

# TAMEONTA

## You Are Our Glory and Joy: The Reward of Spiritual Leadership

By Mark Walker

*"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy." (1 Thess. 2:19-20 ESV)*

*"For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 3-4)*

Ministry is hard. It is heavy. It is often discouraging. We feel our unworthiness, our insufficiency, the sluggishness of our own hearts. Sometimes we fear there has been no fruit from our labor. The responsibility of ministry (which we considered in our Nov. 2014 issue) can begin to feel like a burden. At such times, it is difficult to see it as a joyful burden - where is joy to be found in the midst of such a sobering task?



Photo taken by the author outside his men's group Bible study.

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For the past year, I have been waiting to take up one of Scripture's primary answers to this question. The Lord has led me to other subjects, and unexpected events have intervened. Now, as I return to the issue, I hope I understand (at least in some small measure) why God had me wait until now to address it. One of the lessons He taught me early on in my walk with Jesus (in *Listening to Me 101*, you might say) is that when I start hearing the same message from multiple directions and independent sources, I should sit up and pay attention. Well, over the past six months or so our ministry has been hearing a relatively consistent message from leaders in many of the prison churches. It is a heart-cry, a longing for God's people in their churches to grow toward maturity as disciples of Jesus.

Our Lord commanded us to make not only "converts" or "believers," but "*disciples*" of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). Those who God graciously calls and equips as leaders among His people long to see others grow into true disciples of Christ. Paul described his passion to create mature disciples as a great struggle (Gk. *agona*, Col. 2:1-3), and as being "in the anguish of childbirth" (Gal. 4:19). This longing hurts.

Several years ago I was attending a fellowship group every week with brothers and sisters from my home church in Denver. I quickly noticed that one brother in the group, a former Catholic, seemed to have a lot of potential as a teacher and leader. I spoke to the leaders of the fellowship group, and found that they had noticed the same thing. I talked to this brother and we arranged to begin meeting regularly so that I could disciple him one on one. We worked together to develop a plan for our meetings, and I was really excited about this new opportunity for ministry. I longed to see this brother grow toward maturity in the Lord, becoming the servant of God that I knew he had the potential to be.

By God's grace everything went relatively smoothly for a while; we were sharing our struggles with each other and covering the subjects we had planned. Pretty quickly, however, life began to intrude. The brother I was working to disciple was preparing to get married, and was thinking about moving out of state to go back to school. We started missing our meetings, and eventually they stopped altogether. I was disappointed and discouraged. I couldn't tell if our time together had made any difference for this young brother's spiritual growth or walk with the Lord. I wondered what I had done wrong, and if all the prayer and time and work had been worth it.

**"It was an unexpected moment of joy, realizing that I had been part of helping another brother see the beauty and glory of God in a new way."**

But God surprised me. During one of our final fellowship group meetings before this brother moved out of state for school, he began sharing how his understanding of and relationship with God had been shaped and deepened by his time with me. I found myself moved to tears - even though it seemed to me that I had done a poor job discipling this brother, God chose to work through me to help him grow closer to the Lord. It was a moment of unexpected joy, realizing that I had been part of helping another brother see the beauty and glory of God in a new way. He would be able to walk in the light of that truth, and share it with his new wife and others who God brought across his path.

I had discovered the truth that the Apostle John describes in our passage from his third epistle: there is no greater joy in ministry than to hear that those we serve are walking in the truth (3 John 3-4). "John rejoices when his readers adhere to the teachings of the Word of God, obeying them and living according to them. Their walk in truth brings joy to his heart - as it does to any true pastor. A pastor does not find true joy through increasing membership, a new building, or a higher salary as much as he does when he sees those to whom he ministers walking in the truth. True joy in a pastor's heart flows from watching men and women, boys and girls, being conformed to the image of Christ. True believers are the real wages of a faithful minister" (Beeke, 220).

