are very helpful and even transformational; but we know we don't have the capacity to serve everyone who seeks our help. We know we have to say no sometimes. We do have limitations and we know we must have boundaries to maintain our own mental and physical health. We know that there will always be people who can't see what we are doing and insist on telling us we are not doing enough.

Even after all of these years, I still find JOY and the energy to organize others to do good; to provide care and community to our neighbors. I do have a passion to create and facilitate environments where the "haves and the have-nots" can come together and form relationships with each other; relationships based on trust, good communication, mutual respect and love; safe places where people feel heard and feel loved. In the book *Good Works, Hospitality and Faithful Discipleship* I talk about 4 stages of these relationships for those who want to enter the process: Associating, Serving, Loving and Knowing.

I used to think that the only goal was to 'have the party' Jesus challenges us to host recorded in Luke 14:12-14; to invite those who cannot repay us to an event (and to a community) where they will feel safe, experience welcome, feel heard, enjoy good food and friendship; and when appropriate experience a hug or handshake --- don't underestimate the healing power of appropriate physical touch. This is still good and we do still aspire to this and believe it is important. Friday Night Life --- we start year #30 this week --- is an example of our sincere efforts. These days however, I am hoping that I get invited to the party; to the homes of those who feel excluded, who are impoverished. Somehow, someday, Jesus got invited to the home of someone in the community who hosted him and his disciples. He was not only invited but he showed up. I want to become safe enough (maybe interesting enough too) to get invited first into the living room and then into the kitchen. I desire these places in other people's lives and quietly hope for them. You too?

FEAR AND LYING

FEAR is a very powerful force in many of our lives. Sometimes it is good and can be helpful. More often, fear feels harmful. Sometimes, we can learn a lot from fear.

On my first visit to live with people experiencing homelessness in Lexington Kentucky, I stayed overnight at the Salvation Army. The next day my buddy (I had prayed for a buddy) guided me to McDonalds where I could get a day-labor job. Soon I was in the back of a pick-up truck and we were traveling to Georgetown. I was going to learn how

to strip tobacco. As we crawled out of the truck, I felt sick to my stomach. The fumes from the truck and the cigarette smoke had converged. I felt nauseous. As soon as I exited the truck, one man pulled a knife on another man. As I stepped out of the way. I remember being frozen in fear. Frozen. This kind of fear paralyzes us and we can't make a decision. That feeling stayed with me all morning as I learned how to separate the tobacco leaves from the stalk inside a barn on a cold November day. Soon my upset stomach shifted to back pain. I knew something was wrong. As I stood on my feet for about 4 hours, the air was dusty and the boss came around to hose down the dust. He missed and hosed me down too. My mind was trying to figure out what to do with my pain as I watched the guys next to me who seemed to have stamina work much harder than me. I began to wonder about breaks, but there were no morning breaks. At noon, the boss said we were going to take a lunch break. He drove all of us to a Seven Eleven and gave us \$5.00 for lunch. I think this was the first time I began to ask myself what the labor laws were in this State.

We all went into the store but when I came out, I decided not to return to the van. I really didn't know what the boss would do. I was anxious. I was again experiencing fear. And pain. I later learned that what I was feeling in my body was a gall bladder attack. I hitchhiked back to Lexington and was dropped off on the outer loop called Circle 4. I was tired. I had stayed overnight with 150+ people on the gymnasium floor of the Salvation Army, and I didn't sleep well. I went into Arby's and rested in a booth there. I fell asleep and lost track of time. Then I walked to the downtown area of Lexington which was several miles.

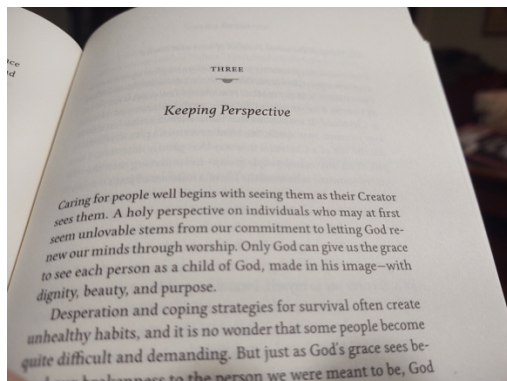
Suddenly and unexpectedly a man came right up to me and said "let me have some money". I replied that I didn't have any money and because I recognized him from the shelter, I said "I stayed where you stayed last night" and walked away. He grabbed my coat and forcefully pulled me close to his face. As he gritted his teeth he whispered "I said, let me have some money"? I already had one level of fear but things elevated to another. I remember lying again, but this time much more dramatically. "I don't have any money, man. I stayed where you stayed last night". He released his grip on me and I began to walk away. It took some time before my heartbeat began to slow down and my brain began to function normally.

