BEING WHERE HE IS

Pastoral Care in a Culture of Disintegration

INTRODUCTION

John 12:20-26

> [20]Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. [21]So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." [22]Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23]And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24]Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. [25]Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. [26]If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Just days before the Son of God died and rose, some Greeks found the disciple Philip and asking him to arrange an audience with Jesus. For whatever reason, Philip gets Andrew involved and they go to Jesus with this seemingly innocent request. Jesus' reply must have struck them as peculiar. Listen to it again:

> "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24]Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. [25]Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. [26]If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

With anyone else we might conclude that a break would be a good, healthy choice or that he completely misunderstood the request ("A couple of Greek guys want to meet you. Okay?"). But Jesus' response alerts us to His higher perceptions of this potential encounter with these Greeks. Though we can't be entirely sure of their desires, here is a very real possibility. In John 7:34, Jesus is at the Feast of Booths and said to the Jews, "You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." The Jews don't get it (John 7:35): "The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

In the intervening months between this Feast of Booths and the Feast of the Passover in John 12, it is quite possible that this rumor of Jesus heading to Greece to extend His remarkable teaching and miracles outside of Israel excited the Greeks, who perhaps were sending emissaries to ensure that it occurred.

It appears that these Greeks never got to this audience, but what did Philip and Andrew make of this odd statement about wheat, life and following Him? What do you make of it? Are there any clues revealed here that might help us as leaders of God's flock, in particular, know not only the path of the Savior but the direction where He beckons us?

Picture Jesus arriving at the agora in Athens. Luke's assessment of this intellectual climate is telling: "[21]Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in

nothing except telling or hearing something new." (Acts 17:21) Jesus had superstar potential in this city – profound teaching, a few incredible miracles and the demonstrations of compassion and love never before seen on these streets. And then, maybe, on to Rome and points beyond. A great long life of ministry and blessing to a broken work. But Jesus doesn't bite. He knows that His life purpose is about to culminate in an encounter with terrifying suffering and certain death. And He knows that this is His Father's will and it is His will. His ultimate earthly purpose is to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" as His cousin the Baptist spoke three years earlier.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He presses Philip and Andrew with words that call them into the same path – to "hate" their lives on earth by yielding habitually to the same will of the Father that Jesus is embracing in this relationship with the Greeks and with every choice he made in every relationship and situation that arose in His life. He called it His "food" in John 4:34 – "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." And, indeed, it has born much fruit. We are living proof.

Yet here is the statement that is so transfixing, so lovely, so hopeful, so challenging to us as leaders of Jesus' beloved flock. John 12:26 – "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him." Here's what I understand:

- Serving Jesus means an active following of Him – in His thinking, His purpose and continuing mission on earth.

- This following has a present tense, a "right now" dynamic to it

- He is "somewhere" ahead of us or within a relationship or situation all the time; "where I am, there will my servant be also." And He expects us to be there with Him to co-labor.

- He promises that the honor of our Father will be apportioned to those who serve and actively follow Jesus.

Being where He is. This is the most primary call to a leader of the sheep of Jesus. I'm guessing that Philip and Andrew didn't quite grasp the weight of Jesus' words. Perhaps you don't see it so clearly either. After 35 years of following Jesus, often haltingly and rarely brilliantly, these words still thrill me. They are bracing and call me to this Person and mission that fill my life with grace and meaning. God has called us to Himself, His people and His mission.

It is this Good Shepherd who is still seeking to care for His flock. And now He does it through His Word, His Spirit and His Body. As overseers of the flock of God, we are called again and again back to Jesus and all of His present interests in those whom He has committed to our care.

And we are called to this task in a particular segment of modern western culture. I use the term "disintegration" purposefully. The very nature of the triune God is integration, within Himself

and with His people and His creation. Sin is the great disintegrating reality that so defines this planet, but our God is undaunted and will prevail.

Jesus lived out this divine integration and called His followers into the same. Jesus integrated rebellious hearts, broken bodies, aimless lives and self-serving fools into the Father's design and purpose. Not everyone and not every situation. But our call is to follow Him in this continuing eternal purpose. Pastoral care is quite simply the ongoing integrating grace of Jesus now being mediated through His people to one another and to the disintegrated, lost lives that populate this planet.

My aim is to help foster our thinking, praying and obeying toward improvement in the way that we give pastoral care – the way that we follow Jesus to wherever His integrating Presence leads us. To be where He is, in the middle of whatever kind of disintegration He leads us to.

CHAPTER 1

Core Disintegration

Very early in the journey of the followers of Jesus it became clear to the leaders of this new covenant people that, although they were free from the consequences of the Law, they needed a clear outline of the core beliefs that defined their life and mission. The Apostle's Creed evolved out of some leadership conclaves and has remained through the centuries as a kind of defining perimeter of Christian distinctives. It is the very first article of the Creed that I want to highlight: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Of course, the first two chapters of the Bible are devoted to this foundational truth. But if that is true and if it is also true that this Creator God is good and loving as well, then the implications are massive. The Creator/Father makes all things ex nihilo and He makes them good. His stamp is upon everything. One ought to be able to explore nature and the workings of the human body and the very realities of the stars and planets and find the handprint of God. The rise of modern science owes its existence to men like Copernicus and Bacon and Kepler, who believed that the universe was created by a good and orderly God and that this order could be discovered if diligently pursued.

There is a kind of pristine wonder surrounding those first two chapters of Genesis – Perfection begetting perfection, beauty and perfect order, the Father/Creator breathing life into His son, making a glorious garden home for him, teaching him how to steward this perfection, calling him into the creative process (by naming the animals) and bringing him a perfect complement to his perfect maleness. There was only one law to obey, but on that obedience hinged the fate of the human race. It appeared to be one law too many and as Eve bit into that fruit, disintegration was in its very sweet juices. And bitterness followed close on the heels in those first tastes of "independence" from the call of the Creator. (March 22, 2008)

And the rattling realities of disintegration were at work

- Theologically – as these two marred creatures thought somehow they could avoid contact with their Creator. They hid in the garden He had created from nothing. And they became "self-providers" – the burden of life feel upon them, they felt, to cover their shame with very inadequate leaf-aprons.
- Psychologically – their sin and shame disoriented them from the One who created their very psyches. Shame led to multiple bad decisions.
- Sociologically – they pointed fingers at each other, God and the devil. But it was now their glorious union as husband and wife that was subjected to a disintegrating influence. Trust was weakened, self-protection became paramount and falsity crept
- into this once unblemished human relationship
- Ecologically – the glorious perfections of their surroundings now lay under a curse that was part of the consequences of their rebellion. Now it would not yield fruit unless there was great effort and then only through the challenges of "thorns and thistles".

And yet amidst all of this early disintegration there was a clarion promise of hope and redemption, a "re-integrating" offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the deceiver and return a broken humanity back to the holy integration of the Creator.

The integrating power of the resurrection and the very Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit are the Creator's great answers to all of the death of sin and the influences of demonic powers, but we have also been made quite aware that the Paradise once lost is not yet fully regained. Indeed, the upper hand has been restored to the people of God through the work of Christ. There's what we possess "already" – and it's magnificent. But the "not yet" still calls us to great diligence and the efforts of faith on every level:

- Theologically – we must learn the paths of faith, living out of our baptism into the death of Christ and what it means to be raised into and live out of the new creation. The problem of remaining sin continues to press each of us sorely but the reality of His grace and truth continue to not only restrain the tide of death but overcome its influence as we grow toward maturity in Christ
- Psychologically – God has sent His very Spirit into our inner beings, the Spirit who created the universe with incredible order and beauty. This is our great Advantage, the Helper who is God Himself within us. He invites our cooperation and provides His Word for objective clarity, His people for relational context and accountability and His mission for co-laboring in His ongoing eternal purposes. This all conspires to put us back together in a fashion that more closely resembles the image of our Creator.
- Sociologically – the new humanity established by Christ's resurrection now is to be defined by the new commandment – to love each other as Christ loved each of us. It is meant to define our marriages, families and churches and our mission to God's beloved broken world. But this is no small work. The instincts for self-protection and self-promotion are deeply inbred. But when grace overcomes these obstacles, the results are charming. Yes, we've all had our deeply discouraging exchanges with our mates, families and brethren. We've done poorly and we've had "poorly" done to us. Sometimes it threatens to suck the very faith out of one's soul. But we keep on, believing that God uses even these difficult pieces to conform us "to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).
- Ecologically – though all creation will continue to groan "in the pains of childbirth" (Rom 8:22), there remains multiple ways that we can work together with our Creator to rightly steward what He has made, to be creative ourselves in our own ways to make this earth more beautiful, more orderly. And even when ugliness and chaos seem to win the day more often than not, we do not lose hearth but keep pressing back in hope of another Day to come when all things will be made right, a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness reigns.

In the first 10 verses of Ephesians 2 Paul unpacks this flow of disintegration and God's answer to it. Every human being is dead in sin and all of its disintegrating features:

- The spiritual influence of "the prince of the power of the air" (2:2), Satan and his demonic cohort that continue their prowling and devouring habits. Disobedience is the persistent agenda
- The passions of our flesh, "the desires of body and mind" (2:3)

- The course of this world – ignoring their Creator and rushing headlong into deception and disintegration.

But God has pushed back and done it all in His Son. He has:

- Made us alive together with Christ
- Raised us up with Him
- Seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus
- Created us in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them

Here is the great and glorious U-turn of authentic conversion. And it is entirely located in the Person and Work of Christ. Here we come back to some pre-fall realities – we are again sons and daughters, restored to unbroken fellowship with our Creator, living with His righteousness as our provision and covering. As my own pastor is given to say everyday as he views his form in the mirror, "Ray, you deserve hell but you're going to get heaven." And the gracious implication, of course, is to go ahead and live that out in the coming hours.

About ten years ago I contracted a rare neurological disease. My immune system had become deeply confused, manufacturing antibodies to attach the myelin that coated my nerves. The easiest picture is of a plastic coated wire, the plastic being the myelin and the wire being the nerve axon. The disease typically begins in the extremities. So I awoke one day in Germany with the tips of all ten toss and ten fingers tingling. Over the next five months the tingling became a numbness that migrated up my arms and legs into my trunk and face and then into my inner organs. Weakness followed the numbness until I could only take halting steps and was unable to button a shirt. Finally I was reduced to a walker, a wheelchair and then a bed where I was unable to do much of anything. My wife fed me for weeks. I lost almost all feeling and could do nothing that required even minimal strength.

I started receiving treatments of immunoglobulin after the disease (CIDP…don't ask!) was diagnosed. But each one-pint bag of this clear liquid cost $7500 and I needed it again in two weeks. Over the next 7 years, over 2 million dollars of exotic liquids and treatments were administered to my beleaguered frame. I was able to keep working as I regained feeling and strength. And my doctors tried other routes – chemotherapy (lovely) and plasma pheresis (weird) among other things. Finally, my original doctor suggested a variation on the simplest and cheapest approach. It worked. After two years of this I went into my present remission. My doctor reminds me every time I see him that I have an incurable disease and it could lurch back into the foreground at any time. I've told him I'm quite comfortable with all of that and that he too has an incurable disease. I'm not trying to be cute or overly spiritual. Death and disintegration stalks all of us. We feel its numbing and weakening dynamics around us, within us, in our relationships and in this groaning creation. But Jesus is the expensive cure and provides it freely (at one time I was costing $40,000 per month – and at the end, less than $200 per month).

Someday I'll die. You'll die. My beautiful little granddaughter will die. But because of the resurrection of the 2nd Adam, we can die in hope, riding on the wings of His victory. In the intervening days we carryon His glorious mission of re-integrating all things in Him.

CHAPTER 2

Our Dis-integrating Culture

I was born in 1948. I grew up watching Ward and June Cleaver ("Leave it to Beaver") and Jim and Margaret Anderson ("Father Knows Best") model the expectations of that social milieu. My 5th grade class had 40 students – 39 were products of the original father and original mother, still intact. The other – Doug Desaulniers – lost his father in a hunting accident. I would often envision his entrance home and try to wrap my brain and emotions around that odd dynamic. How did that work minus a father? I never knew a divorced person until I was 19. Not only had I never met a homosexual, but I had never seen one depicted in media. Both sets of my grandparents lived in my hometown, plus 16 aunts and uncles and 29 cousins. From the age of 10, I rode my bike miles from my home to play baseball and never once thought about a possible abduction. I did think a fair amount about Nikita Khrushchev and nuclear war and wondered why we didn't build a fall-out shelter. This was undoubtedly a very flawed culture, but it was predictable and from a family standpoint, integral.

The sixties proved to be utterly transformational for me. The Beatles were personally captivating and I rode with their philosophical journey all the way from "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" to "Why Don't We Do It In The Road?". I abandoned any vestige of faith I had in 1966 and focused mainly on staying in college and out of Vietnam. And it was quite clear that we were entering a very heady atmosphere were all bets were off and where we were reinventing life built on more communal, peace-loving values. It didn't work. I began to discover in 1970 why it could never work. In my first year of graduate school I was converted to Christ and began to see the Kingdom of God.

Disintegration began to work in the human heart from very close to the beginning. When Adam and Eve felt shame in their relationship and fear in their perception of God and blame shirting regarding personal responsibility for wrongdoing, the process of disintegration was afoot. Man became disjointed from God (theologically) from himself (psychologically), from others (sociologically) and from creation (ecologically). Every human being and every culture has been shaped by this dynamic. The Bible calls it sin, theologians identify it as total depravity and we all experience it as brokenness, tension and a pervasive "not rightness".

During my lifetime, U.S. culture has become increasingly dis-integrated. You've heard the litany of our social woes too many times, but of the sake of this argument here are the elements that seem most formidable:

- Family disintegration – including our culture of divorce, fatherlessness, abortion, co-habitation and the exaltation and sex role confusion of the gay lifestyle
- Individualism – the 70s were rightly dubbed the "Me Decade" and the pace continues to escalate. Apart from a few ethnic minorities, or communal instinct has eroded to memories
- Consumerism – the intense pressure to acquire appears unabated. Life defined by things rather than relationships is now deeply rooted

- Boredom – the unexpected result of the overload of media and entertainment is boredom, a growing sense of meaninglessness
- Addictions – with the loss of communal supports and a weak interior life, our culture is vulnerable to powerful addictions – drugs/sex/work/eating disorders/gambling/alcohol
- Post-modernism – the loss of confidence in truth and a right expression of human authority has deep ramifications for all of us in western culture
- Globalism – the loss of a true meta-narrative, a defining story that helps a people negotiate life, sets us in a precarious place

In his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul alerts his two protégés to this dynamic of dis-integration that shapes the cultures in which they were called to make disciples:

> [1]But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. [2]For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3]heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4]treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5]having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

> [3]For the time is coming when people will not endure sound[a] teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4]and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 3-4)

> [10]For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11]They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. [12]One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." [13]This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, (Titus 1:10-13)

I've often reflected on what a challenge it must have been for young Titus to look for and establish elders in a culture so shaped by excess and dishonesty. But Paul doesn't appear to modify his injunction – you're in Crete, it's a mess, now get to work – God will be with you. And he relates similarly to Timothy. Paul describes an environment in which folk will be far more shaped by myths than by objective truth. Our age seems to be full flower of that kind of madness. Periodically I pick up brochures for New Age seminars that are full of shamanism and all means of exotica and esoterica enough to boggle the soul. And all of it purports to some kind of salvific effect. Partly we could say that it is the response of a hyper-technological culture looking for some kind of spiritual meaning. But the only truth claims are subjective, experiential and anecdotal. Truth lies within the seeker or the practice or the particular guru hawking his brand of spirituality. One's first impression of all of this is just how sadly weird and pathetic it is. But it can't be dismissed. At least in part it is the groaning of a disintegrating culture that has long abandoned any basis for objective truth.

Think for a moment of the kind of human beings that would typically and increasingly be produced out of a culture that has largely lost its instincts for virtue or corporeity or objective truth. The direst feature would be the steady loss of moral conscience. What does a culture look like when its inhabitant largely and increasingly lack a strong foundation of moral truth? There is no clear integrating center and any memory of one is waning rapidly.

