



## Safe Families *for* Children

### Hidden Treasures

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I once knew a very busy man who had stressed himself to such a point that he suffered a heart attack. His cardiologist insisted that he walk a mile every day until he built up his stamina for more strenuous work-outs like a cardio machine. The man would walk each day in the hills behind his house. He found himself praying to God as a way to pass the time as he walked slowly along the nature paths. Greatly restored by his exertion, he saw much progress in the lowering of his high blood pressure. It was not until later in life that he saw that it was the habit of prayer developed, even more than the exercise, which reduced his stress and restored his health.

Often times the actions we take have unaccountable positive benefits, especially if the actions have a strong spiritual components. The positive effects are like the treasures in the field which Jesus spoke of. There was an investment in the field for one particular reason, but the true treasure remained hidden. The treasure was buried from sight until the investment was made, and it was only after the investment was made, that the more valuable effect was realized.

I believe that this parable has an application for those of us whom have invested in Safe Families. We are committed for good reason to help change the world into a better place. What is less immediately apparent is the change which can work within ourselves as we make this investment in others

As a Safe Families staff personnel, I am often in a position of talking to people not yet engaged with Safe Families to come aboard our movement. I look to persuade people by showing them all the good we are doing “out there” in the lives of people in great need. But this devotion, as most devotions are, is more focused on the “within” than the “out there”. And the people whom I will speak

of changing are not the people in physical life, crisis, but rather I am talking about us.

You are different than people not yet engaged with Safe Families; you are part of Safe Families as a volunteer, or as staff. A devotion is written to those already within the family, a devotion is written to those whom already believe, not to the yet to be converted.

A devotion is to provide depth, or new perspectives, and encouragement. What you read today is less about what you are doing, but rather why and how you are doing it. The Bible shows how Jesus was more interested in the attitudes of the heart, and less about outward conformity and convention. (Luke 11:39) Jesus taught the way of finding our way to God, I am going to be audacious enough to suggest that Safe Families can be of great benefit to you in your journey of finding your way even more fully to God, and that through devotion, you can find way to joy as well.

A Spiritual Devotion...To write, or to read, a Spiritual Devotion, is an interesting process. Devotion means, in part, a committed engagement. Devotion is passionate, active, going beneath the surface. By reading this, you are devoting yourself to engage deeper, to look beyond the obvious and easily apparent.

The more obvious focus of Safe Families is to look at the population of people we seem to most commonly engage with. We reach out to families living on the outer edges of physical, financial, and relational poverty. But poverty as it relates to you and me is most likely not to be physical, but poverty of spirit. Even for us, as born-again Christians, forgiven by the Blood of the Lamb, we are spiritually impoverished by the lack of the experience of God in our lives. We are saved, and yet we are experientially comatose and forgetful of who we are and who God is, and how we are designed to live in His ways, through His power. Isaiah (Isaiah 53:6) speaks of how we have all turned our backs and gone our own way. We are not trained; we are not devoted to living richly in His Spirit and Presence. We rely on ourselves, our own energy. We live in poverty.

Jesus teaches us through the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) and elsewhere, how to be rich in Spirit, how to find our way back to His Kingdom from which we have lost connection. Whoever wants to be great must become the servant...The first shall be last and the last shall be first...Blessed are the merciful...Give and it shall be given unto you...It's more blessed to give than to receive...Give a cup of cold water...Feed the hungry, care for the sick, visit those in prison...Invite to your home for dinner the poor, crippled, and blind who can't repay you..Wash one another's feet...Welcome little children...Love your enemies...Bless those who insult you...Pray for those who persecute you...Give away your coat...Go the extra mile...As you do unto the least of these so you've done unto me.

We know how we are supposed to be, but “our spirit is willing, and our flesh is weak”. (Matthew 26:41 ) To live the way of the Beatitudes is foreign; we don’t naturally seem to have the right muscles required. We forget God, we forget our dependence on Him for our very existence, and we live in pride and self concerns. But God has a plan, and it’s to “discipline, to train those Whom He loves” (Hebrews 12:6). He leads us, through the ordinary sufferings in life, back to a place of humility. It is in the place of humility that we are best able to adjust our perspectives and see all that He gives as lovingly pointing the way back to Him, pointing the way back to use our spiritual muscle of faith, prayer, and love. His correction and instruction can seem severe, but they need to be to lead us as Prodigal Sons and Daughters back to the blessed realm of our loving Father (Luke 15:11-32). Remember that His training is not designed to deprive us of happiness nearly as much as lead us to bliss and joy.

