

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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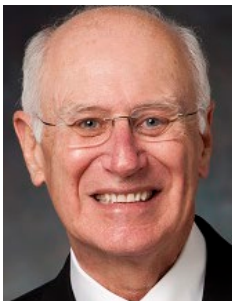
We Must Have the
FRUIT of the SPIRIT

BY DOUG BEACHAM



TODAY'S LEADERS NEED THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

We must develop the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but kindness is not weakness, and meekness is not timidity.



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries.

Throughout the Bible the metaphor of “fruit” is used to describe the attitudes and actions that are pleasing to God. In the poetic books, Psalm 1:3 describes the godly person who brings forth “fruit in its season.” A similar thought is expressed in Psalm 92:13-14, which says that the righteous “shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.” Proverbs 12:14 refers to the power of words as “the fruit” of our mouths.

The prophets used the same agricultural image. Isaiah 3:10 refers to the righteous eating “the fruit of their doings.” Jeremiah 6:19 refers to judgment upon the “fruit of their thoughts.”

The New Testament begins with John the Baptist using the same imagery in reference to judgment upon those who do not bring forth “good fruit” (Matthew 3:10). Jesus continued the rich metaphor in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:17-19) with this closing admonition: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

In John 15:2-16, as part of His closing comments to the disciples before His arrest and death, Jesus referenced “fruit” eight times and closed with the command that we “should go and bear fruit,” and that our fruit “should remain” (John 15:16).

The apostles used this same rich imagery of “fruit” 20 times from Romans to Revelation. Perhaps the most well-known use of this is found in Galatians 5:22-23. Reflecting on this passage about the fruit of the Spirit, I decided to read these verses again in light of the entire brief letter to a group of churches in central modern Turkey.

A reading of Acts 13-18 gives a broad context to Paul’s visits to these churches in the Galatian region (see Acts 16:6; 18:23). When read in that light, the fruit of the Spirit offers insights for us as leaders in the Body of Christ.

First, we need to remember the singular nature of the “fruit of the Spirit.” There are not nine Christ-like qualities from which we can pick and choose. This stands in contrast to the “works of the flesh” just a few verses earlier in Galatians 5:19. The “works” (plural) of the flesh are “evident,” as Paul named 17 as examples. He made it clear that those who “practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).

Paul understood that a life lived in the Holy Spirit and a life lived by the dictates of our fallen carnal nature cannot coexist. The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another and they war against one another. A life of compromise is actually a life lived in the “works of the flesh.” The cost is steep and potentially eternal: loss of inheritance in the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).

The plural dimension of the “works” of the flesh means that we can live outwardly moral lives, avoiding “adultery, fornication, and lewdness,” and still be controlled in our passions by “hatred, contentions, jealousies, outburst of wrath, envy.”

But life in the Spirit brings about a wholeness, or to use another term, a holiness of life whereby we are consciously striving to allow (1) the Word, (2) the Spirit, and (3) community to manifest congruity between our actions and our inner self. Thus, these nine fruit work together to order our lives in such a way that “against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:23).

This is not an invitation to antinomianism but rather to a recognition that the power of love, fulfilling the Torah of God, is not bound in its outreach to others. It means that right judgment does not become judgmentalism towards others. It actually enables us to engage our sinful world, and one another, in a fashion that holds “truth and love” together in the Spirit of Christ.

Second, the fruit of the Spirit are manifested through our own personalities and temperament. This involves transformation and renewal as “new creatures in Christ.” But it also preserves and engages the uniqueness of every person.

We are not redeemed to become

a collection of robots, unified in someone’s manipulative view of “common witness,” devoid of personality. Rather, the full range of God’s creative purpose is set forth, even in these “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7), to put us on display as trophies of His grace.

This is readily evident when we consider Galatians 5:22-23 in light of the first two chapters of Galatians. Paul, who “walked in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) with his powerful revelation of law and grace, did not interpret the

“kindness, longsuffering, meekness” and the other characteristics of the Spirit’s fruit to mean timidity, cowering before people, avoiding conflict, or accommodating to some culturally defined code of civil discourse.

Notice that in the promotion and defense of the gospel, Paul was not accommodating! He was not interested in pleasing men. In Galatians 2 Paul publicly rebuked the apostle Peter for failing to live according to grace when dealing with Judaizers and Gentiles (2:11-21).

