

by Ken Barnes



God works in the mundane activities of life to apply his principles to our lives. As Christians it is the transfer of head knowledge to heart revelation that transforms us. This often happens in ordinary life experiences.

Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement had a tremendous impact on world missions. It was a group of Moravians that inspired Charles Wesley, the founder of Methodism, when on an ocean voyage to America. Their ship was in peril and the rest of the passengers were screaming in terror, while the Moravians were quietly singing hymns. Their roots in pietism, a renewal movement within the German Lutheran churches, can only explain Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Pietism saw a disconnect between academic theology (head knowledge) and spiritual life (heart revelation). The Pietists focused on the spiritual formation of soul and character rather than just the mere transmission of scholarship. They were committed to a living and practical outworking of Christian love rather than a head-knowledge of Christian doctrine alone.

Anyone can acquire information in a classroom, but true Christian love can only be learned through life experiences. If our Christian love is to be lived out in the everyday world, maybe it is the classroom of life in which our spiritual lessons are best learned. Lessons of eternal consequence are often hidden in the commonplace or menial duties of our lives, and we miss them because we are always looking for God in the unusual and spectacular. I once learned some lessons of eternal consequence while working in the mundane atmosphere of a kitchen.

The Kitchen

"Here I am a thirty-four year old gofer, breaking my back carrying produce in this kitchen. This is not my idea of mission work!"

It was 1981. We were about 39,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean in a Boeing 747 returning from a missionary furlough in route to a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) training center in Hawaii. I was gazing out the window with my Bible on my lap, praying and thinking about God's direction for my life. Deep down in my inner being I knew God was going to reveal to me my future direction. I was reading Exodus 17 and was drawn to the part where Moses was leading Israel in battle against the Amalekites. With his staff in his hands, Moses extended his arms above his head, and Israel prevailed in the battle. As Moses's arms became heavy and fell to his side, the battle turned in favor of the enemy. Aaron and Hur quickly rushed to Moses's aid. With Moses seated, each of them supported an arm, and Israel again became victorious.

I felt a rush in my emotions. Was I to be like Aaron and Hur? Was God going to have me come alongside of one of the mission leaders? Several people flashed through my mind; all of them were leaders at the training center. I envisioned myself with several of them in ministry situations. Closing my Bible, my expectancy continued to peak as I pondered who this person would turn out to be.

We arrived at the YWAM base in sunny Kona, Hawaii and proceeded to get back into the swing of things. One Saturday I found myself harvesting bananas with our cook, Hans-Rudi. In the course of the morning, Hans-Rudi said, "Ken, we have so much work to do in the kitchen and so few workers. We are really understaffed." My mind drifted back to the plane and to Aaron and Hur holding up Moses's arms. God, is this the person? After a momentary pause, I said to myself, No way, and dismissed the thought. We finished the harvesting, and I went on my way trying my best to forget this little incident.

A day or two later I received a phone call from a lady in personnel. She mentioned the need in the kitchen and asked if I would help out Hans-Rudi. I told her that I would pray about it, and hung up the phone. I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. Considering the airplane revelation and the banana-harvesting experience, deep down I already knew what God wanted me to do. But I prayed anyway, hoping God would change his mind. (Sometimes we substitute praying for obeying.) In the end, I called the woman in personnel and agreed to do it: I would try my hand in the kitchen.

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What Am I, Limburger Cheese?

I reported to the kitchen. I was thirty-four years old and had become, for lack of a better description, Hans-Rudi's "gofer." If Hans-Rudi needed some carrots, I would go to the cold-storage room (commonly called the cool room) to get them. If he needed potatoes, meat, cheese, or just about anything else, I got it for him. The work did not stimulate my mind a whole lot, but it kept my body really busy.

Hans-Rudi had come to us from Switzerland after having worked as a chef at a classy hotel there. He was a great cook. People were always coming by and giving him a hug and congratulating him on the great meals he prepared. As people were hugging Hans-Rudi, I would be lifting a box of vegetables off the kitchen floor. The more they commended him, the more I felt unnoticed. I wanted to say to them, "What am I, Limburger cheese?"

Negative thoughts and attitudes started to arise in me. If I weren't lifting these boxes, Hans-Rudi wouldn't be able to do what he does. But no one seems to notice. This missionary life isn't what it's cracked up to be. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? I went to work, but not happily. I dwelt on what was wrong with circumstances and people rather than what was right. I became critical, at first mainly in my thought life. Soon little comments, though veiled, spoke volumes about what was going on in my heart. I was showing a telltale sign which surfaces when God starts to challenge attitudes I was losing my joy.

The situation came to a head at a weekly staff meeting. It was the "unsung hero" section of the meeting where we highlighted a staff member's contributions and commitment to the training center. Hans-Rudi was chosen as the unsung hero this night. Remembering all the hugs and congratulations, I sat there thinking, Hans-Rudi, an unsung hero? Yeah, right! Hans-Rudi rose to his feet. Person after person stood up and affirmed his culinary skills, his servant heart, and various other things. I on the other hand could not think of one good thing to say more correctly, one good thing I wanted to say. As a matter of fact, as each person spoke, I became more and more angry. Finally, I couldn't take it any longer, and I got up and left the meeting.

Something was desperately wrong. Why couldn't I stand to hear something good said about a Christian brother? I walked to the field in the back of the meeting area and looked up into the dark of the night. "What is going on, God?" Almost immediately God brought to my mind a prayer I had prayed several months earlier. I had just finished a character study on the life of Moses and had seen him as an unselfish kingdom builder. The prayer was "Lord, make me like

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this man." As clearly as I had ever heard God speak, he said, "Ken, I am just answering your prayer."

I was stunned. After a few moments, all I could say was, "God, forgive me. Forgive me for the selfishness of my heart."

As I wept before the Lord, he showed me that there needed to be feet to my contrition. My repentance was not just to be words that I said but actions, which demonstrated that my words were true. God gave me a plan of action. When I started to complain about where he had placed me, I needed to pray, "Thank you, Lord, for the honor of serving you in this kitchen." When I was tempted to be critical of Hans-Rudi or others I worked with, I needed to call it what it was envy, jealousy, selfish ambition. Criticism was to be countered with compliments and gratefulness. Can you imagine how the enemy of our soul hates it when we counter his lies with the truth?

I returned to the kitchen with new resolve. And no, everything wasn't a bed of roses from this point forward. The tests came. When criticism and complaining reared their ugly heads, my response was, "Hans-Rudi, you are a great guy" which he really was and I am privileged to work with you." I was not flattering him; I was speaking the truth. As God enabled me to respond in this manner, little by little I started to be victorious over my critical attitude. And you guessed it my joy started to return. God had done a work in my heart.

I must emphasize that I did not change my heart; God did. I did what I could do, which was to be obedient. God did the rest. It was God's initiative; it did not start with me or my choices. I responded in obedience, and God's will and power brought it to pass. The process wasn't quick and easy, and it did not happen overnight. But it began as I started to move in the right direction.

What pointed me in the right direction? It was God's graciousness in providing this life experience (the kitchen) to enable me to bridge the disconnect between head knowledge and character formation; between how I thought I served God and how I actually reacted when placed in a servant role. It happened when I responded to God's invitation to navigate that long, long journey of eighteen inches from head to heart.

Extraordinary Lessons in Ordinary Places: The Journey from Head Knowledge to Heart Revelation

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Adapted from Ken Barnes, *The Chicken Farm and Other Sacred Places: The Joy of Serving God in the Ordinary* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2011), 47-51.

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