

## ***Self-Awareness***

Dear Jay,

When I began pastoring, at least for a few months, I believed that I could do just about anything—manage a mega-church, counsel, teach, pray, lead and build a leadership team. There was a subtle grandiosity that marked my humility!

I had served on Inter-Varsity staff at Rutgers University and surrounding NJ colleges/universities for three years. This was followed by three years at seminary (Princeton and Gordon-Conwell). My mind was filled with Hudson Taylor, David Brainerd, Jim Elliot, Willow Creek, Paul Yongji Cho, etc. I, too, would do a great work for God.

Following seminary, my wife of six months, Geri, and I, spent an additional year in Costa Rica learning Spanish to prepare for pastoring in New York City. Then finally, we moved into Queens, New York to get the lay of the land prior to planting a church that would plant other churches in both English and Spanish. Thus another year was spent preparing, serving as an associate pastor, and seeking God's face 2-3 hours a day in prayer about the future.

I was a rocket ready to be launched, seasoned (at least I thought so), 31 years old, full of fire. I had been trained, mentored and developed in the best of Evangelicalism. Who would ever have imagined that six years later I would be on a therapist's couch, very depressed, angry at God for my horrible life and

thoroughly confused as to why Geri felt she would be happier separated than married to me! What do I wish someone had told me? Three simple principles:

1. *Be Yourself.* Nate was a seasoned believer. At least he was raised in the church. He was a good worker, a *tither*. He understood the *church* thing that was new to me, having come to Christ at age 19 in a para-church ministry.

One day, Nate approached me with great seriousness after one of our cell meetings. I knew the experience. He was leaving. With sobriety, speaking as an oracle of God he simply stated, *Pete, I believe in the vision of this church. The problem is, I don't believe God will do it through you. I'm leaving.*

He had been visiting two of the larger churches in the area that had powerful prayer ministries, seasoned leadership and thousands of people. We were less than 60, most of whom were deciding if they wanted to follow Jesus or not.

I tried to be a *good* pastor, at least, what others thought I *should* be. The problem was that I was trying to be somebody else! And that ran against the grain of my soul.

Thomas Merton has spoken of the *true self* in his writings. That is a composite of your personality, your story and your limitations. To live another person's life is a great burden. I didn't explore the story of my life and its influence in shaping me until my life and ministry were crumbling. Why bother? I was a new creation in Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit!

Don't make the same mistake, Jay. Know your story. Take time to explore your family of origin. What critical events have shaped you today? What *limps*

has God given you as a result? How do they impact the way you relate to people today?

*2. Be Truthful.* By year six we had started two churches—one in English with about 450 people, another in Spanish with almost 300. I was senior pastor of both. I was proclaiming our vision of churches all over the city and overseas. (No, I didn't understand my limitations.)

I was so committed to doing a good job that I lied. Yes, I lied. Not consciously, but I lied. I lied to myself. I did not embrace my limits and weaknesses. I looked at only the good side of others, the ministry, and myself consistently pressing ahead into the future. I lied to others. I made promises I couldn't keep. I would take responsibility and blame for things to ease over tensions and to resolve conflicts. I wouldn't tell people hard things about their lives for fear they would leave. I lied to God. Much of my work for Him was for me. My low level of awareness made it difficult to discern the two. And it was too painful to seriously address.

You can't build a church, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim.3:15) upon lies and half-truths. The material is too flimsy.

*3. Be Loving.* 1 Corinthians 13 makes clear that it is possible to move in the gifts of God and not be loving. That is true. I did it. I was too busy working for God to be loving. I thought I loved my wife, children, staff and friends. I couldn't understand why they didn't feel it, why they didn't feel valued. I rationalized that it was their problem. It wasn't.

When our Spanish congregation had a split, I found myself descending, against my will, into the reality of who I was—a person who didn't really love well. Jay, I have learned a lot from this experience. In fact, I believe that failure, depression, weakness, loss, sorrow and closed doors are integral parts of God's work in our lives.

I have also learned a lot from Mother Teresa. She taught me the value of loving one person—just one. I continue to work at growing in my ability to listen deeply to people's stories, to be present, to value the unlovely and to see the image of God in each person I meet.

This is, I believe, the order God has for our loving: Love God (take the time you need to enjoy Him); love yourself (self-care is not a selfish act. It is good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I am to give to others); love your spouse (if applicable); love your children (if applicable); finally, with what is left, love the church. Everything in hell and on earth will come against these priorities. This is the pathway to joy and long-term fruit both for you and those you serve.

Warmly Yours in Christ,

Pete Scazzero

New Life Fellowship, Elmhurst Queens, New York

*Mary . . . sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*

*Luke 10:39*