

CHAPTER 20 – PRINCIPLE 4 “LET’S TALK ABOUT THE OBVIOUS”

I Corinthians 2:12, “We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

INTRODUCTION

The summer was very hot and the tensions in the “Big House” were high. Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary had some of the federal system’s more dangerous individuals and the antagonism between the gangs made the environment even more explosive. My recollection of the summer of 1991 was that serious “inmate to inmate” assaults occurred weekly and at least once a month one of these was a homicide. In this caldron of tension and aggression, I ran the Drug and Alcohol treatment groups. All inmate movement occurred on the “Red Top”, which was the main “strip” of the prison. It was a straight corridor that extended for the length of the prison. The clay colored ceramic tiles was the inspiration for its name. Off of “Red Top” at right angles were the cellblocks and the support services such as the Chapel, Psychology and the Medical Department.

While I was facilitating one of these groups the institution went into an emergency “lock down” where all inmate movement was frozen in place. The dozen or so inmates in my group, myself and the psychologist who was working outside the group room were all together for about three hours until the emergency situation was secure. We were in the chapel’s group room, which was right next to the door that led out to “Red Top”. It was another inmate on inmate assault. With the prison having a metal shop that made metal cabinets “shanks” were common. The inmate who was assaulted had his throat slashed. The psychologist who was outside my group told me that from his position he saw the inmate being transported to medical.

This was one of those “Oh sh..” moments. “Oh Lord, how should I run this group?” “Should I distract them from the tension of this situation?” “Should I stay on the course the group was on prior to the incident?” Within the first minute the memory of the voice of Robert my group trainer/mentor came to mind. “When in doubt, talk about the obvious.” With a silent “Thank you Lord”, I transitioned to something like, “How do you guys deal with living in this every day?” We spent the rest of the “lock down” in the best group that I ever ran while working in that institution. They shared what it was like for them to live there and how they coped with the environmental violence. They had a safe place to process this experience and I learned from them about the realities of prison life.

I have shared this story for a number of reasons. One is to give you a snapshot from my professional world. The second is because people like myself who have a driving need to “talk about the obvious” can find a spot in life where this is valued. The behavior trait that many times got us in trouble in our families of origin and in other group or organizational situations for pushing to talk about what most others want to ignore and avoid, is now a professional asset. In my business there are two sayings that convey the condition where no one wants to talk about the obvious. One is “no one wants to talk about the elephant sitting in the living room”. The other saying for this situation is “who is going to tell the emperor that he has no clothes on?” The material in the first three Principles of this book has identified a number of “elephants sitting in the church’s living room”. By my nature, training and the purpose of this book, I must stop and “talk about the obvious”. I have identified 6 elephants. They are

1. The Trinity principle of Spirit, Soul and Body and the trinity nature of the soul (mind, will and emotions) are not universally taught in a practical manner so as to help people manage these parts of themselves with the enablement of the Holy Spirit.
2. Most Christians do not have a clue how damaged they are in their soul even after their salvation.
3. In depth teaching on the Parable of the Sower is done very infrequently.
4. Believing God (faith) is an essential skill/ability for everyone and aside from some specialized ministries on this subject, this is absent in many churches that I have encountered.
5. Now that Jesus is in heaven, the Holy Spirit is the Wonderful Counselor in our midst. Many churches don’t appear to recognize this fact.
6. Developing Good Soil in every believer is essential for any ministry to effectively work in the power of God.