



TAMEONTA

Imitate Their Faith: The Joyful Burden of Spiritual Leadership

By Mark Walker

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." (Hebrews 13:7, 17 ESV)

Those of you who have been following along with us over the first two issues of Tameonta will know we have been focusing on passages that talk about the kinds of people God loves to put into His service, and why He chooses to use notorious sinners like you and me. If you missed these articles in the April and July issues, feel free to write us and we'll be happy to send them to you.



Anonymous original pen drawing, Limon Correctional Facility, Limon, CO

The Cell Church is burdened by these matters because the vision the Lord has given us for prison ministry could be accurately described as "indigenous leadership development." Our prayer for those of you who have been called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit for some form of ministry

leadership is that these meditations on Scripture have encouraged you. Not only *can* the Lord work through someone like you, He *delights* to work through someone like you because it brings Him great glory. So here's the question now: If God is calling you to a position of leadership, and He wants to use you for His glory, what does that look like? What is a biblical, godly ministry leader? This question will occupy us in these articles for quite some time, Lord willing. If you are reading this and you do not think you are called to spiritual leadership, we pray you will still find this series edifying. Who knows - you may discover a calling you never knew you had! May God enable all of us to grow into the leaders He has called us to be, and above all to grow into the image of

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our Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect human leader.

Before we embark on an extended study of Scripture, seeking to allow God's word to mold us into Christ-like spiritual leaders, we need to pause and count the cost (Luke 14:28-32). We must temper all our biblical encouragement with some biblical caution. There are a number of trials, pitfalls, and temptations which are specific to spiritual leadership, and we will discuss many of them further in future articles. For now I want to focus, by God's grace, on two related burdens of leadership: being accountable to God for our leadership, and being a model for other believers.

Being a leader is hard. It's not primarily about privilege - although it certainly *is* a great privilege to serve God and others as a leader (1 Tim. 3:1) - but about responsibility. The Scripture makes it clear that if we are called to take up the mantle of spiritual leadership we will be responsible to God for the other believers He has entrusted to our ministry. As the writer to the Hebrews encouraged Christians in our opening passage, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, **as those who will have to give an account**" (Heb. 13:17, emphasis added). Similarly James wrote, "Not many of you should become teachers, brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jam. 3:1). Think about this very carefully: if you are placed by God in a position of leadership, the Bible says you will be responsible to God for the souls of those you lead! This should sober all of us who sense such a call, and prompt us to examine our hearts and motives. Are we willing to shoulder this burden, to take up this cross and follow after our Lord Jesus in the strength of His Spirit?

"[Spiritual leaders] are called to be models of the Christian life, living examples to others of what it looks like to follow Christ."

Why are ministry leaders held to such a high standard by the Lord? Because as leaders people imitate us; they walk the spiritual path behind us and go wherever we go. "The spiritual leader must know where he or she is going before presuming to lead others" (Sanders 2007, 127). We are called to be models of the Christian life, living examples of what it looks like to follow Christ. "In a world that reeks of rebellion against God, people need to see living examples of obedience to his Word. Indeed, people learn as much by watching the lives of their leaders as by listening to their words" (Strauch 2006, 179). Consider our opening passage from Hebrews:

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. **Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith**" (Heb. 13:7, emphasis added). In other words, if God has placed me in a leadership role, He tells His people to try to live like I live and end up like I end up. If that is the case, I had better strive by God's grace to live like Christ and make sure the path of my life leads straight to Him! As J. Oswald Sanders (2007, 19) cautioned, "If those who hold influence over others fail to lead toward the spiritual uplands, then surely the path to the lowlands will be well worn."

We should be able to say confidently with the Apostle Paul, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9). Commenting on Paul's similar exhortation in 1

Corinthians 4:16, 17, D.A. Carson (2004, 111-112) writes, "This [passage] suggests that the Christian leader today not only must teach the gospel, but also must teach how the gospel works out in daily life and conduct. And that union must be modeled as well as explained...Faithful Christian leaders must make the connections between creed and conduct, between the cross and how to live. And they must exemplify this union in their own lives."

Being a model is part of the burden of spiritual leadership (Tit. 2:7). Ministry leaders, like all Christians, are called to Christ-like life. But unlike other Christians, their lives are held up publicly as examples for fellow believers to follow (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). This means that if we are in positions of leadership our sins and failures can do great damage to the church. Think of the high-profile pastors who have been caught in very public sin. How much harm did they do to others' faith? How much dishonor did they bring on the name of Christ? How did they impact the way unbelievers think about the gospel? Being a spiritual leader means being a public representative of Christ and His people, both to the church and to the world.

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Ministry leadership is a tremendous responsibility, and not to be undertaken lightly or with improper motives. "Spiritual leadership is not a calling we choose to pursue; it is a calling we choose to answer. We don't decide to become leaders; we decide to respond and keep responding to God's call in our lives. Along the way, whether we like it or not, that involves us in leadership" (Sanders 2007, 171). Therefore we should seek God diligently in prayer and carefully examine our hearts. If you do these things and are still convinced that God is calling you to a leadership role in ministry, you can answer His call with humble confidence, knowing that as you submit to His leading the Lord will be with you and enable you to carry out the ministry He has given you. As the great Puritan pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote:

They that are about to undertake this work and devote themselves to it ought to do it with a sense of the greatness of the work and of their own insufficiency for it and of their unworthiness of the honor of being called to and improved in it, and especially of being succeeded in it and actually made instruments of carrying on the work of God's grace in the hearts of men...

