

February 12, 2009

I've just finished writing an important word to the elders of Youth With A Mission worldwide. Will you look at it over my shoulder and push with me in prayer?

I just read it to Julie and she bowed her head and prayed, "Lord, it has cost us so much to give this word, but it was worth it. May the power of your Spirit bring it to our friends' hearts."

She had a large tumor, the size of a hockey puck removed from her back two weeks ago. It proved not to be cancer when the biopsy came in, but you can imagine the trauma. She is a treasure to me.

Thank you for walking with us. Our little prayer shield keeps us alive spiritually, financially and emotionally.

I don't mind if you copy this word to others, particularly if they are senior leaders in a ministry or Kingdom enterprise. YWAM is so diverse that Jesus' 'now' word to the Mission is usually appropriate for the rest of the Church in part.

Yours always,

John Dawson

A Word to YWAM Eldership

This morning a cold rain is hammering the roof as Julie and I pray for the mission. God often speaks to us through objects and circumstances. Let me tell you a story, a story about covering and protection.

Many years ago when we entered into the responsibilities of Youth With A Mission's presidency the Lord impressed upon me the significance of Exodus 17 and the description of the battle against Amalek as a passage that holds significant keys for YWAM's future.

By now you know what I have to say about it, but to reiterate briefly it shows the significance of three generations in alignment. Moses, Aaron and Hur are some distance from the battle as they collectively hold the rod of authority on the mountain, Joshua and Caleb are in charge and the young Israelites, eighteen to thirty years old, are facing Amalek in battle in the valley below.

Even though the elders on the hill give no tactical leadership to the troops, there is an extraordinary link between their actions and the victory or defeat of the young army below.

Now back to the house in which we sit. It's a nice house, three bedrooms and a tiny low-maintenance yard, convenient for our constant travel. We know God led us to it and He has certainly provided for each month's mortgage payment as we have lived by faith as missionaries. We soon discovered, however, that the roof leaked. The house sits in an exposed location on the Oxnard Plain near the coast of California. The surrounding houses sit tightly clustered on tiny lots with their shoulders hunched to the westerly winds.

We have learned that an ordinary roof will not hold in adverse conditions. During the entire time of this presidency we have struggled with the failing roof. It has exhausted us, put stress on our relationship, caused us to question the Lord's leading, drained us of energy and joy. Many professionals have given their sage advice. Many contractors have taken our money and left us with solutions that did not work. We have replaced sections of the roof in five different ways but it was not until I began acting on my own amateur insights after prayer that the biggest problem was solved. While demolishing a deck railing wall, I found wood rot and a hole the size of my fist that had never been uncovered by eight years of expert advice and expensive repairs. It was a simple fix. I did it myself. The work was completed through the generosity of one of the elders from a ministry in Tacoma that has helped YWAM so much through their emphasis on repentance and restoration. I think that's significant.

Today the rain is torrential and the wind moans in the eaves but the roof holds. We are reading Deuteronomy's description of the priests presenting the lamb's blood morning and evening and we are taking a similar position as we worship, intercede and declare blessing over the mission. We believe our roof drama has been a parable about Youth With A Mission and the dynamics of covering or spiritual protection. You can have effective leadership and a well-equipped army but there's something more.

I believe that there is something profound at work through our simple, fragile arrangements within the Global Leadership Team. As Team 3 we can report to you that we love one another, not professional cooperation, not an efficient division of labor, but heart unity and a common purpose as we sit at Jesus' feet and take steps of childlike obedience.

In doing this, we often take counsel with Loren, Darlene, Jim and Tom. There too, is a circle of genuine affection and respect. Heart unity forged in many trials is the basis of our spiritual authority. The GLT as a whole also reflects a dynamic of honesty, intimacy and the rewards of friendship.

Here's my thought for today. Team 3 is leaning forward into the hope of transition into the leadership of a new generation but we have come to suspect that it's not about dates, processes and worthy candidates just yet. God wants from us certain outcomes before we are released to modified roles. God wants to complete some healing within our relationships as elders. He wants to strengthen that which gives covering to many. He wants this done in every field, region and global ministry. Some of this is our responsibility, some of this is yours.