The loss of confidence in objective moral truth and the breakdown of the family need to be understood well by a pastoral leader. If the apprehension of real truth is seen increasingly as a subjective journey, mere arguments for the validity of the gospel will not win the day. Don't misunderstand me. My own conversion from an avowed atheist to a grateful believer occurred within a week of hearing the gospel. In fact, I heart it at the conclusion of a worship service that I disdained and categorically dismissed as the weak pantings of silly and ignorant folk. And all I heard was "Jesus Christ can give you a new start on your life." The words pinned me to the back of that Pentecostal pew. After a week of trying to dismiss this intrusion, I surrendered and like C.S. Lewis was surprised by joy. But here me – we live in a very different world. The gospel has not lost any power, but think of the qualitative shift that Paul employed when preaching in Athens as opposed to Berea. The culture doesn't shift for us, but we must like Paul discern what it means to "become all things to all people that by all means I might save some." (I Corinthians 9:22)

The breakdown of the family in our culture provides a great opportunity for us. Sounds odd, doesn't it? But if truth claims are so volatile, perhaps we ought to go around to the back door and trying knocking there. The normal foundation of love, security and recognition that ought to flow from healthy family life is now commonly missing. Simple relationship will be much more valued than multiple truth propositions, however well-argued. Jesus, of course, was the perfection of truth and love expressed and imparted. Even in the pastoral care of Christians, we have to get better at "winning" (I Corinthians 9:19-23). But loving, involved relationships are expensive. Words alone do not make mature believers in Christ. What typically happens to a human soul that witnesses the step-by-step disintegration of a marriage that produced their life? At the very surface we can count on the following:

- A weakened sense of identity
- A loss of confidence in relational authority
- Deep insecurities regarding commitments
- Increased vulnerability to bitterness, anger and fear
- Greater reluctance to engage marriage and family life
- Besides all of this, the deep human pain that occurs when such a primary point of integration is dismantled

The gospel must be incarnated in and through pastoral leaders who are committed to following Jesus into the lives of believers (and unbelievers) who have been shattered and disoriented by their own sinfulness and the elements of this culture that work against the image of God in the human heart. Developing leaders who see these challenges and are well formed enough to sustain these cultural pressures must be a primary focus of senior leaders. Otherwise we will find ourselves treading water and trying to keep others' heads above water. We must do better

than this and we can, because Christ indeed is risen and He is still afoot on this earth with clear paths and objectives for His leaders to traverse.

Finally, just note Paul's exhortation to Timothy in perhaps the last letter he wrote before his death. He describes the moral breakdown of a culture of the last days:

> [1]But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. [2]For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3]heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4]treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5]having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Not a pretty picture, to be sure, and not so unlike what we presently live amidst. He later says, "…a time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching…and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Moral breakdown and the loss of confidence in objective truth. These realities pervert our own culture. But in the face of these things, hear Paul's exhortation to his protégé:

> [10]You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11]my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra--which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12]Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13]while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [14]But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it (2 Timothy 3:10-14)

He goes on to call him deeply into the equipping of the Scriptures for his own service and the faithful preaching of the same to Christ's flock. But note how his appeal to Timothy springs from the weight of the loving relationship they shared. Timothy had been deeply impacted by Paul's "teaching…conduct…aim in life…faith…patience…love…steadfastness…persecutions and sufferings" (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Timothy had been raised by holy women in a deeply polytheistic pagan culture and Paul fathered him into a substantial leader who could withstand the weirdness of Ephesus and make disciples to the glory of God.

Our cultural challenges are ours. We can't roll over and hope they'll evaporate. We must manfully embrace the challenge and follow the Son of God right into the thick of the swamp, trusting Him for all the wisdom and power we need to be fruitful to His glory.

CHAPTER 3

The Antidote of the Gospel

Some years ago, Jack Miller, the founder of World Harvest Mission and the author of the "Sonship" series, spoke to a group of 40 missionaries on furlough from Uganda. As one of his opening exercises, he asked them to break up into pairs and preach the gospel to each other. To a person they were puzzled. Their perception of the gospel was radically limited – they saw it only as the means by which an unbeliever came into the faith. World Harvest Mission had been sorting through recurring problems among the field missionaries and now Jack knew why. The gospel of grace that they preached to the Ugandans was not seen as the very foundation of their life together and their mission. Consequently, their life together drifted into a kind of moralism, increasingly short on grace. Miller put together the "Sonship" series that is deeply rooted in Paul's Galatian arguments and Luther's theology. It's a very helpful series (in fact, a derivative program called "Gospel Transformation" is even better) and became the springboard for Jack's familiar mantra, "Preach the gospel to yourself".

Most evangelicals have grown up with the phrase "accepting Jesus as my personal savior". I have nothing but respect for Billy Graham, but I think this phrase is unhelpful. It easily fuels the poor notion that I exist as an individual who needs saving and I accept Jesus to do that. This is true on one level, but wouldn't it be more helpful to say that it is God who does the inviting into His life, into the very fellowship of the Trinity? I often say to the congregation I serve that "when you received Jesus you got more than you bargained for at the time – you also got His people and His mission." And this must be our conviction – Jesus doesn't come into my life to personally save me and get me to heaven. Rather, I become part of His new humanity, a member of His Body, infused by His Holy Spirit with gifts that belong to Him, His people and His mission. The good news of the gospel is that Christ saves me from sin and its awful consequences. But it also saves me <u>to</u> a set of incredible realities. Through my baptism I learn that God no longer is interested in developing a relationship with my "old man" – he's buried with Christ in His death. And now I live by faith in Christ in a new creation with others who have undergone this most foundational transformation. The wonderful news of the gospel is this – God has reversed the curse of human degradation, turned the curse on its head and through Christ made a way for enemies to become not only friends but sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters. We are in Christ, no longer orphans trying to make our way through this quagmire of ignorance and rebellion on our own.

It is of supreme importance early on in our disciple-making and pastoral care focus that we disabuse our friends of this notion of a deeply individualistic understanding of being in Christ. How can it be that one can "have" Christ and remain largely detached from His people and His mission? But unless this is taught and modeled by a leadership team, that's exactly the terrain of western cultural Christianity. It's instructive to see Jesus' pastoral perspectives to both the rich young ruler and to Zaccheus. Both had similar life issues – money was their primary altar of worship. The rich young ruler was "extremely rich" (Luke 18:23) and apparently couldn't envision this "treasure in heaven" (Luke 18:22) that Jesus promised in place of his money. Nor could he connect to "come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). But Jesus doesn't dial the call down to fit this young man's life. There is no future in any of us trying to control our own destiny. But this

quiet horror unfolds with deep sadness in both this wealthy young man and the Son of God. Not everyone sees the gospel as good news, and sadness is the result. The young man was "very sad" and Jesus looked at him "with sadness". But Jesus doesn't come to fit into our lives – He widens His heart to take us into Himself. And this is treasure beyond treasure. Zaccheus gets it. Jesus graces his life and home and the result is a deep repentance and joy and acquisition of true wealth. Perhaps for the first time in his life, Zaccheus tastes the sweetness of being caught up in God. Jesus noticed him, wanted him and invited Himself into his life. And he comments, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

Pastoral leaders must be thoroughly grounded in the greatness and broad goodness of the gospel. This is where Jesus I located for each one of us. So much of our call as leaders is to continually translate these life truths from the risen Christ to the hearer, whether believing or unbelieving. Every program or new church structure or preaching series must be measured against this overarching standard – the message of God's saving acts in Jesus which are mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. We dare not trifle with this foundation.

In fact, it is utterly incumbent for us to proclaim Jesus or we will promote the disaster of attaching folk to ourselves or to a false gospel. Hence Paul's intensity toward the Galatians – anathema, anathema! he cries. And we must feel the same antipathy toward anything that might supplant this eternal work of God. The gospel remains "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). I see two great needs for pastoral leaders regarding this gospel:

1. To be as explicit and careful as one can to tell this truth
2. To be a model of applying these truths into the very stuff of life

I will never forget hearing the call of God to love my wife as Christ loved the church. We'd been married for about six months and were not doing so well. I was stunned by my wife's self-centeredness and obstinacy. But when Pastor Larry unpacked the call of Ephesians 5 to husbands, I remember distinctly being cut to pieces, down to the very marrow of my soul. And it was also clear to me that I did not possess the virtue or skill to pull this off. Here's what I heard:

> Ephesians 5:28-29 – "[28]In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29]For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church…"

I was completely daunted and at the same time utterly drawn to this call. And here is what saved me – I heard the Holy Spirit say to my panicked little heart, "I will help you." That's all. That's it. And that was not only good news but it was power for real transformation. God has entered into all of our disintegration with supreme confidence in Himself and His Word. Jesus was not daunted when he stood before the tomb of Lazarus. He tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Overcoming death is exactly why He had come and the resulting glory that would come to God was the end purpose. The good news of the gospel proclaims and backs up this great reality. The Maker of heaven and earth is for us. He has overcome the power of sin and death and all demonic powers. So Paul can boldly proclaim these truths:

Romans 8:31-39 – "[31]What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be[a] against us? [32]He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33]Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34]Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.[b] [35]Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36]As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

[37]No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38]For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39]nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The gospel of God's love and power and help is the great antidote to all of the disintegration of sin in our own souls and sin in our relationships and culture. Don't worry. He will help you. He is undaunted by your particular wreckage or the extremity of your particular circumstances. This is the best news you'll hear today and the best news you can pass on to God's children. We easily forget, but we will continue to preach the gospel to ourselves and eagerly hear it from one another so we can generously pass it on to the poor and hungry.

CHAPTER 4

But Who Do You Say that I Am?

Jesus knows precisely who He is. And what he's doing, and where He's going. His recorded years of ministry reveal a man who never appeared rushed or confused. Every step was deliberate. Sometimes he would be surprised, as with the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Her secretive touch drew power from him that was different than the jostling crowd. Peter's response to Jesus' question ("Who was it that touched me?"…Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you." – Luke 8:45) betrays a very simplistic assessment on Peter's part. Does he suspect that Jesus is "losing it", getting broken down by the intense ministry to the deeply needy, on the verge of burnout? Peter was still learning the Master. It takes time and a practiced attentiveness to His ways and His Spirit to see Him as He is.

Sometime later, Jesus posed two questions to the twelve: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" and "But who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:18, 20). Peter's response ("The Christ of God") is hailed by Jesus as the foundation upon which He would build a church that would withstand the oppression of hell itself. Demons quickly identified Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24) and a Roman centurion got it right during Jesus' crucifixion ("Truly this was the Son of God") in Matthew 27:54. But it is a question that must be answered repetititiously in the heart of leaders if they are to rightly communicate His heart and feed His flock. The weight of this revelation must be regularly renewed in the soul of a leader. How do we make disciples of Jesus without clear perception of who He is? The dimmer that revelation, the more we lead out of our own personalities and our own agendas that are easily shaped by pride and insecurity.

Paul's revelation of Christ was massive and, I think, the source of his passion and courage. He saw Jesus as the great integrating Presence of the universe and all spiritual realities. Listen to the way he unfolds this revelation to the Colossians (Colossians 1:15-20):

> [15]He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16]For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. [17]And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18]And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19]For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20]and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

First, take note of the use of the words "all" and "every":

- v. 15 – all creation
- v. 16 – all things, all things were created through him and for him
- v. 17 – before all things, in him all things hold together
- v. 18 – that in everything he might be pre-eminent
- v. 19 – in him all the fullness of God

- v. 20 – through him to reconcile to himself all things

Paul is describing Jesus in all of His cosmic significance. And, indeed, He is all of that. John saw him clearly:

> John 1:1-4, 10, 14 – "[1]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
>
> [10]He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
>
> [14]And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Think of this again:

- the world was made through him
- and without him was not anything made that was made

He is not only the center of the universe, but He is the integrating point of everything. That's why all of "creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:22). The disintegrating dynamic of sin has been at work since Eve bought the lie and ate the fruit. Have you ever wondered at the three hours of midday darkness and the splitting rocks and earthquakes that occurred during the crucifixion of the Creator of the Universe? These very splitting rocks owed their "rockiness" to Jesus. And as the Creator takes the place of utter humiliation and consummate sacrifice, the creation responds with a writhing agony. And all of the physical creation, including all humans both believing and unbelieving, continue groaning until His return to redeem all things. For the believer it is to be a conscious groaning into improvement and further conforming to the image of Jesus. For the unbeliever there is, at least for the more sensitive sort, the angst, the "not rightness" that marks this present existence.

The Person of Jesus is the center of life. To the extent that anyone is integrated around Him and His purposes, that person is whole. But the greatest insult in the universe is the wholesale dismissal of its Creator. If the veil is drawn back, the rejection of the Son of God is the most colossally foolish choice a soul could make, but it made incessantly by the vast majority of those created in the image and likeness of God. The great deception continues to hold sway.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of those events where the veil is drawn back. The Center of the Universe confronts Saul's disintegrating crusade. Jesus blinds him and knocks him down and then identifies Himself: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" and then He begins to orient Saul around Himself and His purposes. Everything is going to be recalibrated. The great persecutor will become the great apostle and great sufferer. Jesus then confides to Ananias that Paul will be both: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15-16). Paul carries Jesus into Asia Minor, Greece and Rome

among other places. And as he does, pockets of the Kingdom are formed. Paul becomes a channel of the Integrating Center of the universe. And as he carries on his apostolic oversight to churches and individuals, he persistently presses out the centrality of the Person of Jesus. A good friend of mine once described Paul's posture to the Colossians as "slavishly Christocentric". I like that. Paul understood that the whole of the Christian faith is rooted primarily in a Person: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 6:28).

Modern Christian leaders in the West are both blessed and afflicted with a multiplicity of books, programs and seminars on the best way to lead, grow, do small groups, be sensitive to the post-modern personality, etc., ad infinitism (and sometimes ad nauseum!). You're reading one right now! I've been frequently helped by all of the above. But it took me years to learn how to take these events on, how to draw something from them rather than try to implement everything, how to discern the impartation of the Spirit through the particular leader or event. What can never be downgraded is the ongoing centrality of the Person of Christ. Paul poignantly testifies to Timothy regarding a deeply distressing leadership experience: "At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me." (2 Timothy 4:16-17)

Beyond our own call to be where He is, we must go deeper into the confidence that God is supremely focused on conforming us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29) and unfolding His mission through our lives. The writer of Hebrews enjoins us to keep "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith…" (Hebrews 12:2). Even when chaos appears to reign and it feels like the whole thrust of your leadership has gone off the rails, it is supremely unhelpful to do anything but seek out the very Person of Christ. Jesus' exchange with Martha and Mary is always instructive. He describes Martha as "anxious and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41). Dis-integration was afoot in her soul. And the Master says, "…one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:42). And He clearly implies "It's Me, you need Me, you need my ongoing influence in your soul, you need my words, my presence, the weight of my Person deeply affecting the tone and direction of your thinking as well as your actions. You need Me!" Otherwise the entropy of the soul kicks in. There is no neutrality, no leniency for the exhausted and depleted. All things hold together in Him.

Learning Jesus is the great occupation of His servant. I worked my way through college as a waiter in fairly upscale restaurants. I learned to pay attention to the ongoing and shifting needs for service and to gauge the particular style that suited each one. Better service, bigger tips…usually. But my most significant focus went to the businessmen who rolled in on Monday nights. They had generous expense accounts and were afraid to use them. I studied them and got to the point that almost before they were seated I had the drink they wanted, just how they wanted it (with a twist of lemon, not the whole wedge…please!). Many times they would let me order for them – and then I would go back to the chef and tell him precisely how I wanted it done. And then I would always share some of the booty with him. I would instruct the bus boy how to unobtrusively keep this man's table cleared of debris and properly supplied with whatever was appropriate. Beyond the good tips, I loved the very dynamic. It's not so dissimilar from my present service – to seek to be entirely focused on the desires of this Master, Jesus, to

know His preferences, His instincts and His variable “needs”. The tips are wonderful. But the Person and His integrating influence are indeed the very core of Life.

CHAPTER 5

Rabbi, Where Are You Staying? – Personal Loyalty to Jesus

Following Jesus must go well beyond a cerebral, principle-based effort that is located mainly in the will of the servant. We are following a Spirit-being. To be sure, Jesus owns a physical, immortal body that has remarkable capacities that all of His followers will one day possess. But He's not here physically and has decided to pass on His lead through the Holy Spirit – "[13]When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14]He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. [15]All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-15) The Holy Spirit is on task to take the things of Jesus and declare them to us. Consequently, we must become very personally familiar with this very powerful combined effort from the Triune God. Our call is to be where He is and serve His interests wherever He happens to lead us.

I think that one of the modern aberrations of Christian discipleship is the technologizing of the relational process. We are often cajoled into believing that if we just achieve the right combination of principles, efforts, programs and the right amount of time in prayer and study, we will arrive in the right place with the right amount of fruit. It's all very componential. And I don't deny the merit of some of this. Years ago I read a book on a certain amount of keys to have a really effective church. I was repulsed by the title and dismissed it as drivel unworthy of my time. I am quite sure the Holy Spirit prompted me to purchase it and read it. It was the second chapter that utterly undid me, brought me to repentance and real change motivated by the Father's heart. I don't remember the rest of the book. No matter. I deeply needed chapter two and to this day I'm grateful for the way the Spirit took a "thing" of Jesus and declared it to me. What we must avoid is the notion that all of this is rooted in spiritual facts. We're following a Person.