Those that are about to undertake this work should do it with the greatest seriousness and consideration of the vast importance of the work, how great a thing it is to have the care of precious souls committed to them, and with a suitable concern upon their minds, considering the great difficulties, dangers, and temptations that do accompany it. It is compared to going to warfare (1 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Timothy 1:18). They ought solemnly to devote themselves to the Lord to serve him in this work, with a resolution to give themselves wholly to these things, and with all their might to seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom and the

salvation of souls in it, looking to God to furnish them with those gifts and graces of his Spirit that shall fit them for this work, for these are the fruits of God's grace. (Bailey and Wills 2003, 51-52)

So far we have focused on our biblical caution; the responsibility and the burden of ministry leadership should by now be clearer. But we have called this a "joyful burden." Where can we find joy in what Scripture tells us is a daunting and difficult calling? We will take up that question in our next issue.

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My Road to Mongolia

By Q. Valdois

11.10.14 - 9:30 a.m. Pacific Time

Looking Forward to Ministry in Mongolia

As I write this short article, I am sitting in the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport waiting to board my flight to Beijing, China and then to Mongolia.

A Little Context

If you have ever met me, the chances are good that you have heard me talk about Mongolia. About ten years ago, I really couldn't have told you anything about the

country or even have pointed it out on a map. Then I had the privilege of being cellies with a Mongolian guy named Darkhanbayar (Danny). Over the next year and a half, he told me a lot about his country and we talked about a time in the future when we would be out of prison and "planned" a trip in which I would travel to Mongolia to visit him. When I met Danny he wasn't a Christian and, in fact, hadn't really even heard the name of Jesus. Because, at the time, he had very little English it was difficult for him to fully understand the Gospel and he wasn't too interested in it anyway.

Eventually I was transferred to another prison, but Danny and I kept in touch through letters. I could see that God was opening up his heart. At last, the Gospel of Christ overtook and conquered him.

The Spirit began working on his life and he became, truly, a different person. Over the next several years Danny faced many hardships, losses, and devastating disappointments. God showed him that he was loved and brought him through those times, and gave him more faith along the way.

In August, Danny was released on parole. He had an ICE detainer, and spent two more months waiting to be deported back to Mongolia. It had been about 18 years since he'd seen his family, so his homecoming was a very happy thing. So many things have changed in Mongolia, in his family, and - because of Christ - in his life. He is experiencing some pretty awesome culture shock.



Q. Valdois is the Southern Colorado Regional Director for The Cell Church.

Back to the Article

So, here I am in Seattle waiting for the next leg of my journey to see my friend who I haven't seen face to face in nearly nine years. We have some things planned, but mostly we want to sit and talk a lot. We will also look for a good church for him to attend, and work on his resume. But above all we will celebrate the goodness of God, who can take a place like prison and fill it with Spirit, start a mass adoption, and change lives and develop leaders in His church - and on and on...

Take a look at the people God has surrounded you with right now. Don't be shy about making plans together for future ministry, completely leave the timing in God's hands, and see how God starts to prepare you for what He has for you. Your life doesn't start when you get out - it's already started!

I'll let you know how everything went when I get back. God bless you guys!

Why Are We in Prison?

By Gary Hardy

Why are you, or why were you in prison, is one of the most challenging questions a prisoner or former prisoner must face. It is a question which is asked not only by others, but one which each prisoner must ask - and answer - themselves. Simplistically, each question may easily be answered

"Do we view prison as punishment, as discipline and correction, or as an opportunity to grow and serve?"

by stating the nature of the offense for which they are imprisoned; however, life changing events are rarely as simple as they appear. Therefore, to obtain a better understanding of why someone is in prison, perhaps we should consider a different view, by looking through the eyes of a prisoner. Welcome to my world.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "What you see and hear depends a great deal on where you stand, and what sort of person you are." In other words, how we view things in

this life depends on who we are and where we stand in our present circumstances. For example, once the natural and legal consequences of our sins and criminal acts led us to prison, how do we then view such things? Is imprisonment purely an act of man, or a scheme of the enemy, or are we being rescued and delivered by the mighty hand of a loving and merciful God? Do we view prison as punishment, as discipline and correction, or as an opportunity to grow and serve?

Prison is naturally viewed as a place of punishment, and for those who choose to see and believe they are being punished, prison remains a difficult and dreadful place. However, for a child of God, who has been saved through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8), prison is not a place of such punishment. For Jesus took the punishment which was due us upon himself when He died upon the cross for our sins. So for the believer, since prison is not a place of punishment, there must be a greater purpose.

