

## **Greetings**

Todd, a servant of God, according to the promise of fullness of life found in Christ.

To my dear brother in the faith, Mark:

May the grace of God and the love of Christ lead you and the congregation entrusted to your care to a more embodied and embedded formation in the Spirit!

## **A Disquieting Observation: Godly & Dysfunctional**

Let me begin with a disquieting observation from a middle-aged pastor. After more than thirty years as a Christian; after twenty years as a pastor; and after ten years working with pastors (including yourself!) from different denominations around the country—I have come to this sobering and unsettling conclusion: *Pastors can be both godly and dysfunctional at the same time.*

This singular fact not only explains many of the pastoral burnouts and blowups we see and grieve all around us, but it also explains much of the spiritual and missional weakness of the church, not least its cultural and political captivity.

You see, Mark, pastors can be *both holy and not whole*. They can be both biblically faithful and yet psychologically maladjusted. They can be both spiritually mature and emotionally immature.

Pastors can love evangelism yet fear those of a different race or the opposite sex. They can be “prayer warriors” and “control freaks,” powerful preachers and domineering spouses, faithful shepherds and disengaged or overbearing parents. They can love Jesus and be addicted to food, pornography, or pain medication.

What do we make of this? How do we explain this combination of deep Christian commitment and yet serious psychological and behavioral dysfunction? Many of us are

tempted to go with the easy Manichean explanation and simply conclude that one is *either good or bad, real or fake, saint or sinner, godly or charlatan.*

But I think it's a bit more complicated than that.

### **The Problem with Evangelical Spiritual Formation: A Lack of Integration**

At the risk of oversimplification, most stories of pastoral or personal implosion hinge on one word: *integration*. Or more accurately, four words: *a lack of integration*. What unites a thousand godly and dysfunctional pastors? *A lack of integration*.

Integration. From the Latin *integrare*, which means “to make whole.” To integrate is to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. To be *dis-integrated* is the failure to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. Integration is when the different elements of *the human person* come together to form a coordinate, unified whole, and to be *dis-integrated* is to fall short of that purpose.

Now, *most forms of evangelical spirituality fail to foster integration*. We prioritize doctrinal instruction and moral development. But we neglect psychological healing. We emphasize the cultivation of character. But we overlook our deep-seated psychological compulsions, fixations, and emotional reactivity.

You might say that evangelical approaches to spiritual formation often fail to promote integration. Sadly, this means that, if left to itself, evangelical spirituality will breed not integrated but *dis-integrated* pastors whose ministries may sooner or later *disintegrate*.

Dis-integration isn't a problem just for pastors. It's a condition that afflicts many Christians. We have dis-integrated pastors, but we also have dis-integrated *Christians*—sincere followers of Jesus who live with deep psychological dysfunctions.

At the risk of sounding like a grumpy old man, may I say that we see evidence of *dis-integrated* Christians all around us.

Let me ask this question. *Why is it that good Christians don't always make good human beings?* They're faithful to their families, consistent in church attendance, read their Bibles and pray for the lost. But they can be, at the same time, rigid, self-righteous, xenophobic, racist, sexist, controlling, narrow-minded, emotionally repressed, sexually dysfunctional, bitter, impulsive, angry. In a word, *unchristian*.

Or *why is it that non-Christians can be more Christian than Christians?* Haven't you had that experience, or had someone say something like that to you? It's as though those without knowledge of the gospel can achieve a measure of *psychological health and healing* that outstrips even what some professing Christians have attained.

Or consider this. *Why is it that evangelicals are notoriously clumsy when it comes to dealing with issues like race, sex, and gender?* Could it be that all three of these issues—race, sex and gender—are *body-issues*. They concern *the body*—the very thing that much of evangelical spirituality conditions us to downplay or overlook. Is it any wonder, then, that we struggle to speak thoughtfully and winsomely about these body issues when we spend so little time cultivating a spirituality that concerns *our own bodies*?

Where am I going with all of this? We need to rethink our approach to spiritual formation. We need an approach to spiritual formation that *fosters integration*—that brings together doctrinal instruction and moral development *with* psychological healing.

