

The Gospel Ministry: A Triumphal Procession In Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-17)

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"Deal with the success syndrome. Tell us what the Bible says about success." That, as I understood it, was the telephoned request of your program chairman; his follow-up letter was along similar lines. The conversation and the letter did not give the impression that this group of missionaries was exalted above measure because of its many successes. The word "syndrome," in fact, suggested that we might be addressing an ailment.

In the word "syndrome" the Greek students present recognize a compounding of the preposition "with" and the verbal noun "running." One dictionary definition is "a group of signs or symptoms that collectively indicate the existence of an undesirable condition." A root ailment causes a coincidence of observable signs; the signs run together with the condition. To speak of a "success syndrome" is to speak of success as something undesirable.

The success syndrome can afflict those who enjoy observable success and those who do not. If a missionary measures his work and his worth by secular standards of success he is operating with a two-edged instrument. If the number of adult baptisms, increase in membership, progress toward self-support, deftness in building programs are evidences of success, what can their absence mean but failure? If converts are trophies, counselees are plaques, congregations are monuments to one's successful efforts, what does the absence of those or a dwindling in these mean? Why, some of the most important things a missionary does in his work with people are things he should not report to other people—not even his wife. Some of his best efforts can never be quantified on his reports to the mission board. How can anyone know that he is successful?

There is an ever-present danger in the public ministry that we become demoralized and cynical because we forget the joy of God's salvation, the power of the gospel, the privilege of service in the Kingdom. This danger is intensified when a man is infected with the success syndrome.

Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* has more than fifty entries on "succeed," "success," "successful," "successfully." Some are from pagan philosophers, some from cynical Frenchmen, some from agnostic Englishmen, some from religiously indifferent Americans. The quotations by no means all speak of success in a positive manner! Two of them, in fact, identify success as a false god, an idol, which it too often is. James Matthew Barrie (d 1937) wrote: "One's religion is whatever he is most interested in, and yours is Success" ("The Twelve Pound Look," 1910).

William James (d 1910) wrote of "the moral flabbiness born of the exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess SUCCESS. That—with the squalid cash interpretation put on the word success—is our national disease" [Letter to H.G. Wells, September 11, 1906].

A former president of the Michigan District added the desire for glory (the lust for success) to sex and money as a third great temptation in the life of a pastor. In the light of Genesis 3 we can say that it is not only the oldest temptation but also the oldest sin.

When success is not busy being an idol it is a Calvinist heresy. In that Reformed theological system material and social success is regarded as a sure sign of being one of God's elect and the reward of virtue. Lack of it is a sign of God's rejection.

My Hebrew lexicon has more entries for failure and related ideas than for success. Even where there is success, people do not for the most part succeed. Rather, God **gives** success. In the English New Testament translations there is almost no use for the word and not much more for related concepts. The closest thing to it seems to lie in past tense forms of *ischuo*, "I am able." In the case of people the "able" words are usually preceded by "not." Conversely, they are almost always positive when used with God as the subject.

So, it is not overstating by much to say that the New Testament knows nothing of human success in matters of the Spirit, including the gospel ministry. Nevertheless, it is possible for the Apostle Paul to speak in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 of THE GOSPEL MINISTRY: A TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION IN CHRIST.

1. Our ministry is a celebration of Christ's success.

"Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ"(2 Co 2:14a). Recall that the subject matter of 2 Corinthians is "ministers of Christ." In the portion of the Letter we will be looking at Paul likens the gospel ministry to a triumphal procession. When a Roman general had waged a successful campaign the emperor might recognize his efforts by granting him a "triumph." A large victory parade would be held in Rome and the conqueror would be acknowledged by all.