This little vignette of Andrew and another of John's disciples asking Jesus where He was staying is instructive. Of course, it is rooted in a very Hebrew pattern of a group of disciples following a rabbi and pretty much living with him whether he is itinerant or residential. But there is a key understanding that must not be lost as we translate this practice to a 21st century technological post-modern culture – and that is, simply this – Jesus Christ expects His followers to be personally loyal to Him and put all other things in proper context to this One. He thinks He is Lord.

Andrew and this other fellow went after Jesus upon hearing John's identification of Him as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:37). It seems to me that they have an awkward response to His question of "What are you seeking?" (John 1:38) and all they come up with is apparently a desire to know his present residential location. But they want much more and He knows it. They want Him and what He has and His invitation is a gracious "Come and you will see" (John 1:39). And John records that "they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour" (John 1:39). A sleepover with Jesus. What could this have been like? I'm not trying to be cute but these two men spent an evening with the Son of God. They ate and spoke and sat and felt feelings and

drew conclusions. Andrew is convinced that John was right and he finds his brother and brings him into this amazing and very real relationship. And the rest, as they say, is history.

But what of our histories? How easily does our following of Jesus get reduced to spiritual disciplines, meetings and mission statements? I'm a great advocate of all of them, by the way. I like meetings. Honestly. And I know my heart can be deceived into believing that movement forward and lovely efficiency and enough praise songs could constitute what it means to please the Lord. Jesus actually returned in Spirit to some of His people in the late first century. He talks to His people at Ephesus this way:

> [2]"'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. [3]I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. [4]But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." (Revelation 2:2-4)

They're doing well. They're hard working. And they're doing it all "for my name's sake". But I think Jesus gets after them because they are increasingly losing "touch" with Him personally. The battle is intense and the mission compelling, but the Person who is at the center of it all is becoming a distant figurehead. He will not and cannot be reduced like that and we not suffer disorienting consequences. I'm sure most of you have heard impassioned sermons on this text and I've preached my share of them. But don't turn too quickly away from this. This Jesus does not change. These words are for all of us individually and corporately. Jesus yearns for the kind of loyalty and fellowship that rightly perceives His worth. He speaks of "the love you had at first".

I remember the early love I knew for my wife. I mostly wanted to be with her because I had begun to envision a life lived in union with her for the rest of my days. It's an intoxicating brew, isn't it? We were graduate teaching assistants at Marquette University in Milwaukee. Before I met her I was quite busy with correcting 120 compositions a week, studying for my own classes and planning classes for my students. What was so amazing was the amount of time that became available for Sue once it was clear that we would be together in marriage. Large blocks of previously unavailable time were now offered to this relationship. I was crazy in love! I saw her worth and myself deeply connected to her, our future intertwined, living one life together. Over 35 years of marriage we've gone through seasons where we had to reassess that quality of what we were sharing together. And through some tears and repenting and re-promising we have grown in love and respect and deep joy together. I think this is what Jesus is after with the Ephesians – and us.

Being with Jesus is certainly more than having a good "quiet time" with Him. I'm all for quiet times and study and meditation and all the spiritual disciplines. In fact, I think they're crucial. I've encountered too many Gnostics who proclaim "My life is a prayer" but are far too often self-absorbed and unaccountable to Christ's people and mission. I call it a "detached spirituality" and I almost always feel off-balance trying to communicate with these folk. They appear strongly insular, uncomfortable with their own humanness. So when I consider Paul's exhortation to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25 NIV), I am certainly not thinking of

these folk. But neither would I connect this to nervous systematic theologians who fear any subjective impulse and demand chapter and verse for every move. The excesses on either end of this spectrum are unpleasant and un-Christ-like. Jesus is fully God and fully man. I love this doctrine – both its mysteries and its implications. Jesus was quite comfortable in His own skin and quite comfortable in His spirituality. He was neither ethereal nor stiff. And if we are to follow Him and be where He is, we'll have to get comfortable with how He behaves.

Personal loyalty to Jesus of course plays out by our commitment to follow Him and be where He is. But where is He? Within the context of your individual life He is, as Paul says, at work "in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13)." But He's also seeking to be at work through you in the relationships and circumstances of your life. As I write this I am seated in a nice tea shop in St. Paul, MN. Just outside the door near me are five Asian college students in a lovely garden environment. Where is Jesus in this mix? As best as I can discern, He's in the middle of this writing process. I feel no great impulse to stop and ease my way into this Asian assemblage so that I can preach the gospel to them.

Don't I care? Doesn't Jesus care? Am I completely missing the missional purposes of God? Well, I'm open to adjustment, but frankly I've got to get this chapter done because I'm committed to a deadline. In fact, I think I'm being obedient to Jesus in this writing. I think he prompted me to do it. And He knows what He's working with – me – in all my humanity and all of my spirituality. Last night my wife and I spoke to a Muslim couple who are experiencing some first year of marriage adjustments and challenges. It was wonderful. Both of them think my wife is the most loving, wise person on the earth. So I mainly worked at staying out of the way so Sue had free expression in their lives. Sometimes she'd throw me the ball and after a few dribbles I'd throw it right back. My posture in that conversation was to simply be where He was in the lives of this young Arab couple. And the clearest sense I had was to take a quite supportive role to Sue's lead. My loyalty to Jesus is to play the part He ordains for whatever the situation.

I love the scene on the beach after the shipwreck of Paul's vessel headed for Rome. Remember, it was Paul's great revelation and spirituality that heralded God's saving act for these folk. So what does he do on the beach? It was rainy and cold and they build a fire to get warm and the great apostle is gathering a bunch of sticks. No need for prophecies and visions at the moment – just sticks. Go get some sticks in the name of Jesus.

I work at present tense questions in my following of Jesus. Like "Where are you here?" or "What are you doing?" or "What do you want me to say or do here?" It's personal and I'm His servant. I know that WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) was a bit of a fad sometime back. It sold lots of bracelets and I hope aligned hearts more with Him. But I think the better question is WIJD (What Is Jesus Doing?), and further WDYWMTBSODITPS (What Do You Want Me To Be Saying Or Doing In This Particular Situation?). Not too catchy, but a great question. And I'm not suggesting a funny reliance on trying to hear internal voices. But if the sheep of Jesus hear His voice, then I'm all ears. Talk to me in my heart, Great Shepherd, and guide my steps into the paths of righteousness.

Personal loyalty to Jesus will mean a real, personal connection to Him. We must talk to Him and listen to Him, study Him in His Word and look for Him in His people. It really is all about Him and all of my worth and esteem is wrapped up in following Him and being where He is – in every relationship, conversation, circumstance and meeting.

CHAPTER 6

Paying Attention to the Necessary

One aspect of our culture's disintegration is its noise level, not only literal decibels but the "white noise", the intrusive announcements anywhere, the technological phone banks, and the cumulative effect it generates in one's soul. We are over stimulated, stressed out and increasingly incapable of fulfilling Pascal's dietum: "Most problems would be solved if a man or woman would spend 30 minutes alone and quite in a room each day." I recommend Richard Winter's Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment as an excellent lens into our particular cultural dysfunctions. He claims that the consequence of the noise and over stimulation is boredom, an interior impoverishment that weakens one's capacity to know oneself or anyone else. A soul-depleted individual or culture easily becomes prey to the kind of charismatic leader who seems to provide clear answers and pathways that deliver from confusion. But the capacity to discern good from evil will be limited and a deeper disease will ensue.

Jesus spoke to this issue once with two women in a very domestic environment:

> Luke 10:38-42 – "[38]Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. [39]And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. [40]But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." [41]But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42]but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha's "world" had become an emotional storm. She addressed Jesus as "Lord" but clearly had lost all perspective as to what that might mean. She demands that the "Lord" fits into her understanding of life, fairness and work distribution. When Jesus describes her inner life He uses the word "troubled". The Greek, *turbazo*, derives from a Latin root, *turba*, which means *crowd*. And that one word is so helpful in seeing the core issue. Martha's life is crowded with many things. She has become emotionally eruptive. She lacks a quiet and attentive center in her soul. And Jesus gently but firmly focuses her on "one thing" that is "necessary". Mary was listening to Jesus. And Jesus is the Integrative Center of the Universe. And He is the Word of God, the continuous expression of the very heart and mind of the Father. His communication eclipses, supercedes and transcends all other communication. His words are spirit and life (John 6:63). This "good portion" that Mary has chosen is the same portion that begs for choosing by all creatures created in the image and likeness of God. It is the portion that Jesus Himself chose in His relationship to the Father:

> John 5:19-20, 30 – "[19]So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. [20]For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel."

> [30]"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

It is this kind of attentiveness that begins to dismiss the noisy, disorderly, internal "crowd" that regularly disrupts and distorts the human soul. Being a servant of Jesus means we must follow Him so that we can be where He is in relationships with others, in our own souls, in His thinking about any situation. Attentiveness is a habitual choosing, a regular asking of this question: "Where are you?" But how does one develop this quality of attentiveness? I believe that it is a deliberate embracing of three disciplines:

- His Word
- His Spirit
- His People

His Word

I came to Christ while in graduate school for English Literature. I was thoroughly undisciplined in my study habits but was able to get good enough grades by cramming and whatever reservoir I possessed of innate intelligence. I had little trouble rejecting the falsities that had previously defined my soul or the habits that shaped my actions. My encounter with Jesus was real and utterly life changing. But His real presence in my soul didn't make me immediately disciplined. In fact, it was quite a messy business to dismiss my crowd and focus my attention. In the early days of my conversion I would go forward to the altar for prayer at the Sunday evening service of the Pentecostal church where I had surrendered to Christ. Sister Smith always seemed to find her way to me and relentlessly pressed the same question: "Are you having your quiet times?" I was initially clueless to this peculiar reference. I found out later that it entailed reading the Bible and praying. I wanted to do both, but I discovered that I was not very good with the former and utterly abysmal with the latter. I loved going to church and talking to folk about my experience of Christ, but this "quiet time" business was incredibly irritating. So I decided to do my best at avoiding Sister Smith and thereby eliminating this burr in my soul. It didn't work.

My spiritual career now became increasingly defined by starts and stops, resolutions and failures, inspirations and condemnations. However, I do remember the turning point. I was listening to preaching that focused on Galatians 6:7-9 – "[7]Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [8]For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9]And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

That particular image opened the door to embracing God's Word and eventually experiencing something like what occurred for those two disciples with Jesus on the Emmaus road – "They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32) I began to record insights in a Scripture journal and write daily devotionals and eventually commentaries on various books. My mind was being renewed and was increasingly in synch with the thinking of God. But this matter of prayer was on a different plan altogether it seemed. How does one commune spirit to Spirit? Perhaps my lowest moment came half way through reading the book Rees Howells: Intercessor. This guy

prayed and fasted incessantly and supposedly changed the course of World War II. Upon reading through one more remarkable prayer achievement, I closed the book, set it down and became utterly despondent. I was just trying to talk with God for 15 minutes or so on a regular basis. World War II? I was going for this nasty little skirmish afoot in my own soul. But sometime later, grace came in an odd package. I was determined to be before God for 30 minutes in prayer every day, no matter what and with no critique on the quality of that time. I pulled out my journal and recorded the time: 7:13 a.m. This meant I would go on in whatever form until 7:43 a.m. Many of those 30-minute exercises were occupied with my own musings, multiple distractions, wondering who won the ballgame last night or what I should do about a particular relationship. But I got better at sustaining attention. I began to pray thoughtfully through the Lord's Prayer and to meditate and pray through the Psalms. Spiritual attention increased and I felt like I gained a better handle on what the writer of Hebrews was exhorting these folk about:

> Hebrews 5:11-14
> [11]About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [12]For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, [13]for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. [14]But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

"Powers of discernment trained by constant practice". The Greek word for practice is *gymnazo* and the image is unarguable. Salvation is by faith alone apart from any works. And sanctification is by faith alone as we engage in constant practice and repetitious application of our soul's attention to the perfecter of our faith. There are no shortcuts and sloth in these exercises results in dullness of hearing and weak discernment of good from evil. If we are to follow Jesus and arrive where He is with some consistency, we must feed on what fed Him

> Matthew 4:4 – "But he answered, "It is written,
>
> "'Man shall not live by bread alone,
> but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

His Spirit

Can we hear the voice of the Lord in our hearts? Many evangelicals are more than a bit nervous about this matter. Who hasn't been singed by the hyper-spiritualized pronouncements of a self-ordained (or otherwise ordained!) prophet who has God's special word for you? It's enough to make one despise prophesying…and quench the Spirit in process (I Thessalonians. 5:19-21). Encouraging prophecy and exercising real discernment is tougher than simply relegating it all to a bygone era. But that is both unfaithful and unbiblical.

Paul refers to this matter as being "led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14) and the phrases "live by the Spirit" and "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Living, walking, being led. The very promise of Jesus is that the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13.

Unquestionably, this relationship with the Spirit is learned by listening to what He has already said (His Word) and what He is saying in any given relationship and circumstance (His Word applied). If we are to follow Jesus as faithful servants who arrive where He is at work in a life or circumstance or decision, our powers of discernment must be regularly applied and honed.

My own practice of this principle unfolds in various ways, but most often like this: within a pastoral context I will be asking the primary question – "Jesus, where are you in this situation?" I'm His servant and I am seeking to follow His lead. Often I let my heart scan the Scriptures from the narratives of the Old Testament patriarchs through the gospel events into Paul's letters. Often before I get into the "scan", the Spirit will identify a character (David) or a saying of Jesus or a Pauline perspective. Less often I will see an internal vision. Recently, praying for a woman, I saw her life as a train with many empty flat cars and a vehicle loading them with materials. Is this some special spiritual gift? I don't think so. Am I making this up in my head? Well, I think it's all subject to discernment, but no, I think I'm connecting to the Spirit who is the Helper, the One who always seeks to conform us to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29). These "seeings" or senses are always subject to confirmation and discernment just as every Scripture injunction should undergo the same scrutiny. The Word of God is misapplied far more than spiritual senses.

Being led by the Spirit means, among other things, that we are attending to the present tense direction of a Person who has a mind and will and purpose to unfold. Paying attention the inner movements of this Wonderful Counselor is a path that every leader must engage with persevering energy.

His People

I add this third element because as individuals we are quite capable of mauling the objective truth of God's Word or distorting a perceived sense from the Holy Spirit. The very real context of the people of God provides a human check and balance on interpretations of the Word and Spirit that are awry. This doesn't resolve every issue that may arise, but it does give a framework for discernment.

For instance, when I am training a leader, I have a particular route that I walk. I am always very interested in his understanding of the gospel, both its objective truths and its applied practices. I am also pressing him a bit regarding his attentiveness to Jesus. What is he seeing or hearing from the Master? Frequently, I am able to adjust or helpfully embellish or enthusiastically confirm his spiritual perceptions. And I am quite deliberate about helping him to see the deep unity of Word and Spirit. But there I am, the balance of the people of God into this man's development. This dynamic is seen throughout the Scriptures, but perhaps most clearly in Paul's relationship to Timothy. He makes Timothy remember important junctures in his life when he received special impartations of the Spirit:

> I Timothy 4:14 – "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."

> II Timothy 1:6 – "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,"

And he is quite clear bout the relationship of Word and Spirit:

> II Timothy 1:13-14 – "[13]Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [14]By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."

And, of course, Paul's helpful presence in Timothy's life is crucial:

> I Timothy 1:2a – "To Timothy, my true child in the faith:"
>
> II Timothy 1:2a – "To Timothy, my beloved child:"
>
> II Timothy 2:1 – "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,"
>
> I Timothy 6:20a – "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you"

The Word, the Spirit and the Body. These are the places where we must focus our attention and learn the ways of Jesus. Choosing the good portion, developing a spiritual ear, growing into spiritual sight. These are the necessary things from which all of our life and leadership will flow.

CHAPTER 7

Gaining and Practicing an Integrated Interior Life
or
What Does it Mean to Walk by the Spirit?

Serving Jesus will always mean following Him, learning to be where He is at work in whatever situation. And following Him is not merely the learning of His principles and ways, as if all of this were primarily predicated on the acquisition of information. To be sure, there is much of that to be apprehended. But following Jesus in His mission has to do most plainly with a personal relationship. Yet it's spiritual – *really* spiritual. Jesus has a body and a soul and a face and vocal cords and a spinal cord. But He doesn't live here anymore. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit to inhabit and animate every believer and so to teach them how to worship and live in Spirit and truth. And this learning occurs over a good length of time and is never fully perfect in this life. This development of an integrated interior life is the most foundational path for any believer and especially for any leader of the flock of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit is of inestimable value. He is the seal and the reality of this new covenant. But think on this for a moment – this Holy Spirit is the very same Spirit that lived in and empowered Jesus. And He is the One who, as Jesus said, "will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14). It is these internal spiritual declarations to which we must become habitually and increasingly attuned.

