



LESSONS ·

from
THE
PORCH

-ken pierpont

Lessons From the Porch

For Pastors and Christian Workers

by Ken Pierpont

Chapter One: Raccoons on a Cool Night

It was mid-August 2015. It was the Lord's Day. It had been a long day. Sundays are always long days. Good, long days. After a full Lord's Day of ministry I call my parents on the way home and we catch up and talk about the things of the Lord and our churches. I remember them doing the same with their folks. Back then one of the reasons was because long distance rates were lower on the weekend. Now it is because our lives are built around ministry and our ministries are built around the Lord's Day.

After the conversation I went out and sat in the rocker on the front porch and put my feet up. A couple raccoons frolicked around the other side the the street then crossed passing into the back yard without noticing me. Then I heard a voice. It was the voice of the Spirit in my soul, like an internal conversation.

“Ken, you have certainly devoted yourself to the ministry of the Word, haven't you?”

“Yes, I have, Lord, for decades now I have devoted myself to the ministry of the Word every single week for over thirty-five years. I have written messages and Bible studies and

articles for Sunday School, Sunday Morning and Wednesday Evening Bible and sermons week after week, month after month, and year after wonderful year of ministry. The delivery of those messages has been the great joy of my ministry.”

The Lord seemed to say to me: “Have you devoted yourself to prayer in the same way?”

I knew the answer was no.

The book of Acts records the story of the early church. The sixth chapter is the passage where the first deacons were chosen. They were chosen so the Apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. If the Apostles were directly commissioned by the risen Christ needed to devote themselves to prayer, it is certain that we will not have the increase that comes from God unless we devote ourselves to prayer.

The dialog was an inner dialog in my spirit, but I went to sleep that night knowing that God was communicating something very significant to me on that summer evening out on the porch. I need to devote myself to prayer like I have devoted myself to the ministry of the Word.

In the morning a parishioner was scheduled for an early surgery. I would need to rise early. What happened that morning is something I will not soon forget... I'll tell you that in the next chapter.

Lesson One:

Devote yourself to prayer in the same way you devote yourself to the ministry of the word.

Chapter Two: A Forgotten Name

Monday is my day off. Now that most of the children are grown I almost always work most of the day, but I rarely go into the study at church. Some Mondays I will have a funeral or a hospital call or an emergency. On Monday morning, August 10th I had a hospital call early in the morning. I rose about five a.m. and made my way to the hospital. I was there to pray with a woman before her surgery. She and her family mentioned another family from the church who was there in the hospital that morning. Neither of us could remember their names. I knew someone who would remember and taking a risk that I would wake them up I called. It was 630 a.m. Immediately they answered and told me the name of the family.

I found them in the hospital and visited with them. As I drove away from the hospital that morning I had two things on my mind. First, I wanted to get a cup of coffee and some breakfast. The other thought wasn't so pleasant. It came in the form of a gentle rebuke. It was that inner voice from the Spirit speaking to me again as He had the night before out on the porch.

“You didn’t remember their names, but they have been faithfully listening to you preach for eight years.”

The family had not officially joined our church so their contact information fell through the cracks of our system and even though they came almost every week, their names did not come to my mind. Something about that just isn’t the way it should be. It was as if the Lord said to me in my heart, “If you prayed for them every week you would remember their names. You don’t remember their names because you don’t pray for them.”

A pastor is a shepherd. To shepherd the flock you have to know the flock. The very first step in knowing someone is knowing their name.

As I drove away from the hospital that morning the sun was coming up. I prayed. “Yes, Lord. Please forgive me and help me. By your grace and help I will make it my goal never to preach to people that I have not prayed for by name that week if at all possible.”

I thought about it over breakfast and I had an idea about how I could begin to devote myself to prayer in the same way I have devoted myself to the ministry of the Word for the

last thirty-five years. I had a strong feeling in my heart that God was teaching me something very important, something vital to my ministry as a pastor. He wasn't done. Walking around the pond in a neighborhood park the next day He would teach me more. I will tell you that next.

Lesson Two:

Pray for every member and every attender every week.