Later in the day, I began to reflect on what happened and why I lied. I actually had a dollar and change in my pocket left from the five dollars I had been given earlier in the day for four hours of work. Why did I lie? I could have said "I only have a dollar and some change and I'd prefer to keep it, thank you". But I didn't say that. Had I been on my turf I may have said something like that, but I was not on my turf. I LIED IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. Suddenly, I understood something I had never comprehended in all of my previous nine years working to help people who experience homelessness. I lied in order to survive. Later I would understand that survival is often the mission statement of those we serve at The Good Works Timothy House. This incident caused a paradigm

shift in me and gave me a new lens for how to view and understand why people cope by lying.

Oftentimes, these acts of lying to survive which flow from fear become patterns of survival. As people learn to kill their conscience, they lie about many things in order to survive the terrible and difficult situation they are in. Would you?

The women from Samaria described in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John lied. She too was a kind of 'outcast' in her community. I have learned from this passage how Jesus used tough and tender love to communicate with her and lead her to a transformation so powerful that her life changed. She later went into her city and told stories about Jesus' amazing powers. I too desire the wisdom to use tough love when necessary, but tender love in an effort to see the hearts of those I am helping soften. So many of those we serve have learned to cope lying and have become hard hearted in part because of the trauma they have experienced. LORD, help us learn to love like you love. Amen.



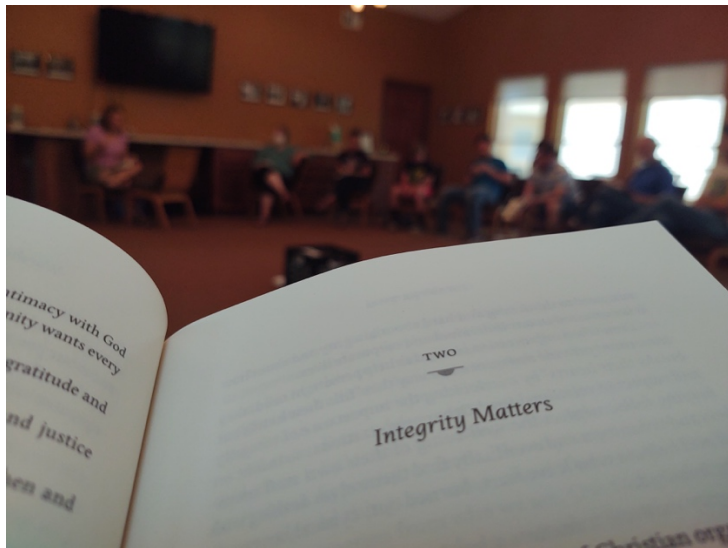
But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. – Psalm 19:12

When I talk about someone in casual conversation (and we do this often), I try to be aware of how I am talking about this person and put them in a good light, even when I know things about them which don't "sit well" with me. Or do I? Honestly, we may not be the best judge of how we talk about people. But you can't really ask someone "am I talking about ____ in a way that appears harmful to them or puts them in a bad light? Or can you? The thought I'm trying to convey is that I don't always know if I am talking about someone too much or putting them in a bad light because there are things which are unresolved in me about them that "seep through" my attitude and tone. Maybe I am saying things about them with a kind of 'negative twist' and I am not even aware of it. Is that possible? Maybe some of us speak "ill" of others and don't realize it; and don't

realize that we are also speaking “ill” OF OURSELVES at the same time. I am NOT writing about the need for planned, confidential conversations where we intentionally share discretely and confidentially how a person in our lives has hurt us and is really making life hard for us. That conversation is necessary and may be needed for our mental and spiritual health. No, I am speaking now about the casual or spontaneous way we mention people to others in our day-to-day conversations, and how we may be unaware of the impression we are making about them AND ABOUT OURSELVES. Been there? Done THAT? I want to grow in my own awareness of how I speak about others in casual conversation, and to learn from wisdom when to keep my mouth shut, when it is appropriate to speak and how much is I should say.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. – Ephesians 4:29 (See also James 2:12, James 4:11)



Leadership is lonely. Ministry is fragile. Real fruit takes years. These three themes have been with me for a long time. Today, I offer one small reflection on the loneliness of leadership.

