

## *Implications for the Church*

If we take seriously the scriptural perspective laid out in the preceding chapters and find validity in it, then certain implications emerge for the church. Five areas are in the forefront of my thinking; I present them for the consideration of leaders at all levels in the body of Christ.

### **1. The Importance of Prepared Hearts**

The church is not effective unless it looks and acts like Jesus. The roots of a powerful church are hearts deeply connected with the Lord, following Him and reflecting His heart. A substantial work of God in our hearts must occur to bring us to that level of strength and maturity. Two prevalent themes in Scripture illustrate the importance of our heart condition: everything is impacted by the state of our heart; therefore the Lord is committed to uniting our *whole* heart with Him.

*Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*

*Proverbs 27:19 As in water face reflects face, So a man's heart reveals the man.*

*Jer. 24:7 "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart."*

The work of uniting our hearts with the Lord is the province of the church—there is no other organization or environment where that priority will occur. The primary agents in the church for the work of bringing our hearts to God are the pastors, the shepherds. Where are they in this

process of prepared hearts? They will have to have worshipped their way across the bridge if they are to encourage and lead the rest of us there. At present, it looks like preparation of heart and the connection with the Lord it produces are not the primary credentials or the strength being trained into pastoral leadership; there is great loss due to that oversight. Some statistics bearing on where pastors are in their ministry experience in the church will illustrate the cost *to the shepherds* of not being solidly rooted in dependence upon and intimacy with God before they try to lead others there. I have excerpted some statistics, followed by some of the encouragement offered pastors from the website referenced below.

**From:** <http://maranathalife.com/lifeline/stats.htm>

### **Pastors**

- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout or contention in their churches.
- Four thousand new churches begin each year, but over seven thousand churches close.
- Fifty percent of pastors' marriages will end in divorce.
- Eighty percent of pastors and eighty-four percent of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors.
- Fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years. Ninety percent of pastors said their seminary or Bible school training did only a fair to poor job preparing them for ministry.

- Eighty-five percent of pastors said their greatest problem is they are sick and tired of dealing with problem people, such as disgruntled elders, deacons, worship leaders, worship teams, board members, and associate pastors. Ninety percent said the hardest thing about ministry is dealing with uncooperative people.
- Seventy percent of pastors feel grossly underpaid.
- Ninety percent said the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be before they entered the ministry.
- Seventy percent felt God called them to pastoral ministry before their ministry began, but after three years of ministry, only fifty percent still felt called.

### **Pastors' Relationship with the Lord**

- Seventy percent of pastors do not have a close friend, confidant, or mentor.
- Ninety-five percent of pastors do not regularly pray with their spouses.
- Eighty percent of pastors surveyed spend less than fifteen minutes a day in prayer.
- Seventy percent said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons.

The website states that their statistics are gathered from across denominational lines, and have been gleaned from various reliable sources such as Pastor to Pastor, Focus on the Family, Ministries Today, Charisma Magazine, TNT Ministries, Campus Crusade for Christ and the Global Pastors Network.

The following comments are also from the website—pastoral encouragement to pastors about how to address the problem.

God's intent isn't that the ministry destroys you, but builds your inner, spiritual man. That way, you can go on to do greater and greater works for Him. Yet, what we are seeing today is droves of pastors leaving the ministry defeated, depressed, and dejected. Why is this happening, and what can we do about it?

First of all, let's deal with the question of why. I think that if we look at what the pastors said, we'd have to conclude that the problem is the church people, especially the leadership. Unfortunately, that's a hard one to change.

However, if we look at the last section of statistics, the ones that deal with the pastor's relationship with the Lord, we see some interesting clues to the true root of the problem.

More than anything, God has called pastors to have an intimate relationship with Him. That must come before the ministry, that must come before the congregation, and that must even come before the family. As you can plainly see from the statistics above, we literally cannot survive in the ministry without taking the time to be with the Lord.

If we, as ministers, don't have an intimate relationship with the Lord, how can we expect to have anything to minister to others?

Of course it is true that with solid interaction with the Lord and drawing on Him for strength and sustenance any pastor will be in better shape to deal with the demands of ministry. BUT intimacy depends on connection, and connection depends on clearing up the things that prevent it. Where does that develop for pastors? It is not part of their training, and is probably a chief reason why ninety percent of the pastors questioned said their training was only a fair to poor preparation for ministry. Connection with, dependence upon, the ability to seek out and draw on God for His purpose and wisdom in virtually every situation is not yet a primary credential for ministry, either for the office of pastor or for other levels of leadership in the church. The statistics starkly and tragically reflect this weakness and the cost of it.