Chapter Three: Walking Around the Pond

Sunday night August 10 God spoke to my heart in a very clear way out on the porch after a long Lord's Day of ministry. He challenged me to devote myself to prayer in the same way I have devoted myself to the ministry of the Word. The next morning God arranged an experience for me at the hospital early in the morning to challenge me to pray for every member and every regular attender of Evangel every week. He was not done.

Tuesday morning I got up and went for a walk around the pond. Hazard (our Yorkie) loves to walk and we have a great neighborhood for walking. Just north of our home is a park that is situated around a pond. I try to walk around the pond regularly. On this morning the lessons about prayer God was teaching me were fresh in my heart. Devote yourself to prayer in the same way you have devoted yourself to the ministry of the Word. Pray for every member and every regular attender at least every week.

On my walk I listened to a message by Pastor Francis Chan. In the message he was talking about a network of house

church pastors he leads. He said something that shocked me. It went something like this: “I don’t care if the pastors are great preachers. What I want to know is this; Do they get down on their knees and pray for the people by name every week. Isn’t that the pastor you want. If you are not going to do that for your church I don’t want you to be one of our pastors.”

Immediately I know that God was speaking to my very own soul. I went home and watched a video version of the message. I asked our son Kyle to create a video clip from the message to share with the people and to remind me. Now there were three parts to what God was showing me:

- 1. Devote yourself to prayer in the same way you have devoted yourself to the ministry of the Word.**
- 2. Pray for every member and every attender of Evangel every week.**
- 3. Make prayer for the people a priority. If you don’t pray for people you aren’t really their pastor.**

It was unmistakable. God was using a series of circumstances and reminders to guide me to a biblical truth that would transform my pastoral ministry. I was grieved

because it was so simple and because it took me so long to see it.

I have always prayed for the people, but I moved through the membership slowly. I didn't pray for every person every week. I didn't devote myself to it. I didn't carefully add people to the list who consider Evangel their home and me their pastor who had not yet formally joined. I knew I would have to make some changes. I wasn't sure how.

I heard of a pastor in Oregon who had experienced a ministry revolution after years of frustration and three church splits. What he discovered about prayer transformed his life and his church. The church grew to over a thousand and became strong and unified. I had a remarkable conversation with him. I will tell what I learned from him in my next chapter.

Lesson Three:

Make prayer a priority. If you aren't praying for people you are not pastoring people.

Chapter Four: Dee Duke's Story

Last August God began to work in my heart, bringing me to deep conviction about devoting myself to prayer in the same way I have devoted myself to the ministry of the Word for the last 36 years. Using the Word, the the inner voice of the Spirit, and divinely-arranged circumstances, He moved me to devote myself to pray for each of the members and each of the regular attenders of Evangel every week. This would mean that ministry for me would change in a significant way.

Here were the lessons God was teaching me beginning on that summer evening on the porch:

- 1. Devote yourself to prayer in the same way you have devoted yourself to the ministry of the Word.**
- 2. Pray for every member and every attender of Evangel every week.**
- 3. Make prayer for the people a priority.** If you don't pray for people you aren't really their pastor. Don't preach to people you haven't prayed for.

A friend gave me the name of a pastor in Oregon who had experienced a remarkable working of God in his church. His name is Dee Duke. He had started the church but he had been through three church splits. He was raised on a dairy farm and he know the importance of hard work. He worked hard and every time he got to church up to 200 in attendance at split and dropped back to 100.

No matter how hard he worked he could not see the church grow beyond 100. He was discouraged. He was defeated. He was determined to quit the ministry. About this time he was invited to a meeting in Cannon Beach, Oregon at a Bible Conference Center on the Pacific Coast. The meeting was organized by Joe Aldrich, then the president of Multnomah School of the Bible. He didn't have enough money to attend, but he was offered a scholarship. (Cannon Beach is just a few miles south of where our daughter and her husband Jesse live. It is a beautiful place).

Pastor Duke said to himself; "I'll go to the conference that way I can walk on the beach and eat the food, but I will skip the sessions. When he got to the conference he felt obligated to attend at least the first session of the conference. During that first session God began to show him why he had been defeated in ministry. His pastoral life was revolutionized by what he was learning about prayer. He returned to his

church and began to emphasize prayer. God began to bless. The spirit of the church was transformed thought prayer. The church grew to over 1000. Now they have started other churches in Oregon and over 20 churches in Africa.