Leaders have many roles and responsibilities. One role that I have is to “carry things” and wait and discern and, with wisdom figure out the best timing for words, actions and decisions. I also must discern who to consult with when possible. I am still learning how to carry some things. I’ve often said “to walk in the spirit (Galatians 5:15) is to walk in the timing” of God. Leaders see things and need wisdom to know when to ‘hold on to it’ and when to act and speak. In the meantime, we feel the burden of the loneliness of

leadership. We can't just talk about these things with anyone and oftentimes, the number of people we can process some delicate things with (and decisions) is few, very few. And sometimes, they are either not available or ... fill in the blank. And so, we must carry things. Fortunately, there are people over time who can share the load of stress and anxiety we carry on behalf of others.

Unfortunately, most people are not aware of what leaders must carry as a part of being in leadership in an organization or community. Those of us who have raised children have a "glimpse" into the struggle of when to speak and when to keep silent. As I transition from adult/child to an adult/adult relationship with my son, I am learning to keep my mouth shut. But I still carry concern, some anxiety, stress as well as hope and fears for him. Unfortunately, some of our learning comes through making mistakes which some call failure. Failure produces regret. What do you do with that? I do believe that we can make friends with failure --- I am not speaking of irresponsibility -- but rather sincere decisions we made which resulted in failure. Failure, if we can learn from it, can dramatically increase our perspective and we can grow wiser from it. Indeed, if we always fear failure, we may find that we learn substantially less in life. If you don't have a theology or philosophy of failure, I can help you with that. Failure does move us to what I like to refer to as second generation questions. These are questions we didn't think of until we had a failure of some kind. But we all need someone to come alongside us, offer reassurance and remind us we are loved as we carry things as leaders. While we can't talk about some things with others, we can still receive support from people who understand that we carry a lot of difficult things in our heart. For me, I am learning to carry things as an act of worship; to offer up the things I carry through prayer. I said I am still learning. I once read that in Luke 2:19 that "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart". Wow... I can't even imagine what Mary carried, knowing a little bit about what she knew. I suspect that she too experienced loneliness.



Posted on 3/23/22

SLOW CHANGE is a word we often use to describe the work of God in our lives and in the lives of those we love and serve. When I first asked Jesus into my life, I began to experience many rapid changes in my character, thoughts, hopes and plans; and within a year, even I had noticed that I had become a different person from the kid who, as a teenager wanted to own a rock and roll record store and sell drug paraphernalia. These days, the changes in my character feel slower, much slower.

Sometimes I really have to lament and ask God to help me over and over again. My anger is one of my defects of character, and people who know me know about the tone of voice I can use when I'm angry. LORD HELP ME! This is still an ongoing work of grace in my life and yet, there is a continual stream of small but incremental growth. We see this process in those we are serving at Good Works, slow but steady change as they experience the love of God and community where people believe in them and HOPE for them.

People often ask me how I am doing. Most of the time I answer "grateful" A few years ago I would say "becoming". Most of the time they would follow up and ask "become what"? I would respond and say "I am becoming like Jesus, but the process is taking longer than anticipated". You too?

Posted on 3/21/22

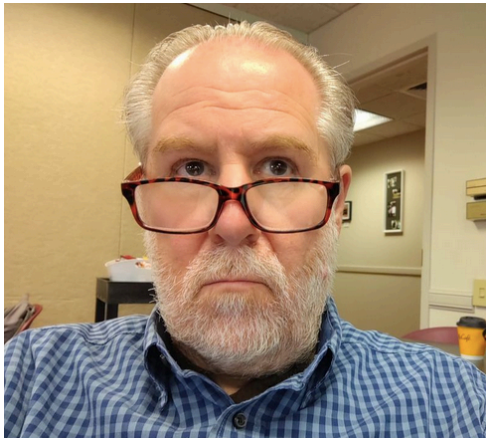


Die before you die.