In short, I'm appealing for an approach that—by the grace of God, through the Spirit of God, grounded in the Word of God—engenders *not only holiness but wholeness*.

In saying this I'm sounding a note similar to the one Dallas Willard sounded several

decades ago. Willard's concern was that *Christians weren't attaining Christlikeness*.

Why not? Not because of a lack of effort, he concluded. No, everywhere he looked he saw sincere Christians doing the very best they could.

Instead, according to Willard the problem is *our deficient theological anthropology*. He explains: "For serious churchgoing Christians, the hindrance to true spiritual growth is not unwillingness. While they are far from perfect, no one who knows such people can fail to appreciate their willingness and goodness of heart. For my part, at least, I could no longer deny the fact. I finally decided their problem was a theological deficiency, a lack in teaching, understanding, and practical direction. ... As I now see it, ... the gospel preached and the instruction and example given these faithful ones simply do not do justice to the *nature of human personality, as embodied, incarnate*. And this fact has far reaching implications for the development of human health and excellence."

We have a deficient theological anthropology. A failure to do justice to the true nature of the human personality, to take seriously that we are not just souls inhabiting bodies, or minds connected to brains.

Rather, we are *embodied* and even *incarnate* creatures. To put it bluntly, we don't *have* bodies—we *are* bodies. Yes, we have a mind and soul too (or at least soulish capacities), but they are far better *integrated* with our bodies than we've been led to believe.

### **Take the Body More Seriously**

Here is something we often and easily forget. *Every approach to spiritual formation presupposes some understanding of the human person—a theological anthropology.*

And what is the dominant theological anthropology of evangelicalism? It is *a dualism*

*of mind-body, inner-outer, spiritual-physical*—a dualistic anthropology that is, as best as I can tell, indebted to the monumental influence of the great St. Augustine.

As Christian philosopher Nancy Murphy says, “it is in fact the case that most Christians, throughout most of their history, have been dualists of one sort or another.” Most Christians have assumed that the person has two parts—soul or mind, on the one hand, and body, on the other; or, inner and outer, or spiritual and physical parts.

We owe this dualism, as Murphy notes, to the fourth-century bishop and theologian Augustine. “Augustine (354-430) has been the most influential teacher on these matters [of mind-body dualism] because of his legacy in both Protestant and Catholic theology and because of his importance in the development of Christian spirituality. Augustine’s conception of the person is a modified Platonic view: a human being is an immortal (not eternal) soul using (not imprisoned in) a mortal body.” She adds, “From Augustine to the present we have had a conception of the self that distinguishes the inner life from the outer, and *spirituality has been associated largely with the inner.*”

Consequently, Augustine’s modified Platonic dualism merged with Paul’s way of talking about flesh and s/Spirit. Western Christianity hasn’t been the same since. At least, our understanding of spirituality and spiritual formation hasn’t been the same.

Augustine’s dualistic anthropology leads very naturally to a dis-integrated spirituality, an approach to spiritual formation that focuses on the mind or soul and not on the body, on the inner person and not the outer, or on the spiritual and not the physical.

But if we want to move toward a spiritual formation that promotes integration, then we need to scrutinize our *dualistic anthropology*. We need to ask ourselves whether it is the most biblically faithful, theologically sound way of understanding what it means to be

human. Or are there not better ways to conceive of the person that are more in line with Christian commitments to embodiment?

### **Final Exhortations & Encouragements**

When we talk about spiritual formation, we are talking about the process whereby a person moves toward maturity in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Spiritual formation is, as Paul puts it in Colossians 1, about becoming *complete in Christ*.

“Him we proclaim,” the Apostle writes, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature (*teleios*) in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (vv. 28-29). We could say that the *telos* or goal of spiritual formation is to be *teleios* or complete in Christ.

And yet will have a very hard time getting to this *telos* without taking more seriously the *embodied* and *embedded* nature of what it means to be human. We will not become “complete in Christ” without being known—not only by one another, but by our Lord and Maker himself.

But let us take heart, Mark, learn to walk by faith, and embrace the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the power of God’s Spirit, trusting that, “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now [we] know in part; then [we] shall know fully, even as [we] have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Amen.