

Taking It to the Next Level

INTRODUCTION

Roughly 3 months ago, Edwin read a letter to the congregation here informing everyone he was going to leave the work here at Franklin and go work with the congregation in Brownsburg. And in his letter he made a statement about perhaps another person working with us here and helping to “take this congregation to the next level”. Over the past several weeks as Edwin and family were getting ready to leave and especially once the decision was made for Mitch and his family to come work with us, that phrase has been used multiple times.

While I don’t think there is anything wrong with that phrase, the question I have is this: what exactly is the next level? And how exactly do I impact reaching it?

I’m going to share with you what I think it means. I fully acknowledge I may be way off base or I’m not totally covering everything the “next level” entails. But when I think about myself and this congregation moving to the “next level” I start by thinking about...

I. STRENGTHENING MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- A. Why is this so important?
 - 1. All other aspects of my life are dependent upon this one!
 - a. My relationship with my wife is better if my relationship with God is stronger – cf. **Ephesians 5:23**
 - b. My relationship with my children is better if my relationship with God is stronger
 - i. As I understand how God the Father deals with me the child it impacts how I deal with my children
 - c. My relationship with my brethren is better if my relationship with God is stronger
 - d. My relationship with co-worker, neighbor, boss, etc.
 - B. No matter how strong our relationship with God, we can always improve
 - 1. Paul recognized this in his own life - **Philippians 3:12-15**
 - 2. Peter wrote that our spiritual growth must always be increasing (aka going to the next level) - **2 Peter 1:5-8**
 - C. Therefore we must continue to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge...
 - 1. Much of this is accomplished through personal and daily devotions - **Psalms 1:1-3**
 - a. **TEASER!!! B90X**
 - 2. But personal efforts must be accompanied by frequent assembling - **Hebrews 10:24-25**

[If we are going to take ourselves and subsequently the congregation to the next level, the foundation has to be our relationship with God. And then we turn our attention outwards.]

II. BUILDING UP THE BODY

- A. Why is this important?
 - 1. Our love and unity is a powerful witness for Christ - **John 13:34-35; 17:20-21**
 - 2. A strong network of Christians is essential to assimilate and nurture new Christians
 - 3. A strong family of Christians is essential when troublesome times come
- B. No matter how strong our relationship with one another, we can always improve
 - 1. As Paul exhorted the Thessalonians - **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10**
 - 2. As Peter wrote to Christians in general - **1 Peter 1:22**
- C. Therefore we must seek out opportunities to strengthen our bond in Christ...
 - 1. Regular attendance is certainly a great help - **Hebrews 10:24-25**
 - 2. And so is simple hospitality (both offered, and accepted) - **1 Peter 4:8-9**

[How can we expect to go the next level together if we aren't together? The body has to be built up in order to take the next steps]

III. DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOST

- A. Why is this important?
 - 1. Light must shine in darkness to be of much value - **Matthew 5:14-16**
 - 2. If people are sick, those with the cure must be willing to be among them - cf. **Matthew 9:10-13**
 - 3. Relationships with the lost can serve as the basis for continued relationships with them after they are saved
- B. Developing relationships with the lost is an ongoing process
 - 1. If an effort to share the gospel is not well-received, we may need to move on - **Matthew 7:6**
 - 2. Just as Jesus could not stay in one place, we cannot limit our outreach to just a few friends, relatives, and neighbors - cf. **Luke 4:42-44**
- C. Therefore we must always be on the lookout for new relationships with the lost...
 - 1. Simple hospitality will go a long way (both offered and accepted) - cf. **Matthew 9:9-13**
 - a. Matthew extended hospitality to his friends soon after Jesus called him
 - b. Jesus accepted the opportunity to eat and be with the lost
 - 2. Inviting the lost to our assemblies can be very profitable
 - a. Giving them an opportunity to meet other Christians
 - i. With whom they may also develop relationships
- D. Most probably already have relationships with the lost. The question becomes are we trying to take that relationship to the next level by talking to them about God?
 - 1. So often we are afraid of what they will say or how they will react rather than focusing on what we have (God's forgiveness and salvation) and what they need (God's forgiveness and salvation)

[To get to the next level, we must be engaged in...]

IV. SERVING GOD MORE FULLY

- A. Why is this important?
 - 1. Because being a servant is what a disciple of Christ is called to be
 - a. Jesus stressed this point on several occasions
 - i. While rebuking the Scribes and the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:8-12** ("*but he who is greatest among you will be your servant*")
 - ii. During the Last Supper – **John 13:12-17**
 - iii. By His own example – **Philippians 2:5-8**
 - 2. If we are talking about taking it up to the next level, to go up in the Kingdom is to go down in service to others!
 - 3. Being a servant is a sign of maturity (aka: the next level)
 - a. Someone who is immature is normally focused on themselves (i.e. newborns)
 - b. But a person who serves others is not selfish but understands the value and importance of putting other people first
- B. The great thing about being a servant is there is never a lack for areas to serve. What we have to do is have our eyes open for the opportunities
 - 1. There are physical areas of service: driving someone around, mowing their lawn, fixing food, etc
 - 2. But there are also spiritual areas of service: teach a Bible class, etc.
- C. If we want to go up in the kingdom of God then we must be willing to go down in service to others. That is what Christ did (i.e. washing the feet of His Disciples)

CONCLUSION

What is it going to take for us as individuals and a congregation to get to the next level? In some ways it's too bad there is a "Next Level" chart where we could see the requirements for moving up to see where we are. But then again, there is a chart. It's the Word of God. It shows us and tells us where we should be and what we should be doing (**2 Peter 1:5-8**).