Paul says, "God has granted us such a triumphal procession. It is not a onetime event but a continuing parade." The amazing thing about it is that we have not won the victory. Christ did. In him we have conquered and in him we celebrate. Our righteousness could not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. We fell short of God's favorable estimate as much as they. But Christ is our Righteousness. He has fulfilled the law, done the will of him that sent him, gone to the cross as the blameless Lamb of God. He has cried, "it is finished!" and the angel has said at the empty tomb, "He is not here. He is risen, as he said." Jesus has become the firstfruits of those who are sleeping. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We don't always remember and realize it and the world will never acknowledge it, but our ministry is one grand victory march celebrating our Savior's success.

2. We Celebrate by Preaching the Gospel.

"Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Co 2:14). Anyone who witnessed a Roman triumph would always remember the smell of it. There were flowers on the chariots and the soldiers. There was the smell of incense offered to the gods. There was the smell of exotic animals, brought from foreign parts and included in the procession. There was the smell of meat, being roasted for the feast that would follow.

Paul says, "The knowledge of Christ is such a fragrance. Wherever we spread the knowledge of his mercy, of his redeeming love, there is the aroma of victory. In Syria and Cilicia, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece; in synagogues, marketplaces, and prisons; the preaching of the gospel is a celebration of Christ's victory."

It is not our function to tell people to be good. That will not bring them to salvation. Some would be presumptuous and say, "I am good." Some would despair and go away sorrowing. All of them would go to hell. But to say, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and he did it, and God raised him from the dead, and in him you have forgiveness of sins and eternal life"—that is sharing the absolutely essential knowledge needed by every human being.

It's true, my people in Twan do not pamper me. And when I am preparing my sermon on Saturday there are two who come to me. One of them says to me, "Albert, why do you bother yourself so much for the twenty or thirty people who come to your church?" But then the second one comes and says, "Albert, look, I had only twelve who listened to me, and of the twelve one betrayed me and another denied me. Do you want to be better off than I was?"

Then I say to the first, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense unto me." And to the second I say, "Thanks be to thee, Lord Jesus; help me to be thy disciple." [Albert Bitzius, cited in John W. Doberstein: *The Ministers' Prayer Book*, Philadelphia: Muehlenberg Press, 195-1

The New Testament has a rich store of "titles" for those who preach and teach the gospel. They are never merely titles, for they always signify the function of the person who is designated by them. One of them is *poimen* = shepherd = pastor. It is one of the most appealing. It evokes the story of a risen Lord saying to a penitent disciple "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep." It calls to mind Jesus' self-designation as the Good Shepherd and helps us remember that the most "successful" missionary is always only an undershepherd.

The reminder of subordination is also present in the title ambassador," which Paul employs in 2 Corinthians 5:19,20. "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." An ambassador of Christ is a representative of the One who sent him. He is not sent to say what he thinks but what his Master says. He makes no offers on his own, makes no demands on his own authority, makes no promises except those which he knows his Sovereign will back up. On happy occasions and sad, to young and old, to the eager and the reluctant, to the faithful and the infidel, when he is fresh and when he is weary, he implores on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God."

We are, and we are always becoming, "ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Co 3:16). The letter, the law, religion" says: "Do. Love. Be good. Get right with God." That kills. The Spirit, in the gospel, says: "God has done. God has loved. God is gracious. God has set things right." That gives life.

Now, stated in that way or in similar ways, the proper distinction between law and gospel is a simple formula. Such formulas have their basis in Scripture and they are useful. But we do not want to mistreat Scripture by applying them in a mechanical way, without regard for what Scripture is saying in a given place or without reference to the life situation in which we apply them. Occasionally one hears the thought expressed that what is needed in someone's ministry is "more law" or "more gospel." That might betray an unconsciously held notion that God's Word is some kind of chemical mixture and that rightly dividing the word of truth means properly adjusting the chemicals to get the right proportions and thus the desired effects.

We know that there is more art than science in applying the messages of law and gospel, and that it is an art taught by the Holy Spirit. God grant that in all our work it is always evident that the work of the law is "alien" even when it is necessary.

"Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Co 2:17a). In view of our assigned topic, may we substitute "personal success" for "profit?" We do not peddle the word of God to enhance our own reputations, to gain power over people, for self-gratification in "meeting human needs." We do not "peddle" the word of God at all!