As a very young believer, the Holy Spirit challenged me to adopt a pattern of participation in a worship gathering. The church I attended encouraged the expression of spiritual gifts as well as the sharing of lessons and personal testimonies a la 1 Corinthians 14:26 – "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." The challenge to me from the Holy Spirit was this: "Every time you come into a place of worship, I want you to be three things: Attentive, Available and Obedient." And so with just a bit of fear and trepidation I began to pay attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit within my own heart and within the context of the gathering. I began to increasingly "see" and "hear" spiritually. And I obeyed and gave some awkward and halting expressions of the Spirit. And I became more fluent in this pattern. My sight and hearing and expressions were increasingly helpful.

I pastored for six years in the north woods of Wisconsin. One of the leaders I trained was a very large, bearded Norwegian named Tryg. He spent most of his youth in the woods, hunting and trapping and observing the movements of whatever was out there. I often drove with him on country roads and watched his scanning maneuver. He rarely kept his eyes directly on the road (cars were a rare occurrence!), but watched both sides for "critters". He would alert me continually to his findings. Early on I thought he was manufacturing these sightings – I rarely saw anything. But he'd point out deer to the right or a fox to the left or an eagle sitting in a tree. Sometimes he would stop the truck and actually point my face to the supposed spot where the animal was, and describe the entire environment around it. I honestly couldn't see it. I'm a city boy. But I was determined to see what Tryg saw. I got better and as time went on, once or twice I saw something before him. OK, actually it was only once, but it was a great moment. I trained

my eyes to look for movement and shading and distinguishing marks. I'll never see as much as Tryg, but I now see far more than I did.

Spiritual attentiveness is a skill and a habit that ought to shape the interior life of every pastoral leader. This was Jesus' exhortation to the frustrated and anxious Martha when she blew up at Him: "You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41) This "good portion" was a full attentiveness to the Person and words of Jesus. And His very words continue to press us to this day.

Trained attentiveness to Jesus is not somewhere down the list of priorities for a pastoral leader. If we don't learn this way we will most certainly lead out of our pride or anxiety or emotional dysfunctions – not that we every completely overcome the "rebel sigh" of the heart. But we must make substantial improvement if we are to lead others. And this is the great transforming work of the Spirit of God. When Paul was engaging the deep spiritual disintegration of the Galatians, he pressed them with this: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). He wasn't alluding to some subjective, mystical dynamic by which one might waft through life and maintain a beatific pose. That would be quite unlike Jesus. But He was pressing these poor, distorted folk back into the heart of the gospel. Listen to his pastoral heart: "…my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). He was re-integrating them and looking ahead again to that holy formation in their inner beings and their life together.

Walking by the Spirit is best demonstrated by the lives of three men – David, Jesus and Paul. Taking a good look at their spiritual dispositions and habits will help anyone gain greater wisdom on this ideal of developing an integrated interior life.

God described David as a man who shared His own internal disposition; a remarkable assessment indeed! How did he get there? He found the grace of God tending his father's sheep in the fields of Bethlehem. He paid attention to God particularly in the context of Creator and Covenant Redeemer. David actually believed that the world and everything in it belonged to God and declared the glory of God:

> Psalm 19:1-3
> [1]The heavens declare the glory of God,
> and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
> [2]Day to day pours out speech,
> and night to night reveals knowledge.
> [3]There is no speech, nor are there words,
> whose voice is not heard.

And he was completely enraptured by the revelation of God in His Word:

> Psalm 19:7-11
> [7]The law of the LORD is perfect,
> reviving the soul;

the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
[8]the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
[9]the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
[10]More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
[11]Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

David absorbed all of this divine speaking in such a way that his interior life was ordered by the priorities and preferences of God. His arrival on Israel's battle line to witness the taunt of Goliath reveals his heart for God. Two words are noteworthy here:

> I Samuel 17:26b – "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David identifies the Philistine as "uncircumcised" and God as "living". Consequently, Goliath was outside covenantal relationship with God and opposed to God so that he was presently in a profoundly terrible dilemma. David understood that if God were alive and as powerful as He proclaimed, and if David was in covenant with this God, well, then Mr. Goliath was an arrogant trespasser, not so different from the lion or the bear that David would kill protecting his father's flock. But here is where we must observe this young man's interior disposition. He was filled with God and utterly occupied by his faith. He saw differently from his brothers and every other soldier in Saul's army. He saw God as He is, undiminished by long seasons of unbelief. And David's expression of faith energized the whole army into victory.

Two other examples will be helpful to this focus. When David enters his fugitive season eh comes to the cave of Adullam where 400 not-so-mighty men "gathered to him" (I Samuel 22:2). They were identified as "in distress…in debt, and…bitter in soul." And it is here that David writes and sings Psalm 57. No doubt, some or all of these men heard David and were deeply impacted by this song. David had already been anointed to be King of Israel, but found himself disenfranchised from his home, his family, his reputation, his heritage, his ministry and his country. And the 400 men are listening to these words:

Psalm 57:1-2
[1]Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,

till the storms of destruction pass by.
[2]I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

God is Most High, sings David. And He "fulfills his purpose for me". Really? Apparently something has gone quite wrong. David has ostensibly lost everything. These men know it. None of them has lost as much as David. And he goes on about God in this way. Is he mad? Is he one of these "faith" guys who doesn't deal well with reality and humanness? Listen to verse 3:

[3]He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me.

David knows enough of the ways of God to perceive that his present suffering is not an unusual development piece of God making him ready for his future work. David is quite sure that God will be sending help in some form. He not only believes it but he's writing songs about it and teaching those songs to these bewildered men. But here is the part that is so God-like – from this fugitive cave environment David sings this:

[7]My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast!
I will sing and make melody!
[8]Awake, my glory!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
[9]I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
[10]For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

Do you see his heart? It is steadfast, it is steadfast and he will sing and make melody and tell his soul and musical instruments and the very dawn to wake up and worship God. "Indomitable" is the word that comes to mind. But know this – David had grown in an interior life relationships with a Spirit-God that not only sustained him in the worst of times but shepherded others toward God as they observed his life. David sees the nations and the glory of God over all the earth – from a cave! This must be what God seeks to impart to all those who will lead His flock.

Finally, consider one more passage. As David and his men try to avoid Saul's grasp they get wind of some difficulties in a little town:

I Samuel 23:1-5
[1]Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." [2]Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." [3]But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" [4]Then

> David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." [5]And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

Now follow David's interior process. It's quite uncomplicated. Even though he's on the run and trying to keep a very low profile, this challenging situation arises. The natural response, at best, is to offer some heartfelt prayers for Keliah's deliverance. But to risk one's cover and expose oneself to battle, well, that's a bit much, don't you agree? God, don't you agree? But from a place of deeply seated faith, David "inquired of the Lord". This is so rich. He's being attentive and available to God not based on either emotions or circumstances. And he obeys and teaches these 400 men how a man of faith lives. Further, they all see the results of this kind of radical obedience – a participation in the very power and deliverance of God. Few things taste as sweet. But make no mistake – this fruit proceeds directly from the grace-filled roots of a man's interior life of attention to the Most High God.

Jesus' relationship with the Father is the ultimate expression of an interior life conformed to the mind and will of God. John's gospel unfolds the clearest picture of how Jesus related to the Father:

> John 4:34 – "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."
>
> John 5:19-20a – "[19]So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father[a] does, that the Son does likewise. [20]For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing."
>
> John 5:30 - "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."
>
> John 6:57 – "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."
>
> John 7:16 – "So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."
>
> John 8:28b – "…I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."
>
> John 10:14-15 – "[14]I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, [15]just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."
>
> John 10:30 – "I and the Father are one."

> John 12:27-28a – "[27]Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. [28]Father, glorify your name."
>
> John 12:49-50 – "[49]For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment--what to say and what to speak. [50]And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

That's a long list of Scriptures and, if you're like me, you've breezed through them quite briskly. But these words are compelling. If the work of the Holy Spirit is to conform us "to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29), then these patterns are the ideal to which we will be moved. Does it sound like too much? It is not. The Spirit works of course within our gifts and personalities, but He is headed toward the very disposition of Christ being worked in us. And so much of the emphasis is on the development of internal hearing and seeing that results in external works. This was the life and mission of Jesus and it is the relational and missional image to which we are being conformed.

Jesus' attentiveness to the Father was so radical and wonderful. He knew that He was on earth to succeed where Adam had failed, to be the Son who would fully express the heart of God to His beloved broken world. And His interior life was gracious transfixed upon the Father. Jesus heard and saw in and by the Spirit. He lived submissively and responsively in every situation, with every person He encountered. Jesus said that the Son could only do "what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). It is this "seeing" that must be developed. Bible study and prayer are central. But I would press for what I call "the ongoing conversation". It may be what Paul was referencing when he exhorts to "pray without ceasing". But the habit of asking the right questions is so important toward the development of a fruitful interior life. My list of questions is quite short and pointed:

- Where are You? (in a situation or life)
- What are You doing here?
- How do you want me to serve You? (or, How do I "be" where You are?)
- Will You show me Your heart for this?

There are plenty of other questions to ask, but I've found that if these aren't addressed and answered to some degree, it's easy to go off the path. Jesus never got off the path. He heard and saw and spoke and acted and obeyed fully. And no life has had near the impact of His. Yet we are called into that same obedience.

I've addressed the apostle Paul elsewhere but let me bring into one vignette that captures the essence of his rich interior life. Acts 27 is on one hand a great adventure story, as harrowing as any Robert Louis Stevenson novel, but it also casts a lens into Paul's spirituality. One the second leg of the journey, Paul, the prisoner, offers some advice:

> Acts 27:10 – "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

Paul's internal sense is a journey of significant loss and injury and death. He's disregarded. And when this journey and ship appear to be on the brink of doom, Paul pipes up with a rather cheerful "I told you so" and then relates his interactions with God – Paul will live to face Caesar, the ship will be destroyed and no one will die. And Paul says this:

> Acts 27:25 – "So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told."

God is sovereignly at work to glorify Himself and He just needed one out of the 276 aboard to get it done (actually, He does fine without any of us but He graciously chooses to use us jars of clay to display His glory). As the wreck approaches, Paul appears again to get them to take some nourishment for the arduous swim ahead for everyone. Very simply, Paul was seeing and hearing a God who was indeed a "very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1) and out of the richness of that relationship he "pastored" a mid-size church of 276 to safety. He was not shaped by external circumstances. He lived life from the inside out. But this habitual posture was only developed over years of looking to God and His Word and His Spirit for power and wisdom. He saw the Kingdom of God. He heard the voice of the Spirit. He was able to interpret the Spirit into the present circumstance. And consequently he bore the fruit of Christ and His glorious saving grace.

The Bible is full of exquisite stories and truths that unpack this direction for us. Our own interior development will most likely follow similar routes as the Spirit calls us on to the ideal of Jesus.

CHAPTER 8

The Priorities of the Good Shepherd

A deeper and more integrated interior life is the continuous path that a pastoral leader must travel. We are at once both sheep and shepherds. Our call is to both hear His voice and lead in such a way that His voice is heard through us. This is no arrogance, but rather one of the means by which His incarnational presence and leadership is translated to the flock of God. Perceiving His priorities becomes more than needful if we are to care for His beloved flock.

In the 10th chapter of his gospel, John relates a Jesus monologue and then a dialogue with the Jews regarding His relationship with His Father and the way it unfolded toward both His sheep and these unbelieving Jews. I see seven priorities here that should inform the undershepherds of the Good Shepherd. These priorities are really all of a piece, all part of our call to live out of the union of the Father, Son and Spirit as an expression of His continuing mission on this earth. But each one should be viewed as an expression of the one who owns the sheep and expects the undershepherds to embrace the same union as He did and emulate the priorities of the Good Shepherd.

1st Priority – Jesus' relationship with the Father was seamless. Even in His incarnation as the 2nd Adam, He came to teach the sons of men how to live in and from this union with the Father. His interior life was fixed on the heart and desire of His Father. Jesus took special actions to nurture and replenish this relationship so that every move He made proceeded out of that union. We are called into that same path with the help of the Holy Spirit who "will take what is mine and declare it to you…All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14-15). This is both our great privilege and responsibility – to receive from the Triune God and share it with His flock.

2nd Priority – Jesus said that the "reason the Father loves me (is) because I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 10:17). He understood that His entire purpose on earth was to glorify God by completing the mission He had been given (John 17:4). Jesus didn't lay down His life only once at the cross but every day, every relationship, every circumstance, every conversation. It isn't so much that he didn't have a will of his own but rather He had come into full unity with the Father's will. It was His very food (John 4:34) and what He finally embrace in Gethsemane (Matthew 26).

A pastoral leader following this Master must learn the habit, the faithful, conscious, deliberate yield to a Person and a purpose that eclipses all others. The thoughtful, slow praying of the Lord's Prayer has been highly recommended through the centuries. Luther was consumed with its significance. Think of it. When asked to give specific instruction on prayer, Jesus teaches us to start by looking away from ourselves to the Father's greatness and then to submit ourselves to His will being done on earth like it's done in heaven, I suppose quite expeditiously done by angels who are beholding the very glory of God. That way. And, of course, rightly perceiving the greatness of God, His supremacy and glory would be the great motivating feature of yielding to the will of Another.

3rd Priority – The greatest asset of a shepherd was not his rod and staff but his voice – its familiarity and clarity. Jesus said that the good shepherd "calls his own sheep by name" (10:2) and they "hear his voice" (10:2). Behind that voice is love and truth and wisdom. Its weight and tone and clarity resonate deeply with the sheet. And that voice strikes the deepest spiritual chord in a human heart.

I have regularly encouraged the leaders I have trained over the years to let the flock hear their voice. And, of course, the hope is that the flock will hear more than a mere human. That leader's capacity to lead the flock and help believers into maturity in Christi is deeply tied to the formation of that voice within him by the Spirit. Only time in the Word and waiting before Him as a servant can engender that. Learning to be with Him, letting His Word shape us and equip us, meditating on His ways and the ways of those who imitated Him so well – only these things can form the foundation of being where He is in the midst of the pastoral fray. There must be evidence of an acquired clarity of His voice if we will lead the true flock of Christ. Certainly there have been many voices that have led millions astray. Learning Jesus, the One who said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" must be our great preoccupation.

4th Priority – Jesus led His sheep by going before them. This was General James Longstreet's constant rejoinder to his lieutenants who always begged him to retire to the rear to avoid injury: "Can't lead from behind!" Jesus has come in the Incarnation and lived out the perfect life of the 2nd Adam, died the perfect atoning death and rose from the dead as the perfect firstfruits of the new humanity. And our path is similar – we are called to a life of virtue, to live sacrificially before and with the flock and to model a life that reflects the values of the Kingdom of heaven. We are following Jesus, yes? Especially as leaders this cannot be a source of constant ambivalence. That posture is translated to the flock and discipleship and mission are thwarted. The leadership team ought to be the place where the priorities of the Good Shepherd are understood, embraced and modeled.

5th Priority – Jesus said that He had come to give life and give it abundantly, to the full. Later He tells the eleven that the reason He was speaking to them was so that "my joy may be in you and your joy may be full" (John 15:11). And in His last prayer before Gethsemane He says, "I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). Jesus could give life because He was full of life and His aim was to give it away. We can't give what we don't have. Replenishing the soul was the first order of business for George Mueller every day – to make his soul happy in God. David knew this route, didn't he? I have often meditated on the circumstantial weight of Psalm 57. This is written and sung and prayed during the early days of David's fugitive relationship with Saul. He's at the Cave of Adullam, having just absorbed the loss of family, reputation, position, country and anything like a secure future. Probably he's also dealing with the motley band of discontents that find their way to this pitiful cave. But I can't but believe that this tough crowd hears David worship God and are deeply affected by it and eventually transformed. Listen to what they heard this holy fugitive sing:

> [1]Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
> for in you my soul takes refuge;
> in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
> till the storms of destruction pass by.

[2]I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
[3]He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. (Selah)

God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

[4]My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts--
the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.

[5]Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

[6]They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my way,
but they have fallen into it themselves. (Selah)

[7]My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast!
I will sing and make melody!
[8]Awake, my glory!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
[9]I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
[10]For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

[11]Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

Note verse 2:

[2]I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

And verse 3:

[3]He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. (Selah)

God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

God is Most High, not Saul. Consequently, no matter what this looks like, God will prevail – He will send out his love and His faithfulness. David is looking for it. But there's more here that thrills the soul. From this cave David prays, "Let your glory be over all the earth." Really? This is a different breed. He's caught up with God and His glory, not merely David's own deliverance. It really is all about God. And David talks to his own soul in verses 7-9:

> [7]My heart is steadfast, O God,
> my heart is steadfast!
> I will sing and make melody!
> [8]Awake, my glory!
> Awake, O harp and lyre!
> I will awake the dawn!
> [9]I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
> I will sing praises to you among the nations.

