

## **The ways the Lord invites us to follow, #1 of 3 – 20200222**

Hi all,

The northeast part of Oklahoma where I live is cattle country, with real cowboys, horses, spurs on their boots and cowboy hats on their heads. The region is called 'Green Country', for this eastern third of the state is well watered, with many hills and streams and large pastures good for grazing. When cattle are brought in to be separated, they pass through a passageway with a gate that makes the animals go right or left, used to separate young males (bulls or steers) from young females who have never had a baby (heifers). To encourage the animal to move along, a 'cattle prod' or what scripture calls an ox-goad, is used to poke them in their hip or rear end.

### **The Lord's cattle prod**

The Lord says this to Paul when He appeared to him outside Damascus: "Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks (ox-goad, cattle prod)." Acts 26:14

The word 'goad' is the Greek word 'kentron', and means a 'sharp point, a sting'. It was used in that day of bees and scorpions as well as an ox-goad. The Lord was telling Saul to stop kicking against the Lord poking him to move him along. Evidently, Saul had been thinking on the claims of the Christians but resisting what the Lord was showing him, thus the 'It's hard for you to kick against the ox-goad' comment. Give up Saul! Stop resisting!

### **Yes He is the Great Shepherd, but...He can poke you in the butt now and again when you need it, lol**

Many of us have Psalm 23 on a plaque on their wall, highlighting v1: "The Lord is my Shepherd...", but I'd be surprised if any of us have Acts 26: 14 on our wall: "It's hard for you to kick against the cattle prod."

So we must ask, what was the Lord poking Paul with, why, and in what way might He do that to us today?

### **Context is everything**

The Lord does not contradict Himself, and John 10 is true, He is the Good Shepherd, and I'll share more how He leads us later. But for this week, how might He jab us in the rear end?

Hebrews 4: 12-13 tells us the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing between our soul and spirit, to the joints and marrow, and critiques the thoughts and motives of our heart. But lest anyone reading mistakenly think that is talking about the written Word of God, the writer continues:

"And all things are open and naked before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Seeing then we have such a great high priest, Jesus Christ the righteous...."

It is the Person of the Word, not the written Word, that Hebrews 4:12 tells us is sharper than any two-edged sword, knowing even our deepest thoughts and intentions of the heart. Swords have 2 edges, 2 broad sides, and a point. The point is used to stab, deeply or shallow it doesn't matter, the pointy end is sharp and piercing.

Saul of Tarsus, the future apostle Paul, was persecuting Christians, and no doubt studied their claims that Jesus was Messiah. It would appear from the Lord's words to him, that Paul had been thinking on these things for some time and stubbornly refused to believe, and instead expanded his efforts to stamp out all believers in Jesus as Messiah.

The 'ox goad' he was kicking against, was the Person of Jesus as seen through the body of Christ. "Why are you persecuting me?" Jesus had long since ascended to heaven, but took persecution against His people personally, because we are His body.

### **The Lord's first efforts to reach us are private, in the heart**

No one knew how the Lord was poking Saul of Tarsus in his heart to consider the claims of these believers in Jesus. It was private. The Lord only took it public because it got to the point he was strongly resisting, and not only resisting, but insisting on going the exact opposite direction.

Years ago a noted TV evangelist was caught in a car with a prostitute about half his age. He later admitted that he had a 'porn problem' since he was a teenager. The Lord never changes; The way He dealt with Saul He dealt with this evangelist and countless others - keeping things internal, private, and only going public if the person insists on going the wrong direction - kicking against the ox-goad.

A man has lust in his heart for years, though on the outside his life and marriage seem perfect. But one day in a shock to all, he has an affair with a co-worker - it doesn't matter whether it is a pastor and a worship leader having an affair, or the factory boss and his secretary, the Lord works the same way: Private attempts first to get them to change their ways, then if the person firmly refuses, the Lord allows it to become public.

Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 18: 11-21 with the Parable of the Lost Sheep. He said if a brother trespasses, keep it private and you who he wronged get with him to seek reconciliation. If he won't be reconciled, take 1 or 2 others who are witnesses (know what is going on) and try to get him to reconcile. If he won't hear those 2 or 3, THEN and only then, take it to leadership, making it public.

Look around at the news, Christian or secular: When secret things come to light, saved or unsaved, know the Father who loves all unconditionally, works the same way with all in the hopes they will come to Him. From unsaved rock star or actor to a small town pastor, He works privately to spare the person the embarrassment and possible collapse of their relationships and lives, in the hopes they will come to Him. He is SO very gracious and loving to all.

He tries first to lead us like a Shepherd, but if we won't follow, there are those times He gets behind us and gives us a good stab in the butt to get our attention - not with sickness or tragic accident, but as He did with Saul - public revelation of what had been up to that point, private. It is much easier to be led, and I will pick it up there next week. Until then, blessings,  
John Fenn

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## **The ways the Lord leads us #2 of 3, from the inside out - 20200228**

Hi all,

Last week I shared how the Father first tries privately to get us to change our ways, and only takes things public if we refuse - patient to wait even decades for us to change. His ways in this are the same whether He uses the 'cattle prod' method of poking us, or the gentle and private internal workings to get us to grow up and lay aside sin.

