Father's Inheritance

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Bob Sutton's editing was instrumental in helping me put together the pieces of this Plumbline. Bob nurtures the body of Christ as a pastor and educator. He served many years as an editor of *New Wine* magazine. I would like to express my gratitude for his friendship and his assistance with this Plumbline.

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> "That God is related to the world as its Creator tells us that He is the responsible origin and source of all this: that He wants to be Father to His world tells us about His universal purpose in Christ for everything that is.... That He is Creator points back to the beginning from which He is working and tells us that it has all been His from the start. That He is Father points to the purpose towards which He is working and tells us that it will be His again at the end" (Tom Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, 191-192).

As the people of God, our focus on God's redemptive work has been primarily about humanity. Our perspective is legitimate, of course, because it is the story presented throughout Scripture. As a result, the foremost themes of our Christian thinking have been about our failures, our salvation, our forgiveness, our inheritance, our rewards, and our place in heaven or in the millennium.

Check out the majority of Christian book themes on Amazon or the posts on YouTube. For the most part they tell us how to have more or do better. Often the biblical foundation may be solid

and helpful, but are we missing something? There is another emphasis that flows, almost between the lines of Scripture and history, which is waiting to be discovered. It is like a treasure hidden in the field. There is a foundational message flowing out of Christ that, like a foundation of a building, may not be fully seen but is that on which all else rests.

For example, we are all familiar with the parable of the *Prodigal Son*. The word "prodigal" does not appear in the text; it is a heading inserted by editors. Might I suggest that Jesus did not tell a story about a son, or two sons. Listen carefully, He said, "A man [who was a father] had two sons." Really, Jesus told a parable about a father. If we read the context in Luke 15, we find He told of a woman who lost her coin and a shepherd who lost his sheep. As the incarnate Son, Jesus personified His Father who joyously welcomes the worst of sinners and eats with them (See Luke 15:1-2). The parables incriminated a generation of religious people who claimed to represent God but were behaving more like older brothers than loving fathers.

Jesus had a single focus—*it's all about the Father!* His life and message, as presented in the gospels, indicate Him to be the exact image and representation of Father.[1] He continually and repeatedly spoke about Father's Agape and His providential care for humanity and His creation. He opened a way to Father by His death, burial, and

1 Hebrews 1:1-3

resurrection. In fact, *He is the Way*.

A careful reading of John 14-17 reveals that as Jesus was completing His earthly ministry. He took His disciples through an extraordinary transition. He told them that He would be leaving them to prepare a "place of abiding in the Father's household" (14:2-3). Contrary to a misguided tradition, this is not heaven. It is God's present dwelling on the earth in the body of Christ.[2]

As the Way, Jesus was taking them to Father (14:6). Christ committed us into a friendship relationship with Father. John 16:27 says, "The Father Himself loves you." The Greek word is *phileo—Father loves us as friends*.

For the sake of clarity allow me to give you something like a Mumford's *Readers' Digest* condensed version of what Jesus told His disciples. Please hear the relational intimacy in Jesus' words: "In the years we have been together you have learned to be my friends. Now I must leave you and go back to My Father. I know this makes you sad, but the Father loves you as His friends. Therefore, I will no longer need to ask the Father for you, you can ask Him yourselves, in My Name!"

I realize I have taken liberties and that these verses must be framed within the context of abiding in Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit as a Helper. But let us not slip past the profoundness of what took place in this brief interchange. If we do,

2 See Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15

we will miss the invitation into relational intimacy. The Father, Son, and Spirit beckon us to enter Their friendship and enjoy.

On the way to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to Father: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Wait a minute! He had not yet gone to the cross, shed His blood, or been raised from the dead. Wasn't that His job description? What then was the work He accomplished? Jesus clarified, "I manifested Your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world" (vs.6). There was only one name He manifested–Father!

The Son came to reveal the Father and make Him know. First, Jesus trained His disciples how to know Father. Then, He rent the veil of separation in the temple with His blood. He opened the way for Father to be known as He, the Son, knew Father. Finally, He cried, "It is finished!"[3] We have been given access to the Father. *Jesus facilitated the ingathering of Father's family* in a new creation.

Centering on Father

For some time, there has been pressing upon my human spirit the conviction that we are moving through a season of transition. I believe the Lord is, with great providential care, leading us into an age that will be different from what the church has been experiencing for centuries. I would like to say it is

3 John 19:30

a "new age," but the term has been so besmudged by dark mysticism and humanism that it cannot be used with any neutral sense of meaning.

I am not using the term "age" lightly. The Scripture speaks of times, seasons, and ages. We may draw an example from the New Testament. The scope of events recorded in the New Testament occurred at particular times. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, His crucifixion, the resurrection, Pentecost, etc. All of these events occurred during a season of transition beginning with John the Baptist and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. The Age of the Law, as given to Moses, was over. The new age with a New Covenant had begun. For our purposes, I would like to call our present age, the Age of the Son.

Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that the Father has spoken to us in His Son, whom John called the Word, the "only begotten from the Father."[4] Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me"[5] The Father granted Jesus a Kingdom over which He was to reign.[6] Jesus is presently in the process of completing the Kingdom*:* "He must reign until all His enemies are under His feet." In the end He hands over His Kingdom to "the God and Father…that God may be all in all."[7]. This is His

4 John 1:14
5 Matthew 28:18
6 See Luke 22:29
7 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

job description in this Age of the Son. Christ Jesus, through His body, the ecclesia (the governmental assembly or the church), is preparing *an inheritance for Father*.