It borders on a kind of holy madness, don't you think? But this is what David gave to these beleaguered men. He gave them God and a model of life lived before Him and for His purposes. Perhaps this is a bit of what Asaph meant when he wrote Psalm 78:70-72:

> [70]He chose David his servant
> and took him from the sheepfolds;
> [71]from following the nursing ewes he brought him
> to shepherd Jacob his people,
> Israel his inheritance.
> [72]With upright heart he shepherded them
> and guided them with his skillful hand.

Jesus came to give life to the full and He did it with His leaders then and is still imparting life to them now so that they can do likewise.

6th Priority – Jesus was and is deeply committed to protect His own from danger. He sees the wolf and stands His ground. He is utterly one with these sheep, not a single hair of a hireling on His head. He's got them in His hand and will ward off any "snatcher". Not going to happen. He's alert to danger and aggressive toward an attack. Again, David displays this wonderfully to King Saul when He describes his protection of his father's flock in I Samuel 17:34-36:

> [34]But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, [35]I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. [36]Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

That bear or lion got far more than they anticipated. I love Paul's letter to the Galatians. Rather intense, wouldn't you say? Consider Galatians 1:8-9:

> [8]But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. [9]As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Or Galatians 5:12:

> [12]I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

I fear the emasculation of the modern Christian leader. Increasingly, I see men unwilling to fight for the flock or enter the places of danger with a clear authority. We are increasingly becoming "men without chests" as C.S. Lewis prophesied. But there is a great hope for us weaklings. Jesus has risen from the dead and reigns on high from a throne of grace. And He's sent the Helper to us. And He's as strong as Jesus. And He's equipping us to be like the Good Shepherd with a holy ferocity that faces danger in His name and for His glory.

7th Priority – Jesus was not content with the size of the present flock. He wanted all that belonged to Him and was intending to go get them – John 10:16:

> [16]And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Isn't this wonderful? What a large heart He possesses. And that is what He is able to impart to all of His beloved leaders – a desire and determination to gather, to make one, to cross all humanly constructed boundaries and see a people come together who, by their life and mission, bring glory to God.

One leader that I work closely with pastors a congregation of about 400 – but there are 26 nations represented! He is a consummate gatherer and the more diverse, the better he likes it. I don't have that gift, but I love being around it. It's like Jesus. He's not stopping until everyone is in. He'll keep laying down His life until the end.

I've put these forward as priorities of Jesus. And, of course, He's better than all of this. But for an undershepherd of the flock that is entirely owned by Jesus (remember that), these priorities ought to inform our own leadership and when we stray ourselves they will serve as a bit of a plumb line for our service to this "Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20).

CHAPTER 9

A Pastoral Suffering

Apart from the very life and ministry of Jesus, the apostle Paul provides the greatest insights and example of pastoral care. He had been personally captured by Jesus and infused with His Holy Spirit and the most defined expression of the gospel. His understanding of life was rooted in "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." And a central part of his calling was described by Jesus to Ananias in Acts 9:16 – "…I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." And so Paul talks to the Philippians of his deep longing to "know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Philippians 3:10)."

Jesus' incarnate and redemptively necessary suffering began in Mary's womb. Mary's anxiety over Joseph's decision to divorce her (Matthew 1:19), the arduous 70-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the 9th month of pregnancy, the dismal settings for his birth and the fugitive existence in Egypt were a foretaste of yet more profound challenges. Consider the near unfathomable reality of the morally perfect Son of God living among such profound distortions of the image of God that He was aiming to restore to those who would trust Him. John said it this way, "He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him." (John 1:10-11) For perhaps 20 or 25 years he lived in an obscure hamlet in Galilee, knowing his calling, filled with wisdom (remember him with the temple scholars in Luke 2:49-52?) and morally perfect (I Peter 2:22, Hebrews 4:15, 7:26). Later on, his townsfolk tried to kill him (Luke 4:28-30) and his own family though him to be "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). The crowds used him, the religious elite disdained him, plotted to kill him and ultimately succeeded. His own disciples were regularly obtuse and later betrayed, denied and abandoned him.

He was even mocked by criminals in the middle of his horrific execution. What would possess anyone to yearn for this kind of pain? What benefit lay hidden in the middle of that misery? Of course we know and believe that this was the Savior's chosen path, to literally fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (52:13-53:12) in remarkable detail. But what do we make of Paul's desire for the same treatment?

In his letter to the brethren of Colossae, Paul speaks poignantly about the preeminence of Christ (1:15-23) declaring majestically that "in him all things hold together" (1:17). HE is the center of existence in the universe and yet he became human to, as Augustine says, "make us divine". And it was his embrace of the human condition, its deep brokenness and spiritual death, which redeemed us from fruitless lives and eternal death. As he continues in this letter (1:24 – 2:5), Paul unpacks his pastoral strategy. The first question that must be answered from this passage is, "What could possibly be 'lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church'" (1:24)? And what does Paul mean by "filling up what is lacking"? From the standpoint of redemption, of course, nothing is lacking in Christ's sufferings. It was a finished work, once for all, saving event punctuated by the Father's own tearing of the temple curtain at the very second of Jesus' death. But what is lacking is all of the incarnational pastoral suffering that proceeded from the soul and body of Jesus as he taught, healed, corrected, challenged, exorcised,

endured the sinfulness of those closest to him and never flinched from the purpose of His existence. Jesus is no longer present in body to suffer with us in the same way He did for those three short years of ministry. But now through the gift of His Spirit He can live through pastoral leaders, in particular, to carry on His shepherding work in the lives of His people and among the lost. Paul's "filling up…in my flesh" what is lacking is then an expression of Jesus caring for His flock through Paul's body and soul. Jesus is no longer present to enter into the human suffering of a broken Samaritan woman, a conflicted tax collector, a confused friend or a demonized Gadarene. He's not here to train rough-hewn fishermen into men of grace and spirit. And so Paul must fill up that lack. And it will involve similar sufferings endured by Jesus. Pastoral leaders must budget on these kinds of sufferings:

- Being used by people to help them live a happier life on earth, often having no desire for eternal truth or blessing.

- Entering the deep brokenness of another soul with hope but no guarantees of quick reversals or healings. And continuing to stay with them in and through their suffering.

- Being misunderstood, slandered and perhaps vilified for doing God's will and thoroughly pleasing God. Of course, this doesn't preclude the many times we do our work improperly and sinfully. Then we must humble ourselves, repent and do it right. Peter speaks to the servants of this kind of suffering and God's disposition toward it. And the same applies to leaders. Listen to his thinking in I Peter 2:18-25:

> [18]Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. [19]For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. [20]For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21]For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22]He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23]When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24]He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [25]For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

- Working hard, enduring difficulty patiently, serving sacrificially and it all being largely unnoticed, unappreciated or corrected for the minor defect amid major faithfulness.

Avoiding bitterness here cannot be a matter of will power but rather an authentic identification with Jesus in His pastoral sufferings, a filling up as it were, of what is lacking by His bodily absence. And this path of suffering and fellowship not only helps to conform us to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:29) but makes us a resource for others.

Consider Hebrews 5:8-9 – "[8]Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9]And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,"

The Father clearly led the Son on a path of suffering well before the ultimate suffering of the trial, scourging and crucifixion. The Incarnation was suffering. But Jesus' unbroken submission to the Father's will at every juncture of His life and ministry was designed and needed to satisfy the holiness of God and make Jesus the "source of eternal salvation to all who obey him". Now as leaders are conformed to the image of Jesus, both in character and particular giftings, it is impossible to skip or circumvent this path of necessary suffering. It is here that we learn and here that we become a resource to others of God's wisdom, power and salvation. We are not pretending to be Jesus, nor do we try to draw men to ourselves in some perverse way. We are servants of Jesus "for the sake of his body" (Colossians 1:24) and we are being shaped by obedience, faithful suffering so that we become more and more expressive of the true source of salvation. The Incarnation goes on. Jesus lives in His people and peculiarly in His pastoral leaders.

In Colossians 1:28-29, Paul outlines the goal of pastoral care, its focus and practices. The goal is "to present everyone mature in Christ". This is daunting stuff, but if we have a reasonably clear idea of what this kind of maturity looks like, we have at least a solid direction to head for improvement along the way. Paul gives the means of improvement: "Him we proclaim". It is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, the work God did in Him in the Incarnation, Perfect Life, Atoning Death, Powerful Resurrection and Authoritative Ascension and Reign. Pastoral leaders must be thoroughly versed in "Him". Out of that primary revelation we are to warn and teach with all wisdom. Think of it – wise warnings, wise teachings that come out of clear understandings of Him and with clear helping power from His Holy Spirit. Paul says, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Paul's struggle was the same as Jesus – entering into the particular cultures of disintegration with the great deposit of truth and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Every culture was somewhat different, just as every individual soul is shaped by its own personal history of relationships, sin, events, love and grace. Entering an individual soul is not so different than sensitively entering a culture. Paul cajoles the Athenians into giving him a hearing at the Areopagus. He was beat up and jailed in Philippi and head to flee Thessalonica. Each culture demanded an adjustment on Paul's part – first to Jesus and then to the culture. Paul was under the same call of Christ – to follow Him by being where He was in a culture or a culture or an individual. Paul's calling was to proclaim Christ and then allow the Spirit to engage him in the struggle for maturity in a church or a believer.

Consider these instances:

- Paul spends a year and a half in Corinth "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11). Not so long after his departure, he receives word that this church is in profound upheaval. There are at least twelve significant pastoral and theological challenges that he must address. No cell phones, no e-mail, not even over-night

mail. And his pastoral authority is under serious question. His second letter to these folks is a remarkable example of pastoral suffering and is worth serious study by everyone called to this kind of work. The particular group of churches with which I am affiliated uses an artist's portrayal of broken shards of clay on our ordination certificates to depict the reality of 2 Corinthians 4:7-8 – "[7]But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;" Not only does this image rightly situate us in our humanness but is so helpful in properly perceiving the role of faithful suffering in the service of a pastoral leader. Listen to Paul again in 2 Corinthians 5:11 – "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience." Does God really give leaders over to death for Jesus' sake? Yes, of course – we're following Jesus, not Donald Trump!

- Paul's appeals to the Galatians are alternately aggressive and tenderly solicitous. Consider this: "…my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! (Galatians 4:19)" Was Paul over relating just a bit to their condition? I think not, but to engage something like this posture in our devotion to Jesus, His people and His mission our own inner man must regularly be brought to glad submission to this One who sacrificed intentionally and graciously because He loved His Father and He continually saw the glorious end of the Father's design.

- Or consider this simple pastoral appeal to two women leaders who were at odds in Philippi – "[2]I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3]Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:2-3) What was going on here? The same thing that goes on in every church of Jesus everywhere on the globe! We get tied up in each other's humanness and have difficulty getting extracted. Side by side workers for the mission of Christ who get disoriented by flaws and sins. Paul appeals to his "true companion" to help them get out of it. He tells his friend to head right into their little swamp and get them back onto a clear path. My simple approach starts with a question: Where is Jesus in this broken relationship with Euodia and Syntyche? He's not avoiding it, hoping it will evaporate. He wasn't cowed by Martha's accusations of Him and Mary ("Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." – Luke 10:40). He absorbs her disintegration and gently, firmly points her back to grace. He followed the Father in every situation. We follow Him.

- Think of Paul's exhortations to his beloved Timothy. He knew him well. As a very young pastor, I was so deeply impacted by three lectures by J.I. Packer on 2 Timothy. He identified Timothy as "Timid Tim". But whatever his personality type, Paul understood that Timothy was under his care – whether given to timidity or rashness, depression or pride. Paul served Jesus' interests in Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:6-8 – "[6]For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, [7]for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. [8]Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

2 Timothy 2:3 – "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

One pastoral leader calls another on into this meaningful, God-shaped suffering for others. Timothy is to be a source of grade to others. He can't get there any other way besides this holy suffering for Jesus' sake.

- There are many examples of this kind of pastoral suffering, but indulge me with one more. I love Paul's posture on his nightmarish voyage to Rome. He prophetically warns the centurion Julius to not weigh anchor – "…[10]saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." [11]But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. (Acts 27:10-11)" How many times have folks disregarded your wise input? And once they charge ahead into a complicated mess, what is your disposition? Certainly we can't control others' choices but we must continue to engage, often in groaning prayer, looking for entrance into the mess so that we can be agents of grace. Suffering? Yes, sometimes years of it and sometimes never seeing redemption or restoration. Is it worth it? A thousand times, yes! We are being conformed to the Son of God and being freed from that demanding self-absorbed instinct in all of us that insists that all things resolve well. Paul finds himself now in some incredibly wretched circumstances: "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. (Acts 27:20)". But he gets to God and pastors this chaos into safety:

  "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. [22]Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. [23]For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, [24]and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' [25]So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. [26]But we must run aground on some island." (Acts 27:21b-26)

  We belong to a God who has called us into broken lives and broken situations – to be there for Him, to be where He is. This is our calling and our worship.

Presenting "everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28) is a manly task for such jars of clay as you and me. But we must be heartened and confident with Paul's own testimony – "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." (Colossians 1:29) We are indwelt by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. When Jesus calls Peter to tend

His sheep, there is never a hint that the Son of God Himself will not be intrinsically involved in that work. He tells Peter again, only days before His ascension, to "Follow me" (John 21:19). He'll still be at work on the earth calling His beloved leaders into this struggling, suffering, glorious work.

In the first five verses of Colossians 2, Paul gives more detail to this work. It's not merely individual maturity in Christ. In fact, we can't get there alone – it's is a deeply corporate dynamic:

> [1]For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, [2]that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, [3]in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:1-3)

It's quite apparent, isn't it, that my capacity "to reach all the riches" of the treasures of Christ is deeply linked to a knitting together in love with all the other Colossians and Laodiceans with whom God has placed me. How can it be any other way if we are a people brought to birth by a Triune God who has lived from eternity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Jesus presses this to His leaders in John 15 with an inescapable divine logic:

- Abiding in Him occurs as we abide in His Word – "[9]As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. [10]If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (John 15:9-10)

- Abiding in His Word and Love results in utterly fulfilled joy – "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

- And the one pivotal Word he gives them is this – "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

As we give ourselves to this, we move beyond servants to friends. Of course, we are forever servants but more – friends of Jesus, fully embraced into this holy fellowship with the same confidence that He is seeking to impart to these eleven leaders – "all that I have heard from the Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Is this still His posture? Does He offer to us what He offered to them? With a great sense of awe, we must say yes. With all of our frailty and brokenness, He has chosen us to bear much fruit for Him. And this fruit must work out into a community of love that reflects who God is to His beloved and broken world. This is what Paul sees as he exhorts the Colossians together to reach "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3) hidden in Christ. A great struggle, yes, but dear God, what a great reward!

CHAPTER 10

Engaging Another's Disintegration

Jesus selected an unusual combination of men to be trained as leaders of His continuing mission on the earth – four fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot and six others who were not particularly known for their human achievements. He claimed early on to be the Messiah, but that revelation evolved over time for these men. They witnessed and participated in remarkable miracles. They heard the most profound teaching to enter a human heart. They saw love and wisdom incarnate. Lepers were totally healed. Paralytics walked free. Dead people walked out of tombs. And Jesus expressed most of this in a rather unspectacular fashion. No grandiose performances, minimal fanfare – in fact, He repeatedly called His followers to keep things quiet. He was teaching them the ways of his Father. In all of His divinity, He was beautifully humble. And this was His call to his followers:

> [28]Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29]Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30]For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Learn of me. As we are called to care for His flock we are to do so out of a rest in union with Him, yoked to Him and His people and His mission, learning Him and how to let Him work through us to the good of others.

It is arguable that the most broken personality in all of Scripture was the Gadarene demoniac. He lived naked, among the tombs, sometimes driven into the desert by the demons, breaking off iron shackles when the town folk tried to control him in their efforts to feel somewhat safe from his unpredictable and terrifying movements. A lot of demons actually lived inside this poor broken soul. Perhaps he had lived so wretchedly that he had become wide open to their grotesque influence. No matter. Jesus didn't interview him to get to the bottom of his human responsibility. He was completely given over to evil and completely unable to do a thing about it. And Jesus walks right into the middle of this human disintegration, fully confident of His authority and His mission. This horror was why He had come.

The disciples had just endured a harrowing boat excursion on the lake. Following Jesus increasingly stretched the borders of their human capacity – all the crowds, these sick folk, the unending human misery that pressed toward them. And now this completely challenging scenario. Whatever pastoral skill they thought they had attained to this juncture must have felt pitifully inadequate. And they watch Jesus walk toward him. What were they thinking?

- "I don't believe this chap wants us here. Let's try another beach."
- "I'm completely shot. Can we table this for another day?"
- "Do we have to get involved with every crisis that presents itself?"
- "Can we take a vote on this one?"