I once heard someone say that we need to learn how to die before we die. For some time, I have been praying this prayer: "Lord, whatever it is in me that needs to die today, I ask for grace to let it die so that your life can flow through me". There are many things I

have learned (and am learning) to die to including my need to be thanked and appreciated. The more I learn to love people, the more I am aware that I can lean into the truth that “love covers a multitude of sins’ and this frees me to let go and not expect everyone to appreciate what I do for them.

To be transparent, this is something that works best in community. Those of us who have raised teenagers have gone through this as kind of “rite of passage”. But there are so many other things in my life that I must learn to die to including (1) my need to prove something, (2) my need to be right (3) my need to be recognized; and the list goes on. God is still working in my life enabling me to grow in faith, love and hope. Die before you die.



Unfinished thought's Part 1

I am doing a lot of listening, thinking and writing during these days. Here is another short excerpt/reflection.

IN THE GOOD WORKS COMMUNITY, WORSHIP is our primary paradigm for mission. “I’ll bring you more than a song” (Heart of Worship by Matt Redman). Offering a song of praise with thanksgiving is an expression of worship, but true worship (see John 4:23-24) is much broader. In our community, we are learning to BE worshippers through song, service, sacrifice and suffering.

SINGING (with thanksgiving) is such a part of my daily life that I can’t imagine living without singing all day long. Anyone who knows me knows I often “break into song”. And my song is an offering of gratitude and praise to God. I need to sing, whether or not I want to sing. Bless the LORD the Psalmist instructs his soul in Psalm 103

SERVICE is another clear expression of worship. What really strikes me is the question behind the question. WHO am I serving? WHO are we serving? It would be easy for

example to fall into thinking that the person whose home we are visiting or the person whose meal we are making is the person we are serving. They are, but they are not. What if we don't see any results or changes in their lives? What if they are ungrateful or unkind and we feel insulted or hurt by something they said or did (or did not do)? Can this still be seen as an act of worship? I say that actually, Jesus said it best "what you have done unto the least of these, you have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus did not speak about results nor about being appreciated. In my view, he was speaking here about SERVICE AS WORSHIP. I am learning to live on a much higher level than being thanked and appreciated.

SACRIFICE. All service as a form of worship involves some form of personal sacrifice. Better yet, true worship always involves some form of sacrifice. We must "dig" inside ourselves and listen and internally respond to God, oftentimes coming to terms with what we must sacrifice (See Romans 12:1-2) for what scripture calls "our reasonable worship". In our interactions with people there is often times a thin line between serving people and serving God. Right? Can you connect to this too? For me, I must have the mindset that 'whatever sacrifices I make (physically, emotionally, financially), I am making these sacrifices for a much larger reason than the person I'm servicing.

I am leaning into these truths and they are setting me free.

SUFFERING. Suffering is very complex. Many books have been written about suffering and many words spoken. I simply want to say that whether we are (1) Suffering (2) Suffering WITH or (3) Suffering FOR, we can navigate this all of these through the lens of worship. I plan to say more about this soon.

There is a book which explores some of these ideas on a much deeper level. It is called GOOD WORKS, Hospitality and Faithful Discipleship. This is not a quote nor excerpt from that book.

Unfinished thoughts Part II

About Suffering

I am doing a lot of listening, thinking and writing during these days. Most of my writing at this point is for me to see my thoughts. But here is another short reflection.

Like you, I know (and know about) people who are suffering. In fact, as I write this, I have several people in mind. I have been thinking about the idea of suffering. Nothing in me (naturally) wants to suffer. I believe and know that Jesus suffered FOR me; for us. Jesus suffers WITH me; with us. I hope I never lose some of the mystery of this truth.

As I continue to follow Jesus, I am becoming more and more aware that there is a connection between my own suffering, suffering FOR others, suffering WITH others and knowing Christ more intimately. We learn from Philippians 3:10 that to know Christ is to know and participate in Christ's sufferings.

