

sharper focus “Dispensable”

By Linda Manhardt, Major

We all want to feel needed—that we are important and that what we contribute is valued. It naturally feels good to us when people tell us we are special and that we make a contribution that no one else could make. It makes us feel validated, important and useful. It keeps us going and is a great motivator that somehow pushes us onward to accomplish even greater things.

You may have heard of Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs.” In his 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” he lists the need for esteem as one of our five basic needs. He describes it as “self-esteem, confidence, respect of others, and respect by others.”



As a reinforcement officer appointed as the training principal in the Philippines, I recently had the experience of walking away for two long months from all that made me “feel important.” As I prepared to leave for my furlough, I felt myself at first unconsciously, and then consciously, make a choice. I could either worry and fret about the details of my appointment in my absence and feed the illusion that I was indispensable, or I could let go—thus rendering myself dispensable.

I chose dispensable. I consciously distanced myself while I was away. And I found that this decision accomplished several things.

First, I was able to rest from the demands of the appointment. I was totally free from worry, and I absolutely took delight in having NO responsibility!

Second, it gave my staff an opportunity to develop and demonstrated my confidence in them. In other words, it “built them up.” That’s a biblical thing. I was not there to problem solve and come up with brilliant solutions. What do you know? They even started a new session without me, and it’s going fine.

Third, it was an opportunity to completely trust God.

Fourth, it reminded me that my ministry is “not about me.” My responsibility is simply to be obedient to God and give in the way he has designed (or gifted) me to give.

We are in this world, but not of this world. Therefore, our thinking and way of living in this world is different from non-believers.

This need that Maslow describes as “esteem” can be found in total surrender to God, and living life in the center of his will. For the Christian, this is where true significance is found, not in the achievements and accomplishments that are recognized and valued by others.

What freedom and joy is found in total surrender to God and becoming his “dispensable” servant.