We want to be able to say in simple honesty, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Co 4:5). The minister is not in the ministry to promote his own interests. He is not a hustler whose talents and achievements must be recognized with promotions and salary increases. I am not called to the service of Christ's church in order to do my own thing." Consciously cultivating and highlighting my "individuality" calls attention to me but away from him whom I was called to serve. The man whose theme is "I've gotta be me" is just as useless or even dangerous as the one who is constantly asking, "What's in it for me?" God does not put people under our spiritual care so that they can stroke our egos. They are there to be fed and led and we are there to shepherd them.

"We do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God." Sincerity here is *eilikrineia*, what is able to pass the test of bright sunlight. Our commitment to God's Word includes our formal subscription to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as given by inspiration of God, the only and perfect rule of faith. But it also includes this, that we avoid using methods which, although they may not be immoral or an explicit denial of Scripture, are somehow unworthy of the gospel. It means patiently pointing out, again and again, that gimmickry cannot establish and strengthen healthy congregations. "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Co 4:2).

Still another "on the contrary" passage from 2 Corinthians: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (10:4,5). The only effective implement of warfare in the struggle against idolatry, unbelief, and self-righteousness is the divine power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No fleshly weapons—reason research, righteous sentiment—can win hearts for God. But the gospel is the power to be used in God's service for demolishing the strongholds of nay-saying and teach people to say "Amen" to God's "Yes" in Christ. The struggling missionary prays for and strives to develop the discernment to test the spirits and does not fall for the subtle legalism of many "practical helps." The evangelical pastor needs to give attention to the source of the materials and methods he uses. He must beware the poisoned well, the evil tree which cannot bring forth good fruit, the piety which comes from the Law and not from the gospel.

We **celebrate** Christ's victory by preaching the gospel. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve" (1 Pe 3:2). We are supported by a monthly check to do what we would be willing to do for nothing if we could. There is no material reward that could really "pay for" what ministers of the gospel do. There are people who work harder, work longer hours, work smarter than we do. Some of them are in your congregations. But none of them do the work of the public ministry. That work is supported—subsidized, if you will—and not rewarded in the way other work is. So, why even think in terms of what we might be earning at some other honorable work? Why ever let our wives or our children hear us speculate on what we might be worth in some other field of endeavor? The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. He privileges me to do his work on earth. Why pretend that I have made some kind of sacrifice to do this work?

Teach me, good Lord:

Not to murmur at multitude of business or shortness of time.

Not to magnify undertaken duties by seeming to suffer under them, but to treat all as liberties and gladnesses.

Not to call attention to crowded work, or petty fatigues.

Not to gather encouragement from appreciation by others, lest this should interfere with purity of motive.

Not to seek praise, respect, gratitude or regard from superiors or equals on account of age or past service.

Not to let myself be placed in favorable contrast with another. - [Edward White Benson, in Doberstein]

Celebrate Christ's victory by preaching the gospel, "not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the Flock" (1 Pe 5:3). I am not to be a little neurotic god who teaches people to tug at the hem of my garment and ask, "Pastor, may I" before they ever speak or act. I am not to be a little pope, taking Christ's place in people's hearts and imposing rules and regulations on them. I am to be an example to the flock, but that does not mean imposing my tastes and preferences on them. It means trying to spread the contagion of the Redeemer's unconditional love.

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Pe 5:4). The public gospel service has limited rewards on earth. The Chief Shepherd will reward it when he appears. The ministry is for awhile; the reward will last forever. Peter speaks of "the crown of glory that will never fade away." Isn't that what all Christians receive? Yes, but isn't that enough? Isn't it still more than we deserve? Isn't it still the reward of grace? It is enough.

