

Wisdom from a young person

Aug 11

From Trev Larsen

To the Church

I'm sending this to 64 people, all people who have or still go to meetings. If you are receiving this directly from me it is because you are someone that I felt should know that I am the one who sent this, and that it is unedited. Some of you are my close friends, some I have or currently go to meeting with, some are workers, and some names that jumped out at me when I was searching old e-mails for addresses - a good reminder to always use Bcc on group e-mails. There were others I thought of including, but had no e-mail for. You all have my permission to share or post his letter anywhere that you see fit. I am comfortable with my name being attached to this message.

To the church, whether or not you attend meetings,

All my life I have preferred to stay out of the spotlight, to quietly try to fill my place and do my part. Unfortunately, there sometimes comes a time where it is necessary to be willing to stand for what is right while others sit silently by. I recently went to Hermosa convention with a testimony burned on my heart. For days I wrestled with it, prayed and meditated on it. Asked if it could come from someone else, asked if I could give the testimony and the words be remembered, but not the speaker. Sometimes the answer that we receive is no, and that was my answer. I will not deny the message that God has put on my heart. I will not stand idly by while evil and self-interest pervades God's people. I stood in the first meeting and spoke my message. As close as I can recall it:

"I have come here with a message upon my heart, and I will have no peace until I share it. David committed a terrible crime. He used his power to take that which was not his, and then used his power to cover it up. He was forgiven, but there were consequences, and he became unworthy to build God's temple. There will be a day when forgiveness is absolute, in eternity forgiveness will have no consequences and no loss of worthiness. But we are not in eternity, and while we are on earth there are consequences and there can be a loss of worthiness. Lately we have been hearing stories of those who used their power to commit terrible acts, and stories of those who used their power to cover those acts up. There can be forgiveness, but there are consequences and there is a loss of worthiness. Some have become unworthy of having fellowship in our homes – especially ones with the most innocent and vulnerable. Some

have become unworthy to be a part of God's ministry. Every year we hear from the platform about that desperate need in the harvest field. There is a need, but that need might not seem so desperate if the worthy ministers were not unevenly yoked with the unworthy and with wolves."

This is not a message I feel worthy to speak on but is a message that I must share. There seems to be a thought amongst some that the only way to be saved is to attend meetings. That casting people from our fellowship homes is relegating people to hell. That is not true. We do not need meetings to be saved, we need a close personal relationship with God. Abusers that are truly repentant will see that they are a danger to the meetings and accept that they have lost worthiness. They will accept that there are places that they cannot go, that there are positions that they are unworthy of. The ones who fight against those consequences are the ones who are not repentant.

Growing up reading the bible I was aware that there were going to be false ministers, that there were going to be wolves in sheep's clothing hiding among the flock. So, when the stories originally came out I was sad, but not surprised. What did surprise me were the stories that kept coming out about all of those who used their position to sweep things under the rug. To tell victims of terrible abuse that they needed to forgive their abusers and to not involve the law. Hearing of workers, who were known to be abusers, moved to a different state rather than removed from the ministry and arrested. I cannot begin to express the hate that has raged in my heart since hearing those stories. We are to be like God. To love the things that God loves and to hate the things that God hates. God hates the abuse of his little ones. God hates that the abusers are allowed to remain in his ministry. God hates that ministers in positions of power would prefer to do that which is easy to that which is right.

It's easy to pass off the blame. It's easy to tell victims that they need to forgive their abusers. It's easy to allow people to remain in meetings, to allow ministers to remain in the ministry. None of it is right. Mathew 23:24 "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." Why is there such a strain to tell survivors to forgive those who are not even repentant. Why is that the gnat that causes such consternation. You have swallowed the camel that is sexual assault. You have swallowed the camel that is abuse. Mathew 23:25 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."

I will name no names in this letter. I do not know who the righteous are and who the unrighteous are. The overseers and the workers know who among them is unworthy. The elders and meetings know who among them is unworthy. They know who clings to power. They know who (Matthew 23:26) "love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and chief seats at the synagogues." Cast them out.

There are few things that Jesus said that are said in multiple gospels. One thing that was said in Mathew, Mark, and Luke was deemed important enough to be included in 3 of them. Mark 9:42 "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." That verse isn't just for the people who have perpetrated abuse. Not just for those who swept it under the rug. That verse is also for those who sat idly by. Those who, through their lack of standing against evil, caused offence. In testimony we also heard at Hermosa that in the parable of the good Samaritan that it was the fault of the thieves that the man was in a ditch on the side of the road. But that as soon as the Levite and priest saw and did nothing, they were why that man was still in the ditch.

John Stuart Mill wrote "Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing." Too many have done nothing. Too many have walked on the other side of the road while the wounded were dying. Too many have trusted that others knew best. Do not deceive yourself. You know what is best, you know what Jesus would do. He would cast the evil out.

I have seen many letters from those who have stopped coming to meetings, explaining why – the wrong that they saw in the church. This is my letter as to why I have stayed. It is not because I need the fellowship. Never have I learned or grown more in my personal relationship with God, than during Covid when we had no fellowship meetings. I stayed, because I love the friends. It is because I believe that this is the closest thing to what Jesus taught. I have stayed because I believe that change must come from within. I am unafraid of being asked not to share. I am unafraid of being asked not to attend. Mathew 10:28 "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

I have seen the pride that people have in what family people come from. People revering "good families" as if the next generation inherits the testimony of the prior. I have seen people looked down on because they aren't from the white middle or upper class. I have seen the pervasion of tradition being treated as scripture. I have seen people create rules and treat them as if they are the law. I have not been blind. I have tried to do everything I can to push back on those wrongs, but now I publicly state the feelings of my heart on these issues.

Some of the worst offences we have seen are by those who come from a "good family" and "made a mistake". That attitude is what allows repeat offenders to continue their offences. A lot of the offences are pushed under the rug because they are committed on those that are seen as on the fringes of the flock. Offenders can sense who the most vulnerable are. They can sense who the flock does not fully welcome. They target them and go free, because people don't care as much about them. I will not dance around the issues with niceties and platitudes. Often it is the poor, the ones from broken homes, and the minorities who get no consideration. When they face abuse and cry out, they are the most likely to be told what

happened was their own fault. There is an issue with racism. There is an issue with classism. There is an issue with elitism. There is an issue with sexism. There is an issue with tradition. God's way is perfect, but men are trying to walk it imperfectly. These are the imperfections. These are the reasons that it took so long for these issues to come to light. Unless I am asked not to, I will consider myself a part of this way, but I will not accept the wrongs that are pervading it.

It may feel less important than some of the terrible wrongs that have been happening, but it is also important to stamp out the littler things. The tradition of it being evil or wrong for women to wear pants or have their hair down is something that should have been left in the past. The continued control of how women look, and dress is about control and shame. There is no reason that people dress in a specific way to go to fellowship meetings. How many people who would have happily shared fellowship with us have been turned aside by something that is not biblical and is treated as if it is. It is not because they are unwilling, it is because they see something that is not of God. It is easier to blame others than look within.

Do what is right, not what is easy. Look within the fellowship, cast out traditions, prove the ministers, and live for God.

Trevor Larsen

Fargo, ND