At the closing the Old Testament, Malachi tells us the Father was "despised" during the Mosaic Age.[8] God was then silent until John the Baptist appeared introducing the Age of the Son. During the present age (2000 years), the Father "hid" Himself in the person of Jesus. He was known only through Jesus' words, actions, and personality. During this age it might seem the Father has been neglected, not in doctrine, but in the central focus of church life and emphasis. I am not suggesting this is irreverence or a lack of devotion. It is simply that we have centered on Christ and His work.

That being said, it is my intense personal and prophetic sense that we are progressing into a different age. The Father is now going to be revealed in a manner that still retains mystery but points toward His receiving His full inheritance.

Father's Own Inheritance

Culturally we envision an inheritance as something bequeathed to us by parents or grandparents. It is usually something of substance: finances, land, personal possessions, etc. With this in mind, there is nothing of substance that could be given to the Father that He does not already possess.

8 See Malachi 1:6-10

"All the earth is mine[9] . . . all the silver and gold are mine. . . ."[10]

The Father's inheritance will be the return of His lost family (similar to the prodigal son) and the restoration of His creation. Hear what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

> I pray that the light of God will illuminate the eyes of your imagination, flooding you with light, until you experience the full revelation of the hope of his calling —that is, the wealth of God's glorious *inheritances that He finds in us, His holy ones!* (Ephesians 1:18 TPT).

We are the Father's inheritance. The testimony of Scripture is clear that Father has sovereignly purposed that the loss of humanity to darkness and corruption will be defeated.

To understand how Father's inheritance is being prepared for Him, we need to approach inheritance from a biblical context. First, an inheritance may be an estate or position that is established by right of birth. I am a Mumford because my father was a Mumford. Pretty simple. The Prodigal son and his brother had an estate that was theirs simply because they were sons of their father. The vine-growers in Jesus' parable recognized that the vineyard they were keeping was the inheritance of the owner's son

9 Exodus 19:5
10 Haggai 2:8

simply because he was the son[11].

However, there is another form of inheritance that is a dominant theme of both the Old and New Testaments. It is an inheritance that is promised by the giver but must be possessed and retained by the heir or heirs. Israel's inheritance was the land solemnly promised to the fathers, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob[12]. The promise was repeated when God delivered them from Egypt. However, possessing their inheritance called them to walk relationally.

God the Father has purchased an inheritance for Himself from the foundation of the world. The preparation, possession, and perfection of that inheritance by Christ may be seen as three generally progressive phases moving toward the consummation of Father's purposes. Even though one phase will naturally progress to the next, there will be overlapping and interaction among all three at various times.

I. Freedom from all that separates us from Father's Person
II. Face to face with Father in joyous fellowship and friendship
III. Fruitfulness in co-laboring with Christ in advancing the Kingdom

11 See Matthew 21:38; Mark 12:7; Luke 20:14
12 Abraham - Genesis. 12:1-3. Isaac - 26:3-4. Jacob - 28:13-14

I. Freedom

The enslavement of humanity to the powers of darkness was more grievous to the heart of the Father than we can imagine. Therefore, redemption, deliverance, and freedom have always been front and center in the intentions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Trinitarian family.

Perhaps the following fictional story will help bring this into a contemporary situation. The son of an upper middle-class, well-educated couple was beginning a five-year prison sentence for burglary, theft, and drug trafficking. He had been a star quarterback for his high school football team with a college scholarship in place for the future.

However, in the third game of his senior year, he had severely damaged the ACL ligament of his right knee. His season and possibly his athletic career was over.

To manage his pain during his post-surgical recovery and rehabilitation, he was prescribed opioids to which he became addicted. To maintain his habit after his prescriptions ran out, he found that drugs could be obtained on the street, for a price. At first it was petty crimes. Then he began selling drugs to maintain his addiction.

His parents no longer thought about his college, profession, or marriage. Of all their hopes, only one was now their singular focus—His freedom! Not just his freedom from prison, but from the darkness and addiction that had swallowed and enslaved him.

Without his freedom nothing else mattered.

God the Father has a primary focus for us as His family—*our freedom*! Until we are free from slavery to the powers of darkness and the corruption of our human nature, little else ultimately matters. Populating Heaven with forgiven people has never been the Father's highest passion. It is tragically possible to be born from above, enjoying many of God's blessings, while living in an illusion of freedom enslaved to multiple facets of darkness.

Israel was miraculously freed from the slavery of Egypt to inherit the land promised to their forefathers. With the destruction of Pharoah's army, they were forever cut off from physical slavery through their baptism in the sea. Once on dry land they danced and sang because they could possess the land of inheritance. I am sure they could almost taste the milk and honey!

They were free from Egypt, but they were yet to confront their ongoing bondage to fear, lack of trust, ungoverned desires, and blindness to God's care. They were not free to trust or obey God's providential leading in order to possess their inheritance. It took forty years to begin to discover that freedom.

Like Israel, we have been providentially called to be part of Father's inheritance. And like Israel, we find that as we embrace the journey before us, internal encumbrances and shortcomings may make it seem like we are traveling with our feet in chains.

I would like to suggest some spheres of captivity and deception that are essential to break. We are going to focus on four primary arenas of conflict.

1. The Absence of "Other Lovers"

I once confronted the Lord in a period of personal spiritual frustration, "Father, what do you want from me?!"

Quietly He whispered, "Your unshared love." Ouch! Over time I began to see that I had given a portion of my devotion and affection, which belonged only to God, to ministry, reputation, and success. In the following years, Father's providential care and loving patience helped me find my focus. Occasionally not as gently as I would have preferred!