Or perhaps the stark terror of this human deformation paralyzed them into a weak-kneed acquiescence to keep following Jesus – at a safe distance. But the Integrating Personality of the

Universe sorted out these quivering demons in an expeditious manner – "Go." (Matthew 8:32) And they were gone to the chagrin of many pigs. The result was complete healing, a remarkable re-integration of this man's entire existence. He begged Jesus to let him "be with him" (Luke 8:38).

This event was part of their training. Jesus is unafraid of the worst, the most disintegrated and deformed. He knows who He is and what He possesses. And He calls us to be where He is – that's where He expects His servants to be. I've had minimal experience with demons and nothing remotely approximating the magnitude of this scenario. And I don't believe that most pastoral leaders will ever face the horror of this unpleasantness. However, we will face difficult and profoundly challenging realities in the lives of so many who have been afflicted by the evil propagated by Satanic forces and the spirit of this world, not to mention the continuous workings of sin in the human heart. Following Jesus will mean learning to walk into variable disintegrations with real confidence in the power of the gospel and the very power of the Holy Spirit to transform. This is what He did and it continues to be what He does. And He calls us on into the fray, equipped with all we need to be channels of His grace.

We live in the age of the managerial and therapeutic. Christian leaders are increasingly uncertain about their capacity to handle various levels of human brokenness. We are easily cowed by the "experts". And yet there certainly are times when yielding to good expertise is entirely appropriate. The loss of community in our culture and the rebuilding of the same within church bodies is a crucial x-factor that plays a large part in the care and maturing of human souls. As a young believer, I was quite impacted by a sociological survey done over a 25-year period of a small town in Pennsylvania (Roseto) that had very little incidence of heart attacks or mental illness. The survey revealed a tight-knight Italian-American community where identity was secure and mutual care was a given. As soon as the community broke up because of job changes or moves to the suburbs, their apparent immunity from heart and mental disease was lost. In fact, they rose above the national average. When individualism rules the day and the instinct for community is severely diminished, the "experts" are helpful – but only in a stop-gap fashion. Most maturing and healing was meant to unfold organically within the context of Christ's Spirit and His people who obey His new commandment to love one another as He loved them.

Reading a book on pastoral care is a bit like reading a book on how to play tennis. Helpful thoughts can be proffered and primitive wisdom acquired, but the sooner you get onto a court with a racket and somebody who knows what they're doing, the quicker will be your progress. I was taught tennis by Herb Clements. Not only was he a Big Ten doubles champion, but also the most patient, encouraging man I know. Early on in my training, I was terrible but he found something good to say about even my serious flaws:

- "Good power!" as I hit the ball over the fence
- "Good get!" as I managed to barely get my racket on the ball
- "Nice form!"

Sometimes he would offer gentle advice like "You might want to try holding the racket this way" (i.e. the proper way). And when I actually did something well he would drop his arms and seem

genuinely awed by my progress: "Ned, that was wonderful!" I kept coming back in large part because Herb made me believe I had potential. I got better, and although I never beat Herb I grew to love the game (there must be tennis in heaven and there, with my resurrected body, I'm feeling better about my chances against Herb!).

Jesus entered into the lives of 12 men for three years – he loved them, taught them, corrected them, suffered them and continued to call them on into the full expression of their calling. Peter's two epistles are such gracious testimonies of a tempered, gracious leader. In his early days with Jesus, he was rash and reactionary and at the end we hear him speak so poignantly of suffering and virtue and the glory of God. He even affirms Paul who had once challenged him so directly at Antioch (Galatians 2). Peter takes his apostolic/pastoral place among the flock of God in these letters and calls them to follow Jesus as he had been called by the Master:

> [21]For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.
> [25]For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (I Peter 2:21 & 25)

Entering effectively into the soul of another to help them toward maturity in Christ is an important feature of pastoral care. Beyond orthodox sermons and healthy organizational wisdom, this activity is at the heart of biblical shepherding. The aberrant "shepherding" movement of the 70s was certainly askew on numbers of levels but it was not without a measure of wisdom and grace. How do we understand Scriptures like these?

> Hebrews 13:17 – "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."
>
> 2 Corinthians 13:10 – "For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down."
>
> 1 Timothy 4:11-12 – " [11]Command and teach these things. [12]Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."
>
> Titus 1:13 – "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,"
>
> 1 Corinthians 4:14-16 – " [14]I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15]For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. [16]I urge you, then, be imitators of me."

Our disintegrating culture has been deeply defined by political correctness, gender confusion and a wholesale departure from objective truth. Our men are increasingly emasculated, unable to

find their way through the morass much less lead anyone else with great effect. But this is exactly where we must follow the risen Christ – He knows no bounds and is daunted by nothing. He remains the Master at engaging and transforming a human soul. And He has chosen to use the likes of us to do it.

Given the present cultural terrain, what are the main issues we will encounter in the pastoral care of others?

- Gospel Understanding and Conversion – it is my contention that most evangelical Christians have a very weak understanding of the gospel of grace and little perception of walking by the Spirit. This is the foundation that cannot be neglected. Otherwise, what will we be building upon? Us? Teaching His flock will require a constant vigilance that forever points the believer to their identity in Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. If we fail here, we risk the horror of seeing grace deformed into a life-sucking moralism that neither saves nor transforms.

- Corporate Understanding and Conversion – our cultural disintegration has deeply influenced the American evangelical church. Our assemblies are often full of consumers of religious goods and services while we diligently vend them. Spirituality has morphed into whatever particular concoction one conceives ("I'm finding God in the Enneagram with some aromatherapy and a splash of Zen"). The call to peoplehood and service and brotherhood "feels, like, so last year." But how do we own Jesus and not His people? We have been baptized into the Body of Christ. My life is bound up with these people in Jesus. And if a soul doesn't get that, it loses.

- Missional Understanding and Conversion – Jesus called us to make disciples everywhere. Disciples are not consumers – they are missionaries, a people sent on a mission (I highly recommend the words of "The Gospel and our Culture Network – GOCN. They have incisively addressed this matter. In particular, consider The Missional Church, edited by Darrell Guder and The Continuing Conversion of the Church by Guder). The goal of pastoral care is to make disciples, those who are able to contribute fruitfully to the mission.

To effectively enter the brokenness of another we must not only be reasonably whole ourselves but have a very clear spiritual perception of what wholeness in Christ looks like. I am convinced that these three understandings and conversions form the template for making mature disciples of Christ. But merely knowing this is insufficient. Someone has to enter in and engage the soul of another. All of this happens of course within the context of a pastoral structure – corporate worship and prayer, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, small group fellowship, missional outreaches, etc. But the influence of a pastoral leader out not to be underestimated.

As a very young Christian I struggled mightily with condemnation. My perception of the gospel was quite misshapen. I had a great sense of the call of God on my life, but an even stronger sense of my own filthiness before a holy God. I felt a bit of Luther's agony and wasn't finding much relief. One evening after a midweek worship and teaching meeting, I went up for prayer from the elders. I was quite ashamed of my bad patterns of spiritual discipline, my ineptness

with my new wife, my struggle with lustful thoughts, my unbelief regarding finances, etc., etc. I waited to be the last one to go for prayer because I didn't want anyone else to hear my sins. At the end, only one elder remained and me. This elder was the head of this particular community. I sat before him, head bowed, and laid out my woeful condition. I expected him to be quite disappointed and then lay out a path of rigorous spiritual exercises that would fix me. Instead, after a few moments of silence he said something like this: "Ned, when I see you, I see a man who is hungry for God and ready to do whatever it takes to become more like Jesus." Now, even though he didn't unpack Romans 3:21-28 for me and thoroughly explain justification by faith, something profoundly gospel-like engaged my soul. I didn't feel Wesley's strange warmness, but I think I could identify a bit with Lazarus as he emerged from the tomb. Larry Ballard saw the new creation within me and was calling it out. I began to see that I was not my sins, but I was a beloved son of God, a new creation that needed development for sure but accepted and empowered. It was profoundly incarnational and this is what we must grasp – the incarnation of Christ continues through His people. He lives through us and in a very particular way through pastoral leaders.

I have directly discipled many men over the years, but as I grow in my own capacity for this work I become increasingly clear of what they ought to expect from me. I told them that I could bring them a piece of what they needed and that they ought to pay close attention to the author and perfecter of their faith so that they could receive what I could give and be open to others who could add more. God shapes us in three main ways, often intertwined:

- By the objective truth of His Word
- By the subjective witness of His Spirit
- By the incarnational love of His Body

The Word, the Spirit and the Body. It is this third dynamic that is our central theme. But the place of the Word and the Spirit are co-existing within whatever place a pastoral leader plays. Over the course of my years in Christ, God has used four men to impart "pieces" into my life and which in turn I have sought to pass on. These men all had pastoral authority in my life and I am deeply grateful to Christ for using them to give Himself to me:

- Larry Ballard gave me a passion for God's Word and a desire to teach it passionately. Beyond that, he was the clearest example I've ever seen of personal sacrifice and moral integrity. I am always constrained to be a better man because I was with him. Larry is presently the head of Youth With A Mission's Family Ministries worldwide.

- Bill Lemke was the founder of Eden Ministries (now with YWAM), a discipleship training school where I taught and pastored for four years. This was the most key developmental time in my life and it was Bill who challenged me and released me into so many of the disciplines and expressions that mark my present service. Beyond that, he may have been the most faithful, hard-working man I have ever known.

- Bob Morris was my pastoral leader for four years. Nobody ever got "up in my face" more than him. He addressed weaknesses in my life graciously and straightforwardly. I simply learned a lot about being spiritually male from Bob.

- Ray Nethery is the founder of the ARC (Alliance for Renewal Churches). He worked closely with Bill Bright in Campus Crusade for years and spent a season with Francis Schaeffer and L'Abri. When I felt that my life and ministry was imploding in 1991, it was Ray who after getting my desperate phone call, hopped on a plane from Cleveland to Minneapolis, spent seven hours with me and got back on a return flight because of prior commitments. It is this kind of commitment that has been saving in my life. And his exercise of humility is constantly instructive to me. Ray remains my pastor to this day.

Each of these men gave me a piece. And if I am attentive, I believe there are "pieces" to be acquired from innumerable sources. But the influence of a pastoral leader has great potential to help a soul out levels of disintegration. That is precisely where we must follow Jesus and be where He is.

CHAPTER 11

Developing Pastoral Leaders

The record passed down to us of the 3-year ministry of Jesus is remarkable in multiple ways. Yes, as Christians, we believe it to be a most significant piece of the inspired Word of God and, as such, compels our devout attention. But where else do we have the details of a leader's words, works and leadership priorities given with such clarity and emotional nuance? There are five chapters of John's gospel (chapters 13-17) that cover only a few hours – significant hours to be sure – but think of it – John's inspired thoughts and Jesus' actual words and actions on the day before His suffering press us with a divine perspective that out to radically inform our own practices.

Consider some of the details of the Last Supper. Jesus had poured Himself into these twelve men for three years and though they are still largely unaware of the impending realities of torture and death (although Jesus had been pressing these things to them for months), he patiently walks them through some critical understandings. And he begins with an unforgettable object lesson. He washes the feet of the twelve men that He has been mentoring for the past three years.

John pulls back the veil from Jesus' actions in the first three verses of the thirteenth chapter:

John 13:1-3 – "[1]Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. [2]During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, [3]Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,"

Consider the things that Jesus knew:

- That the very hour of His ordeal and horror was upon Him. He was aiming this way on purpose (John 12:27-28a – "[27]"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. [28]Father, glorify your name.") but make no mistake, dark intensity was escalating parallel to his persevering obedience.
- That he was leaving this world to regain His pre-incarnate place with the Father but now as the God-man who was about to complete the Father's mission.
- That he had graciously loved these twelve men for these entire three years and was about to put a crowning visual punctuation on their training.
- That one of the twelve would be the great vessel of dishonor – Judas – and yet He still humbly washes his feet.
- That the father had given all things into His hands. He said as much in John 10:17-18 – "[17]For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18]No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to

lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

- That He had come from God. His very existence was the only begotten Son of the only God
- That He was going back to God. Mission almost accomplished, he was finishing well, continuing to eat the food of the Father's will, continuing to pour Himself into His beloved men – right to the very end.

Jesus, of course, defines the word "unique". Yet every leader in the Body of Christ must identify with their Master right here. What does Jesus model for every presiding or senior leader of His people and what are His expectations and desire for every leadership team that will come together around Him and His continuing mission on earth? He states it plainly – "For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you." (John 13:15) The most central disposition of a senior leader must be to follow Jesus to this place of serving the others that God has placed with him for leading His people and mission. This profound modeling of service given by Jesus to the twelve had been occurring in actuality for three years. Consider His relationship with Peter.

- Upon first meeting him (John 1:40-42), Jesus changes his name from Cephas (reed) to Peter (rock), thereby pointing him to a process of transformation that will be a direct result of his association with Jesus. Jesus sees it and begins the relationship by identifying who he is by relationship to Jesus, and who he will become has he continues to follow. This is pastoral foot-washing at its core – to be able to identify the new creation in every leader and call it out over a period of time and commitment. We recognize both the reed and the rock, but co-labor with the Holy Spirit and the Word to see the rock unfold.
- Sometime later, Jesus specifically calls Peter to follow him on the mission of God (Luke 5:1-11). He enters into a frustrating human circumstance (a night of fishing with no results) and reveals Himself as the one who is heading out on a mission of fruitfulness and is interested in enlisting others on this same great goal of "catching men". Calling men and women beyond themselves and their own self-centered objectives into the greatness of this eternal mission is still the central piece of developing pastoral leaders. They must see the greatness of both the One that calls and the calling itself.
- Throughout the three years of training, Jesus engaged Peter in various ways, all purposeful and focused on his own development. Consider these particular incidents:
    - Luke 8:40-48 – Jesus teaches Peter about spirituality. When He says that someone touched him, don't correct him out of your own merely earth-bound perceptions. Pay attention and learn.
    - John 6:60-69 – a test of commitment around words of Spirit and flesh. Jesus is so insistent about disciples following Him without complete understanding. He teaches trust in His person without every rational piece in place. What could he possibly mean by drinking His blood? Really? And Jesus doesn't rush to explain. He lets the

words play out while standing there among them. And Peter gets it right – "We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69).

- Matthew 14:22-23 – another test and opportunity to grow in faith – Jesus calls Peter out of the boat onto the storm-driven lake to be where He was. Peter does it. He responds to the word of Jesus and walks on water for a while. Wonderful, amazing, very instructive. He sinks as he gets focused on the tumultuous environment and his father limited experience in water-walking. Jesus chastises him for his "little faith" and "doubt", but what is so clear is that this little exercise will be played out over and over again in the ongoing mission – taking steps of faith upon the Word of the Lord to be wherever Jesus is.
- Matthew 16:13-23 – Here Jesus demonstrates the two control dynamics of developing pastoral leaders – encouragement and correction. Peter clearly speaks out the core identity of Jesus and receives the most wonderful commendation – that his revelation from the Spirit is utterly foundational to the building of the people of God and with the "keys of the Kingdom" hell will not be able to resist God's people or mission. What a profound sense of being on the "right page" Peter must have known at that moment.
- But not long after that, Jesus describes the destination of His mission and is rebuked by Peter who, no doubt, has run ahead of the Lord with his confidence in his own capacity to interpret not only the identity of Jesus but the appropriate steps to accomplish His mission. Jesus' rebuke is searing and extreme – Satan? What about the "rock" and the "keys" and the "in" with the Father in heaven? How can it be that a leader can be so right one moment and so desperately wrong the next?
- Matthew 17:1-8 – The Transfiguration was yet another opportunity for Peter to learn that his perceptions and unfiltered "good ideas" were not the best way to see unfolding events. Peter was not yet a good listener. The Father in heaven, in fact, decided to completely overshadow this incredible mountain scene with a bright cloud and speak audibly three things:
    - Jesus is my beloved Son
    - I am very pleased with Him
    - You must listen to Him

  What remained unspoken but perfectly clear were these things:

    - You weren't brought up to this place to help Jesus understand the next thing to do.
    - You must see how I have focused all things in my Son and how you relate to His lead will determine your own effectiveness as a leader
    - You really must work harder at listening. It will be the first order of your service to the Son from here to the end.
- Matthew 17:24-27 – Peter is accosted by the collectors of the wildly insignificant half shekel temple tax. Jesus, knowing of the encounter, uses this opportunity to teach Peter about larger truths and pastoral wisdom. And he teaches him by way of

"miracle fishing" and, to me, the greatest expression of humor from Jesus that we see in the Bible. The Lord of the Universe being required to pay a half-shekel temple tax? Absurd? But Jesus has Peter go fishing and have a sovereign encounter with a poor fish who has a shekel stuck in its mouth. "There you go, Peter, half from me, half from you, and we're good with these guys who have no understanding of who I am. But you do. And give my blessing to the fish with many thanks for his good service to us." Fanciful? Yes, but Jesus loved the men he was training and I'm sure did not fail to help them see the humor in human frailty and faulty perceptions.

