

THURSDAY NIGHT NEWSLETTER



Why do we come to TNO? Do we come to serve, to fellowship, to delve into the word? This past week we asked volunteers why they show up on a perfectly good Thursday evening to spend several hours in a ministry that serves the homeless and disenfranchised at our doorstep? Popular answers included ‘to serve the homeless, those who are practically our “neighbors” on the Common’, ‘to fellowship with friends’, ‘to help expand the ministry’ and the like.

After a few minutes Alex, our fearless leader, in his usual booming voice, responded, and reminded us that the mission and focus of TNO is to serve the King of Kings, and His Kingdom. The sole purpose of TNO is to serve our Lord. We come to serve because of the unconditional love God has for us, he says. This love then makes us want to express our profound gratitude in service to our God. We quickly transitioned into listening to a sermon on this topic. Speaking from John 14:5-15, Tim Keller, the renowned Presbyterian minister in his sermon titled “Knowing the Father”, narrows down our ultimate objective as Christians, and thus our reason to serve, to a single compelling point. It is to know the Father.

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:5-15 (ESV)

Trend experts say that the more ‘high tech’ a society becomes the more ‘high touch’ we crave, Keller explains. In big cities, we want to experience more personal touch. We want to talk to real people not machines. Gone are the days when people had a single job and lived in the same neighborhood for life. Today, we change jobs more frequently to advance our careers. Likewise, employers move and evolve rapidly to keep companies competitive in the market. The more often we change that which is familiar -jobs, communities, neighbors, the less we feel like people, and more like objects. Prayer in this context becomes something for success, for more blessings and comfort. Keller points out that this

prayer life is in stark contrast to what we see in the Bible. The prayers recorded in the Bible are for personal knowledge. Prayers were uttered to seek a personal knowledge of God. Keller points out that the real problem today is our lack of a personal knowledge of God. Keller presents the analogy of a knotted string of thread. It appears to be twisted, caught, unable to come free into a single length of string. Knowing God is like pulling on that single twist in the string that makes it come suddenly free, untangling it from the knot. Personal knowledge of God is the same, he says, it relieves the “log jam” of our problems. The supremacy and

centrality of the knowledge of God is the center of Christianity. “Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip?”, Jesus asks. Is it then possible to be full of zeal for the Lord, and yet not know Him? How troubling is it when we realize that we only know of the Lord (informationally) but not KNOW the Lord (personally).

Keller presents a telltale sign to judge for ourselves if we have a personal knowledge of God. He says, **when we do things that affect how we live, then, we have crossed over from the informational knowledge of God to the personal**. The real problem people have with Christianity then is how personal it is supposed to be. Is Jesus too personal? Keller asks. In every marriage some interactions are transactional, or business-like. However, the majority, and foundational interactions are personal. They come from a lifestyle that has been affected by the other person. Christianity, likewise is about a person. We need to strive to have an intimate, personal relationship with the Father. Just as Jeremiah 9:24 reads, “but let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands and knows me...”, if we wish to boast, let us boast in our personal knowledge of God. This is the very definition of life. There is truly nothing compared to the satisfaction of knowing God. Jesus came so that we may know God intimately. Finally, at the end of our scripture passage in John 14, Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (v15). We cannot know God personally without knowing the Bible... without knowing what we make of Jesus, who we think He is, what we accept He and what He asked us to do.

Here is where we stopped for the night. The rest of the sermon will be continued next week, Thursday 9/12.

With this we went out to serve the community, providing food, drink, socks and clothes. We had a good turnout and were able to give away several plates of food and pairs of socks. It was also a time of fellowship. Our goal at TNO has always been to build lasting relationships with the people we serve, and not simply to provide a meal. In the past, the transactional aspect of the outreach has been an avenue to provide other forms of support to those we serve, such as help with finding accommodations, job applications and interviews, help with legal and healthcare matters. Min, one of our volunteers has been making strides in reaching the Chinese population that gather on the Common using a system of Bible verses written out in Mandarin, which she asks them to read before receiving their socks. We were also overjoyed to welcome back many of our faithful volunteers who had been away for the summer.

When we gathered back together in the Fellowship Hall that night we had many testimonies to share. A couple of women from MGH, who were simply walking through the common stopped by the fountain where we usually station our food and drinks and inquired about what we were doing there. After a brief conversation with some of our volunteers the women expressed interest in participating in the outreach and they had indeed had a conversation with their coworkers recently about finding an opportunity. They were overjoyed, and a bit awestruck they had been in the right place in the right time. We look forward to working with them in the future. A few men stopped by and expressed a desire to drop off clothes. Men’s clothes is something we are actively seeking at the moment, this was an answer to prayer. Also, to our great surprise three bags of women’s clothes were dropped off by an anonymous donor at the church while we were out on the Common. These will be distributed to those in need next week. As we approach the winter months, we are in need of winter clothing.

It is not uncommon for us to walk away at the end of this long day more refreshed than when we first came in and today was no exception. Until we meet again next week, may we get to know God more personally than we have in the past. **Have a wonderful week ahead, dear friends.**