Paul’s righteous indignation was rooted in his understanding that certain acts deny the reality of justification by faith, and the unity meant to arise from it. It was not personal animosity against Peter; it was genuine concern that Peter’s actions, regardless of Peter’s motives, were dividing the Body of Christ.

As I’ve reflected on these matters, I have found myself thinking of the fruit of the Spirit in light of our need to live and speak clearly and openly in our world. There are many outside and inside the Christian community who warn us about being “mean-spirited.” I agree, and continue to say that. However, what we must not do is to allow such phrases to intimidate or silence our witness. I suspect that some of Peter’s friends thought that

“The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another and they war against one another.”

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A place of hope. A people of promise.

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Paul was “mean-spirited” when he openly rebuked the pillar of the church!

I’ll concede this is a thin line. Some of us might be tempted to use Galatians 1 and 2 as an excuse for unrestrained anger. Others might drift into compliant attitudes, using Galatians 5:22-23 as an excuse to fearfully retreat into silence or even compromise.

But for us as leaders, Paul offers us a way to stand strong and courageous in defending the gospel. He offers us a way to speak truthfully, even if someone is offended and even if they call us “mean-spirited.”

Paul reminds us to live by “walking in the Spirit,” conscious that we “have crucified the flesh,” and manifesting hearts and minds transformed by the character of Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:22-25). My beloved brothers and sisters, let us heed the words of Paul: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:25, 26). □



SHHHHH!

SOMETIMES IT'S JUST BETTER TO BE QUIET

All ministry leaders must discover the power of prophetic silence.



BY CHRIS
FRIEND

CHRIS FRIEND is the senior pastor of Mount Lawley Church in Perth, Australia, and a national leader in the IPHC. He is married to Natalee. You can find more about their ministry on Facebook at facebook.com/CollectiveHopeMtLawleyChurch.

One of the greatest challenges in leadership is offering the right counsel. This has always been important for pastors and leaders, but it is particularly pressing in the 21st century. Now, more than ever, it seems that we are always on—especially on the Internet world's public forums. Someone, somewhere, can use everything we say in some way!

In the Scriptures we are admonished, "...be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19 NKJV). Most of us are used to thinking of this in terms of the latter point. We know to encourage each other to avoid speaking in the heat of the moment.

Being slow to speak when you are angry is good advice, but I think that the wisdom here is broader than that. There are many times when the best thing for a leader to do is to be silent. This should, by no means, be viewed as some kind of leadership weakness but instead as a valuable attribute of leadership.

This attribute is often manifested in what I like to call prophetic silence. A great example of this is seen when Jesus was brought to trial before Herod. Despite Herod's interrogation, the gospels have recorded that Jesus said nothing

(Luke 23:9). In that moment, saying nothing was the right thing to do. Jesus' silence pleased the Father.

Everything Jesus did was by the leading of the Holy Spirit. So it follows that His silence was Spirit led. It was anointed. It was the significant fulfillment of what the great prophet Isaiah had said, "He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7). God will lead us to be silent at times.

Therefore, the challenge is to develop an appreciation for prophetic silence. As Pentecostals it is imperative that we know when to have a prophetic word and when to have prophetic restraint! Assuming that most of us are in some form of pastoral ministry, let me couch this in the following categories:

1. CONSIDER PROPHETIC SILENCE IN PASTORAL ADVICE.

What would it mean for us to counsel people in this way? Sure, there are times when we sense God at work, using us to speak words of wisdom into people's lives. These times are wonderful, but the challenge remains for us to not always provide the right answer every single time. There are times when we should send people away to pray and wait on God for themselves, before we discuss it again.

Prophetic silence on our part, can lead to prophetic listening in others. This is how mature disciples are developed. Let us wait for the Spirit's leading and not just jump in and get in God's way.

2. PROPHETIC SILENCE FROM THE PULPIT.

What would it mean for us to consider our preaching in a similar way? Just because people are pushing

us to have an opinion on everything does not mean we should preach on every topic that appears in news feeds on social media. That would make our preaching media-driven rather than Spirit-driven.

The challenge is for us to preach "Christ crucified [which is] to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23). To the world, this focus on Jesus over the latest hot topic may seem like a withdrawal from reality. But it isn't! It is the very power and "wisdom of God" (v. 24).