Unshared love or undivided affection is setting my love on the Lord in such a way that all my heart, soul, and strength is focused on Him. This exhortation is repeated ten times in Deuteronomy as Israel was preparing to possess the Land of Promise. It is the heart of the Jewish *Shema.*[13] This binding motivation ensures His presence and a place of rest for all that was to follow. It is the yoke offered by Christ.

The Father deeply desires intimacy with us. He

13 The Shema. "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

wants to "see our face". We are not to share illegal affection with anyone or anything. I use the term "lovers" quite intentionally because the prophets of the Old Testament referred to the other gods as lovers[14] with whom Judah and Israel played the harlot.[15] The implication of a lover is one to whom an illegitimate affection and intimacy is given. In the case of Israel, her lovers were most often the gods of the land, dark spiritual entities displayed through idols. They not only gave the gods their sacrifices and devotion, but they also looked to them for provision and protection. Yahweh had promised to supply those in abundance.

Jesus addressed the god of wealth, Mammon, making it equal with God in its ability to command affection and devotion. Today, "other lovers" are just as seductive. With the dismissal of God from our culture and civil consciousness, other dark entities have captured our attention and affections. We have become so accustomed to their presence that we often do not realize how much of our devotion to and dependance upon God's very Person has been compromised.

Wealth, reputation, personal comfort, or physical and emotional addictions may become idols that we love and serve. Religious devotion, increased spiritual knowledge, and moral goodness are often subversive to intimacy with the Lord.

14 E.g., Ezekiel 16:33-41
15 E.g., Ezekiel 6:9

Make no mistake, being a believer, even moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, does not exempt one from being drawn away from unshared love.[16] We become conformed to the image of what or whom we worship.

Similar to idolatry are illegitimate friendships. These "friendships" influence our desires, worldview, or interests in a way that dilutes or compromises our peace and intimacy with the Lord. James spoke of this when he wrote concerning those who seek the Lord simply to fulfill their own pleasures. James tells us:

> You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us."[17]

Notice that the issue here is the relationship of the Lord with our human spirit. Our spirits are "command centers" for the Holy Spirit's work in us. Illegitimate friendships with the world can be the crack in the door into our deepest person allowing "other lovers" to begin to dominate. To elaborate

16 For further reading along these lines, check https://lifechangers.org, for the title: *Dr. Frankenstein and World Systems*.

17 James 4:4-5

any further on this vital topic would require another *Plumbline.* Suffice for now, it is simply enough to ask ourselves, are we influencing, or are we being influenced?

2. The Termination of Hidden, Internal Resistance

This often-told story illustrates internal resistance. A little boy insisted on standing up in the church pew during the service. This embarrassed and irritated his mother. After escalating demands and threats, he finally sat down with his arms folded in defiance. Looking at his mother he quietly whispered, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside."

Hidden internal resistance is our closely guarded personal sovereignty. I have come to understand that the foundational source of human failure centers in the idea of gaining and maintaining an illegal right to myself. Jesus told the parable of a son whose father asked him to work in his vineyard. The son answered, "I will, sir." But he did not go. The son was outwardly compliant but reserved the right to do as he pleased.

Many late model cars have "safe driving" features. Cruise control can sense the distance to the car in front, slowing down or speeding up automatically to keep a safe distance. Lane control features sound warnings if you are in danger of drifting out of your lane. Some cars will even gently

steer you back to the middle.

Even with all features operating properly, a conscientious driver will keep a hand lightly on the steering wheel and a foot close to the brake pedal. Driving like this gives the option of taking control again if the "safe driving" features do not operate properly.

"Internal resistance" operates in a similar manner. To the best of our knowledge, we are following the Lord in faith and obedience. However, we internally reserve the right to take control if staying in the yoke with Jesus becomes too difficult or too demanding.

This in no way implies that internally yielding to the Lord or being obedient in what He asks will always come easily. We will experience internal conflict. In His humanity, Jesus was free of internal resistance to His father's wishes. Even so, He needed to learn to rest in what His father was asking. Listen to Jesus' words:

> Now My soul has become troubled [internal conflict]; and what shall I say, "Father, save Me from this hour?" But for this purpose I came to this hour.[18]

> The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?[19]

18 John 12:27
19 John 18:11

He faced the cross without internal resistance to the Father, yet His humanity was conflicted:

> Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me [internal conflict]; yet not as I will, but as you will [lack of internal resistance].[20]

In His humanity, Jesus, like each of us, needed to progress and mature in obedience.[21] He kept Himself free from internal resistance. His single motivation was to be pleasing to His father.

We are often unaware of internal resistance. It lies hidden in the depths of our internal darkness. However, if we are willing, the Father, in His deep personal desire for us to know intimacy as His inheritance, will expose and provide an escape for our internal resistance.

3. The Cessation of Being Repeatedly Offended

Being offended, or giving offense, is an important subject of the New Testament. "Offense" is the translation of a Greek word *skandalo*, derived from stumbling block. It is the word from which we get the words scandal or scandalize.

In our physical lives, we are familiar with the idea of stumbling. Being in my mid-90's, I have become ever more cautious about the possibility of a stumble leading to an injurious fall. A couple of years ago I went out the front door to check our

20 Matthew 26:39
21 See Hebrews 5:8

mailbox. I was not anticipating a small drop off the front walk and stumbled forward. I grabbed a near by light post to try and catch myself but ended up pulling it over. I rolled down the hill of our front yard ending up close to the street. No harm was done, but I was most chagrined when Judith had to help me up. Now I sometimes use a cane to steady myself, much to the insult of my masculinity.