I pray for healing in my life every day. In fact, I am seeking out people and places where I am likely to experience more healing. Evidence of my own healing is revealed when I am able to FEEL other people's pain and offer empathy and compassion. As I become aware of the emotional, physical and historical pain of others, something in me wants to come alongside, (with their permission of course). This desire to "come alongside" can also be described as suffering with. These are often invitations from God (seen more clearly in retrospect); indeed, what I call privileges. But isn't it a privilege to be invited to listen to someone who is suffering pour out their heart to you? Isn't it the invitation from God to be asked by someone if you would pray for them /with them and listen to them? And it remains a gift; an opportunity to walk with someone in and during their time of suffering. The more I learn, the more I learn how much I need to learn. The more I know, the more I know how much I don't know. LORD, keep guiding me to see people as you see them, especially those who are suffering ("harassed and helpless"); like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 10:35-38)

"We have learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer".

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Asking for help

Asking for help is a good thing. Or is it? What is the door through which we can start, develop, experience and even sustain a measure of community? Vulnerability. And by community, I mean the experience of trusting relationships where we feel safe; relationships which lead to healthy intimacy which is, well good for us. But it starts with a leap of faith; that is, asking for help. And we all live in places where asking for help means there is something wrong with us and we don't want others to think that. Can we be counter cultural this once? We may be willing to go against the grain of the culture at the point that we really want community.

LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD.

With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. – Psalm 16:5-8

This has been a hard season for me. And I will be 64 next week on February 22. Most of you know that Good Works is celebrating 41 years. This is good, but I am feeling it. BECAUSE of God's goodness and the love from our Good Works community, I have been able to temporarily step into a more restful season and pace. Asbury Theological Seminary located outside of Lexington Kentucky has again invited me to stay on campus for a few months, sit in on a few classes, mentor some students and do some speaking/teaching in classes. I am also doing some writing. I am grateful. In 2012, Asbury Theological Seminary awarded me an Honorary Doctorate. This is the one place in the world where people call me Dr. Keith. I'm smiling. Everyone needs at least one place in the world where people think more highly of you than they ought to think. I am grateful. The seminary has provided me with housing and I feel warmly welcomed and received. I am looking forward to some rest and perspective. Those who know me know that I believe perspective is everything. I will still be carrying most of my Good Works responsibilities while I am here, but that's okay. I'm just thankful to be here. Darlene has increased her responsibilities a bit and she will be in the office every day and will continue to be present at Friday Night Life.

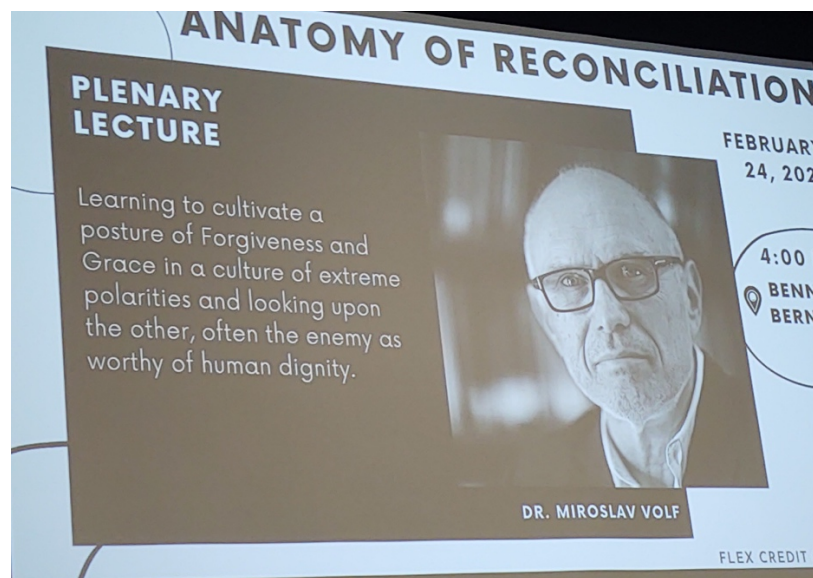
FOOD and GENEROSITY

Since we started Good Works in 1981, we have relied upon the generosity of our neighbors to donate food both to The Timothy House (our home for adults and children who experience homelessness) and later to Friday Night Life (our weekly public meal which started in 1993). In the early days, we had organized several households of college age students in our neighborhood in Athens (about 6 households) and they would "host" our residents for dinner from time to time. Also, in the early days we had a mini fridge and a microwave in the newly constructed basement of our home on Elliott Street which served as a shelter. When we started, we were the only shelter in 14 counties here in southeast Ohio.