When I meditate on this it reminds me that the answer to every problem in our world is ultimately found in the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and second coming of Jesus. Everything else, by comparison, is trivial. We don't need to comment on everything that happens around us. Let's let God lead us in our sermon preparation and delivery.

3. PROPHETIC SILENCE ONLINE.

This is the big one! Here, we need to exercise real wisdom. The online platforms of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other forms of social media provide us with a myriad of potential disasters. Author Frank Viola makes a fitting comment about Facebook when he says it is not always "a place for intelligent dialogue."

Viola writes: "Very few people [online] can have a rational discussion about anything ... [I have] learned to refrain from engaging current political, religious, or cultural topics. The vast majority of people already have their minds made up on a given issue and viewpoint. Facebook is merely a place they use to reinforce that viewpoint, and anything challenging them is viciously attacked."

"As Pentecostals it is imperative that we know when to have a prophetic word and when to have prophetic restraint!"

We need to know when to engage in an online conversation that is constructive and when to remove ourselves so as not to "throw [our] pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6). We definitely need to be led of the Spirit to allow God to restrain us in these Internet venues.

I recently shared lunch with a friend of mine. He had just come back from a theological conference that focused on the nature of media. After contemplating our lunchtime conversation, and having the opportunity to read through his notes, I could not help but reflect on the way that Jesus works. Just think about all the things that Jesus could have said but didn't! He had incredible restraint. The silence of Jesus can be surprising!

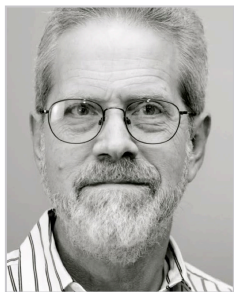
The speaker at that conference was Scott Stephens, who says, "One of the most important things we can do, is be surprising." If we are sick of saying the same thing, the same way, and getting the same reaction, then we need to consider the value of being "surprising."

Here in the IPHC, we know that this doesn't depend on how clever we are. It hinges on our ability to listen to the Holy Spirit and speak as He speaks. And, sometimes, to say nothing—when He is encouraging us to be silent. □

WHINING IS NOT ALLOWED IN MINISTRY!



Do you want the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life? It begins with the way you talk.



BY DR. TRACY
REYNOLDS

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Contrary to what some might think, whining is not a spiritual gift. The “No Whining” signs you see on this page sat on my wife’s desk each day when she taught first grade. I know from first-hand experience that her top three pet peeves are whining, lying and tattling. To be in her class or our home is to be in a whine-free zone.

Perhaps that is why I have adopted the habit of answering the “How are you doing?” question with a toothy response: “No complaints from me!”

When I was a kid I learned a little ditty that said: “Be careful little mouth what you say.” My Mom would remind me to make sure my words were soft and sweet because one day I might have to eat them.

Your words are important! Psalm 19:14 says: “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (NIV). Yet while it is still important to concern myself with *what* I say, I must also be careful with *how* I say what I say. Attitudes matter. Tone and inflection impact our communication.

Perhaps whining and complaining begin as simple, negative reactions to a life circumstance. Or they may be little more than a minor slip of the tongue on a bad day. Even David said, “I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.” (Psalm 142:2). But David also praised God a lot!

Persistent whining and complaining are



indications or symptoms of a deeper condition of my heart. “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:45 NIV).

Whining is evidence of a larger, more insidious problem lurking further beneath the surface of my soul. Out of the abundance of my heart my mouth begins to speak its overflow. What began as a single unguarded comment, even if it was true, has now become a habit. One cloudy day has become a climate of my soul. Instead of merely whining, we have become whiners.

The problem with constant complaining is that our focus stays on the negative. We are ignoring the fact that we have an amazingly good God who wants to bring good in every situation.

The Bible tells us that God wants to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Paul told the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in

Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Phil. 4:5–8)

That is one excellent reason why thankfulness and praise is a remedy to a whining heart—it changes our focus.

We have been warned to watch what comes out of our mouths.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Eph. 4:29).

Remember that we hear our own words too! We are to build others up and ourselves.

I don’t share these biblical exhortations to scold you. I share them as a loving reminder to myself that my words matter and that constant negativity is a likely sign that I am on the wrong road—a path that will not, ultimately, take me where my heart deeply desires to dwell. I need to change course. But, more than a change in course, I need a change in heart and a renewed mind.