Stumbling interrupts or stops our intended progress. This holds true spiritually. Have you ever noticed how much of the New Testament speaks of our lives as believers in terms of motion? “Walk in the truth.” “Run the race.” “Follow Me.” “Grow in the knowledge.” “Being built up.” Offense has the potential of interrupting or halting our progress toward intimacy with the Father.

Jesus warned us that it was inevitable that offenses would come to each of us. In other words, we are all going to be offended at one time or another. In the legal system, an offense occurs when someone has broken the law. The offender has stepped over a line that was defined as a boundary by the law. Likewise, an offense occurs in our person when someone or something steps across our personal “boundaries”.

Offenses can come in any form and from almost any source. They can usually be recognized by an almost immediate negative reaction. Our peace can be stolen by an insult to our characters, being taken advantage of, or a social slight. Events or positions

can cut across our strongly held sense of right and wrong and our deep commitment to a particular biblical belief system or political philosophy. Jesus said it, and we can believe it—*offenses and stumbling blocks will come our way*.

What I would like to consider is how these offenses can affect our progress towards being conformed to the image of the Son of Man. First, when we are presented with a potential stumbling block, do we respond or do we react. An appropriate response prevents us from being tripped up by whatever has crossed our path. A reaction is usually uncontrolled, spontaneous, and can lead to undesirable consequences.

Jesus knew how to handle offenses. When He saw the profane businesses in the temple, He was offended for His Father and the sanctity of the temple. It was not about Himself. He responded by removing the offense—He cleaned house. The religious leaders offended Jesus with their intentional rejection of truth. In the end, He responded by unveiling the hypocrisy.

A second factor is the term repeatedly. Most often reactions happen repeatedly. Here is a rather simple, but graphic illustration. Sam is taking a hike on a nature trail in a local state park. He's admiring the birds and butterflies and does not see a root running across the trail. He stubs his toe and falls to his hands and knees. He can respond by getting up, dusting himself off, and making a mental note

to watch the path in front of him more carefully. During his hike he encounters several irregularities but carefully steps over or around them. No repeat performances. Or he might react, cursing the park managers for not keeping roots out of the path and being thoughtless about the safety of the hikers. He blunders on trying to admire the variety of trees, only to stumble twice more because he did not notice an outcropping rock and a sudden down step in the path.

Jesus articulated, the Kingdom demands something like this: *Never expect or demand equity and fair treatment. However, the Kingdom requires us to always give grace, forgiveness, and blessing in whatever the circumstances.* This means we do not react when offenses come. We respond with grace and Agape. Ignorance of this simple principle robs the church of glory both within itself and before the world. If we are repeatedly being offended by the same things, the stumbling block may be something in our own hearts that needs to be transformed. Reactions are not necessarily sinful, but they have the potential of knocking us off course in responding in Agape.

Closing this section, I would like to report that I am now exceedingly aware of the small drop off my front porch and either avoid it or make careful accommodations to handle it. Sometimes wisdom even dictates allowing Judith to get the mail.

4. The Freedom from the Power Centers of Human Culture:

By power centers I mean spiritual and / or soulish forces that strongly influence, and sometimes control, certain areas of our lives. These power centers to one degree or another determine our:

- Worldview—the "lens" by which we judge, explain, understand, and respond to the world as we encounter it both personally and globally.
- Behavior—what is acceptable and what is not.
- Morals and ethics—what is right and what is wrong.
- Loyalties—to what or to whom we owe our allegiances.
- Personal identity—who am I and where I fit in.
- Responsibilities—what is expected of me.

They affect us through a variety of channels. It may be as mundane as the suggestions of friends and family or the influence of an institution. It might be a demonic stronghold or a ruling entity in the heavenlies.

I will leave a discussion of spiritual warfare to men and women who are called to develop these truths to the body of Christ. I simply want to

recognize the influences power centers can have in undermining or corrupting our singleness of vision in giving our unshared love to the Trinitarian family.

I have identified these five power centers as:

1. Natural Family
2. Culture/Tradition
3. Political Ideologies and Agendas
4. Economic Entanglements
5. Religious Entities

Natural Family

Our natural families are the earliest and most deeply ingrained sources of our outlooks and behavioral norms. Hopefully as we mature, we begin to sort out our own values and worldview. However, family can become a source of control through finances, intimidation, or the need for validation. This creates a power center, a stumbling block in our journey toward Father. Jesus said, "If you love father or mother more than Me, you are not worthy of Me."[22] To the ones who would follow Jesus but needed to bury a Father, or say goodbye to those at home, He simply said, "Follow me."

Culture/Tradition

Outside of our natural families, social culture probably has the deepest influence on our behavior

22 Matthew 10:37

and world view. Acceptance of cultural "norms" allows us to function with others and institutions where everyone is "playing by the same rules." Within the American culture, there are sub-cultures that have slightly different "norms". There are progressives, conservatives, southerners, New Englanders, baby boomers, Generation X, etc. Of course, culture norms vary greatly in people groups around the world.

Understanding and making room for cultural differences, though not necessarily agreeing with or condoning them, is important. It is an immense tragedy that the Christian faith became historically enmeshed primarily in European / Western culture. Even though the advancement of Western societies provided the vehicle for spreading the Gospel, the imposition of "superior" Western culture on other people groups around the world often had horrific consequences. People groups have suffered the destruction of generations of cultural traditions, genocide, enslavement, and economic exploitation. The mixture of the Christian religion with European culture hindered the spread of the Gospel of the Kingdom for hundreds of years.