We have hope of joy in ministry leadership only when we are pouring ourselves into the lives of others for the purpose of helping them to see, rejoice in, and live out the truths of the word of God as they become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. "Spiritual leaders who invest in people will experience deep satisfaction when they see those individuals fulfill God's purposes for their lives. There is no greater experience for leaders than rejoicing with those who have matured in their faith as a result of their leaders' faithfulness...Leaders' joy is multiplied as younger associates follow their example and they in turn help others grow" (Blackaby, 365).

The longing to disciple others that we may see them walking in the truth rises naturally from a shepherd's heart that is being made more like the heart of Jesus. The Lord found joy in the preservation and growth of those whom God had given Him (John 17). There was a promise of great satisfaction in the prospect of an uncountable redeemed multitude from every tribe, tongue, and nation which would be brought to God through Jesus' faithful ministry (Isaiah 53:10-11). But this joy and satisfaction did not come without cost - it lay on the other side of the cross. Jesus was strengthened to endure the difficulty, rejection, and suffering of His earthly ministry by the future hope of the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:1-2).

**"Jesus was strengthened to endure the difficulty, rejection, and suffering of His earthly ministry by the future hope of joy set before Him."**

In the same way, as leaders and disciplers we can be strengthened to endure the pain, the longing, and the apparent failures of ministry by focusing on the hope of joy that we know we will one day experience at the Lord's coming. On that day we will see what God has done in the lives of so many through our feeble but faithful service. Then we will rejoice in praising Him for making us a part of our brothers' and sisters' journeys to glory in His presence. Above all, we will see how Christ is glorified, and God magnified, in the lives and praises of those into whom we have poured ourselves. If we remember this hope when our ministries feel pointless or seem like failures, God will work through it to strengthen us for perseverance in His service.

Every one looks at least a certain distance into the future, and projects something into it to give it reality and interest to himself. That is his hope. It may be the returns he expects from investments of money; it may be the expansion of some scheme he has set on foot for the common good; it may be his children, on whose love and reverence, or on whose advancement in life, he counts for the happiness of his declining years. Paul, we know, had none of these hopes; when he looked down into the future he saw no fortune growing secretly, no peaceful retirement in which the love of sons and daughters would surround him and call him blessed. Yet his future was not dreary or desolate; it was bright with a great light; he had a hope that made life abundantly worth living, and that hope was the Thessalonians. He saw them in his mind's eye grow daily out of the lingering taint of heathenism into the purity and love of Christ. He saw them, as the discipline of God's providence had its perfect work in them, escape from the immaturity of babes in Christ, and grow in the grace

and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour to the measure of the stature of perfect men. He saw them presented faultless in the presence of the Lord's glory in the great day. That was something to live for. To witness that spiritual transformation which he had inaugurated carried on to completion gave the future a greatness and a worth which made the Apostle's heart leap for joy...Such words might well be charged with extravagance if we omitted to look at the connection in which they stand. "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming?" *Before our Lord Jesus at His coming*: this is the presence, this the occasion, with which Paul confronts, in imagination, his hope and joy and triumph. They are such as give him confidence and exultation even as he thinks of the great event which will try all common hopes and put them to shame (Denney n.d., 106-108).

#### **References:**

Beeke, Joel. 2006. *The Epistles of John*. New York: Evangelical Press.

Blackaby, Henry & Richard Blackaby. 2011. *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing.

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## **You Don't Mean My Whole Heart, Do You? (Part Two)**

*By Nathan Cothorn*

### ***An Unanswered Call (the kid's a runner)***

I was 15 years old when I first remember hearing the call. It was late one night after everyone else had went to bed, and I was in my bedroom secretly tearing pictures of Jesus out of our big family Bible so I could draw them. I would tear them out real careful so that no one would notice (I'm pretty sure no one would have anyway) and then trace the picture onto a piece of art paper and color it with color pencils. At the time, that seemed okay to me. Then one night I was tearing a page out of the book of Matthew and for some reason, I started reading. By 3 a.m. I knew. I was God's man, but I didn't know what to do about it. After a bit of thought I knew I had to tell someone, so I went downstairs to the kitchen and picked up the phone. I called the only person I thought would understand.