The success syndrome made an appearance along the Jordan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John's disciples meant well. They cared about his ministry and were jealous for him: "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one about whom you testified—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is

going to him" (Jn 3:26). "That man," they say, not even naming him. "The one you testified about, they say, not seeming to remember the content and the significance of John's testimony concerning Jesus. "An interloper is moving in on your turf, usurping your special task: baptizing." They resent it and they overstate: "Everyone is going to him."

Was John tempted to accept the sympathy of his disciples? Would you have been tempted? I would. Even knowing better, I would be tempted. Vanity, pride, ego, ambition are always ready to agree that we are not really appreciated, not getting our share of the credit. John, however, did not chime in: "Yes, Jesus of Nazareth owes me a great deal. It isn't really right that he should be drawing disciples away from me. I stuck my neck out, made a spectacle of myself, lived a disciplined life, burned myself out. And now he's reaping all the benefits"

What John said instead was that it should be just that way. In God's economy that was just right: "He must become greater; I must become less important" (Jn 3:30). How can you and I learn that, accept it, live it, reflect it in our ministry? How can we become bigger men and better servants of Jesus Christ? Only as the love of Christ compels us, the grace of God motivates us, the Spirit of God helps us. God offers and gives help in the words and example of John: "He must become greater; I must become less important."

In our privileged position it is easy to forget that even in the workaday world, especially in the workaday world, people cannot always do the work they want to do or see the results they hoped for or reap the benefits they expected. How much more is that the case in the gospel ministry! The assignment follows God's specifications as to kind of service, place of service, duration of service. I am only temporary help, an interim holder of this office. Furthermore, the results are in his hands.

John's disciples wanted more time, wider influence, ever-increasing popularity for him. John understood that his work was to point away from himself to Jesus. Not, "Look at me!" but "Look at him!" I am not the main attraction; He is. God forbid that I should be a sideshow that detracts from him. The good news is not what I am and what I have done but who he is and what he has done. It is not our business to impress people with what a wonderful pastor they have. It is rather to get them to acknowledge: "What a wonderful Savior we have." It is not, "Our pastor says," "The minister won't like it;" but "God's Word teaches; this is God's will."

"The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine and it is now complete" (Jn 3:29). Single-minded, clear-eyed loyalty. The redeemed church is not mine but Christ's. What is happening is right and I am glad it is happening. No self-seeking hireling or self-centered enthusiast can say that. John said it. We want to say it. God help us to say it and mean it.

We are accustomed to say, "my congregation," "my field," "my students." We are speaking of Christ's bride, for whom he paid the price of his own blood. We listen to his voice—we are privileged characters who get paid to listen to his voice fulltime—and we are glad. We are glad because it means he is coming with his grace, coming to live in the hearts of those who hear his voice, coming to take his bride to himself. He must become greater; I must become less. If we faithfully do what God has called us to do, this will happen in the lives of those we serve. The spotlight will be diverted from us to him. Like John, we will recognize the rightness of that, and rejoice.

The gospel is God's power to save. Even the cultured, the proud, the powerful must be confronted with the dynamic message that a provincial Jew was crucified and then rose again to rescue the human race from eternal death for eternal life. That is the gospel and that is God's power to save wise and unlearned, little children and old people and all between. It is God's power to lead coarse sinners and moralists and agnostics to faith in their Savior.

The gospel is powerful, "for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." (Ro 1:17). The righteousness it reveals is not that which God demands in his unchanging law but that which God provides in his Son. It does not say, "Obey." It says, "Christ obeyed in your place and gave his life to pay the penalty of your disobedience." It is God's power to impart salvation. It works the faith that accepts the righteousness. It convinces us that this righteousness is ours by faith from first to last."

Does that make for a ministry that marches from mass conversion to spectacular growth to splendid success? Paul experienced opposition from the outside, dealt with internal problems of the church, saw meager results often enough to know that the ministry does not **seem** to be one grand triumphal procession. Furthermore, let us not imagine that nurturing young Christians and confirming new converts in the faith was easier in the first century because the faith was fresh and there were not any heretics or sects or tamperers with Scripture. The Pastoral Epistles—indeed, all the Letters of the New testament—disabuse us of that notion.