Tonight, I am spending the evening at the Good Works Timothy House with the residents staying here now. On two different occasions today, people have brought trays (or boxes) of prepared food and donated them. I'm smiling. It feels good to be in a

community where people remember the people Good Works serves when they have an event or party and have leftovers.

The residents here usually eat pretty well. There is a variety of fresh foods, fresh meats, fresh milk almost every day donated from people in our community. This IS generosity. Sometimes it is “scheduled” and sometimes it is “spontaneous” but it is generosity. What a gift to the men and women (and children) who are experiencing homelessness and staying here ... to come home to a hot, nutritious and tasty meal. WE are so thankful to be the recipients of kindness. And you know and I know we all need kindness, for acts of kindness can softens our hearts and can often move us to being kind and being generous.



ANOTHER GAP?

I have long believed that forgiveness and the possibility of reconciliation is what makes the good news good. I will have more to say about that later.

I had the opportunity to listen to Miroslav Volf today. He spoke on his book “The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World” to the students and faculty of Asbury University. He provided all of us some perspective and guidance toward the HOPE of forgiveness and a plan for reconciliation in our relationships.

He shared 5 Key elements of reconciliation all of which are explained in detail through his book:

1. Remember
2. Forgive
3. Apologize
4. Repair
5. Embrace

Here is a thought I had after listening to him. Even as many of us now value and appreciate Spiritual Directors in our communities who help us go to a deeper place in our own spiritual growth, why not seek to identify and elevate leaders who can help facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation in our congregations or churches?

Maybe God has called and gifted one or two safe people in each community to lead us? Maybe we should identify a few “go-to” safe people in each of our local congregations; people who understand both process of forgiveness and journey of reconciliation. Maybe these leaders can serve the community as a facilitator of the reconciliation practice both for individuals and for groups. In a time of such division between people, we need wise leaders with a willing spirit who will say “here I am”; people who will lead us by example towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Maybe this needs to be more of the “daily diet” of our life together.

THE DARK SIDE Part 1

Because I am able to step back and reflect a bit more these days, I am also writing more.

Most of those we serve through Good Works recognize that what we are doing/saying to help them comes from the sincerity of our hearts and our efforts to love God and people as Christ has loved us. By grace. But we are human and we do fall short. I think we not only try to know when we fall short, but we also try to take responsibility both as individuals and as a community. Keep in mind that we are often “over our head” with the needs of others who seek our help far exceeding our capacity. But that is an essay for another day.

We often have HOPE for people and do our best to believe in them even when they can't or don't believe in themselves. This too is love. We often try to communicate something like “you can do this and we want to walk with you”. Sometimes, the actions and verbal reactions we experience from those we are helping (often sacrificially) are not ideal. Said another way, people we are trying to love and serve can sometimes say mean and hurtful things to us. Hurt people hurt people. We grieve. We pray. We make

time to process these things with one another. We try to live out forgiveness (forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us) and help each other heal from the hurt and harm we have experienced. As a community, it is important that we try to bear one another's burdens and not expect each other to go-it-alone.

ONE area these things show up is at the Good Works Timothy House. WE welcome and receive strangers (men, women and children) some of whom have been hurt by others and find it difficult to trust us. Many times, they have held unforgiveness for a long time and it has turned into resentment and now they have become bitter. The process of getting to bitterness in one's life (in my view) begins when the person is hurt and angry and really doesn't know what to do with that; or is unwilling or unable to address what happened oftentimes because they never learned how to. I don't mean to oversimplify this. Some people have experienced abuse by others and are in a lot of pain and don't know what to do. By the way, there is often a thin line separating unwilling and unable in many of the people we serve. Maybe they don't understand the good hope of forgiveness and the freedom they can experience; or can't wrap their mind around the idea of reconciliation because they are so blinded by their emotional pain and pride. This is why I believe the good news Jesus offers us in a relationship with God begins with understanding the significance of the grace to receive acceptance and forgiveness from God, experience this forgiveness and freedom which results in our mind, will and emotions to be able to experience peace. This work of the Holy Spirit enables us to offer forgiveness to others. I know this is more complex than what I am trying to describe in a few sentences. But I'm trying to say something.

For me, forgiveness is what makes the good news good. It is the capacity (by grace) to receive and then offer forgiveness that gives us the hope of true reconciliation with others. And living in reconciled relationships is one significant aspect of true meaning in this life.