The decisive culture, which must be embraced, is contained in the true power center, the Kingdom of God. James identified this culture when he wrote:

> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of

> mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.[23]

Political Ideologies and Agendas

The war (I chose the word "war" intentionally) of opposing and sometimes contradictory political power centers in America threatens to tear this country apart. Fearfully, the American dream may become the American nightmare! Both progressive and conservative camps have "moderate" sub-camps, but the driving agendas seem to come from the more extreme positions. Sincere Christians are entrenched in both sides. Jesus faced a highly factious political society in first century Israel. However, He refused to give either approval or allegiance.

Illegitimate devotion to a political persuasion or agenda often becomes obvious in one, or both, of two extremes. The first is a kind of blind allegiance to an elected man or woman. Support is often given with a messianic fervor. Mistakes, inconsistencies, and irrational decisions are rationalized, or minimized to the point of irrelevance. They can do nothing wrong!

The second is contempt for and demonizing of political leaders. As responsible citizens, we have every right to scrutinize and speak out where

23 James 3:17-18

we disagree with people or the policies of our elected officials. However, character assassination, degrading humor, and misleading information can rise to cult-like fascination. I find it most grievous when Christians indulge in and propagate this kind of behavior. In Peter's first epistle he wrote that we should "honor the king [emperor]"[24]. It is interesting that he may have written this under the reign of Nero, a corrupt emperor who persecuted the Church.

There are dark spiritual entities who energize this power center with the intent of dividing and destroying a benevolent, effectual government that God has ordained. Being entrapped by either political extreme can misdirect our undiluted affections. We can lose focus on the only government with the power to rectify the difficult issues of our world—the Kingdom and Fatherhood of God.

God's basic foundation of human government has always been family. His rule on earth was entrusted to the first family, Adam and Eve. He ordained Abraham to become the father of many nations and the father of all who believe. In Abraham, "all the families of the earth"[25] were to be blessed.

Within Father's family, I believe there is intended to be a core value system that expresses the very heart of a true father. Listen to its simplicity:

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24 1 Peter 2:17
25 Genisis 12:3

1. I will keep my word and do what I promise.
2. I will not encroach on that which is another's. I honor others' boundaries.
3. I will personally seek to do others good.
4. If I am unable or restrained from doing good, I promise never to endeavor to do harm in word or deed.[26]

If the Church would lead the way in living by this value system in the power and love of the Spirit, what would the world look like!

Economic Entanglement

Wealth promises power, control, prestige, and escape from the discomforts and pressures of life. Jesus recognized wealth (Mammon) held a divine-like status. It is a "master" demanding equal status with God.[27] The sad reality is that the inordinate desire for wealth can be rooted in the dark, primal desire to be like the most high. If carefully considered, we can see that wealth seems to promise a degree of transcendence over the difficulties of a fallen world. It is this "deceitfulness of wealth"[28] that Jesus warned would stifle the life of the Kingdom and leave us unfruitful.

Over the years, I have seen believers invest

26 If you are interested in digging deeper into this value system, you may order, *The Eternal Value System,* Parts 1-3 from Lifechangers.org
27 Matthew 6:24
28 Matthew 13:22

thousands of dollars in all kinds of money-making schemes. Many of these were marketed with the idea that money will be available to sow into the Kingdom or to free individuals from secular employment to work in the ministry.

Wealth often includes not only finances but a lifestyle that we believe we "need" or to which we are entitled. There is nothing holy about deprivation or poverty. God promises an abundance of provision. But the unchecked desire for more, better, and newer stuff is the driving force behind much unnecessary debt and financial lack. The New Testament is filled with warnings about the idolatrous devotion to money and need to live in contentment and thanksgiving for what we have.[29] If you are inclined to dig deeper into this mysterious force, I would suggest my *Plumbline*, *Dealing with the Other God,* available from Lifechangers.[30]

Religious Entities

In some ways, the hidden power behind religious beliefs and practices can be the most insidious and deceptive power center I have mentioned. The image of God imparted to humanity in creation seeks the spiritual, mystical, and transcendent. Innately, God's image in us knows there is someone "out there" that we long to touch. Knowing this human drive,

29 See 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5

30 Connect with LifeChangers: https://lifechangers.org/teachings/dealing-with-that-other-god/

the forces of darkness seek to keep us sidetracked. We are lured into practices that fall short of the full knowledge and intimacy Father desires.

Ironically, darkness utilizes the zeal and drive for faithfulness and truth to divide the church. As a result, the church consumes itself like an auto-immune disease. In the Thirty Years' War (1618 – 1648), between four and a half to eight million soldiers and civilians were killed in the religious power struggle fueled in part by the Protestant Reformation. It is now estimated that there are some 45,000 Christian denominations worldwide. This does not include the numerous independent churches and movements, many of which claim to have a unique possession of the truth.

As the Spirit of God is restoring truth to the body of Christ, there has been the tendency to embrace a new facet of biblical truth and stop there. We think we have arrived. Unfortunately, this often keeps us from embracing God's constant encouragement that we continue to grow and change. Here is a sampling of some "rabbit trails" that tend to keep us, as the body of Christ, from the fulness of the Father's purpose for His family.

The myth of separation. It is a myth that somehow God is far away, and we need to get closer. This keeps us absorbed in our efforts. The entirety of the Trinity has taken up residence within our human spirits. How much closer can we be? Our source of "separation" is our inability to believe in

what Scripture plainly declares about our oneness with Christ. We cannot base the Lord's closeness or care on our negative experiences, be they physical, emotional, or circumstantial. Our illusions of distance from the Lord are often fueled by adding items to a list (memorize scripture, pray more, etc.).