More Prayer More Often

Pastor Duke told the story of his dad who was a farmer and a faithful church attender though he wasn't a believer until late in his life. His dad during the sermon every week would methodically fold his offering and faithfully drop it in the plate when the offering plate was passed at the end of the service. He was a consistent and faithful giver but he only gave one dollar a week.

If you asked him if he was a giver he could honestly say, "Yes. I give every week and I give a consistent amount. I am a regular, faithful giver." What is wrong with that picture? It's simple. He did not give enough. Most of us pray. We may even pray faithfully and often, but like Dee Duke's dad, we just don't pray enough we don't pray frequently, faithfully, and fervently.

If you read the prayers of the Bible you will see that men and women of God took prayer seriously. Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, and Jesus made prayer a priority. They

prayed frequently. They prayed faithfully. They prayed fervently.

If you only give a dollar a week unless you only make ten dollars a week, you are not a faithful giver. If you only pray when it comes to mind, and when you stop to eat, you are not a faithful prayer. You cannot say you are devoted to prayer.

After my conversation with Pastor Duke I went on-line and listened to some of his messages on prayer and I decided to take action and make some significant changes in the way I do ministry.

I decided to divide the members and regular attenders into six groups and pray for them Monday through Saturday. On the Lord's day I would pray for pastors and missionaries. There are about four-hundred families in the church so I'm praying for 60 or so families a day.

I began to pray faithfully for every member and every attender of Evangel.

Paul said; I planted Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. We may work, plant, plan, cultivate and water, but only God can give the increase and he gives the increase when we pray.

I noticed that as I prayed for each of the people every day I began to have a greater burden and a greater connection and involvement in their lives. I began to “know the state of the flock” better than ever. I began to take more interest in each person, in each family, in each child. Ministry ideas would come to mind and as I prepared my messages their circumstances would naturally come to me in the form of powerful and pointed applications in my preaching to help the very heart of each of those who listened to me.

I began to encourage the other pastor, deacons, teachers, and small group leaders to devoted themselves to prayer for those who were under their care. I began to challenge the people to create a detailed list of all their neighbors and friends who did not yet know the Lord and begin to faithfully pray for them.

I had a strong sense that God was in this. I asked Him for a token—a confirmation that this was the way He wanted me to approach ministry. Before a week passed He gave me powerful confirmation.

Lesson Four:

Pray more

Chapter Five: Numbers

When God began to move my heart to pray more faithfully, more frequently, more fervently I knew that prayer was a clear command and emphasis of the Bible. I didn't need any confirmation of that. All I had to do was open the Bible and read the place of prayer in the life of men and women of God, the place of prayer in the life of the church, and the place of prayer in the life of our Savior, Jesus. But there was something more that troubled me and has for many, many years.

I have read dozens of books, scores of articles, and I have attended conferences and had hundreds of conversations with fellow pastors whose ministry skills I admire, to discover the adjustments that need to be made to see increase in the church.

Church increase is a good thing, if it is something that God has given, but there can be a painful, dangerous, subtle idolatry in it for me. If I'm not careful the default setting of my soul will tell me that all that is wrong will be right if there are more people in the pews and if the church prospers as an organization. I can depend too heavily on the numbers for a

sense of personal affirmation and that is a painful trap for a pastor.

There is the temptation to try to be someone you are not in ministry—to try to copy the ministry gifts and leadership styles of people who have experienced the increase you desire. God has gifted each of us uniquely. To try to reproduce the leadership style of another is like trying to defeat Goliath in Saul's armor.

The roots of this weakness are deep in my heart. I was only fourteen when I knew that I would pursue pastoral ministry. I began immediately to be a student of the pastoral calling. My Dad is a pastor, my grandfather was a pastor. The continual conversation around our dinner table and on long car rides was speculation about what it was that made churches flourish. How could we see more people become followers of Jesus? What should we emphasize? What did other people do to achieve such impressive attendance numbers?