- Matthew 19:27-30 – Peter is concerned about his future and the earthly wisdom of leaving a "real" job and a stable kinship network for…what? But Jesus presses him with the promise of an ultimately secure future both on this earth and the life to come. The promise of great reward for sacrificial following is a must for the perseverance of every developing leader. And Jesus is quite clear and confident, unwavering in His own certainty of the great reward of putting Him and His mission first, even at the cost of one's life
- Mark 9:33-37 – Although Peter is never specifically identified in any of the multiple times that Jesus addressed the recurring issue of internal arguments regarding who was to be considered the greatest disciple, one cannot realistically imagine Peter being anywhere but the center of those exchanges. This particular event recorded by Mark took place in Peter's hometown. Remember, Jesus is developing pastoral leaders and they will have to unlearn the proud, competitive dynamics typical of aggressive male personalities. Note how Jesus handles this particular event.
    - He asks them about their discussion and gets no response because by this time in their relationships they know that He knows.
    - He sits down and they all get ready for a lesson
    - He talks to them about servant leadership
    - He then asks a neighbor child to stand among the twelve. Think of the atmospheric weight of this episode – a little boy stands among the twelve proud competitors
    - After some moments (and perhaps a confusingly lengthy few moments) Jesus takes the child in his arms and draws their focus to what it will mean to be related to Him and the Father. It will demand an ongoing humility regarding their attitudes to whom they are called to serve. They health of their relationship to the Father rand Son are at risk if they will not serve those whom they see as the least or the insignificant.
- John 13: 6-10 – During this most profound object lesson, our beloved brother Peter once again makes assumptions rooted in his own sense of propriety. Twice he tries to tell Jesus the right way to do this ministry. He remains far too confident in his own sense of leadership priorities and far too questioning of Jesus' actions. But note the patient grace of the Son of God to this one who has been chosen for a particular place in His mission. Jesus tells Peter that he doesn't understand, but the will. Just pay attention. Be humble. Listen. But no, Peter races on to his own conclusions. He's reactionary still,, not yet integrated around the heart of the Father and Son. But he'll

learn because the love of the Son is steadfast beyond all frailty and spiritual obtuseness.

- Luke 22:31-34 – Jesus previews Peter's denials and at the same time affirms His ongoing commitment to see him through to the other side. He lets Peter know about the demand of Satan (no doubt a hellish design on every leader's life and ministry) and the pastoral care with which Jesus counters ("I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail") and the clear hope that Jesus possesses for this "rock" who still exhibits a good bit of "reed" ("And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers"). And once again Peter tells Jesus that He is misguided. Peter remains quite sure of himself and consequently quite vulnerable to the one whose own pride precipitated his demise. Satan was a leader who squared off against the Almighty and was thrown from the greatest heights. Now Jesus warns Peter of this evil one's intrusions.
- The Garden, arrest, denials and the "look"

  Peter's sifting begins in the garden. He falls asleep on Jesus three times. Jesus teaches even during these lapses about the need to be with Him in His suffering, about the willing spirit and the weak human nature, about the need to pray against the inevitable temptations that afflict us from inside and outside. What amazing care even through some of the worst behavior of a trainee who had been given the best modeling in all of the annals of human history. And as Jesus is being arrested, Peter exerts his best human effort in the ear slicing of a high priest's servant. So the arrest halts as Jesus undoes another blunder by this "reed". And, indeed, within the next few hours, Peter denies any relationship with Jesus. Three times. And the third is remarkable: "Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear 'I do not know the man'." (Matthew 26:74) As the cock crows, Jesus turns and looks at Peter (Luke 22:61). What was in the look? Without doubt, commitment to this leader at his worst – "but I have prayed for you." Could it be that even while he was being dragged through the suffering of this hideous arrest and trial that Jesus was praying for Peter? Of course. He's that good. And particularly when we are failing in our most embarrassing moments and lowest expressions of our sinfulness.

  And Peter finally breaks. He weeps bitterly. He sees his crudeness, his terrible pride. And he sees it in the face of One who is utterly blameless and perfect, One who has already poured His best out to Peter. And he has responded not just poorly, but despicably, horrifically. But somehow there is grace to remember that this has all been predicted and beyond that, a predicted return to lead the brotherhood. And here we have one of the most blatantly counter-intuitive moves unfolding before us. This great failure is continuing to be groomed for primary leadership. And the revelation of the depth of his sin doesn't lead to a Judas-like suicide, but somehow to a return to an uncertain connection to the brothers and ultimately to Jesus. He has been sustained by grace during his worst time just as he will be sustained during his best times.
- John 21:1-23

Here I think is the pinnacle of Jesus' pastoral care to Peter. It is here in this incredible narrative that I am drawn to devotion to this Jesus. Herein lies the deepest and loveliest expression of leadership grace ever beheld. Consider the emotional terrain – Jesus is being rather mysterious in His interactions with the disciples and with Peter, in particular, all is not clear. But Jesus arranges a sunrise breakfast on the beach for His boys and He intends a particular expression with Peter.

Peter charges off to go fishing. He is uncertain, no doubt, about his capacity to be a spiritual leader. But he knows how to fish, and he needs a bit of success to affirm his worth, don't you think? Now I am quite sure of this – there is no way under heaven that Peter was going to catch one fish that night. The Author of Life and the legitimate Lord of all the fish in that lake was arranging another intersection in Peter, development that would seal his identity and destiny. Consider the all-night efforts of these seven disciples – cast after cast of nets into the dark, hour after hour with nothing – a resounding zero. Failure upon failure, now exhibiting in the physical efforts and compounding their spiritual efforts. By the time the sun rises, I think, everyone is not only exhausted but frustrated and, perhaps, lost in their own thoughts of these past three years and these past few days and what the future may hold. Who am I anymore? What am I supposed to do?

But the "stranger" stands on the shore and addresses them as "children" and thereby touches the deepest core of any leader. When all of the human frills and proud conventions are removed, when we stand in our boats with nothing to show and Jesus stands on the shore calling to us, we are just children to His wise paternal goodness, wisdom and capacity. Peter's done his best and has no fish – not one – to show for it. So the kindly stranger invites them to one more toss with a prediction of finding "some". Why not, right? And I think out of the same spent emotion they actually do it. Why in the world would they listen to whoever this is? But they do it. And, I think, at His provocation, 153 "large fish" crowd their way into this net. Hours of nothing and a moment of absolute pandemonium. Completely unpredictable and unexplainable except for…

And this failed disciple (with help from a more sensitive compatriot) gets refocused on the One who is relentlessly good and committed and determined to bear His fruit through a chosen one. But this profound pastoral care to a leader is just beginning. Jesus invites Peter to "bring some of the fish that you have just caught". Isn't this wonderfully gracious? Peter's all-night efforts produced a resounding zero and one obedient net drop garners 153. But Jesus is so willing to share the glory of the catch. And in typical style, Peter doesn't bring "some", but hauled the whole net ashore. As he proceeded in, did he search the eyes of Jesus for affirmation? Jesus clearly has a different appearance in His resurrected body, but was unmistakable in His gracious presence. I am quite sure Peter saw a piece of the same look Jesus gave after his third denial – "…and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32) That's the look – a sovereign confidence in His own choosing that eclipses our sin and frailty, a deep love for His chosen ones, not only in their faithfulness but even more in their breakdowns.

But when they all arrive on shore, they are met with a brilliant pastoral move – a men's leadership breakfast prepared by the Son of God. He serves them still. And

they eat without words, yet volumes are being uttered incarnationally. They have no doubt eaten many meals together. During the last one, the Master had washed Peter's feet. And He continues here. He's still serving them. They've all failed and behaved poorly but Peter, who has been clearly called to a leadership among these leaders, has publicly disowned the Master and will need a public restoration. Jesus does it brilliantly – three questions regarding Peter's devotion to Jesus and three commands to give expression to this relationship in the way Peter cares for the sheep of Jesus. The third question got to Peter emotionally but Jesus knows that Peter must feel some pain here – not condemnation – but the sting of facing his own humanness in the light of Jesus' perfection – a kind of call to radical self-distrust. And Jesus presses the issue more deeply. He pointes to the kind of death Peter will die to God's glory. This is amazing stuff – the catch of fish was exhilarating, the breakfast was comforting, the questions were painfully assuring, but why talk about the manner of his death? I think it is an expression of Jesus' sovereign authority over Peter's life even to the kind of death he'll die. Jesus has it all in tow and brings Peter back to ground zero: "Follow me". It all comes back to this – be where I am, do what I tell you, live the life that I have sovereignly ordained for you. And by doing that you will be an integrating force in the middle of colossal disintegration.

And all of this divine pastoral care, of course, must leave such a holy imprint upon Peter that he lives in the glory of it for months afterward. Well, no, not really. In fact, immediately that competitive ugliness emerges and Peter challenges Jesus about John's path of life. I wince every time I hear Peter say, "Lord, what about this man?" It is so you and me, isn't it? I'll be sacrificial as long as everyone else is or at least as long as they notice how sacrificial I'm being. Not so lovely. And Jesus' "…what is that to you?" is just right for all of us, the very pastoral care that we all need periodically in the name of Jesus.

The pastoral care of Peter doesn't end with Jesus' earthly ministry. The Spirit empowers him for bold preaching and miracles in Jerusalem and elsewhere. He is able to confront the Sanhedrin with what he didn't possess when a little servant girl challenged him about his relationship to Jesus. He is called into more expressive ministry to the Gentiles in the Jesus-authorized vision in Acts 10 and even there we see a bit of his "personality" – "By no means, Lord" (Acts 10:14) But Peter, this is where I am, it's what I'm doing and remember, you're not inventing this as you go along. You're following me.

Paul has to correct Peter in Antioch for acting like a coward and distorting God's revelation. But finally we have two wonderful pastoral letters from this man that display wisdom and humility particularly about the development of virtue and the call for leaders to lead out of grace and wisdom. "Clothe yourselves all of you with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'." (I Peter 5:5) Jesus has mastered this man and he is passing on that grace to those in this love of following the Christ Shepherd.

To be where Jesus is, to follow him, to be his servant in development pastoral leaders, we must pay close attention to His ways with Peter. And the very Spirit of Jesus will make those things clear to us and use us to impart the same to those in the line of following.

CHAPTER 12

Pastoral Care for Leaders

Where is it written that "Once you become a leader of God's people, you will no longer require pastoral care or further development"? Nowhere. Yet the empirical evidence would appear to affirm that statement. In fact, leaders are thoroughly neglected in this area of pastoral care and I am convinced it is near the top of the list of reasons for pastoral burn-out and failure. Someone comes out of seminary, applies for a position, meets with the board, preaches a sermon and is handed the reins with often nothing more than a regular critique of subsequent sermons and progress toward missional objectives. This can't be what Jesus meant when He washed the feet of those 12 leaders the night before He died and told them to do the same. Indeed, He meant for these men to be involved in each other's lives in a similar way to His own care for them – encouraging, correcting, persevering, envisioning and simply being in each other's darkest challenges.

As a very young believer I was deeply impacted by the life and ministry of Larry Ballard. Besides his wonderful preaching that awakened me to the glory of God's Word, he affirmed my calling to be a leader of God's people. He assigned multiple tasks to help me develop – worship leading, youth ministry, counseling and a sermon every now and then. I always wanted to pick up the pace but he never seemed rushed. And I watched his life. In fact, my wife Sue and I lived communally with Larry for two years and it was his demonstration of humility and sacrifice that was so compelling and formative to my understanding of leadership. During our early communal days (about 40 of us lived in a pleasant converted nursing home), a woman and her son needed to move in, but all the rooms were occupied. Larry and his wife and son occupied two adjoining rooms with a bathroom, and they decided to move across the hall to what amounted to be a very large closet – no windows, no walls and no bathroom. He didn't make a big deal out of it. He just couldn't see any grace in not taking this woman and her son into the house, nor would he allow her to be situated in a closet. He would do that. He could handle that. The rest of us had a bit more trouble with it (would we all have to move into large closets?), but as it all unfolded and he seemed quite happy and fruitful, it turned out to be his best sermon so far. I've forgotten lots of sermons, but that one sits atop the heap.

Although that example is not exactly pastoral care for leaders, it at least broadens the perspective. There is no substitute for examples of victorious living by leaders. Larry wasn't as intentional in his pastoral care as I train others to be, but what I received from him was gold. And it raises an issue that I press to anyone receiving oversight from me. I am careful to call them to Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith, and to receive "the piece" that I can give through the Holy Spirit. I can't be everything, and they must be careful to not look to me that way. But I can and will bring a piece of Christ to them. Larry's piece to me was crucial.

My later relationship to Bob Morris was all about intentionality and directness. He wasn't intimidating but he was darn clear about the input he was giving me. He didn't cross lines of faith or integrity but taught me a lot about how to enter a man's life in love without crushing him, but also without letting him drift through life, leaving his responsibilities unfulfilled. I got

off of one phone call with Bob and reported to my wife, "Wow, I just got COR-rected." And it felt wonderfully secure and very personally helpful.

Ray Nethery has been my pastor for the past 15 years. He entered my life at a time of deep spiritual crisis. Actually, I called him and poured out my confused and fearful heart for hours. Ray's ministry emerged from years in Campus Crusade, where he would raise up new leaders for their work, and evolved into a ministry called Grace Haven that was similar to Schaeffer's L'Abri – a work-study environment that nurtured young believers into the next stage of growth. Many pastors came out of those days, and Ray naturally took on a mentoring role in their lives as they planted churches and engaged in ministry. What became eminently clear to Ray was the central necessity of caring for the souls of leaders. I've heard many of the stories of men who are connected to Ray. They are similar – "Ray and I took one of our long walks…", "I spent about three hours weekly on the phone with Ray…", "Ray saved my life". Ray is a father in the faith and I believe many fathers will arise to take his place. But can we get on very well without fathers? We live in an increasingly fatherless culture. The instinct is profoundly diminished. This loss is at the core of our disintegration and the recover of true spiritual fatherhood will be at the core of our healing.

I continue to talk to Ray weekly by phone. I see him six to eight times a year in person. And yearly, he takes my wife and I out to dinner. And he has never failed to ask this question: "Sue, in light of our time together and your relationship with Ned, is there anything you'd like to bring up that you feel is important for me to understand?" And she always – always! – has something to say. Not so long ago she requested a meeting with Ray and me to discuss a character issue – anger – that concerned her on a few levels. It was a very humbling time that opened the door to grace and sanctification. I had been sharing my own heart with Ray for months, but Sue upped the ante and opened the door for a fresh apprehension of the gospel in my own life.

Ray brings a piece of Christ into my life. It's significant, but not everything. He doesn't supplant Jesus, but rather cooperates with the work of the Holy Spirit in my life – encouraging, correcting, envisioning, being. I try to do the same with the leaders for whom I supply pastoral care. We don't go through a checklist together (Quiet time, check. Time with your wife, check. Sexual purity, check. OK, then…), nor do I have to ferret out problem areas. We are agreed to be together for a healthy accountability that occurs both in our times together rand one to one. And I "hijack" anything I can from the leaders in my life, make it my own and pass it on.

Having shared these anecdotes, let me press you into the Scriptures for a bit so that your grounding is rightly situated. In Zachariah 11:16, God speaks to four aspects of shepherding:

- Caring for those being destroyed
- Seeking the young
- Healing the maimed
- Nourishing the healthy

All of these, of course, are critical aspects of pastoral care and all can certainly apply to leaders at various stages of their journeys. But it is this last one that I think is often neglected. What does it mean to nourish the healthy? I remember Bob Morris speaking this to me: "Ned, you have a good marriage. Make it better." Our pattern is often to neglect what is healthy and drive

ourselves into depleted areas, hoping that health will be self-sustaining. But the great need is to replenish what we might call resource relationships. And beyond replenishment we are called by the very nature of God into creative development. Our own souls and our family relationships are great resources to be filled with God, but the continue replenishment of leaders is a great pastoral strategy for any church. And this must be a central responsibility of a senior leader. The kind of relationship that Jesus had with the twelve is more than instructive here. None of us bears or projects the completeness of Jesus' giftings, but if this pastoral dimension of nourishing the healthy is not present, one ought not be the senior leader. Pastoral leaders are developed by pastoral leaders. They won't all come out the same, thank God, and this will require anyone doing the mentoring to be where Jesus is at work in the life of this leader – what is their understanding of the gospel, their calling, their giftings, the mission of Christ, the people of God? How do they approach their primary relationships, their time, money, possessions? This takes a skillful hand to avoid overwhelming a potential or hurting leader. And I think it takes having done it within your own life. This is incarnational stuff, not some managerial or technological dynamic.