Here are examples of both the cattle prod and the internal dealings in the heart of man.

### **The 16 year old speeding**

...he got pulled over and warned against speeding from a small-town police officer. The kid admitted he had a habit of driving too fast and God was dealing with him about slowing down. I told him God tried first in the heart, and now because he wasn't obeying, the Lord was taking it to a new level of a warning ticket. I told him next time he may get a ticket and fine. Evidently he didn't judge himself, for a few weeks later I learned he did get a ticket and fine. A few weeks after that he had a non-injury accident. That accident got his attention, and to my knowledge he has driven focused and within the law ever since.

I was an unpaid Associate Pastor at a church in the Boulder, Colorado area, and each Monday from 1-3 I led what I called 'Healing School', in which each week I took 1 example of healing in the NT and taught how the Lord brought healing to that person or persons. (I have a cd/MP3 series called 'Healing School' that is from a Bible school seminar where I taught based on those teachings.)

### **The stubborn man**

It was one of those times that I had a stern word from the Father for a man who usually attended. I asked if he wanted it given privately or with our small group, who were by this time good friends. He said to just share it, so I did. I heard the Father by His Spirit saying, "I have been dealing with you about your smoking and losing weight, and the time of that grace is nearly ended. You need to obey my dealings with you." He acknowledged it was true, and asked for prayer...but nothing changed...

About 3 months later he had a very severe heart attack, but he survived much to the surprise of the doctors, though with some damage to the heart muscle. He then immediately changed his ways, losing about 35 pounds (16k) and immediately stopped smoking. The last I had heard he was lean and strong as if he had never had a heart attack.

### **Understanding spiritually what is happening**

Back in the days of Job, his friend Elihu spoke accurately about the Lord. In fact Job and his other 3 friends had to repent for saying things that were wrong about the Lord (like, 'the Lord gives and the Lord takes away'). Job admitted: I spoke of things I knew nothing about, I abhor myself... That means we dismiss things Job and his friends said about the Lord as having been spoken out of ignorance or in error.

Only Elihu did not have to repent - what He said of God was accurate, including telling Job that 'God does not afflict\*', and 'Far be it from the Almighty that He would pervert what is right\*'. Elihu also explained to Job how the Lord had been trying privately to reach him privately, though Job resisted.  
\*Job 34:12, 37:23

You may recall that Job explained why he was in the condition of the eruption of Shingles, or boils or blister like lesions on his skin, in 3: 25-26: "I have not been in peace, neither have I been able to sleep nor rest. What I greatly feared has happened to me. I have not felt safe, nor at peace, nor at rest, but only turmoil."

If you were a doctor and this patient named Job came to your office telling you his skin had erupted in sores from the stress he was under, the fear, the lack of sleep - what would you do? You'd tell him to take a holiday, delegate his work, and prescribe medicines to help him sleep - or at least some herbal tea!

Someone wise in the things of the Spirit would know Job opened the door to his condition and it was only God who was sparing his life at each attempt the devil was making. But his refusal to cast his cares on the Lord, do what was right in the natural by better managing his various business interests, and take rest, opened the door to his condition.

Elihu told Job that God had been trying to reach him, in chapters 33- 36 in particular, and includes some of my favorite verses in the whole Bible:

### **"God speaks once, yea twice, yet man perceives it not..."**

...In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep comes upon man, then God speaks to try to open his ears and gives instruction, that He may withdraw man from what he intends to do, and repent of his pride, that He may keep his life from going into the pit, and his life from perishing. If he resists, he will have pain in his body..." Job 33: 14-end

This lays out the progression of God working privately in the hearts of people, through the eventual public revelation of their struggle with sin - in this case he was speaking of Job and his physical illness. That isn't to say every sickness is God making some secret sin public, not at all. But you have seen in these examples that things happen in a person's life because they won't obey the Lord. God was trying to save Job's life and placed limits on what the devil could do to him, and without the Lord's efforts Job would have surely met a premature death.

A person not privy to the situation might see a speeding ticket given a 16 year old and make a comment about boys and their cars, but have no idea what God had been doing for months before.

Another might see an overweight man who smoked, have a heart attack, and say, 'What did he expect?', not realizing God's work in the inner man.

The friends of Job saw their friend in pain and suggest everything from God is doing it to him to a secret sin, not realizing the very private efforts of the Lord to deal with Job about fear, stress, worry, and his business and kids.

Personally, that's why I usually limit my comments to the fruit of a person's life, for the heart is the realm of the Lord to know.