Consequently, there are pastors and leaders falling prey to forms of comfort and satisfaction which have nothing to do with the provision of the Lord for our heart needs, and the church is regularly exposed and embarrassed in this arena. Yet, the training in Bible College and Seminary, as well as in the church itself does not focus on preparation of heart; leaders at either level are not required to exhibit a close connection with the Lord which would enable them to draw on Him for their own health and well-being and for direction for the body. Without that steadying and strengthening influence, pastors start out excited, but get killed in the flux of the church body and many drop out of the ministry long before their ministry career is complete. Failing to ensure that pastors *can* draw on the Lord and be sustained by Him does them a great disservice. If they are not connected enough to do so, we are sending them out to be killed. Without that connection in place the likelihood of them falling, diverting, substituting harmful gratifications and misusing members of the body in the process is very high indeed!

*Exod. 17:2-6 Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?" And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

Pastors recognize this kind of relational challenge well, but many do not know how to resolve it the way Moses did. It is interactive partnership with the Lord that saved Moses, gave him direction, maintained his credibility with the people, and taught them how life with the Lord works. Whether the people chose to live there themselves or not, it was nevertheless manifest before their eyes. Moses listened to and followed God to the threshold of the Promised Land despite their strident rebellion and desire to dictate the circumstances, and he was sustained by the Lord in that grueling, though fruitful, process. Ministry will always hold similar challenges; those who venture into it will do well to go with prepared hearts and clear understanding of their need to keep drawing on the Lord through each challenging contingency which characterizes life with the Lord in the body of Christ. If pastors cannot draw on the Lord as Moses did, they are more likely to fall than grow into deeper, stronger places with the Lord and learn to overcome even the gnarliest snares, which will surely be devised. Repeated events which do not result in victory or peace eventually lead to the high instances of pastors leaving the ministry.

Similarly, believers with unprepared hearts are the people pastors identify as their biggest problem: "disgruntled elders, deacons, worship leaders, worship teams, board members, and associate pastors. Ninety percent said the hardest thing about ministry is dealing with uncooperative people." Here is where Philip Schaff's description of the early church is the essential goal: "there was in the apostolic church a ministerial office, instituted by Christ, for the very purpose of raising

the mass of believers from infancy and pupilage to independent and immediate intercourse with God, to that prophetic, priestly, and kingly position, which in principle and destination belongs to them all.” It will be difficult enough for pastors to bring others to that place of immediate intercourse with the Lord if they live in that state themselves. If they do not live there, they simply are not equipped to bring others—preparing their own hearts must come first.

## 2. The Provision for Prepared Hearts

Getting our hearts cleared and cleansed enough to connect with the Lord is a process. Every believer seeking a deeper connection with the Lord needs access to the means for accomplishing it. What are the means? Here are some factors which usually are involved in preparation of heart.

- We must have a systematic way to discover beliefs we did not receive from the Lord and which actually impair our ability to know and unite with Him. This means investigating the teaching, events, and relationships in our lives—what spiritual and emotional perspectives did our influential figures have, what kinds of protections did we learn to set up, and what view of God and self was imparted? People cannot successfully question these factors themselves because they generally believe the constructs they have received are true; it does not even occur to them to question them or examine the effects they actually have.
- We must learn to turn our beliefs into questions—“I see this is what I believe, Lord, and it doesn’t sound like what You say about Yourself; is it true?”
- We must have help examining and learning to ask the Lord simple questions which unmask the deceitful misconceptions that have accumulated. Continued interaction with the Lord in a structure that facilitates it precedes intimacy as a way of life—the outcome we seek.
- This kind of investigation needs to be provided long enough for believers to become adept at it themselves, for it to become an activity they can walk in regularly because their discernment and knowledge of God has grown to the point that the old beliefs do not hold sway or swallow them up in the way

they have in the past. The time frame for beginning to identify core heart structures, see how diverse they are from God's view, begin to get in touch with deeper heart beliefs, and start to develop some tools for addressing the gap is probably *at least* two years. Then there is the need for those understandings to strengthen into a habit of unraveling the assaults upon our connection with God, being able to spot them and dismantle them. Depending on the degree of brokenness and how early on it occurred, it will take longer. This is a reality we must come to terms with, else we will discourage and damage the efforts people make by implying that they should already be through to the goal. We would do well to think of preparing our hearts with and for the Lord in a way similar to the way we think of preparing for practical careers in life—people spend four, five or more years in college. We do not question taking that time for college, but balk at taking the time to prepare the core of our being for life with the Lord.