3. Reaction to This Celebration Is Not Always the Same

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the stench of death; to the other, the fragrance of life" (2 Co 2:15,16a). Paul is still working with the picture of the triumphal procession. For those on the victorious side, those celebrating the triumph, the smells were the fragrance of life. For the captives, for the conquered people who were dragged along in that procession, the smells were the stench of death.

So it is with the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is intended to give life and, to those who believe it, it is life. They love it and want more of it. When it is rejected it results in death for unbelievers. They hate it and react violently to it. In his earlier Corinthian letter Paul wrote: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Co 1:18).

Why do some find in the gospel the fragrance of life? It is the grace of God (Eph 2:8,9). Why do others find in the gospel only the stench of death? There is no reason other than their own folly. There is no reasonable explanation for an unreasonable act. This is the sorrow and the cross of the gospel ministry, but it does not negate Christ's victory or cancel the triumphal procession. "It is not as though God's word had failed" (Ro 9:6).

Luther's comments at Romans 1:1 [LW 25.137] are one example of the way he applies his theology of the cross to the matter of "success" and "failure." Even the English is a bit hard to read (translated by my Latin teacher Hilton C. Oswald), but persevere: "...Christ wants our whole disposition to be so stripped down that we are not only unafraid of being embarrassed for our faults and also do not delight in the glory and vain joys of our virtues but that we do not feel called upon to glory before men even in that external righteousness which comes to us from Christ. Nor should we be cast down by sufferings and evils which are inflicted on us for His sake. A true Christian must have no glory of his own and must to such an extent be stripped of everything he calls his own that in honor and in dishonor he can always remain the same in the knowledge that the honor bestowed on him has been given not to him but to Christ, whose righteousness and gifts are shining in him, and that the dishonor inflicted on him is inflicted both on him and on Christ. But to obtain such perfection we need much practice, to say nothing of the special gift of grace."

We must make sure that we do not decide that we shall succeed. If we decide to succeed then we may succeed without succeeding in God's way. But if we go on from day to day seeking to do his will, then we shall be prepared to receive success from him if he wills it; and if he does not, then humbly to say: It is God's decision that David shall not build the temple, but he will raise up Solomon.

[W.A. Visser 't Hooft, in Doberstein]

God's success was not apparent at Golgotha, but without Golgotha Christ's ministry would have been a failure. "If you are the Son of God succeed in coming down." It is just because he "failed" to do what they demanded, did not come down, that we confidently expect to spend eternity celebrating his victory with him.

4. "And Who Is Equal to Such a Task?" (2 Co 2:16b)

Consider the man who asks the question. Keen-minded, strong-willed, vigorous, aggressive. Trained in the religious school of the renowned Gamaliel, well acquainted with the learning of the Hellenistic world. With his natural gifts and thorough training, called by Jesus personally, schooled by the Holy Spirit, he asks, "And who is equal to such a task?" Who can think himself truly adequate for the work of the ministry? Who is really fit to handle a message that is so full of life but which also has such a potential of death for those who refuse it?

The obvious answer? No one. One obvious "solution": Don't plan, don't prepare, don't articulate your purpose and objectives, don't develop any orderly procedures. Let anxiety dominate you and feelings of anxiety paralyze you. Resign. That, however, would make you a tragic victim of the success syndrome.

"And who is equal to such a task?" Paul offers the real answer a few verses later: "Our competence comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of the new covenant." (2 Co 3:5b,6a). We are not the soil from which competence springs. God makes us equal to the task. Whence come the ability, the courage, the insight, the wisdom to do the work of the ministry? If we foolishly depend on ourselves we find debilitating doubt at one extreme, presumptuous pride at the other extreme, and all kinds of pestilential things in between. "Our competence comes from God."

I did this day receive **as much honor and work**
as ever I shall be able to know what to do with.
Lord Jesus, proportion supplies accordingly.