I travel the world and have the privilege of seeing firsthand the amazing people that make up Youth With A Mission. I have just witnessed exemplary transitions in India and Norway and I see the beginning of a very significant transition at my home base in Kona that will affect us all. King's Mansion is a place of dignity for Loren and Darlene in this season of their lives. It gives them a place to host leaders in an intimate setting. It is also symbolic of the building of the house of the grandparents throughout the whole mission. I am believing God for great progress on this property and the vision associated with it before we meet as a GLT in Kona for our 50th celebration next year. A new roof is in place and the interior building is progressing.

Unfortunately there are many family streams and geographic ministry structures around the world where the "roof" still leaks after years of expensive and exhausting repairs. I'm not talking about leaders in conflict over issues of legitimate debate or emphasis. I'm not talking about failed leadership and the fallout that comes of it. I'm talking about people who already respect and love each other, moving intentionally toward a position of greater heart connection and specific agreement. That's when revelation about things like structure becomes clear and God-directed change can take place without producing damaged hearts.

Moses, Aaron and Hur were an informal representation of the eldership of Israel, not a formal governing body in session. They were three spiritual grandparents watching in prayer over the new generation. They were three old friends with tender feelings and great respect for one another.

It is these informal clusters that God is seeking to deploy as operational leadership is delegated to the new (Joshua and Caleb) generation. We have too many parts of YWAM where the founding

generation has drifted to a position of polite respectful cooperation. I fear detachment from exercising spiritual authority in today's battle. I fear the loss of intimacy between elders called to protect and nourish that which they brought to birth.

Since the strategy conference, I have been in dialogue with leaders who are involved with ships, or at some time have evidenced a primary calling to a vision involving ships. Two of them lead ship ministries today, three are engaged in leading other types of ministry and one is in transition towards leading a ship-equipped vision.

In a few days they will meet in Kona, renew friendship with each other and pray over each other. It's not a governmental meeting; however it's the type of essential preliminary that will contribute to the spiritual protection of ship-equipped ministries in the new generation as they emerge.

I'm asking you to be alert and take initiative in a similar way. Think about your own story. Has God given you foundational gifts of friendship that through the years have evolved into an alliance of love with a heart of adoption for the ministries you have birthed together?

Where do these relationships stand today? Pleasant memories but no communication? Polite cooperation? Indifference? The memory of a little pain?

We are elders within YWAM at many levels seeking to give covering to the mission in our unity, however like Nehemiah's workers, we are widely scattered upon the walls. It is also true that senior leaders eventually delegate their operational responsibilities and lose the obligation to show up at conferences and network meetings of any kind. What a relief!

If that's you, remember the battle against Amalek. If the three old friends on the hill did not watch, did not support one another, did not continue to hold up the hand of blessing, the young people would have been slaughtered by Amalek.

A few days ago I was praying for you all and I received Isaiah 27:1-3. "In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea. In that day, a vineyard of wine, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; I water it every moment lest anyone damage it, I guard it night and day."

The reference to Leviathan caught my attention because it is this spirit of division that God refers to in Job 41 when illustrating Job's finite inadequacy. Leviathan literally means the twister. Referring to

the power of this spirit, God humbled Job and through reference to this spirit, God calls us to humility also.

Have you ever tried to fix a broken relationship like a church split with tools like reasoned argument or force of personality? You listen, you explain, you bring out your bag of principles, but somehow it all gets twisted because there's a spiritual battle going on at a deeper level than getting a few facts straight and bringing a bit of counsel about reconciliation.

The other day, Vanessa, a respected intercessor from Costa Rica, contacted me with a word from Jesus that was simple and pointed. "Peacemaker, make peace." It was pointed out to me by another leader that Jesus did not say, "peace keeper," a term for one who guards the status quo.