**"I was God's man, but I didn't know what to do about it."**

I don't remember his name anymore, but he was a pastor of a downtown church, and my mom had taken me to talk to him a few times after she divorced my step-father. Plus, I remember that this guy was cool. If there was anyone who would get it, it would be him. So I dialed.

Ring, ring, ring..."Hello?" His voice was sleepy.

"Hi pastor, this is Nathan Cothorn."

"Who?"

"Nathan," I said, "Nathan Cothorn."

"Nathan? What is it...what time is it?" He started to sound a little annoyed.

"I think it's about three," I said. "Hey, I've been reading the Bible, and I think I'm supposed to be a man of God." I was thrilled. I was excited. I thought this was really it. I'd never been so...

"What? It's three a.m. Call back tomorrow." And then he hung up.

I stood staring at the receiver in my hand. I guess that was it. Maybe I'd been wrong. I was just a kid, after all. And the pastor really didn't seem to care (if ever there was a kid with a self-esteem problem, it was me).

I never did call back. Just couldn't bring myself to tell someone again. Even up until now, I can count the number of people I've told on one hand. Now, I'm not putting any of that on the pastor. I had plenty of other reasons why I never brought it up again. But, just for future reference, if a kid ever calls you up in the middle of the night and tells you he believes that he's been called to serve God, give that kid a few minutes of your time. He may be the bruised reed or smoking flax spoken about by Isaiah: *"A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench..."* - *Is. 42:3a*

Not long after that, I started getting into trouble. A couple years later, I was running around the country with a degenerate uncle and learning how to be a dirtbag. A couple years after that, I was in prison serving a 58 year sentence.

In all of that, though, and in everything that would follow, I never forgot the night when I knew, I KNEW, I was made to serve God. Problem was, I didn't let it turn into faith. I kept telling myself, "Who are you to think that God would want you? A man of God. Yeah, right!"

**"I kept telling myself, 'Who are you to think that God would want you? A man of God. Yeah, right!'"**

But God did want me, and somewhere deep down, I knew that. I knew the absolute truth of it, and that's where the guilt came from. But I still ran. That was the one thing I was really good at doing all by myself.

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."* - *Rev. 3:20*

I could hear Him knocking at the door of my heart, and there were times where I wanted to answer so badly it hurt. I sat back and watched as God

worked in life after life. I watched harder men than me give their hearts to Him, and then watched Him deliver them from impossible situations - like being mired in gang life - so they could serve Him. And yet, when I would try to do the same thing, fear would overtake me and I would back out. I just didn't trust God to really take care of me. Plus, I was afraid of the things that He might want me to do. I was in the cool guy crowd in prison, and had worked really hard to get there. I knew that God would want me to talk to people that cool guys just plain aren't supposed to talk to.

In a booklet put out by The Cell Church called *In the Wilderness: Lessons from the Exodus*, author Phillip Rodriguez talks about the children of Israel being afraid to go into the promised land because of the report of the ten spies who said that there were obstacles, strongholds, and giants in the land. The more they dwelt on those fears, the more they grew in their minds and hearts. That's how I felt, except I hadn't even made it out of Egypt yet. I was still in bondage. Not only was I still a slave to my sin, I was a slave to my fears. My mind continued to scream at me to RUN!! But, my heart was tired of running. Tired of being afraid. Tired of pretending. I wanted to serve God. I wanted what these other men had.

*"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." - 1 John 4:18*

I tell you friends, if you are called by God, He is not going to let you run forever. Just ask Jonah. If need be, He will take you to the woodshed over and over again, but eventually He will get your attention. It took a lot, but He finally brought me to that place. He opened my heart and revealed the true motives behind everything I was doing. I was drowning in my own stubborn, self-willed pride. I was afraid. And I was lost in condemnation and feelings of shame and guilt. He took me to that place, but He didn't leave me there. He showed me the One that He had given to die for me, so that I didn't have to be afraid, so that I didn't have to live in condemnation, so that I didn't have to pretend. The One that He showed me was His Son, Jesus Christ. It was Him that I had needed, and it was in Him that I finally found salvation. It was to Him that I finally surrendered. I could finally stop running and rest in Him.