- [Philip Henry, in Doberstein]

Before writing his "last will and testament," 2 Timothy, Paul never used the word "suffering" with regard to his many hardships in the gospel work. When he was no longer free to move about as an ambassador for Christ, however, he did use it. *Suqkakopascho* means to suffer what is hurtful or harmful with someone. "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 2:3). A good soldier obeys orders, has enemies, gets into fights. A soldier suffers and endures along with his comrades, and that is what Paul emphasizes here. He is not supposed to desert his comrades and give up soldiering just when the going gets tough.

As soldiers of the cross we learn that most people are not against morality, but that natural man does not like to hear that his morality will be worthless at the judgment seat of God. People are not usually opposed to the moral philosopher Jesus (as they imagine him to be), but the fleshly mind does not take kindly to the truth that there is salvation in no other than him. People are generally sympathetic to the tragic figure on the center cross and scornful of the rascals who put him there, but they are not by nature open to the idea that their own everyday gossip, chiseling, bigotry, avarice, superstition, contempt for authority, lust, general lovelessness, and idolizing of success brought him there. People can make it rough for a soldier when he teaches such things. In the face of opposition, ridicule, or active persecution, "endure hardship," says Paul by the Holy Spirit.

"If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Ti 2:5). The "rules" of our contest, as set forth in the Pastoral Epistles and in all Scripture make clear that ministers of Christ are **not racing against each other**. We are not engaged in unbrotherly competition in order to triumph over one another. We are competing against the course, with its many hurdles and hazards. We encourage and help one another to run the race according to the rules. We rejoice when one of our brothers runs well. We gather to praise God when one of our teammates reaches the finish line and receives the victor's crown.

"The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops" (2 Ti 2:6). Those who work in God's Word in order to feed God's people must be the first to benefit from that study. This is not an injunction to the church to provide adequate salaries for its workers. This is an admonition to the workers to partake themselves of the nourishment that they are offering to others.

Paul's pictures of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer remind us that the ministry is a strenuous undertaking. Implicit in these depictions is a warning against the sluggishness that craves leisure, the

doublemindedness that is easily distracted, following selfish pursuits and hobbies to the detriment of the gospel work.

When soldiering gets rough, when the race is long, when your appetite for the Word flags, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not in chains" (2 Ti 2:8,9). The imperative is present, "Keep remembering." Jesus lives and you are not in service to a dead teacher who is helpless to help you. He is the Son of David, the Promised One, who came to do God's work of salvation and has done it. This is Paul's gospel, reduced to barest essentials. When everything seems complicated and the flesh grows weary, "Remember Jesus Christ." Remember, too, "God's word is not in chains."

We who experience the subversion of sectarians and the inroads of worldliness in our congregations have not yet endured what Paul endured for the gospel's sake. His good character and his Christian virtues did not prevent persecution. His gospel activity provoked it. Expelled from Pisidian Antioch, conspired against at Iconium, stoned and left for dead at Lystra. That was the **first** missionary journey, and his life had been in danger on more than one occasion before that!

But the Lord was still in charge, looking out for the gospel's interest, controlling things for the advantage of his elect who should still be called by Paul's preaching, protecting his apostle. The enemies of the cross probably said at Lystra, "The rascal lucked out and survived." Paul says, "The Lord rescued me from all of them." God rescued him and God will preserve us, even though things get worse before they get better.

As a matter of fact we can expect them to get worse before they get better: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Ti 3:12,13). How can we survive in the faith, let alone continue leading the flock? "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 3:14,15).

Who is equal to the task? How can we lead, so that others may be brought to faith and survive and grow and serve as Christians? Use the God-breathed Scripture, which "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God [*theou anthropos*, God's person, not only the minister] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Ti 3:16,17).

