

Thursday, August 07, 2008

My brother Mike has a degree in Forestry from what is now called Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio. He has his own successful business in Toledo and can answer any question you might have about trees, weeds, grass, pests, pesticides, scab, or any thing else on the subject. He even calls the green stuff in your yard "turf". He has given me a lot of advice over the years regarding my small apple and peach trees.

One year I called him because I had gone outside to check on my trees and noticed lots of small apples on the ground. I thought to myself, all this work of spraying and pruning and I'm not going to get any fruit. I was pretty frustrated. I thought maybe I had a diseased tree or maybe I needed to fertilize more.

He sort of laughed at my ignorance and said something like, "not to worry, it's just the June drop". "What"? I said. "The June drop" he repeated. "The plants are just shedding excess fruit." I didn't realize that it was just nature's way of thinning the crop so the remaining fruit can reach full size.

Although this June drop may appear to be devastating, many trees do not shed enough fruit naturally for good production of the remaining fruit. For best quality, some hand thinning is recommended before the fruit is halfway to maturity. My little daughters are pretty good at "hand thinning" and eating green apples. They claim to love them! In some cases, if hand thinning is not done, the fruit that is produced will likely be small and of poor quality like the wild apple trees we see by the roadside. Since there won't be enough food reserves to go around, the fruit is **underdeveloped and undesirable**.

This reminds me of issues common to Christianity in America today. As a group our priorities are off center. We seem to be living for the moment instead of investing in the future. We don't seem to be training our children for Christian adulthood, Christian marriage, and biblical discernment of the world around them. This has resulted in the rise of several "world view" seminars and ministries to fill this void. World view is something that used to be called "thinking biblically". As the body of Christ, we are not thinking biblically and therefore, we are not training our kids to think biblically. We cannot impart fully what we do not possess, at least in part.

We have neglected training our sons to be heads of a one-income household so that their wives are free to invest in their children. Instead, we have been distracted and unknowingly plundered by the popular culture, sports, entertainment and living for the moment. In the process, our children's hearts are being won by people we don't really know. Youth and teen groups are so preoccupied with the latest Christian rock music that their free time is spent uploading, downloading, and burning. It consumes their conversations, youth group discussions, text messages and e-mails. Our young people are simply mirroring the popular culture. They are so distracted by busyness and running to the next event that they cannot make time to fellowship with God. We have not taught them to "be still and know that I am God". They have unwittingly jumped in the raft of busyness and popularity and are going wherever the current takes them. **No direction. No conviction. No discretion. No ministry. No fruit.** Youth ministries, Sunday school and Christian schools cannot fix what has either been abdicated or unintentionally overlooked.

Dealing with problems before they surface is always the best practice. It is much like pulling some fruit off the tree early to produce large, juicy fruit later. One way this can be done is to ask the following question of our home life:

Do my children obey immediately, completely and joyfully?

A few years ago a gentleman was sharing with me some problems he was having with his two young children. After listening for a while, I asked him if his children obey immediately,

completely and joyfully. He chuckled and said “well, no! They don’t.” He thought I was joking. We talked further and he started to see the importance of obedience in these three areas. I explained to him that as parents, we are God’s representatives. If children do not learn to obey in this manner, they will not likely learn to obey God. They will be lawless and self centered. They will not have respect for themselves or others. They will grow up thinking that they make the rules and life is all about them. The gentleman agreed and said that this disobedience was in fact making his home life miserable and difficult.

Over the years my wife and I have learned much from families that have started early by purposely and methodically “disciplining” their children to be obedient and disciplined. They have wisely monitored their children’s exposure to sports, music, peers, and other possible influences of the popular culture. They didn’t eliminate it, but carefully measured and monitored it. They were purposeful in what they did instead of “going with the flow”. They believe the scripture teaches that sin comes from within the heart and isolation from evil influences ONLY cannot produce a godly young person. They understand that we can easily become like the people we emulate (1 Corinthians 15:33). For this reason, Psalm 1 instructs us to “walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. But, his delight is in the law of the Lord...” These parents have taught their families that God is above all and effective ministry stems from godly character. They have made a point of living the principles of, “modeling before ministry” (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1) “responsibility before discretionary”, and “having the ‘right’ friends before close friends” (Proverbs). Most importantly, these principles have not only been taught but they have been lived and embraced by mom and dad. Modeling must come before ministry and ministry is inclusive of, and starts in our homes. No amount of teaching can have a greater influence than our walk with Christ.

As redeemed people, we must take responsibility to “thin out” of our lives the “good” things that distract us from accomplishing the “best” things, removing the things that will later produce underdeveloped fruit. Remember, we too, have a limited number of resources. Psalms 90:12 “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Time and energy are at a premium. We must make a decision about what is “good” and what is “best” and remove anything that hinders fruitful living.

It is possible that as you read this, your thoughts have jumped to a specific area of concern and you may be pondering the crop that is growing. Ask the Lord to give you counsel from his word to put a plan of action in place. Repentance may be required. Remember, “good” is the enemy of the “best”.

John 15:8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

May we be fruitful in all things.



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