**"He showed me the One that He had given to die for me, so that I didn't have to be afraid, so that I didn't have to live in condemnation, so that I didn't have to pretend."**

*"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matt. 11:28-30*

I hear similar testimony all the time. Some are even people who served in the church their whole lives without ever knowing the One they claimed to serve. Some were self-reliant, others were afraid to let go and trust God. They all knew about God, but had never given their hearts to Christ. They were walking in their strength, which never got any of them very far, and had no real understanding

of what being born again really meant. But somewhere along the road they met Jesus. The real Jesus. The One who shed His blood and gave His life for them. And friend, He was all they needed.

*"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." - 2 Cor. 3:18*

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## Ministry Updates

### Songlasses

by Daniel Lyons

You know, it always amazes me that we are made in God's image. It also amazes me that our Father cannot look upon us because He finds our sin so detestable. In which the most righteous of men (whose acts are as filthy rags) blind God our Father with sin, Who is pure and holy.

Our Creator God is so glorious and pure with His righteousness, His mere presence blinds us and burns our skin. How are we to communicate if we cannot see eye to eye? Thankfully, God our Creator gives us grace through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Through the righteous blood of Christ Jesus, God the Father of ALL creation bridges our gap, providing a filter or "Songlasses" so He can communicate with and see us.

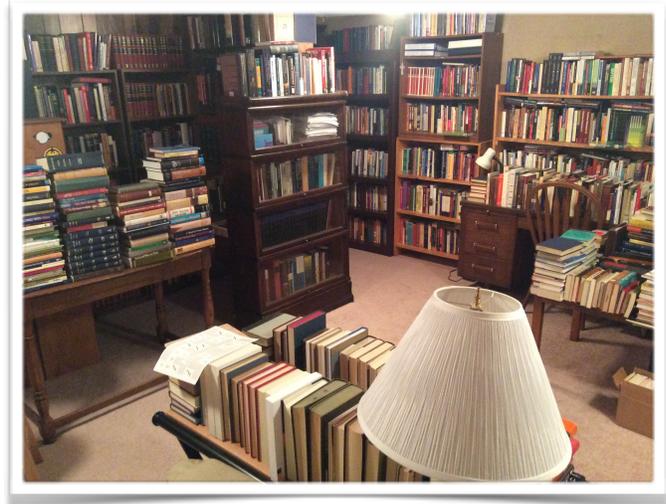
Now as I sit here, I try to think of ways to LOVE all the people I hate. I LOVE Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior more than I hate anyone. As I continue to think, I ask myself, "Did God the Father of All, Creator of the universe, also through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, Precious Redeemer, also create Songlasses for me?"

**•What does "Tameonta" mean?** We get this question so frequently that we have decided to include the answer in every issue from now on! The name is a transliteration of a Greek phrase found in 1 Cor. 1:28 which means "things that are not." Read 1 Cor. 1:26-31 for a better understanding of why we selected this name for our newsletter.

**•Third Millennium Ministries:** The Cell Church continues to look for solid biblical resources we can make available to leaders in the prison churches to help you equip the saints for the work of the ministry. The most recent tool we are pleased to offer is a theological training curriculum from Third Millennium Ministries. "Third Mill" makes the entire curriculum available for free, and each of the seventeen theological courses includes multiple lessons, most with matching study guides and Q&A forums. All the material is written from a Reformed theological perspective and is available in print, with contributions from a number of world-class Christian scholars (including Darrell Bock, Vern Poythress, and Philip Ryken, to name just a few). Anyone interested in using this curriculum to teach theology in the prison churches should contact us for more information. We are excited to see what God will do through this curriculum and the ministers He has gifted and called to teach His word to others!