As a Christian the pastor is entitled to pray; his Lord strongly encourages him to do so. As a pastor he has more people to pray for than most Christians do. When Paul mentions his personal praying we find him praying for others. He prays with gratitude to God, he prays night and day, he remembers others in his prayers. *Oratio* is one of the three indispensables that make a theologian. *Meditatio*, the personal study of the Word, we do more readily, in part because the demands of our calling constantly remind us of the need. *Tentatio* or testing is thrust upon us; it goes with the faithful discharge of our ministry. Prayer is too easily and too often overlooked. It is hard work; it takes time; it is easily replaced by merely saying prayers; sometimes we would rather worry.

We cannot be pastors without being practical theologians and we can't be practical theologians unless we are pray-ers. As we schedule and discipline and train ourselves to do all our other work let us not be slipshod or lackadaisical about this essential work.

I do not ask
That men may sound my praises,
Or headlines spread my name abroad;
I only pray that as I voice the message
Hearts may find God!

[Ralph S. Cushman, in Doberstein]

The Lord knows the environment in which you work, where your children go to school, what the devil's special tactics are in your area. He knows that there is a neo-paganism loose in our land. The abortion mills offer more than a million human beings to the child-eater Molech every year. The love goddess Venus obsesses the minds and takes over the bodies of adolescents of all ages. In the teens it is sowing wild oats and among married couples it is called open marriage and the middle-aged suffer midlife crises that propel them into what used to be called adultery. The press reports it and pseudoscience encourages it and society tolerates it and the media applaud it and how often are we really shocked anymore? Who is equal to such a task? The Lord has equipped, prepared, and called you for the task.

All kinds of doorbell pushers exhort our people to hug their kids today and teach us that "family is forever." They are red, white, and blue Americans. They use the name of Jesus Christ and claim to be his Latter Day Saints, but he is only one of their gods. They have given up polygamy only to embrace polytheism. Others offer a "full gospel" which really means the gospel of Jesus **plus** whatever requirements they may add to whip people into line and make them doubt that they have salvation as God's free gift. Others are zealous to teach us about "Jehovah God," using the Bible with satanic skill. They rob the Bible of its historic content, throw away the Key to the Scriptures, and deny the Lord who bought them. Who is equal to such a task? The Lord has equipped, prepared, and called you for the task.

It is not ordinary in our time and place for ministers of Christ to be called on to risk their lives, but we are called to spend ourselves in the work. We very likely will not die for it but, God helping us, let us live for it. The success syndrome could make cold professionals of us: "It's a job; I need it; I'm too proud not to do it well." The love of Christ compels us to do it as "amateurs"—lovers—until he lets us know there is something else we should be doing.

On the one hand, you have all the dignity you need. God created you body and soul, giving you the breath of life. He became a Man to redeem you. He has called you to be his child, set you apart for service to him, called you to the public service of Christ's church. On the other hand, you cannot be lacking in humility for you have every reason to be humble. You have received all that dignity and responsibility from God and you have not lived up to it. Isn't the success syndrome a lot of foolish nonsense, aren't the worldly notions of success stupid in the light of these things?

(The pastor) needs to be free from the need for "success." There is something profoundly wrong when a pastor's joy in his ministry is dependent upon external success, and no pastor will be able to exercise a blessed ministry until he has once and for all renounced every temptation to achieve "success" in the ordinary human sense. At this point the difference between the ministry and every kind of worldly pursuit is clearly apparent. Every experienced pastor knows how quickly the young and able preacher can deteriorate spiritually from outward success, and older ministers are no exception. Certainty in the exercise of our ministry depends upon whether our hearts are independent of the ups and downs of outward success. Actually, the whole mission which the Lord has committed to his church is very obviously doomed to be unsuccessful in any outward, secularistic sense; this is in the very nature of the task and it cannot be otherwise. Consequently, our ministry must always reflect fundamental law of the church.

On the same level is freedom from all comparisons between one brother and others. They have all received the same ministry from the same Lord, and no matter how natural may be the temptation to make these comparisons, it too must be once and for all overcome.

- [Hanns Lilje, in Doberstein]