Let me be clear about this: I am not suggesting that we should deny our negative circumstances or pretend that the awful situations we find ourselves in today are not all that bad. Your circumstances may be dire. Your situation may be severe. Your need may be great. All the outward indicators may not suggest any real signs of hope or encouragement.

If that is your situation, acknowledge it. Own it. Ignoring it or pretending it does not exist is not healthy or helpful. But, don’t stop there!

The Apostle Paul—the same apostle who had been shipped wrecked, jailed and stoned—wrote, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Phil. 4:12).

He also wrote: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:16–18). Push deeper into your relationship with your heavenly Dad until you can sense the warmth of His embrace and feel the security of His supporting arms.

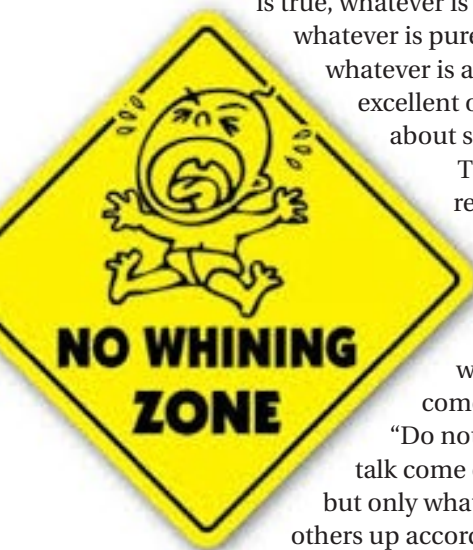
“Constant negativity is a likely sign that I am on the wrong road—a path that will not take me where my heart deeply desires to dwell.”


Let God carry you through your troubling circumstances. Throw the weight you have been handling onto His strong shoulders, release the tears you have long held back, and voice your hurt to Him without censorship until there are no more words or tears.

Ask for and receive forgiveness for excessive negativity. Allow His streams of mercy to flow over you. Welcome the light He begins to shine into your darkness. Allow yourself to dream again of better tomorrows—think again of brighter times.

Remember past victories. Allow your emotional climate to lighten. Let your perspective be renewed by His promise. Count your blessings. Name them one by one! Line them up and call them out. Drop your negativity and replace it with gratitude. Take the time to say thanks specifically and meaningfully.

Chances are your words will sound different—reflecting that new heart and mind. Because you’ve changed your focus, your words are coming from a different place. Before long you realize you’ve shifted from whining to winning, from being defeated to beginning to defeat, and from hopeless despair to joyful anticipation. □





REAL LEADERS WALK WITH THE 'LIMP' OF HUMILITY

To train a new generation for ministry we must get rid of pride and pretension



BY J. LEE
GRADY

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My friend Charles wanted a mentor. He was eager to learn the ropes of ministry, so he asked an older pastor for training. The pastor agreed—but Charles soon realized the man wanted a valet, not an apprentice. Charles became the man's "armor bearer."

The man never took Charles on hospital visits, involved him in ministry assignments or prayed with him. Instead, Charles was expected to carry the pastor's briefcase, fetch coffee and take suits to the cleaners—with no salary offered. In this case, "armor bearer" was a spiritualized term for "slave."

This bizarre trend became popular in churches 20 years ago, but it still thrives. It appeals to insecure leaders who need an entourage to make them feel important. Some pastors have even assigned trainees to serve as bodyguards—complete with dark glasses and concealed weapons.

These young men are instructed to keep people away from the pastor so he doesn't have to talk to anyone after a church service (because, after all, the poor preacher might be "drained of his anointing" if he fraternizes with common folks). I actually know of one minister who instructs his staff not to allow people to talk to him after a church meeting because they might "damage his anointing."

Excuse me while I barf!

I'm not sure what is more nauseating: That some pastors think they are discipling young leaders by exploiting them, or that church members tolerate such pompous behavior from a so-called man of God. And we wonder why many young people have stopped going to church?

When I turned 50, I decided to spend most of my energy investing in the next generation. This became my passionate priority because I met so many gifted men and women in their 20s and 30s who craved mentors. Many of them, like my buddy Charles, were looking for

authentic role models but could only find self-absorbed narcissists who were building their own kingdoms.