Misplaced emphasis on sin. Churches that keep people focused on continual repentance do a disservice to the completed work of the cross. The intent of the cross was to deal with sin once and for all. We are less free to become Father-focused.

Focusing on "signs of end times." The passion of trying to make current events fit into prophetic scriptures can become a cult-like distraction. The "Antichrist" has been identified multiple times throughout church history. Multitudes of prophetic prognosticators have had to make continual changes to predicted dates for the Rapture or the Tribulation. It has been my observation that the spiritual energy expended chasing these shifting shadows has produced much soulish excitement. However, in the end, little or nothing is added to the growth of the body of Christ or the advancement of the Kingdom.

Rigid adherence to a particular doctrine. Topical teaching and the formation of particular doctrines are very helpful in understanding God and His ways. However, Scripture was never intended to be a theological textbook. Taking a single Bible truth, or system of truth, as the whole truth produces error by emphasis. This creates a sheriff culture. A

"sheriff" makes it his or her emphasis to point out who is right or wrong. Historically "sheriffs" have made a train wreck of the intended unity of the body of Christ. The only person who was ever 100% right was Jesus. The rest of us must be careful not to fall into the arrogant trap of believing we have a special corner on the truth. The New Testament does instruct us to discern good from evil and truth from error, but we need to be honest. We have all missed perfect understanding.

Father's ultimate goal is our freedom to become part of His joyful inheritance. The whole of the Trinitarian Family is laboring with us to reach this predestined goal of the image of the Son. *It was for freedom that Christ set us free!*[31]

II. Father-Facing

> God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.[32]
>
> This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.[33]

God the Father has eternally purposed to restore the human race to the originally intended intimate fellowship with Himself along with the Son and the Spirit. Baxter Kruger expresses this eloquently:

31 Galatians 5:1
32 1 Corinthians 1:9 NIV.
33 John 17:3.

> Before there was ever any law, there was the Trinity and the irrepressible life and fellowship and joy of the Triune God. Then there was the decision to give human beings a place in the Trinitarian life through Jesus Christ. The eternal purpose of the Triune God is not to place us under law and turn us into religious legalists; it is to include us in their relationship, and give us a place in their shared life and fellowship and joy.[34]

Father's inheritance is to be far more personal than populating heaven with as many forgiven people as possible. He wants to know us "face to face." As I explained at the beginning of this *Plumbline,* He actually desires our friendship. Much of our Christian culture has viewed God as aloof, unapproachable, and generally edgy about His relationship with sinful humanity. Perhaps this attitude has subtly tainted our view of the Father's exuberance in drawing us to Himself. I would like to suggest three simple postures or attitudes that we can cultivate our ability to keep "facing" Father.

1. **Relationally Centered**

The spirit of the Son in us crying, "Abba, Father," expresses the core of a son or daughter's inclinations. The seed of the Spirit is a homing

34 Kruger, C. Baxter. *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam*. Perichoresis Press. Kindle Edition. Location 1054.

beacon designed to point unswervingly to the face of Father. There is a natural desire in a young child to joyously run toward his parents and throw himself unabashedly into their arms. This is the is the spirit of Abba! It grows into an uncompromised drive to come to His Person and into His Presence with all authority as a child of God.

Christian activity, especially ministry in any form, can give us the sense of the Father's pleasure. It cannot give the personal knowing and being known that Father intensely desires. We all know the story. Sisters, Mary and Martha, both deeply loved Jesus. Martha expressed her care by preparing a meal for the crowd. Mary, however, chose to sit at Jesus' feet. I am sure to Martha's dismay, Jesus said Mary had chosen "the good part"—Him. A key word that is often missed in this story is that Martha was distracted. She wasn't just busy. Her primary attention had moved from Person to project.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (c. 1614 – 1691) spent many of his years as a lay monk working in the kitchen of a monastery in Paris. In the midst of all the business and noise, he learned to continually set his face toward the presence of God.

> I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, and a general fond regard to God, which I may call an actual presence of God; or, to speak better, an

> habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul with God, which often causes me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great, that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others.[35]

With profound simplicity, Brother Lawrence gave the Father what He most desired for His inheritance. He loved fellowship with God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind. His little book, *The Practice of the Presence of God,* is a classic. If you do not have a copy, buy it. If you have a copy, reread it.

2. Child-like Delight and Gratitude

Thankfulness is one of the most necessary, and often too neglected, spiritual postures presented throughout the Scriptures. Living in a state of continual gratitude for Father's seen and unseen providential care leads us to a place of peace and rest in who He is.

Our culture, both secular and Christian, often rivets our attention on what we do not have as opposed to the abundance we have been given. The super-abundance of material "stuff" that is readily available today can engender an entitlement mentality. We can turn from the simplicity of child-

35 Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life* (p. 24). Kindle Edition.

like receivers into incessant "getters."

The simplicity of child-like trust in Father was a common theme of Jesus teaching. He said Father revealed His most precious truth to babes[36]. "Unless you are converted and become like children," He said, "you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."[37] As maturing sons and daughters, we learn that even in the training and discipline of Father[38] we do not allow our trust in Him to be shaken. We have entered Father's sphere. We can find joy living in mystery, not always needing to know all the why's of unexpected events that intersect our journeys.

3. The Heart of a Father-Pleaser

Jesus' singular desire was to be pleasing to His Father by seeking His company and fulfilling of His wishes. "Pleasing" goes beyond religious obedience. In a somewhat enigmatic parable about masters and servants, Jesus concluded, "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"[39] God deeply desires something more. The desire to please is personal, relational, and one of the foundations of friendship.