It was C.S. Lewis who wrote, “If you think of this world as a place intended for our happiness, you find it quite intolerable: think of it as a place of training and correction and it’s not so bad”.

“This world.. a correction”? a correction of what?...a correction for our pride, our reliance on our own illusion of control, and a correction for our forgetfulness of God.

“This world...a training”?, a training for what?...a training to find the path of gratitude and humility so that we might be rightly aligned with God.

Safe Families for Children is a movement of service, a way of engaging with life in a sacrificial way. Christian service is a Spiritual Discipline, like prayer and fasting, or the reading of His Word, or worship. Spiritual Disciplines are ways to get back in synchrony with God and life. Therefore, what many people experience through serving in Safe Families can be very instrumental in providing the antidote to the diseases of the soul, diseases of ego and obsessions with our own dramas and traumas.

You, who are volunteers or Safe Families staff, have already been inspired enough to devote yourselves to this Spiritual Discipline, you might as well see it as such, and be purposeful in seeing Safe Families as part of your spiritual regiment. As you are mindful of the Spiritual act which you perform through serving in Safe Families, the intensity of the spiritual benefits to you will increase. If we are aware of the Christian Spiritual Discipline of service, then our intensity and consistency of that service grows. If we are not intentional in our spiritual pursuits then we lose benefit. Going back to the parables of the field, and the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44,46 ), we have to be aware of the existence of the treasure and then learn how to access it, before we are able to receive the full measure of its value.

So how does this uncovering of hidden spiritual treasure relate to Safe Families and your Safe Families investment? Let me point out some unique features of what most people invested in Safe Families go through. This is how Safe

Families can work for your spiritual enhancement. This is what distinguishes your Safe Families investment from most of the other investments in your life.

It is not a spectator sport. It is not like going to Church and observing others serving you, or like reading the Scriptures and observing how you should live. It's not even like serving meals to the homeless in a shelter, where you step into a different space and serve for an hour or so, and then leave....no, now the homeless child has come to you, into your house, into your world, or the world of someone whom you now know, and this homeless child may be there awhile. While they are being hosted, you will be exposed, to varying degrees, to some of the chaos and desperation of their life and the lives of their family. This will not be business as usual for you. You will be stretched, and in that stretching you will find faith. You will find problems which you can not solve, and people who you can not fully help, and in that place of seeing your limitations, you will find humility, and in your humility, you will feel the closeness of the Lord

Safe Families is like being in a work-out facility, if you dare to be involved, if you dare to lift up a weight you are not accustomed to carrying, you will feel weak, you will feel inadequate, you will feel exposed. We work so hard to hide our fears of the unknown and our own lack of ability to control life, and sadly, many of us operate in the illusion of control. When we win at control, we may gain the world, but at the expense of the health of our soul which needs to maintain humility before God as a precursor to joy.

The beauty of Safe Families is that it is messy. You can't beat it, you can't win at it, you can't control and master all of the elements of it There are just too many uncontrollable variables in the lives of the people you are serving. Over time, your self reliance will be severely tested and then corrected....some can feel that they have their own lives under control, things are pretty much the way things are supposed to be....but then you bring into your life a life out of control, and you feel some of that sinking feeling that things are not likely to unfold in a comfortable or predictable way...this is hard, but it is good...it was not for no reason did Jesus say that he or she that seeks to hold on to their lives will lose it, and that those that lose their lives,.. lose their self-reliance and prideful self-definitions, will find it.(Matthew 16:25)

So enjoy the process, Spiritual Disciplines will alter your consciousness. You will use muscles unfamiliar to you, and you will use these muscles not because you want to but because you have to. We usually do not choose humility and remembrances of God, these things choose us, and Safe Families is a great vehicle for allowing ourselves to be exposed to the kind of life experiences which confronts our pride and ego, and leads us to humility which is good for the soul. One of the keys to whether you will fill maximum spiritual blessing or not will center on your ability to step away from judgment.