I know that not all relationships can be reconciled and this is true for many reasons. I know.

Some people who seek out temporary housing and care through the Timothy house have been so hurt, so wounded, and have become so bitter that they have developed a blindness to what others are doing to help them. Oftentimes, they cannot see or experience our sincere efforts at love. While this is actually a small number of those we serve, their words and actions still "sting" and can trigger in us pockets of our own unresolved pain. Sometimes, people respond to our kindness with anger and nasty words (and even threats sometimes) even though it is often not even us with whom they are angry. Oh, we may have fallen short, but their reaction is not proportional and way over the line; and it is obvious their words and threats are coming from their own bitter life which has defiled them (see Hebrews 12:15). We can often detect that this may be coming our way when we hear them speak about others in ways that are disrespectful and hurtful. So, what do you do when someone you are trying to love and help has

hurtful things to say to you and about you and says things about you and the organization which are untrue? What do you do when they are unwilling to talk about what they are saying? LORD, give us wisdom and especially wisdom to see people as you do and to love people who have been hurt by others and help them through the process of healing.

THE DARKER SIDE (Part 2):
Deceit, trust and the gift of momentum.

Deceit is the bomb which results in breaking trust with others and our hopes for meaningful relationships.

Indeed, trust is built with others over time through a process of practicing integrity, a measure of transparency, being approachable, and several other things. And it takes to build trust ... weeks, months and in some cases, years. Deceit when discovered breaks trust and severs the relationship sometimes instantaneously and sometimes permanently. When my son was young, I tried to help him understand that building trust takes time, and is essential in all healthy and meaningful relationships. I remember telling him that letting me know about something ahead of time that he needs to confess builds trust. Finding out after the fact because he has been "caught" diminishes and sets back trust. While "love covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8) and "it is to one's glory to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11), the rebuilding of trust after deceit is a long process.

I must say at this point that building higher and higher levels of trust with others is one of the goals of my life, and one of the essential ingredients of truly loving and helping our neighbors. I am convinced that building trust is an indispensable part of my own leadership role. Trust will not only benefit me, but trust can be contagious and can ripple beyond us in ways that are fruitful but not quantifiable. Trust in community often moves our work on behalf of others beyond individualism and individual gifts/abilities towards momentum, and a much broader impact. Indeed, the fruit God can produce through US -- "on earth as it is in heaven" -- can often be more impacting to other people than what can happen through ME. Jesus sent his disciples out in small groups of two. Two are better than one. Working with others in mission. in community requires trust, and when you have a high degree of trust over time, we achieve momentum. Like the grape vine which took several years to mature and now bears a lot of grapes, trust takes time, but when it matures bears a lot of impact for good in all of our lives. When we have a high degree of trust with someone, we can more effortlessly believe the best, give the benefit of the doubt and give/receive forgiveness more easily. Indeed, trust becomes a kind of healing in community. We can keep moving forward in the relationship, in part because of the trust that oils our momentum.

BUT DECEIT dramatically changes things; indeed, changes the status of our relationships. While confession and forgiveness are essential elements in the process of restoration and reconciliation, things take more time to return to a high degree of trust and the blessing of momentum.

ONE OF THE THINGS I have learned from my time staying on the streets with people who experience homelessness is how the culture of “street life” often overlooks and even rewards deceit. I remember seeing this in myself first and later in some of the institutions I encountered. I may have more to say about that at another time. The longer one is forced to stay on the streets, in shelters or in the situation of homelessness, the more one is likely to learn the habits of deceit in order to cope and survive. The habits of deceit are the opposite of healing.

I see this in the people our community is learning to love. Sometimes I see fear and I often see deception as a kind of “coping mechanism”, in part because it appears to work. And in many ways, the structures of our society can reward deceit. Indeed, I have personally experienced a Federal/State program to help people, funded through our tax dollars which rewards deceit. I can be more specific in another post.

But what many of us want is momentum as we work in community with one another becoming agents of healing, offering hope as we create the environment where change can occur. Yes, we want momentum, movement together unhampered by mistrust. The outcome of such trust and momentum is goodness And not enough is said about the beauty of “doing good’ for the glory of God!

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

– Hebrews 13:16