I've already addressed the model of Jesus with the 12 and particularly Peter. But let's consider Paul's relationships with timothy. In typical rabbinic style, Paul attaches him to himself and the mission and early on Timothy gets quite an eyeful. This second missionary journey (Acts 165-18) gets dicey rather quickly – they hit obstacles from the Spirit regarding entrance into certain areas. And by virtue of a dream to Paul, they end up in Philippi. But Paul and Silas get thrown into prison and where is young Timothy? Well, he's learning about ministry, probably praying with Lydia, learning to trust God when the plan seems to implode. But, God be praised, they have a miraculous event that moves them on to – angry mobs and more intrigue than this young man had budgeted for. They spend a year and a half in Corinth, a profoundly debauched city, which must have engendered its own challenge to this young man. And he sits under apostolic teaching and interacts daily with Paul. Eventually, Timothy is stationed in Ephesus and Paul writes him two very paternal letters filled with pastoral perspective. Most of the first letter is occupied with instruction about healthy church life:

> I Timothy 3:14-15 – "[14]I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15]if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth."

But I Timothy 4:6-16 merits deeper focus for our purposes. Note how he presses into Timothy's life and practices:

- To be a good servant of Jesus, you'll have to stay steeped in God's Word so you can pass it on to others (v. 6)
- You must avoid myths of the culture (v. 7)
- Train yourself in godliness (v. 7)
- Keep the end in view (v. 10)
- Be a proactive leader (v. 11)
- Set a behavioral example (v. 12)
- Pay attention to your gift (v. 14)
- Watch your life closely (v. 15-16)

Who presses you with these issues? And are there any that you care for in a similar way? These weren't canned questions. They proceeded out of the heart of God, who deeply cares for His leaders and chooses to do it again and again incarnationally. Books help a little bit. But ultimately we all need human vessels infused with the Spirit of God, ones who can wisely sort through our hearts and fears and gifts and confusions and practices. As a very young Christian, a respected leader gave me a birthday card and personally wrote out these verses:

> I Timothy 6:11-12 – "[11]But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. [12]Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Man of God? He thinks I'm a man of God! I kept that card in my Bible for years and would regularly pull it out and re-read those words. I wish I still had it. Somebody saw God in me and was calling it out. And God's Spirit in me was saying "Yes". And I learned to hear that "yes" also in the solitary place, all alone with God. But do we understand how crucial it is for leaders to receive care? We are forever confronting disintegration on multiple levels, regularly experiencing ministerial depletion. Who cares for your soul?

Paul's second letter to Timothy is even more personal and direct. Listen to Paul's care:

> II Timothy 1:3-7 – "[3]I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. [4]As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. [5]I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. [6]For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, [7]for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

He knows Timothy well – his history, his constitution, his giftings, his sincerity. And he's consummately *for* Timothy. Listen again:

> II Timothy 2:1-3 – "[1]You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, [2]and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [3]Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

He's calling him on into the same incarnational ministry that Paul exercised toward him. Pass this kind of grace on, Timothy. You've heard me, seen me make choices, watched my life practices, received my pastoral care – now pass it on and don't be stingy about it. Play the man, Timothy, suffer well. Paul reminds Timothy not only of words but of life practices:

> II Timothy 3:10-12 – "[10]You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11]my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra--which persecutions

> I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12]Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"

There is no reasonable substitute for this stuff. The very reality of the Incarnation demands that we pay close attention to how God chooses to relate to human beings, how he exercises care and how He actually shapes a life. It's words and Spirit and observable life and all the raft of human interactions that constitute life on this planet.

Jesus was the best leader and pastor in all recorded history. And He has left us more than a legacy – He's given us the very same Spirit that lived within Him. I believe that and what's more, I believe Romans 8:32 – "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Do you believe that? Graciously give us all things? Yes, not merely for our personal edification or enjoyment, but to become generous like Him, to love others like Him, to raise up leaders like Him. Yes, we live in a deeply marred culture and we need more than ever the armor of the Spirit. But this task is not too much. These are the works we were created to do. And by His grace we shall.

CHAPTER 13

The Master's Prayer for Integration

Where were you when you learned the awful reality of 9-11? Or the Challenger explosion? Or Kennedy's assassination? I know where I was sitting when I was engaged by the Holy Spirit regarding the weight of Jesus' prayer in John 17. It felt a bit like truth crashing through with clear personal and corporate implications. He's just about ready to walk out to the garden at Gethsemane, just after predicting Peter's denials and washing the feet of the disciples. He'll pray again in the garden, struggling with the impending enormity of the Father's will and then again on the cross for the forgiveness of His persecutors. But this prayer in John 17 is like a final will and testament. This is what He came for, what He lived and died for.

What pierced most incisively into my soul was the gravity with which Jesus prayed for unity, not a mere cooperation together for the sake of a cause, but the very interpenetration of persons (Greek – perichoresis) exemplified in the Trinity. Jesus prays this way:

> John 17:22-23 – "[22]The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23]I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

The most perfectly integrated human expresses his desire to the perfect Father not only for the unity of His people to let the world know the reality of God, but also prays out of the knowledge that our unity is predicated on Jesus' request – "that they also may be in us" (v. 21). Certainly, we are in the realm of spiritual mystery here. But it's not too mysterious. Let's think for a moment what this would imply for a leadership team. First, our capacity to lead together fruitfully would hinge on the reality and depth of what we owned together in spiritual relationship to the Triune God. Secondly, that life that a leadership team shared together would necessarily have to be infused with the Holy Spirit through regular prayer, sharing, study, decision making and a sufficient amount of "down time". Think of how much of that kind of human interaction Jesus shared with his disciples over a 3-year period – all of the journeys and simple relational unfoldings that occurred between all of the Bible passages. They shared a life on earth that gave wonderful expression to the Kingdom of heaven.

The circumstances and demands of a technological culture that values "bottom line" results over relational investments would seem to preclude any close imitation of Jesus' time with his leaders. However, we must push back against the crush of this kind of perversity and create space for a bit more organic "knowing" of each other. If we are to take seriously this prayer of Jesus, then we must give serious attention to leaders:

- praying together regularly
- studying together
- sharing hearts with each other
- taking retreats together
- traveling together

I hear your overcommitted groans! But at the very least we must see the priorities of this prayer and ask for grace to improve toward this ideal. There is no hope in merely throwing up our hands and declaring it to be only nice text to preach to folk who can barely keep pace with their present commitments.

This prayer of Jesus should be ingested and embraced because it must be what God the Father has ordained for every leader. Paul tells us that our pre-destiny in God is "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). The Holy Spirit is at work in every leader to shape us like Jesus – to be moved by His priorities, to feel the weight of His perspectives and to know the grace and wisdom that guards prayer and actions. Think through this prayer for a few moments and hear Jesus' heart as He groans for leaders to be integrated around Him and the Father, around each other and around the mission that will continue through them. The prayer has three distinct yet interdependent sections:

1. John 17:1-15

Jesus understands that the very core of His incarnate life was to bring glory to God. The second Adam succeeds where the first Adam failed. Jesus is now becoming the door to eternal life "to all whom you have given him". And Jesus affirms the core nature of this eternal life – it is a "knowing" of the Father and Son. It is a divine quality of relationship whereby any creature can live wonderfully with an eternal Creator – knowing His heart and mind, receiving His continuous provision, delighting in His calling and empowering. Jesus has lived this out in union with the Father's heart and mission. And He has modeled and taught this in particular to the twelve. Every word and act of Jesus was an expression of the Father, directly from this incredibly shared life. Jesus has demonstrated what it means to be where the Father is, to follow the Father's lead, to serve the Father as an obedient Son. He knows the Father in the deepest realms of relational knowledge. And out of that knowing, He has "accomplished the work" that He had been given. There were no gaps in the interior life of Jesus – perfect integration with the mind and mission of the Father.

And though none of us will know that level of holy integration this side of heaven, we must lean into the ongoing work of the Spirit in our hearts to improve our "knowing" and thereby to improve our missional fruitfulness to the glory of God. I use the word improvement deliberately because it is all too easy to fall into either ditch along this narrow path – to feel overwhelmed by the unattainable perfections of Christ's obedience, or to accept a less-than-vital expression of this union as good enough. Paul models a best response for all of us:

> Philippians 3:12-16 – "[12]Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [13]Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14]I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15]Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16]Only let us hold true to what we have attained."

Paul gets it right, doesn't he? "That I may know him…becoming like him" (Philippians 3:10). It is out of this knowing and integration that any believer bears fruit in the mission to which they are called.

2. John 17:6-19

Now Jesus puts His beloved leadership team before the Father. In fact, He begins by acknowledging that this team belonged to the Father and had been given to Jesus as a missional band to inaugurate the new people of the Kingdom. Jesus has "given them the words that you gave me" (John 17:8) and they have begun to enter into this "knowing" relationship and though Jesus' foundational training of them was complete, He continues on in His intercessory capacity. And He still does to this day and, in particular, for His leaders. He states it so plainly – "I am praying for them." Jesus rehearses again His union with the Father and now these have been brought into this most wonderful fellowship. Amazingly, Jesus says, "I am glorified in them." Can this be? Can Jesus Christ live in and among a group of leaders and be expressed in a glorious way through them? Yes, and listen to how he prays for them so that they get to that place:

- To be kept or protected in the name or nature of the Father; that is, that the very way they live and relate to one another, the priorities of their lives and common mission, would reflect the very nature of God and thereby keep them from the polluting elements of the world and the evil one.
- To be kept in unity, the kind that they have been joined to in the Father and Son by the Spirit. This cannot be stated too strongly – without authentic unity in a leadership team, the glory of God is diminished, even extinguished, and the fruitfulness of the mission is undermined.
- To be guarded from the abductions of evil. Jesus had been guarding them and will continue to do it in a new role of Savior-Intercessor.
- That His very joy would be fulfilled in them. What is the nature of that joy? Try this:

  > The pure joy of working together with loving, sacrificial people to achieve a goal that has wonderfully good and far-reaching benefit. The Father, son and Spirit have together laid down their life for the salvation and restoration of broken humanity. Now these leaders are called into that same joy. There is nothing to compare to this. It eclipses all other joys. It is similar to the response that Jesus makes to His disciples in John 4:34 when they invite Him to eat. He's eaten a better meal. He arrived where the Father was in the life of a broken woman and now a door had been swung open for a whole town of outcast half-breeds to enter into this "knowing". This is real food and real joy. Whatever delicious meal that you could come up with could only be a lovely little trinket compared to the priceless gems of the unfolding mission of God.
- That they would be sanctified in the word of truth or that their capacity to hear and discern the mind and heart of God would be transformative and deeply engaging to both relationship with God and His mission

Jesus' own consecration to the Father, His Word and His Mission will have a profound effect on these He is leading, just as any leader's consecration will beneficially affect the leadership team. These are his final prayer priorities – protection from evil, Trinity unity, fulfilled joy and lives shaped by God's word. These are the same things that any leader should pay attention to in his prayers for the team and his oversight of their lives. These questions might inform his pastoral thinking:

- How much intersection do we share together and is there a passionate determination to maintain it?
- What kind of unity do we share together and is there a passionate determination to maintain it?
- Are we tasting the joy of expressed mission, co-laboring with the Father, Son and Spirit?
- Does the Word of God inform and transform our life together and mission?

If Jesus has prayed for these things shortly before His ultimate sacrifice, is there any doubt that these same priorities ought to shape our praying and team building?

3. John 17:20-26

Finally, Jesus rightly anticipates us – and everyone who will be born by Spirit into this union with God and one another. Unity is the prevailing cry of His heart. And he very deliberately links that unity to the effectiveness of the mission to which He has called them (17:18). But His prayer at this point has even more relational specificity:

- v. 21 – "that they may all be one just as you Father are in me and I in you that they may also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."
- v. 23 – "I in them and you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."
- v. 26 – "I made known to them, and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

The Greek word perichoresis best approximates the prayer of Jesus. It signifies a kind of interpretation and, in this prayer, an interpenetration of personalities and virtue. Jesus is praying for nothing less than a full participation together of mind, heart, purpose and influence. It is what He has known with the Father and Spirit from eternity past and it is what humans were created for. Heaven will be the consummation of this hope and prayer, but there is a "right now" element of this perichoresis that we must experience with the Trinity and with each other if we are to rightly express His nature and mission to a broken and rebellious humanity.

Jesus is the Integrating Point for all humanity for salvation, that is, that every life would be reconnected to God through His death, resurrection and ascension, and the gift of His Spirit within us. Jesus is quite simply praying that the real experience of every leadership team of congregation or Christian marriage or group of Christian churches in a particular locale would reflect, as much as possible, the unity and love of the Trinity. From the weight of this prayer, one could easily conclude that the very mission of God was deeply linked to the quality of these relationships.

Certainly every Christian leader has read John 17 and probably preached a bit from these texts. I would guess that not many of these leaders would have many reservations about what I have said thus far. And further, I think a good number might have had a discouraging episode or two as they sought to build unity broader beyond their congregations. This is one area where a pragmatic realism trumps idealism and renders this prayer punchless. It's challenging to know this kind of integration simply in one's own individual faith walk with Christ or in one's marriage and family relationships. The challenge and complexity escalates as we add more people and groupings into the equation. And yet, this deep heart cry of Jesus compels us to pay close attention to and evaluate the priorities and intentions of our efforts. At the very least, we must arrive at these primary conclusions:

- that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus was not merely to get individual souls to heaven, but to re-establish a new humanity on earth, born out of the work of Christ by the Spirit, to give expression to the very nature of the Trinity
- that the kind of fulfilling joy (17:3) and divine love (17:26) experienced by the followers of Christ would be in direct proportion to the unity they would know with the Triune God and those who are His.
- that the very mission of God would be made plain or obscured by the level of integration known and expressed by the children of God.
- that a believer's experience of the glory of God (17:22), whatever that might be, would draw them into greater unity.

From a very practical standpoint, this profoundly integrating prayer of the Master calls a leadership team to understand their identity and mission. As Jesus prays for the first Christian leadership team in 17:6-18, He quite explicitly states that "they are yours" (v. 9) and "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them" (v. 10) and "that they may be one, even as we are one" (v. 11). Their identity is subsumed into an eternal and glorious relationship. Jesus no doubt intends for an ongoing, real felt intersection among this group of leaders with the Triune God. How would that occur? Well, at the risk of seeming utterly simplistic, I think the following must happen:

- they would have to spend a fair amount of time together
    - worshipping in Spirit and truth
    - praying together for the mind and will of God and for the flock of God
    - ingesting God's wisdom from His word
    - experiencing His joy
- they would have to share their lives together in open fellowship
    - knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses
    - doing the hard work of building genuine integration
    - encouraging, forgiving, correcting, loving and calling one another on
- they would have to learn how to engage the mission of God together
    - hearing the same thing form God
    - discerning the varieties and placement of their gifts and callings
    - adjusting to the regularly changing landscape of life and seasons together

It seems quite clear, doesn't it, that if Jesus prays like this just before His great sacrifice, these petitions must be of the highest importance. And if they were then, they are now. Christ's

intercessory work continues. Are the issues raised in this prayer still pressing within the heart of Christ? Of course. He sees with pristine clarity what is at stake and He carries us still in His heart. And He eternally yearns for these divine realities to define our life with Him and each other. If we will follow Him faithfully, we must practice this kind of praying with the hope of improvement to the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

The Father's honor. What did Jesus mean? The answer is both simple and, at the same time, beyond description. Jesus offers this, honor from the Father, as the great incentive for following Him and being where He is. Listen to it once more:

> John 12:26 – "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

There are three recorded instances of the Father speaking from heaven – at Jesus' baptism, His transfiguration and this particular instance. Jesus has affirmed His life purpose – to give His life over to death for the sins of man and He then exclaims, "Father, glorify your name." The response is immediate and I cannot believe anything but passionate: "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again." What's happening here? Something much larger than our puny minds are sin-scarred souls can barely grasp. Here we have an internal exchange within the Triune God. We can only feel toward this one. But be sure of this – there is no higher pinnacle in heaven or on earth than to receive the honor of the Father, His commendation and passionate delight. And this is what Jesus offers to His servant followers – the same kind of honor that He was receiving right then. It would be one thing to be honored by a national president or some great virtuous person. Or to be honored by Abraham or David or St. Augustine or John Calvin. Pick your hero. It would be a great honor. But, the honor of the Father? This must be beyond the bounds of human imagination. But that's the offer, the great holy incentive of the Son of God.

And I say it to you in his name – pursue the honor of the Father as you seek to be where Jesus is with your calling and giftings. This is the great prize that will satisfy the depth of your soul.