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People Spot Missile: Loving Yourself

I have for years proclaimed that Pastors must love their people. That is the absolute truth. I will not waver from that. In fact, people will not permit you to pastor them if they don't know that you love them. You can preach at them. But, you will not be permitted to pastor them.

I have sat with leaders of a church as they listed petty complaints about their pastor. I'm sitting there thinking that all of these together aren't cause for dismissal. Then they drop the bomb. An outspoken leader will then say, "Our pastor doesn't love us!" Now I have the real answer. People will forgive a pastor when they make mistakes if they know that we love them. And believe me, we all make mistakes in ministry that need forgiveness from Jesus and from people.

Another lesson I learned some years ago is that we can't love others if we don't love ourselves. This truth is based on these words of Jesus, "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matt 22:39) Jesus presupposes that you love yourself. In fact, we will love our neighbors and those around us in the exact same proportion that we love ourselves. That is unavoidable. Are there pastors and Christian leaders who don't love themselves? That answer is unequivocally, "YES!" You may ask, "How do you know that?" Because, it is obvious, their behavior proclaims that they don't love anybody else. Their behavior speaks louder than their words.

Why is that? There may be a whole series of reasons. Maybe they didn't experience a healthy and affirming love as a child. Maybe they have done some really stupid stuff that messed up their lives. Maybe they have failed to understand and comprehend the true nature of the gospel.

The fact is, the Christian faith makes it possible for us to love ourselves. How does it do that? When we confess our sins, and bow before Jesus, he cleanses us and makes us whole. He forgives us our past mistakes and wipes the slate clean. He gives us a chance to start over again forgiven and whole.

There is one significant problem. There are people who have received the forgiveness of God but haven't accepted it. For whatever reason, they fail to grasp that forgiveness and as a result still hate themselves and everybody else.

In John 9 there is a magnificent story of a man born blind who was healed. Jesus heard that the man had difficulty because of his contact with Jesus and came back a second time. "Jesus heard

that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him." (John 9:35-39)

What happened here? The blind man found forgiveness and a new life as he encountered Jesus and worshipped him.

Is that possible today? Absolutely, without a doubt. In the words of the old song, I can personally testify, "Without Him I would be nothing!" I know that even now, I am not all that I should be, but I don't even want to think of what my life would be without Jesus. Christ has made it possible for me to love myself, therefore I can turn and genuinely love others as well.

Whether you are a pastor or a lay leader, I don't care whether you are in a church of 35 or 1,500. If you are going to have a meaningful impact in the life of the Kingdom, you have to love people. You can't love people if you don't love yourself.

I am now available to present "The Role of the Church in the Civil War", "Starting a New Service", "Churches Have Personalities", "People Spots", "Does Your Church Really Care About People?" and "A Christian Perspective on Leadership Skills." "Stewardship and Managing Debt" jm

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