If Father's wishes are not fulfilled because

36 Matthew 11:25
37 Matthew 18:3
38 See Hebrews 12:4-12
39 Luke 17:10

of human failure or disobedience, He has the capacity to fulfill His purposes, regardless of the circumstances. However, what is often unexpressed is His own personal hurt. Hear His grief over Israel: "For forty years I was grieved by that generation . . . How often they rebelled against [Me] in the wilderness and grieved [Me] in the desert."[40] His own family has too often failed to respond to Him in the timing and manner He has desired. Is there a relational necessity in the heart of Father in which our responses provide a relational completeness for Father?

All my life I have sought to be a Father-pleaser. I am growing ever more aware that I am capable of pleasing Him. I am also growing aware that I am capable of causing Him grief. How "human-like" is our relationship with our Father and Creator!

Relationally Mature Sons and Daughters

The Father delights to be with those who have become secure in their identity in Christ. When we know who we are with the Father, we are not striving to become someone or something we envision as a "better" Christian. Our identity becomes relational, not transactional. By transactional I mean trying to do something or be someone that will make us more acceptable and intimate with the Father. Knowing and being known by Him face to face is perfection in the truest sense. Nothing else needs to be added

40 Psalm 95:10; 78:40

for completeness of joy and contentment.

Our intimacy with the Father will naturally produce a life of fruitfulness. As we will discover, He has called us to continue His recreative work in the earth.

III. Fruitfulness

Fruitfulness is one of the primary manifestations of God's life-giving spirit in the earth. He ordained that plants would yield seed and the trees fruit. He commanded the animals to be fruitful and multiply. To the man and woman, He said the same. Every living thing on the earth has in its DNA the dynamic to be fruitful—to pass on its life. Fruit is designed to produce the image of the life that created it: "bearing fruit after its kind;" "like begats like;" "a good tree produces good fruit;" etc.

Fruitfulness is a foremost topic in Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God. In John 15, He declared the Father to be the vine dresser looking for fruit. Jesus continued, "He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit."[41] In the same discourse He said the disciples would glorify the Father and be known as His by their bearing of fruit.[42] And finally, He told them they had been chosen and appointed to "go and bear fruit."[43] A command that is remarkably similar to the first command issued in the garden to Adam and Eve.

41 John 15:1-5
42 John 15:8
43 John 15:16

Many of Jesus' parables centered on fruit bearing: the parable of the Sower[44], of the talents and minas[45], and the barren fig tree[46]. In His confrontation with the Jewish leaders, Jesus pronounced that the Kingdom would be taken away from them and "given to a people bearing the fruit of it." Notice that the final declaration of the removal of Israel's favored position was not solely because of legalism, mixture with the spirit of the world, failure to love God, or failure to properly understand the Scriptures. They failed to produce the fruit that would have identified them as the favored people of God manifesting His glory and blessing.

The fullness of the Father's inheritance will be brought in through a people who are fruitful in reproducing His Life in the nations. Traditionally, we have been taught that being fruitful was mainly leading people to Jesus by presenting the gospel of salvation. However, this is a limited understanding of the fullness of the gospel. It limits the advancement of the Kingdom to primarily being accomplished through personal evangelism and preaching. Fruit bearing is a broader lifestyle in relation to Father's inheritance.

The first two sections of this Plumbline explain the essential elements for the production of fruit. First, it must be free of impediments. Jesus said that

44 Matthew 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15
45 Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27
46 Luke 13:6-7

the father would prune vines to produce more fruit. Second, the life of the Spirit must be flowing out of us from face-to-face abiding in the Trinitarian Family.

We now want to consider what the Father is looking for in the fruit of His inheritance. Let's consider four characteristics that are hallmarks of fruit capable of bringing life to the hurting nations.

1. **Reflecting His image**

It would seem humankind was created in God's image for two reasons. First, He desired our fellowship with the Trinitarian Family. Father desired a mutual sharing with us. He intended something He would not have with the other created beings—friendship.

Second, He wanted His creation to be governed by those who would govern as He would. I believe the most basic characteristic in His shared image is the singular motivation of love: Agape. God is Love. Therefore Agape is the governing absolute of the universe. Until we can comprehend and embrace this, we are missing the essence of the nature and ways of God.

Adam's failure of loyalty and obedience forever corrupted the image in every succeeding generation. Without elaborating, the fruitful aspect continued to operate. Darkness begat darkness leading to corruption. A bad tree produces bad fruit.[47]

47 Matthew 7:8

The incarnation of the second person of the Trinitarian Family in the man, Jesus, was primarily to restore the image of the Father in the earth. It is understood that the atonement for the sin of the race through His blood had to be accomplished for this to happen. But Father's ultimate purpose was that Jesus would become the Pattern Son. He was the first born of many who would become transformed and conformed to His image.

Father has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.[48] The emphasis of the image is *relational—He desires sons and daughters*. Father's image will ultimately fill the earth with His glory. It will be the same glory. Jesus reflected, "full of grace and truth."[49]

2. **Willing Obedience**

Willing obedience is an end in itself. We are reminded that Jesus "learned obedience from the things He suffered."[50] His obedience was perfected. He was free of hidden, internal resistance. This was the full maturing of the Son, the second Adam. He revoked the failure of the first Adam and was qualified to "lead many sons and daughters to glory."[51]

Each of us has a measure of personal sovereignty

48 Romans 8:29
49 John 1:14
50 Hebrews 5:8
51 See Hebrews 2:10

that we are free to exercise to a limited extent. We are intended to freely offer our personal sovereignty to God for the fulfilling of His purposes. Section one of this *Plumbline* addresses many of the factors that hold our sovereignty captive, limiting our ability to obey.