Let this word come to you all. If you are a spiritual grandparent, do two things. First, get back into right relationship with your peers if you have drifted, and second take some social risks with the new generation as a peacemaker. People get stuck in distrust and isolation and sometimes need a catalyst to find each other again.

Relationships never get better without communication. It's true that people need some space sometimes, but ultimately God's standard for spiritual elders is pure fervent love, not "I forgive you, go your way, it doesn't bother me anymore."

There are some relationships that we are to let go of, but not those of spiritual elders called to give common covering to a committed community. A long silence is not good enough because we have an enemy who interprets the silence and he is "a liar and the father of lies from the beginning."

I spend the whole year sitting in your homes, seeing your works, listening to your stories, and discovering the quality of your spiritual children. This mission is filled with a depth of Christ-like, faithful leadership that is astonishing to me. My heart is filled with admiration and trust. Yet I often come across leaders who believe things about the character of other leaders that are just not true. We must contend for intimacy. "Leave your gift at the altar and be reconciled." Even forgiveness with respect and understanding is not enough. Jesus' standard is perfect love.

What gives covering to children? It's not only the efficient function of the family as an institution that protects and provides. The mystery of marriage is designed to give hope to children regarding their own future. The hope of the joy of companionship, the deep contentment that increases as mother and father journey in intimacy with God and each other.

Last night I saw YWAM's ministry in the Amazon portrayed on American television by ABC News. It wasn't all negative, but it tempted me to discouragement because of its ideological spin. One sample e-mail I got today said, "Leave the beautiful indigenous people of Brazil and the rest of the world out of your *Damn* missions."

From where I sit, Amalek is always visible and breathing threats. At times, Lynn and Iain and myself feel quite fragile, there are great trials that we go through known only to each other. I can't wait to sit with them again in a few days.

Who has God given you? Jesus holds the rod of all authority. Put your hands on Him together. Touch Jesus with confidence because you have been beautified in His sight through His mercy and your years of faithfulness. Stretch the other hand toward the new generation. Let the mind of Christ be in you and let it be confirmed by the agreement of the companions God chose for you. In this position, declare the Word of the Lord. Life will come to many who are now overshadowed by death.

I returned to the USA to attend a national leadership forum consisting of a few prominent leaders and hosted by Jack Hayford. For one long, intense day we grappled with themes of crisis and hope facing America, but Jack was exhausted and excused himself from chairing the last session. I love this man so much and I fear the inevitable loss of his leadership one day. On arriving back at LAX I learned that Campbell McAlpine had died. It feels like the passing of Elijah. His life was an utterly reliable plumb line to me. I felt protected by his watchful love. I still do, because his life has set a standard for me.

We have been well-served by such people. We are to become such people. The last time Campbell prayed over me at his home in England, he said, "Make John a man of influence, not a man of activity." This word was resurrected in my spirit by his death. God help me!

March the 5th last year I had a clear word from God as I waited on Him in the morning. The sense I got was something like this... "Today is a boundary in history. Some potentials have died. No longer contend for them. Other things, long hoped for, will now come to birth. I am both disinheriting and causing to inherit worldwide. I am changing the jurisdictions in the earth to serve My purposes." When I went over to the Kona GO Center, I heard David Demian of Canada declare a similar word.

Emboldened, I wrote to you that I felt that the tectonic plates had shifted and we would now see massive change in the earth. Even with this forewarning, I am shocked by what I see around the world. This truly is a time of massive upheaval and change.

Elders of Youth With A Mission, take your position! The Jubilee Year is upon us. Something in the heart of God is to come to completion in the fiftieth year. This morning I had a clear vision of YWAM

as a walled garden filled with beautiful fruit-bearing trees and plants. Parts of it were neglected and parts of it were pruned and tenderly cared for, but fruitfulness was everywhere. I feel a great weeping burden that we present to Jesus a pleasing version of what He has entrusted to us. As the Moravians once said, “That the Lamb would receive the reward of His suffering.”

John Dawson