Next week we forget the cattle prod and look at how He leads us like a shepherd. Until then, blessings,  
John Fenn

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### **The ways the Lord leads us #3 of 3, He leads, how do we follow? - 20200307**

Hi all,

When we think of the 'call of God' on someone's life, we first think of going into pulpit ministry. But in truth His 'call' is something we have all answered, for the first 'call' was to believe.

#### **The invitation is clear, yet subtle**

After we accepted the initial invitation to believe, we found He intended a lifetime of growth. We were asked to move from being a mere believer into being a disciple - a learner.

Perhaps the trouble is we would rather be just a believer at times, with no expectation of growth or change, rather than a disciple - a learner. Being asked to grow as a person in the midst of difficulty runs contrary to our flesh.

There is a tug of war always going on within ourselves, the one side rationalizing reasons not to grow by saying "But I'm a believer!" But He has kept walking ahead in the midst of these growth opportunities trying to lead us as a disciple...and the more we say 'But I'm a believer' the further away He walks and the more faint His voice becomes.

It is up to us to follow Him in these ways. Jesus rebuked Satan's suggestion through Peter that He not go to the cross, telling Peter to take up his cross - crucify the ideas in his mind on how Jesus should live His life - and take up the Father God's ideas for Jesus. That's hard on the flesh, but that is His invitation and leading.

#### **The call of God is to growth**

In Ephesians 1: 17-19 Paul prays the eyes of their understanding would be opened so they would know "the hope of the call the Lord extends to you and the riches of His glory..."

The word 'call' is the Greek word, 'invitation'. Vine's Dictionary of NT Words says it "...is always used as an invitation, in which the origin, nature and destiny are heavenly." His invitation, leading, is to partake of heavenly qualities.

He invites us to heavenly things. Does our character, the way we behave to our spouse, our children, our brothers and sisters in the Lord, our coworkers and neighbors, look like this? And if not, realize that is part of our invitation to know the hope and glory of heavenly things. From the JB Philips Translation:

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—  
it looks for a way of being constructive.  
It is not possessive:  
It is neither anxious to impress  
nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.  
Love has good manners  
and does not pursue selfish advantage.  
It is not touchy.  
It does not keep account of evil  
or gloat over the wickedness of other people.  
On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.  
Love knows no limit to its endurance,  
no end to its trust,  
no fading of its hope;  
it can outlast anything.

It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen. (I Corinthians 13: 4-8a)

Can you sit down on the sofa, look your spouse in the eye, and say: "This is me towards you!" ?  
Can you do the same with your children? Your neighbor? Your fellow church member? Your coworkers?

Are these qualities the way we live? He is leading us deeper into love, deeper into Him, deeper into these qualities.

The invitation as a disciple is to learn to be like Him. That means He leads us to forgive, to endure, to think the best and see the best in others as He Himself does in us. The acceptance of His invitations are daily. He keeps walking in that direction - are we following?

When couples drift apart, it is because they have failed love. Friends drift because they fail love. Relationships that fall apart failed love, either one or both failed love. Love hasn't failed them. They have failed to grow in love, to work through issues, to be more like Him towards each other. The same for friends, neighbors, coworkers, fellow church members.

Consider these character traits and see if you can say: "Yes I have received the Lord's invitation to grow in these things, and therefore I see these things in myself" From II Peter 1: 5-8:

For this very reason you must do your utmost from your side,  
and see that your faith carries with it real goodness of life.  
Your goodness must be accompanied by knowledge,  
your knowledge by self-control, your self-control by the ability to endure.  
Your endurance too must always be accompanied by devotion to God;  
that in turn must have in it the quality of brotherliness,  
and your brotherliness must lead on to Christian love.

Peter goes on to say: "If these qualities are in you and abounding, they will make you so that you are neither barren nor unfruitful in your knowledge of Christ." I don't know anyone who wants a failed spiritual life with the Lord, yet it requires the development of these qualities in our character, and 'they will make you' successful in Him.

He is found within these qualities. So...do you really want to see Him? What if He appeared to you today, would you be willing to grow in these things in order to know Him? Really? Then live it. That is how to know Him - the power of His resurrection AND the fellowship of His sufferings. (To our fleshly desires).

From the same translation, Galatians 5: 22-23:

The Spirit however, produces in human life fruits such as these:

love,  
joy,  
peace,  
patience,  
kindness,  
generosity,  
fidelity, (faithfulness)  
tolerance and

self-control—and no law exists against any of them.

Those who belong to Christ have crucified their old nature with all that it loved and lusted for.

This is where He leads - that's why I say so often where He leads is usually the more difficult of the decisions to make that are before us. His way is usually the more difficult way. It leads to crucifying our old thoughts and ways. He leads us to His cross over and over again, as an invitation to follow Him to that cross by killing off old thoughts, distilling our thoughts and emotions to hold them captive to what He says - do we really want to follow His voice?

**The only difference between someone mature in the Lord and someone not, is a series of decisions.**

Every day requires us to make decisions - make the right ones for that is where He is leading.  
New subject next week, until then, blessings,  
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