If you want to make a genuine impact on the next generation, please make sure you are not infected with the armor bearer virus. Take these steps to adjust your attitude:

1. GET OVER YOURSELF.

As soon as Jesus began his earthly ministry the devil tried to strike a deal with Him. Satan offered the celebrity spotlight by showing Jesus the world's glory and saying, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). But Jesus didn't buy it. He chose the path of servanthood even though He knew it would lead to the cross.

Today's insecure leaders don't realize it's the devil tempting them to become rock-star preachers. Fame is too alluring. Before they realize it, their heads have swelled and ministry becomes a means to prove their imagined greatness. A leader with an inflated ego will have zero interest in selflessly investing in others to make them successful. You must tell yourself daily: "It's not about me!"

2. STAY ACCESSIBLE.

Two years ago I led a retreat for young Ugandans who are training for ministry. We prayed together, shared

"Young people today don't just want our sermons. They want to sit down for coffee after the sermon."

meals and swam at a local pool in the afternoons. When we finished three days of teaching sessions I asked them what they enjoyed the most about the retreat. One guy summarized everyone's sentiment: "We loved that you were *with us*."

My Ugandan friends couldn't

believe that I was willing to spend two hours in a swimming pool with them. They told me that all the American ministers who had visited them in the past simply stood behind the pulpit and preached, but never prayed for them or engaged in conversation. That's sad.

Young people today don't just want our sermons. They want to sit down for coffee after the sermon. They want to ask questions. They can listen to a hundred preachers on You Tube, but when you invite them to dinner, offer to pray with them or take them on a mission trip, you mark them forever.

3. KEEP IT REAL.

Older Christian leaders have picked up some bad habits that turn off young people. Some ministers preach with affected voices, wear weird hairstyles and insist on dressing like funeral parlor directors—even on their days off. Please talk in a normal voice when you preach so young people won't dismiss you as a fake. Be transparent, admit your faults and let everyone know you've had struggles. Young people don't want to follow someone who pretends to be perfect.

4. POUR ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT.

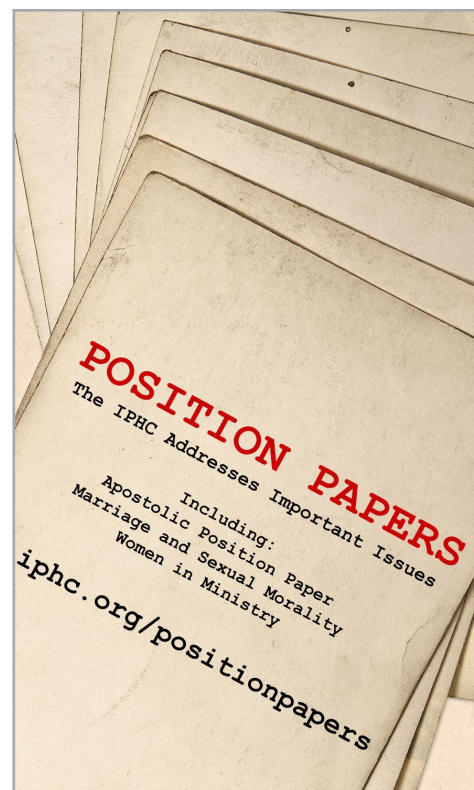
Many young people today struggle to stay disciplined. Some have

addictions. And many of them have attitudes! But you will never reach them if all you do is point out their faults. You have to win their hearts before you address problems. If you saturate them with the love of a caring father or mother, their spiritual growth will amaze you.

5. DON'T CLING TO POWER.

Jesus was the Son of God, yet He willingly handed His authority over to His disciples and told them to finish the job. Likewise, Paul invested his life in Timothy, Titus, Silvanus, Phoebe and others—and he expected them to go farther than He did. Every good leader is already thinking of his succession plan. If you have a tendency to control, dominate or manipulate people, you must wrestle with God until your pride is crushed.

Young leaders today don't want to be your butler or your valet. And they won't follow people who strut and swagger. They are looking for mentors who walk with the limp of humility. □



YOU NEED SOLITUDE, BUT YOU DON'T NEED ISOLATION



BY CHRIS
MAXWELL

CHRIS MAXWELL is the campus pastor at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia. Ordained in the IPHC, he is an author and speaker. This article was adapted from Chris' 2014 book, *Pause for Pastors: Finding Still Waters in the Storm of Ministry*. You can learn more about his ministry at chrismaxwell.me. Or you can follow him on Twitter at [@CMaxMan](https://twitter.com/CMaxMan).