Believers and even unbelievers may view prison as a place of discipline as as an opportunity for correction. There is great value and blessing for those who learn to patiently receive and endure such discipline; for the purpose of discipline is to help conform the one being disciplined into the image of Christ and to help fulfill God's purpose in their lives (Rom. 8:28-29).

Prisoners who see their circumstances only as a place of punishment, or even just as our Father's loving discipline, may yet miss out on God's intended purpose. Those who choose to believe they are being punished often have unbroken hearts and are clinging to worthless idols. Without brokenness, humility, or worshiping the One True God, prison may well appear to be a place of punishment from which one may seek to escape. However, those who choose to believe they are being disciplined have a better, yet incomplete, view. For while discipline may be painful in the present, it produces in the one being disciplined "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). Why would God use loving discipline to bring forth "peaceable fruit of righteousness"?

What if prison is more than a just punishment in a worldly view, and more than discipline and correction in a spiritual view? What if prison is a place beyond punishment, or discipline, or correction, but a place of deliverance where God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose? (Rom. 8:28) What if prison - which the world sees as a wilderness of punishment - is actually a place where God has brought us, just as He brought Israel out of Egypt; and where Jesus Christ is calling us, just as He called His disciples - not to surrender, but to submit our lives to His authority and to follow Him wherever He leads?

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For when we choose to follow Him, instead of seeking our own desires, we are given authority; we are given power; we are given grace; and we are given peace.

David recognized the authority, power, grace, and peace of God in spite of his circumstances when he wrote, *"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord"* (Ps. 27:13-14 NKJV). But of Israel in the wilderness, the Psalmist wrote, *"They (Israel) soon forgot His works. They did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the desert, and He gave them their requests, but He sent leanness to their souls"* (Ps. 106:13-15 NKJV).

So the question becomes, is prison a place of punishment, of discipline, or a place of deliverance? Prisoners who love God above all else, and are the called according to His purpose are being conformed to the image of our Savior, Jesus Christ, for His purpose and for His glory. Therefore, prison is not always a place of punishment, not even a place of discipline and correction, but a place where one is given an opportunity to grow and serve.

For what you see and hear and believe depends a great deal on where you stand; and whether you believe prison is a place of punishment, or discipline and correction, or deliverance and opportunity - it is exactly what you say.

The way to freedom in prison is not through the gate, but through learning from the Psalms to:

Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness, delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noon day. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, do not fret because of the man who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass, cease from anger and forsake wrath, do not fret, it only causes harm." (Ps. 37:3-8 NKJV)

I have been in the system since 2005. There were times I thought prison was a place of punishment; and it was. There were times I thought it was a place of discipline and correction, and it was and still is. However, I am learning to see prison differently, as a place where all who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and who love God are the chosen and called according to His purpose. In some cases we are being disciplined and corrected; however, such discipline is not without purpose, but that we shall be delivered from the power of sin even as we have been delivered from the penalty of sin, so that through the Holy Spirit we shall be witnesses to Jesus Christ in prison and unto the world.

Why are you here?

Copyright 2014 by Gary W. Hardy. Used by permission. Gary Hardy is a prisoner in Florence, Arizona; he recently graduated with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Louisiana Baptist University Theological Seminary, and is beginning a doctoral program.

Ministry Updates

- The Cell Church is finally approved as a TUMI Satellite (TUMI = The Urban Ministry Institute)! Thank you so much for your prayers during this process. We have been raising the necessary funds to purchase the curriculum, textbooks, and materials necessary to start our first site. Please pray that the Lord will open the door for us to begin this program in DOC, and that He would draw those men He has chosen to participate.
- The Lord graciously enabled us to complete and submit our application for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status to the Federal government, and we received official approval early this month. This is a huge burden off of our shoulders, and we praise and thank God for His faithfulness and sustaining grace! He has already begun drawing more financial partners to The Cell Church, and now that we are approved as a 501(c)(3), we pray that more doors will be open for our fundraising efforts in support of the ministries of the prison churches.
- We have begun to meet with small groups at local churches to discuss getting involved in ministry to the prison churches, especially mentoring through letters. By God's grace we have encountered quite a bit of interest and excitement. Please continue to pray that the Lord will prosper this aspect of the ministry in accordance with His will.
- With this issue of *Tameonta* we are excited to offer our first newsletter article written by a prisoner. Please feel free to submit short articles on various subjects that you think might be appropriate for the newsletter. If we are interested in publishing your work we will contact you to discuss it further. Remember that we have limited space, and will not be able to publish every quality submission.



Introducing TUMI of The Cell Church!

Letters from the Church

"Your notes and cards are always such a huge encouragement to me. I'm sure you know what a blessing any mail is in prison, but I am even more excited about what God is doing in The Cell Church."

- Gary, ASPC Eyman, Florence, AZ

"I was filled with joy when [my cell mate] shared your letter with me as well as both of the brothers who wrote about their impacting testimony. This is what God is doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. I believe this is where God is taking the church. He is using men behind the walls to reach thousands, and I do mean thousands, of souls both within the system [and] in our community with the greatest story ever told."

- Maurice, Arrowhead Correctional Center, Cañon City, CO