

THE ENCOURAGER

"He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us." 2 Corinthians 1:4 (THE MESSAGE)



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ABOUT ME: *I am a Landscaper, Writer, and Christian Brother living in Orlando, FL.; reaching out to encourage the body of Christ. This monthly e-newsletter is intended to challenge and strengthen your faith. Please feel free to email your comments and suggestions to me at: TonyGulledge1@aol.com. Thanks for reading this issue.*



***"Good Ground" –
A safe place to grow and thrive.***

I knew that finding a new home for my red flowering tree wasn't going to be easy. My lawn was already saturated with too many plants. This tree was one of three I had harvested from a single plant last fall. Now sporting its first new leaves and great looking flowers; the tree needed a good permanent home.

A few of my regular lawn customers enjoy gardening, but most were not in the best of health. In time, I found the perfect lady who loved gardening and always had a luminous lawn. After transplanting the tree twice in my own yard, its final destination would have to be in just the right location. This fledging seedling deserved a safe place for it to grow and thrive.

- Please see rest of Good Ground article on pgs 3, 4 & 5

STRESS AID:

**Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything,
by prayer and petition,
with thanksgiving, present your
requests to God.
And the peace of God,
which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.**

Philippines 4:6-7

Operation World Missions:



Darrell & Sandy Blatchley
Family Circus Children's Ministries

Hello again, friends.

It was early Wednesday morning. I had finished exercising and was at McDonald's, just finishing a cup of coffee and two hot cakes with peanut butter and chocolate chips. As I walked out the door, a thin street child met me at the door and gave me a gentle hug. Rainara is about 12 years old. As I greeted her and the small group of street kids that she mothers, I turned to get on my motorcycle, but then another smaller child came running over and screamed to Rainara, "Your baby brother is in the street! He was hit by a car and he's dead." (Story continued on page 3)

PASSING THROUGH...

As each of us pass through this river of life, we can be assured that our heavenly destination will be reached. That is if we stay in the boat!



Being a believer in Christ, each of us have been chosen before the foundation of the earth; to live victorious and reach our final goal. In appreciation for his eternal gift, we sometimes try to "paddle" harder to meet his standard of holiness. When we arrive in heaven it won't be because of our effort; but rather because we chose to stay in the boat, no matter how turbulent the waters ahead.



Take comfort in God's presence with you in the boat; as it says in Isaiah 43:2.

"When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty you will not drown." (NLT)



Operation World Missions: Continued..

Rainara ran to her brother and scooped him up in her arms, weeping as the policeman intervened and instructed the driver to take her and her little brother to the hospital. By that time I saw that the little boy, nicknamed Rocky, was moving and thankfully not dead as feared.

I followed the driver to the hospital and checked on Rainara and Rocky while they were in the emergency room. The driver said, "They are just irresponsible children playing in the street." I did not get into an argument with them, since they were taking responsibility for the expenses, but I felt like saying, "No, they are some of the most responsible, precious children you'll ever meet. Yes, they live on the street, but they find their own food, they take care of each other, and when they are hurt they do what any adult should do, they try and do their best to help each other. They demonstrate more responsibility than many adults."

There are 5,000 of these kids living on the streets of our town. Most of them don't act like angels. They act like kids. Hungry, needy kids.



We canceled services at Family Circus about a week ago for one weekend. No, it wasn't a holiday. We simply did not have the funds to bring the kids in. It costs to pay for *jeepneys* to go out and pick them up from the different crowded low income areas around town, and we didn't have the funds. We've canceled services before (a year or so ago) for the same reason, but it still hurts. We never know if it's the last time that some child may have a chance to hear about God's love. (This story is continued on page 5).

"Good Ground." Continued from page 1

By Tony Gulledge

Mrs. H lived near a chain of lakes and from the street one could tell that her lawn's soil was already fertile. The nutrients for rich organic soil required nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Nitrogen helps with plant leaf and stem growth. Phosphorus is essential for root growth. And Potassium keeps plants growing by strengthening their immune system. Each of these fertilizers can be purchased at a garden shop; or cultivated naturally from compost or manure.

When checked on my little tree today, I found that it was situated in just the right spot for full sun spot. The fresh red foliage supplied even more color to the beautifully manicured lawn. This successful transplant caused me to consider what helps us as Christians, transition into healthy church communities. How can we be reasonably assured that we are sowing our time and resources into a church body that is, GOOD GROUND?

Christian churches come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. Most large ones are heavy on giving structure and organization but weak in

helping their members develop a sense of unity and connectedness. Most small churches lack resources. When choosing a church for you or your family, I think the following key elements ought to be considered.