The Bible says to judge not. From the first pages of the book of Genesis, we see that we were not created with the capacity to judge. God wanted to protect us from “the knowledge of good and evil”.(Genesis 2:17) He fully realized that judging good and evil was not something we were equipped to do. Obviously this is still the case. When we judge others, we are hurtful to our own spirits, “judge not lest you be judged in return”. (Matthew 7:1) The negative effects of judging others seems to have a boomer-rang effect, and it blocks blessings, and inflicts pain all around.

Another key to seeing Safe Families as being spiritually significant in your life is the capacity to define success in a humble way. If it is your definition of success to change someone else, or to completely change the circumstances of the person whom you are serving, you will be frustrated and defeated. Instead let success be defined as the extending of hospitality, and the loving of our neighbors. When we do this, the Kingdom of God is advanced, the Church is exercising her muscles, and people see the hands and feet of Jesus in action. This translates to victory on many levels

I want to finish with a parable to illustrate how we are sometimes invited by life to use muscles grown soft over time. Imagine a young man living in a desert region of the world. This man experienced a terrible accident, and was left without the use of his legs. By wheelchair, he propels himself all over the village where he calls home visiting friends and relatives, and doing any odd job which his handicap allows. One day the man receives an invitation to visit a faraway friend. Not wanting to burden anyone he knows, he decides that he is able to wheelchair himself the great distance of 30 miles. His arms, he reasons, have been greatly developed by the effort exerted by using his wheelchair, and they are now a bulging mass of muscles, of which he is quite proud. In secret he starts off on his great journey, using back roads to avoid the danger of motorized vehicle traffic. He sets out early in the morning, while it is still dark, but now he is under the intensity of the desert sun and he is lost in the halfway point between here and there. Even worse, his muscular arms have been defeated by the excursion, and have been locked down by fatigue and spasms. He is stuck, certain to die. The young man, however, making a choice of desperation, is able to make it back to his village alive. Upon hearing his story, his family and friends ask how he was able to make it back to the village. He answered shocked them, he simply said, “ I walked”. They knew the man to be constricted to his wheelchair, so this made no sense to them. The man answered them and said, “I knew I was dead, I couldn’t move my arms, and the sun was so hot, I just had to do something, so I walked, I had no choice. I willed my legs to work because they had to. I had no idea I could, I had forgotten how to walk, but it was either use my legs or die. I used my legs and now I know I can use them again”

We are sometimes like that young man. We forget how to use our spiritual muscles unless we are profoundly provoked. We forget that which was designed

to be most natural to us, and in us. We forget the parts of us best equipped to propel us forward. We forget that we were created to use the things of God's Spirit, we forget that we are spirit, made in the likeness of God who is Spirit. We are made in His image, fashioned in His likeness, primarily spirit. Yet we have forgotten our spiritual nature, and have over utilized our physical muscles until that which is spiritual in us has atrophied, and is in desperate need to be woken up. We need to truly know who we are, and how we are to most effectively operate in the world around us and inside of us

In the movie "The Lion King", the ghost of the dead king admonishes his wayward son Simba in the following dialogue ... "Simba, you have forgotten me."

"No. How could I?"

"You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself, Simba. You are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the Circle of Life."

So, let us say to one another, "we have forgotten He who has made us, we have forgotten Him, so we have forgotten who we are. Let us remember Him, let us be grateful to the experiences in life which led us to Him, to lead us to use muscles long neglected. Let us remember who we are, made in the Spirit, made by the Spirit, made for the Spirit, so that we can take our place in the circle of His Kingdom ever growing, ever moving forward, ever in victory

#### Discussion questions

- 1) Describe a time in life when you made of investment of time, energy, money, and there were benefits which were far different than any you could have anticipated
- 2) Why is it that we, being made by God in His likeness, have seen our lives dominated by the physical cares and concerns of life, and not by the spiritual Kingdom described by Jesus?
- 3) What is the one spiritual act which you perform which always allows a fuller measure of His Presence to seep into your heart, mind, and soul?
- 4) What can you do to be more intentional in experiencing Safe Families as a valuable Spiritual Discipline in your life?