- ***Week of United Prayer:*** We are amazed and grateful to the Lord for moving so many of you to extraordinary wrestling with Him in prayer during the recent week of united prayer for revival in the prison churches. The church at one facility sent us a prayer schedule, where brothers had signed up to pray in half-hour shifts, almost 24 hours a day, for the entire week! Our ministry even has one supporter out here, a brother named Daren who labors with a ministry in Kansas, who happened to be in Colorado during the week of prayer. God called him to climb Mount Princeton, the mountain overlooking Buena Vista, and pray for the prison church there from the summit. We trust that this spirit of prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, will remain and grow stronger in the days ahead. Like Jacob, I pray we will not let our God and Father go until He blesses us with a harvest of souls and the fresh power of His Spirit for ministry!
- ***Looking for Christmas Art:*** The Cell Church enjoys sending Christmas cards to our ministry partners in the prisons. We would love to be able to feature some original artwork on the front of our Christmas cards next year. If you are a Christian artist and have one or more pieces of work that you think would be appropriate for our cards, please send them to us!

- ***The Cell Church Research Library:*** The Cell Church is pleased to offer our theological library as a resource for ministers. Mark Walker's father, Jerome, holds a degree in library science and spent many years as head librarian at Christian colleges. Using his vast knowledge of theological books and libraries, Jerome has spent his life building his own personal library, which he is now graciously transferring to Mark and The Cell Church. The library currently holds over 3000 volumes on philosophy, biblical studies, theology, church & ancient history, biography, ministry, and biblical languages. The Cell Church has created an online searchable library catalog, and has begun offering the books for checkout to our volunteers and parolees who work with our ministry. For imprisoned ministers, if you have a research question please let us know. We will do our best to compile material from our library to send you. We are grateful to God for providing us with the ability to support your ministries in this way!



- ***TUMI Classes Finally Begin:*** We praise God that after years of preparation, The Cell Church TUMI classes began this month at Buena Vista and Arkansas Valley. Between the two facilities we have just over 20 students working faithfully to develop their biblical knowledge and leadership gifts so that they will be able to serve God more effectively in ministry. We are grateful to our volunteers who are giving of their precious time to teach these classes! Please ask the Lord to continue to provide for this aspect of our ministry, and keep both volunteers and students in your prayers as they work together for the glory of God.

## Letters from the Church

"It was our honor and a wonderful experience to join The Cell Church and our brothers in other facilities in this week of prayer and fasting. This was my first time fasting and it was amazing just how much closer I felt to the Father when putting the flesh into submission and depriving it of its desires. Thank you for calling me and all the brothers to join The Cell Church in this week of corporate prayer. The brothers here rallied together at your call and it was a beautiful thing. Some of us would go to chow and give our trays away and spend the time sitting in the chow hall, praying together. Like I said it was a beautiful thing."

- *Richard, Buena Vista Correctional Facility*

"We are yet united in prayer for that great awakening. Myself and the Brothers who were committed to seeking God's face were eager to join in with all the saints in both prayer and fasting. May the saints be encouraged to persist therein and to take heed to themselves lest they forget that to pray for God to do great things, is to ask God to use us to do a great work. It would be a hypocritical prayer should we not fix our gaze towards His house and His fields with the expectation that He shall grant our requests upon the heels of our faithfulness and labor of love."

- *Travis, Buena Vista Correctional Facility*

"After I had received your letter about the week of prayer, I read it to our Sunday morning and Monday evening services. It was a blessing. We have some strong prayer warriors here. Our Monday night service / Bible study has been growing steadily, but our Sunday services were getting real thin - that is, until yesterday. A lot of guys showed up yesterday, and the Holy Spirit was really moving. It was awesome!"

- *Glenn, Canon Minimum Re-entry Center*

"The testimonies you shared from the other prisons were amazing. We have a brother here who had a mass on his lungs and we prayed for him and with him about it, and when he went for his next round of tests it was completely gone...I asked him to write you and share his testimony."

- *Phillip, Arrowhead Correctional Center*