- **The value and significance of God's written Word, the Bible.** Any organization that discounts or disparages its leadership is doomed for ruin. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church body. (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, and in Colossians 1: 18). That's why our churches contain crosses and we are called CHRIST-ians. When Christ left his earthly body to re-unite with the Father in heaven he left us his written words of instruction in the Bible. To neglect or abandon his teachings and instructions in our churches would be paramount to betrayal. If we say that we love Christ as our savior but discount his teachings, how can we claim a viable relationship with Him? A church that offers mere lip service to the word of God but isn't helping its members decipher and devour it; cheat the congregation out of training and coaching needed for the successful Christian life.
- **Opportunities to share one's spiritual gifts and talents.** Although these may and should be used in day to day life and in other para-church ministries; before becoming a church member, it's a good idea to be assured that you will have a chance to serve your fellow brothers and sisters. Every church is filled with plenty of PEW-Potatoes content to watch the show and gripe to others once they leave the church building. I Peter 2:5 tells us that we are living stones that God is building into his own Spiritual Temple, (NLT) In chapter 4, verse 10 we are commanded to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another. Contrary to popular American Christianity church is not just a spectator sport.
- **Sense of Community.** Every church seeker should be asking, 'Where in your church can people bring their hurts and needs?' For some churches it is an altar where trained counselors and prayer partners can assist. Many congregations offer small group opportunities that allow worshipers to get to know each other as friends. Some churches are small enough to function as small groups and often the members naturally develop a sense of being needed and belonging. Mega churches tend to form a wide variety of support groups; centered around helping members with a particular issue or area of challenge.
- **Chances to Grow both Individually and as a Church.** My little red flowering tree would not have remained beautiful for long if it hadn't been given ample space to grow and spread its roots. Churches of any size can keep its members essentially root-bound like my little tree when they persist with outdated traditions, prudish judgmentalism, meaningless ritualism, and obsessing over their list of pre-conceived 'shoulds and 'oughts.' A church without a strong vision for Foreign Missions, Evangelism, Benevolence ministries, Training Disciples, Social Concerns, Giving to others, and essentially ministering to more and more souls is already in a state of decline.

- **Be Identified as a Place of Obsessive Love and Unity.** In Colossians 3:14, Paul tells us that above everything else we should clothe ourselves with love because it binds us all together with perfect harmony, (NLT). A church that expresses genuine affection and delights in honoring each other, is a loving church (Romans 12:10, NLT). According to 1 Corinthians 8: 3, people who love get recognized by God. Likewise without love, 1 Corinthians 13: 2 tells us that we are nothing! Love is to be our highest goal, (1 Corinthians 14: 1, NLT.) We are to do everything with love, (1 Corinthians 16:14 NLT). Paul commands us to express our love by, “always being humble and gentle..patient with each other, making allowances for each other’s faults, (Ephesians 4:2 NLT). Finally in 1 Thessalonians 4: 9, Paul noted that they didn’t even need to teach how to love each other, for God himself had taught them how to love one another. Therefore, all the way throughout the New Testament we find congregations of Christians recognized for and expected to love each other.

All of us know that no church is perfect and of course if we ever find a perfect one, we shouldn’t join because it will no longer be perfect, (because of us.) However, I hope by defining some of these elements needed for growth and development, we can all work together in our churches to improve our service to God and each-other.

Operation World Missions: Cont. For more than a week I did not see Rainara or her brother or any of the little family that she watches over. **(In May we stepped out by faith to have the city install 3 phase electricity for the bakery/cafeteria, the expense has impacted our finances. Thank God two thirds of the \$11,500 installation fee has been miraculously provided).* Also thank you to those who have picked us up or increased us in monthly support!

Thankfully last Wednesday while finishing another meal at McDonald’s I looked up to see Rainara and all her little children excitedly peering in the window, waving at me. Rainara had Rocky in her arms. She showed me where Rocky had been scraped from his head to his feet by the pavement when the car ran over him. Thankfully he’s healing well.

What did Jesus say? “When I was sick, you visited me...Whatever you did for the least of these you did it for me.” It’s not rocket science, it’s simply making the same decision every day. Following Jesus, reaching, teaching, feeding and loving the least of these. Darrell & Sandy Blatchley

Cindy and I had the pleasure of hosting the Blatchley’s in our home a couple of years ago. It was a great experience. Darrell and Sandy are wonderful warm, real deal Christians you would enjoy spending time with. If you want to make a secure online donation check out:

<https://secure1.ag.org/contributions/detail.cfm?LedgerID=f495cf9f-3252-472c-801d-6dc9836640a7>

BOOK REVIEW:

HEALING IS A CHOICE. By Stephen Arterburn.

In her extensive review of this book, Michele Howe notes... “Every person makes choices. Some are major and imposing, while others seem insignificant and inconsequential. Still, each individual --- no matter how discouraged, hopeless, or dejected he or she might feel --- has the opportunity to effect positive, life-enhancing change in his or her life....Stephen Arterburn teaches readers practical methodology for making biblically sound decisions that will change their lives for the good.”

I had heard excellent things about this book; and tuned in almost daily to Mr. Arterburn’s radio show, NEW LIFE LIVE. To my surprise, the book exceeded my highest expectations. I wouldn’t say it was an easy read (because of the thought provoking content and challenges ;) but I can guarantee countless narratives and real-life scenarios. Stephen’s way of dialoguing with his readers help to encourage, to challenge, and to give direction to all of us who need to heal.

Perhaps you haven’t gotten the bad news from a doctor, but every one of us needs to be healed on several levels simply based upon the fact that we live in a fallen world. Mr. Arterburn asks readers to look at areas where they experience fear, then anger, and finally guilt. Stephen helps honesty and courage meet with trust and faith in God. Only God can give us the strength to make lasting changes. I hope many of you will make an investment in your emotional wellbeing and future, by purchasing the book and applying his ideas. I’m sure you won’t be disappointed.

At Home...



Ephesians 3:17- 18 (NLT): “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.”

Relax, put your feet up, and rest in Christ. He’s got you covered at every angle!