When we are honest, we will admit we "edit" the Scriptures. We breeze over those that we find too demanding. How many times have we resisted the quiet whispers of the Holy Spirit when He asks us to do something that challenges our comfort zone.

Many years ago, I was in an assembly of pastors and leaders. One of the speakers boldly declared, "We need to hear a new prophetic voice!" Amid the amens, the Lord quietly said to me, "Tell this bunch of hypocrites they would be the first to stone the prophet." Immediately the consequences of my doing so raced through my mind. The pictures were terrifying. I sat still and kept my mouth shut. I am sorry to say that the cost of obedience was out of reach for me that day.

Years later in the middle of one of the most difficult seasons of my spiritual life the Father asked me, "Are you willing to follow the path of Agape wherever it takes you?" From the depths of my spirit I was able to say, "Yes." It has been at once the most difficult journey and also the most rewarding adventure of my life. The most costly obedience is often the most rewarding.

3. Accept Responsibility within the Boundaries of Sphere, Limit, Measure

Of late the Lord has severely impacted me with the meaning of personal responsibility. When we take the time to ponder the responsibility He has entrusted to us as stewards of the Kingdom, it can be mind-numbing. Some years ago, I was introduced to a book, *The God who Risks*[52]. It accurately challenges the notion that God's sovereignty equals His total control of all things. God took a risk when He gave humanity dominion over His Creation. Asking Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son was a risk. Biblical history is filled with examples of God placing His purposes in our hands. He chooses to depend on our obedience to carry out His will of establishing His Kingdom government on the earth.

Having said that, there are multiple caveats placed upon our commission. First, we are not solely on our own. We are co-laborers with God[53]. As such, Christ is directing us as the Head of the body.

Second, we must be aware that we are assigned to work within our own sphere, limit, and measure. Paul was clear in his understanding that there was a particular "sphere" where he was given a particular "measure" of faith and grace to labor.[54]

52 *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence.* John Sanders © 2007. Published by InterVarsity Press®.
53 1 Corinthians 3:9
54 See 2 Corinthians 10:13-15; Romans 12:3-6

Sphere and measure set limits on where and how we are able to bear fruit by the Holy Spirit. If you are appointed and gifted by the Lord in the area of service, do not rent a tent and try to become an evangelist! Our primary calling is to mature as priests and ambassadors accurately and powerfully representing and instituting the Kingdom of God.

Third, discipling the nations is not some form of religious imperialism by which Christians place the government of God over the world. We are to bring the government of Agape into the world by being salt, light, and yeast. We are to manifest the life of God to hurting nations. Within the world the Kingdom of God does not seek to dominate, but rather to infiltrate. As we genuinely manifest the image of Jesus in the world, I believe the Gospel of the Kingdom will manifest the goodness of the Father. The unseen will be seen through the supernatural.

Fourth, we must be willing to engage and overcome darkness in all its forms. Spiritual warfare has an enormous spectrum of depth and calling. Within my lifetime I have seen the uncovering and understanding of the realms of darkness greatly increase. Some intercessors and prophetic ministries are given the faith to function in dimensions that I can understand, but it is not my calling or place of grace to enter. Make no mistake, darkness is real. It earnestly desires to hinder or destroy you and yours. We must accept the responsibility to confront it. We

cannot pretend it does not exist or expect God to deal with it without our participation. Such warfare is essential to fulfill our callings while being effective within our own sphere of family, fellow believers, and daily contacts.

4. **Capable of Receiving Others in Love**

Religion tends to be exclusive—them and us. If we truly understand the Agape of God, we know that the extension of love is not dependent upon the goodness or worthiness of the one loved. The religious leaders of Jesus' day saw that Jesus was a friend of sinners. He welcomed them and ate with them.[55] These were the ones that the religious system judged as irreligious and unworthy.

Jesus was a gardener not a sheriff. A gardener acts in love toward his or her garden. They recognize the life of the good seed when it sprouts. They encourage and protect it as it matures. Weeds are pulled, harmful insects killed, and diseases eliminated. Jesus knew that the "seed" of the image of God was latent in all men and women. He "watered" the soil of their hearts with the image of the Father. Some responded and germinated with life; others did not. However, all were watered with Agape.

Sheriffs on the other hand, are primarily concerned with who is keeping the law and who

55 Mark 2:15; Luke 15:1-2

is "outside" breaking the law. Relationships and feelings must not come into consideration. The Pharisees were sheriffs. Their six-guns were loaded with traditions, laws, and rules. They shot to kill. For years I wore a badge and carried a "loaded pistol" of Bible verses. And I can honestly say, I do not think it ever added much of value to the furtherance of the Kingdom. As I scan YouTube, I am grieved at how many posts by Christians are trying to shoot holes in one another's beliefs or practices.

Sons and daughters of the Father respond to the hang-ups and failures of those whom they encounter in the same manner as the Father has through Jesus. Tragically the world often sees the Father as a sheriff whose primary interest is in judgment and punishment rather than giving life. Is it possible for this generation to change the way Father is perceived in the earth?

Conclusion

Fruitfulness through maturity is our calling. We are destined to stand before Father as His glorious inheritance. He will spare no expense to see us arrive at that destiny.

Paul said in the context of Agape, "When I became a man, I put away childish things." How I long to see the body of Christ mature past the "bless me . . . do for me . . . make life better for me" approach to our Father. Can we present ourselves

as living sacrifices to become living stones in the living temple of His inheritance?

All creation is waiting!

"And I will be a Father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters unto Me," says the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:18).

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