

## ***Our Inner Life***

Dear Bill,

I am so glad for the opportunity to encourage you in this great adventure which we call the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is God's calling for each of us, and our Creator has already gifted you with what you will need to accomplish and grow your ministry. In the power of God's Holy Spirit, I urge you to claim and live that which you have been given which has been God's vehicle for your call: your inner spiritual life.

I remember how eagerly I entered the ministry of Jesus Christ. I was enthusiastic in preparing sermons, attending meetings, working with others in the growing of the community of faith. In three years, I had made a good beginning. What no one had told me was that my *profession* could actually become an impediment to my practice of the faith! There grew within me a gnawing longing, which I could not understand. One day, in conversation with my wife, she asked if my *public* prayer and scripture life had replaced my personal one. And I knew immediately that she was right. I knew I needed to get back to the basics and *return to my first love*.

*Prayer* has always been a way of life for me, but now that I was being asked to pray so frequently in public, I found my personal prayers sounded like the ones I would give in worship or at a Rotary meeting. They became *polished* and *eloquent*. What I was longing for were the intimate, unrehearsed times of

conversation with my Savior, which had been the staple of my inner life. So I began again taking time to simply talk to the Savior. However, sometimes I would catch myself falling back into my *public persona* and would need to ask the Lord to forgive me. The simplicity and honesty of these times truly are refreshing and freeing. And the warmth of these moments with God in prayer began to re-light my passion for Christ.

I am not the kind of person who can pray at one time of the day, every day, for very long. I tried it . . . it was helpful for a season. Now, I simply *talk* with God all the time—as I come and go, or as I have moments to myself.

However, I have discovered that I need to slow down, even stop, in order to *listen* to God. Now I look for those moments—no, I forge such moments—out of my days. My passion for ministry has taken on an inner confidence in my faithful Friend to whom I can always go and from whom I receive strength, comfort and joy. I urge you to remember the place of prayer in your daily life. Stay connected to the One who has so gifted you and who will see you through all the seasons of your ministry.

A second great joy of our calling is the *opening of God's Word* to others. Few things can match the sheer pleasure of watching someone's spirit light up at the discovery of spiritual truth through the Bible. However, as my ministry grew through that first three years, I found that I read God's Word increasingly with an eye for others. My approach to the Bible was increasingly not *What is God saying to me?* but *What is God saying to our congregation through me?*

Both are good questions. Both have their place in our lives. What I discovered was the lesson of Hosea the prophet. Hosea's ministry began first with a word of God *to* the prophet, and then that word became a word to the people *through* the prophet. My soul was hungering for God's Word to once again come alive in my own life.

I remembered my grandfather sitting in his chair, beneath the floor lamp and reading the Bible. I remembered my own times of discovery in God's Word—how a passage of Scripture which I had read dozens of times would suddenly emerge into an entirely new light by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

So, I began to intentionally read the Bible again—not in preparation for a sermon, but just for the joy of meeting God. And through these times of encounter, I have discovered that I have even more to pass on than ever before! Out of the personal reading of God's Word came an inner integrity of witness which had seemingly gotten lost in the professional *doing* of my ministry. So, I urge you, Bill, to take time with God to allow His Word to bathe your soul, to refresh and enliven your heart, to strengthen and encourage your ministry.

What I am prayerfully raising for you is the need for you to tend your inner life. What I discovered is that our outer life of ministry work can absorb our inner life of the soul. Be careful of its seduction! The most important work of ministry, which you and I can do, is to keep praying and reading the Scriptures *for ourselves!* As God feeds us, we will be equipped to feed the saints.

I thank God for you and your calling. We are partners in the greatest adventure possible to human beings—the life and ministry of the faith.

May our God shower blessings upon you and yours in Jesus Christ.

Your fellow servant in Christ Jesus,

Michael Foss

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, Minnesota

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that  
this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

*2 Corinthians 4:7*