

THE MULTIGENERATIONAL CHURCH “Family Ministry”

Rom 12:2

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will. NIV

We are all mostly aware that we shouldn't let the patterns of this world conform us. But if you are like me, when you read this verse you tend to think of the obviously errant portions of our culture. Some things that come immediately to mind are the excesses promoted by the entertainment industry, sexual immorality, humanism, etc. These are well and rightly avoided. But there are pressures of our culture that do frame and mold us that we are mostly unaware of because they are basic to who we are and how we think as a people.

We are Americans, and America is a Western Culture. As westerners, we tend to think along the lines of Greek constructs. It should be no surprise that the Greeks thought of the world in a different way than the Hebrews. Now, the Bible is a Hebrew book. The Old Testament is certainly Hebraic. And even the Greek New Testament is presented in Hebraic thought forms using the Greek language. So how limited do we become in understanding the Scriptures if we do not understand the mind frame they were expressed from?

*Let me give you a for instance. The word collective is defined in the Tormont Webster's Dictionary as, "1. Formed by collecting; assembled or accumulated into a whole. 2. Of, pertaining to, characteristic of, or made by a number of individuals taken or acting as a group." In our thinking, even by definition, the group is a combination of **individuals**. We start with the person and build up to the group. This is not so in the Hebraic mind. In Hebraic thought, "the particular individual is only a manifestation of the regnant type . . . the individual Moabite is no excerpt from a mass of Moabite individuals, but he is a revelation or manifestation of 'Moabiteness.'"¹*

In other words, in our way of thought, a bunch of people came together and made America. In the Hebrew mind, each American would be a manifestation and embodiment of the American ideal. We don't make the culture, the culture stamps us. We are not self-sovereign, we are a portion of the whole and the whole defines us. So we see that even in the substrata of our thinking process, we have a tendency to view the world individualistically.

In the early 1800's, a French aristocrat by the name of Alexis De Toqueville traveled through the United States to document the effects our revolution had had on society. He felt that democracy was going to be the main governing theory in the age to come and he wanted to understand what that would mean for the world. His observations and forecasts were written in Democracy in America, Vol. I & II. He was the one who coined the word "individualism" for us.

¹ Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, New York, 1960 SCM Press Limited, p. 71

“I have shown how it is that in ages of equality every man seeks for his opinions within himself; I am now to show how it is that in the same ages all his feelings are turned towards himself alone. *Individualism* is a novel expression, to which a novel idea has given birth. Our fathers were only acquainted with *egoisme* [sic.] (selfishness). Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world. Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to server himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. Selfishness originates in blind instinct; individualism proceeds from erroneous judgment more than from depraved feelings; it originate as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart.”²

De Toqueville saw individualism as the result of the democratic ideal. In gaining social equality, the Americans had begun to lose social concern and dependency. His definition meant a pulling away with your sphere of influence (family, friends, etc.). By the time of Theodore Roosevelt, we had rugged individualism. This meant making it on your own. Finally, in the 1960's and 1970's we arrived at a philosophy that our society has not shaken off, "I've gotta be me!"

I share all of this to show the strong cultural undercurrents that constantly pull us apart from each other. Much of church equipping these days focuses on discovery of self. What are my giftings? What is my ministry? What is my passion? Is it important to learn these things? Certainly, but we cannot forget the purpose of the discovery process.

What is the purpose of ministry?

Eccl 12:13

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. NIV

Matt 22:37-39

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' NIV

Ministry is first and foremost to Him. It is not about us, it is about Him. Secondly, it is other directed, "love your neighbor as yourself." We love God and then we love people to bring them to God. With regard to ministry to people, its ultimate aim is to grow them up in Christlikeness, to bring them to God.

Eph 4:11-13

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

² Alexis De Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Chapter 2, paragraph 1.

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. NIV

Now, this is a place where we get hung up. When our ideals of individualism combine with our ideal of “the minister” or “the ministry” we miss God’s plan for us and our lives. Have you ever met Christians who are frustrated because they have a “calling” but they are not “in ministry” yet? Because some in the Bible obviously prayed and served the Word of God instead of fishing for their food, we have come to the conclusion that all ministry should follow this route. In this fashion, many Christians with a calling [and every Christian has a calling] are discouraged and distressed because they are still working in “the world.”

And even those who have no aspirations for “full-time ministry” begin to drive their religious energies into whatever aspect of their Christian experience they deem to be “their ministry.” Secular life, all of life, takes secondary place to ministering. What we are failing to see is that our lives are our ministries and our ministering an expression of that life.

Gen 2:18, 21-24

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. NIV

Though man was gainfully employed in the Garden, his condition was not good. He was alone. God made a suitable helper for him. What did he need help with? His job! In response to this wonderful help and companionship, Adam realizes that the man must leave his parents and focus on his wife that they may be one. If ministry is to God and people, then in Adam and Eve we see the concept of ministry worked out. They both fellowshiped with God in the cool of the day, and ministered to each other as they worked.

Mal 2:14-16

14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

15 Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? **Because he was seeking godly offspring.** So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. NIV

God made them one because He desired that they bring seed up to Him. He was seeking godly [elohym] seed. Faithfulness in marriage affects the children. God's purpose in fruitfulness is that He might have seed.

Ps 127:3

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. NKJV

Ezek 16:20-21

20 "And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough?

21 You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols. NIV

The children belong to God. Instead of leading them to the Lord, the Israelites had been guilty of feeding them to idols. We are no less guilty if we fail to rear our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and hand them over to the gods of culture (humanism, hedonism, and individualism). We want to be like Jesus, and Jesus brought the children to the Father.

Heb 2:12-13

12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." NIV

In our ministry to God, we must minister to our families and minister with our families.

Ministering to Our Families-

- Husbands to wives.

Eph 5:25-28

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. NIV

- Wives to husbands.

Gen 2:18

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. **I will make a helper suitable for him.**" NIV

Eph 5:33

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and **the wife must respect her husband.** NIV

A wife's disrespect of her husband can be very debilitating to the husband and counterproductive to the marriage. If you cannot respect the person, at least respect the position. Running him down won't make him grow up!

- Parents to children.

Deut 6:4-9

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. NIV

Every moment of the day is a time for training our children to obey and follow God. Our houses are to be marked with the requirements of God. God is focused on the household being committed to Him.

Ministering with Our Families

- The Priestly Pattern

God has given us the pattern of family ministry in the example of Aaron and his sons.

Ex 28:1

"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. NIV

Ex 29:29-30

29 "Aaron's sacred garments will belong to his descendants so that they can be anointed and ordained in them.

30 The son who succeeds him as priest and comes to the Tent of Meeting to minister in the Holy Place is to wear them seven days. NIV

Father and sons ministered together so that the father had one who could succeed him. The priestly, Levitical, and prophetic courses for the temple were also organized by families.

1 Chron 25:6-8

6 All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king.

7 Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288.

8 Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties. NIV

- Church leaders and families.

The family element in New Testament church leadership is no less important. The apostle's wives often traveled with them (1 Cor. 9:5). An orderly household is a qualification for leadership.

1 Tim 3:4-5

4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

5(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) NIV

Titus 1:6

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. NIV

- The Household of Stephanas

1 Cor 16:15

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, NIV

Stephanas had arranged his family to minister to the saints. This is our challenge as grow in our understanding of every saint being a minister. Every family should be a ministry center working for the encouragement and growth of the family of God.