I once wrote a blog inspired by a few words prayed honestly and desperately by a friend. My friend requested for an end to a drought—but not a drought related to weather. He asked God, “Please end the drought of relationships.”

Those words never left me. I still see this drought in many lives today. The blog was entitled “The Drought of Relationships.” Many years of ministry and many friends living in isolation remind me we need to hear this addressed again.

Lonely people may stay very busy, letting past hurts influence and prevent possible relationships. Rather than risking another hurt or another disappointment, they tend to choose isolation instead.

That isolation is hidden well, but the telltale signs of avoidance, lack of honesty and the refusal to be authentic will mark a person's life. It might be masked by humor, busyness, and religious activity—yet deep inside the longing for connection grows. We are made to live in the plural, not the singular. We crave community that cannot be suppressed, no matter how hard we try.

What about you? Are you living in community? Do you have real relationships? Do you have a friend who allows you to speak honestly? A friend who refuses to gossip, preach, condemn or turn away from the relationship? Or do past hurts keep you in isolation?

Have you recently spoken hateful words about another person, only to come to the realization that those words came from the storage of

wounds from your past? Are you willing to forgive those who haven't asked for forgiveness and haven't admitted to doing wrong?

Come up with more questions of your own. Think and ponder and consider. Evaluate yourself, not someone else. Then pursue deep, sincere, and transparent friendships.

It is not good that we dwell alone or only have surface friends we never really let inside. We need deep, lasting friendships. If you don't have them, find out what is preventing them. Seek counseling. Seek advice. Seek change. As Bishop Ray Willis says, "Don't live as independent people. Relationships make you stronger." Together, let us begin pursuing an end to this drought.

Often, healthy aloneness offers internal security that can propel us to pursue life together. Solitude can prepare us for community. Community can balance the wonder of solitude. While serving as a lead pastor, I experienced the honor of meeting regularly with my accountability team. Our togetherness inspired my aloneness. Our community prompted my solitude. Lives of both community and solitude keep us from becoming addicted to crowds.

My group retreats in the mountains or at the beach lured me to retreat with no one but my God. Those times helped me adjust, recover, forgive and breathe again. Those times prepared me for reentering face-to-face conversations of transparency rather than ambiguity. Ask yourself, "How am I doing with the balanced diet of community and solitude?"

All people need true friends. But how do we form these relationships? How can genuine, deep friendships be created and designed? Especially among those who have been conditioned not to trust?

The answer is time. Spend time together—much time together. Eat together, play together, pray together and talk together. Choose to see this as essential. Refuse to let anything else steal this time away.

I'm honored and humbled to have relationships many decades deep. They might have begun spontaneously, but they remained alive by intentionality. They grew by prioritizing time together.

I recall the prayers and walks and meals and laughter. I remember the pain and the tears. I have friends who critique my sermons, friends who ask me if I'm living what I preach, and friends who ask about my weaknesses and addictions and inner wars. I have friends to laugh with me and play basketball with me and do nothing with me.

All of those conversations, confrontations, and words of encouragement did not just happen. We worked to be sure they happened.

Disagreements do not need to destroy these friendships. They can strengthen them. Distance doesn't need to destroy these friendships. It can reveal the commitment.

Are you pursuing this? Are you allowing painful relationships in the past rob you of present community? Are you satisfied with shallow friendships, or do you want more?

I contend that you need more. I pray you do not miss the wonder of community in this world that is suffering in isolation.

Deepening our relationship with God can help us do our part in ending the drought of relationships with other people. Please read and reflect on this passage from Luke 6:

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from

"Find out the people Jesus is calling you into close relationship with. See these friendships as a holy calling."

Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all" (Luke 6:12–19 NIV).

It was after a time of solitude—time alone with God—that Jesus chose the men He would choose to work alongside Him. He would later call those men His friends.

Spend time alone with God. Find out the people Jesus is calling you into close relationship with. See these friendships as a holy calling. Then rely on His grace to pursue, build and sustain these relationships.

Don't let your own isolation keep you in a dry, unfruitful place. God can and will end the relationship drought as we are obedient to Him. ■