Some years ago I was involved in putting together a twelve-week course designed to prepare lay people for ministry in the church; it focused on their own healing being the undergirding factor in that preparation. It became evident that while there could be significant movement in three months, it was a bare beginning, not sufficient for them to be able to continue their growth on their own. Subsequently, three more classes were developed. They all involve immersing ourselves in the word, learning to hear the Lord, and becoming adept at exchanging His mind and heart for ours. It is more nearly a two-year series, during which people are supervised and encouraged to deepen their life with the Lord, the goal being to live there whether they are in a teaching series or not. But it must be understood that these classes are not for adding knowledge *about God*; they are for deepening one's connection with the Lord, else the classes could finish with no deeper connection than when the person started—more knowledge but still wondering where the Lord is.

### **3. Raising Up Helpers**

Helpers go through the same process of getting their hearts connected with the Lord that anyone else does, but they are people who have a heart for bringing others, a sense of calling, a compassion and patience for bringing others along. They could become the teachers of classes focused on deepening connection with the Lord; they might be those who meet one-on-one, or in groups where approaches to connecting prayer are developed to aid people in moving through the debris that blocks awareness of the Lord.

A very experienced person in preparation of heart needs to oversee the training of helpers. There are many snares that occur; there can be divisive encounters which need to produce deeper healing, humbling and resolution instead of breaking the unity of the body and the influence of God in forbearing, forgiving, and building one another. Helpers need to continue under direction of a genuinely experienced person while they engage in one-on-one intervention or lead groups.

Everyone can be set off by the issues of another, and there is a need to discern whose issue is whose in order to turn times of friction into opportunity for healing and strengthening—people being continually released from strongholds which would otherwise cause reaction and get in the way of growth for the helper or those they are helping. Remember that preparation of heart is a battle; a great spiritual battle surrounds it, and our own protections act to thwart it. The task is to get a host of helpers raised up who can discern these things, who will honestly face whatever is necessary in order to stay in the clear with the Lord, and who will not lend themselves to disruption and undermining but act to interrupt such efforts and teach others to do so.

#### **4. Forging a Partnership Between Knowledge and Anointing**

We have talked throughout the book about the kind of connection with the Lord that puts Him in charge of things. What does that mean for our approach to knowledge and its significance? Is it *our* knowledge or the presence and power of God which is effective in restoring His creation, heart by heart? The answer is “yes,” because of the way they can work together. If the emphasis is on our knowledge and our understanding, it will have the limitation of our faculties compared to God’s. If we take the position that we are not going to pay any attention to knowledge, but depend solely on God to show us, we are limiting the resources that can be brought to bear on the situation. The goal seems more a partnership between knowledge and anointing which the Lord orchestrates Himself.

I think of knowledge as what is in the storehouse or what we add to the storehouse. It is good to put more and more knowledge in the storehouse. The problem comes when we are the ones selecting from the storehouse instead of the Lord. Then what we select will tend to suffer from the limitation of our experience, the tendency to devise some kind of formula which does not fit as well as the Lord looking on the person’s heart and devising what fits perfectly.

The resolution is to add all the knowledge the Lord prompts you to acquire or your own interest seeks out, and then put the whole storehouse at the Lord’s disposal, making Him the one who selects from it; He chooses the time for each measure and knits them all together. Be under the supervision of the Wonderful Counselor at all times; that is the safest and most effective place in ministry. The partnership between knowledge and anointing is quite workable; when they flow together under the Lord’s supervision, they have a gentleness and power which are remarkably effective!



## 5. The Work of the Ministry: Unlock and Fill the Church of His Spirit

The scriptural metaphor of the Head and the body describes the Church of His Spirit. He is the Head and we are the body. Does your body argue or ask for explanation when your head gives the order to raise your hand, tap your smart phone into action, or brake your automobile when approaching a red light? It's like that. United, responsive hearts come from clearing the things that argue with Him. In every life there are quite a few arguments waiting in line to be tested by His light.

The potential offered by the Lord is the Church of His Spirit, but it must be built with prepared hearts. The alternative, largely in effect now, is the Church of the Hidden Heart—believers and leaders who have not taken the lid off their hearts, partly because they do not know how, partly because there is a deep belief in all of us that we cannot survive an exposed heart.

A heart connected with the Lord and bent on receiving from Him is the foundational priority for the church—the called-out ones. Every believer so engaged, or on his way there, is the Church of His Spirit. To arrive there we must move through our current priority structures and into His, but we cannot consider or perceive the kind of glory His holds without the heart connection on which it rests. So the work is first and foremost to get people connected, actually connected with the Lord. If that happens, grows, and spreads, the Church of His Spirit will inevitably appear.

The work of the ministry is to fight for the connection with the Lord which unlocks the door to the Church of His Spirit. Then the task is to protect and defend that connection against EVERY foe!

*2 Cor. 11:3 (NASB) But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*