The Church-Growth Movement

Dad read inspiring stories about growing churches with dynamic pastors and flourishing ministries, but that level of success always eluded us. The churches Dad pastored always grew. He was faithful and sincere. Mom and the whole

family were engaged in the ministry, but the level of increase was modest. As a result Dad usually was bi-vocational. He would take a small church that could not afford a full-time pastor and he would get a school-teaching assignment within commuting distance. With this bi-vocational arrangement and in churches that were often small for very good reasons, the kind of growth that you read about in ministry success books was unlikely. It didn't happen for us. Longing for a ministry of a thousand we usually had a ministry south of one-hundred.

Sometimes churches were small because they were not healthy. There are people in control who should not be in control and they are unwilling to do the things they should do to see the church be what God wants it to be. Conflict or friction and tension between people and pastor and in-fighting makes increase impossible, but it is not always the fault of the people.

Other times small churches or churches that are declining or plateaued are not growing because pastors feel pressure to make them grow and they import programs from other churches and force them on the people. They assume that because they worked in one place they will work in every place, but they don't take into account other factors, like the location of the church, the skills and gifts of the people, the providential factors that make the church unique, or the

leadership skill of the pastor himself. The people try to follow the pastor, but the efforts they make don't bring increase and they end in frustration. Often the church suffers leading to a pastoral change and the new pastor comes into town with a new bag of ministry tricks and the people have to go through the whole frustrating cycle again.

Ministry and Idolatry

God was showing me the ministry idols in my heart. He was helping me discern my own gifts and skills and leadership style. Now, entering my ninth year of ministry here at Evangel I had plenty of time to evaluate and meditate on what kind of pastor God wanted me to be and what I should depend on for the flourishing of the church. That led me to the emphasis on prayer and personal pastoral care. It brought me full-circle to a way of seeing ministry like a village parson. I saw that I should not primarily concentrate on trying to do things go get the church to grow. I should not put inordinate pressure on the people to use them to grow the church. Instead I should know the state of the flock. I should arrange for the care of every member of the body. I should faithfully and passionately preach. I should identify other men who have natural leadership in the church and inspire them to inspire others. I should lead the way God gifted me to lead and not

frustrate myself by trying to be someone I am not and hurt the people by pressuring them to be something they are not.

You're Not Spurgeon

Years ago my secretary said; "Pastor, I think you should put your sermon titles in the bulletin."

"I'm not sure what my sermon titles are until just before I preach the message," I said. "Charles Spurgeon did not write his Sunday morning message until Saturday night and he did not write his Sunday night message until Sunday afternoon."

She said; "Well, you're not Charles Spurgeon."

As you can imagine, that is not my favorite memory, but it is an important truth. A pastor should have a good awareness of how God has gifted him and where God has placed him. I'm not Spurgeon. You are probably not Spurgeon either. Spurgeons are rare. But I can be faithful and fruitful even though I am not Charles Spurgeon. I am people-oriented. I am creative. I have a busy mind and high-energy. I am verbal. It's been that way for years. You can see it on every one of my report cards from my school days. Everyone who knows me knows that to be true. I am not linear and left-brain in my

thinking. My thought-process is more like fire-works than a flow-chart. I have many tabs open on my mental browser all the time. I am not a high-powered Teddy Roosevelt, “Let’s-charge-San-Juan-hill” kind of leader. I am not John Wayne or William Wallace. I’m Ken Pierpont. God led me to be a pastor. God gifted me to be a pastor, but I don’t leap tall buildings in a single bound, I’m not faster than a speeding bullet, I’m not more powerful than a locomotive, and I don’t walk on water.

I can call on you when you are in the hospital. I can pray for you by name. I can go to your child’s soccer game. I can weep with you when you grieve. I can rejoice with you when you have something to celebrate. I’m actually pretty good at that. I can pray and study the Bible and pay careful attention to your life and preach and teach in a way that is directly applicable to your life and family, because I know you and I live where you live. Your favorite ministry mega-gifted star cannot do that for you.

God has gifted and called local parsons to do that and they should not spend their time spinning their wheels trying to be the local reincarnation of Bill Hybles, Rick Warren, Charles Stanley, Charles Swindoll, Chuck Smith, or David Jeremiah. If pastors try to do that they are going to hurt themselves and they are going to hurt their people. Pastors are shepherds who know the flock and care for the flock. They

should work intimately among their people until the sheep know their voice and follow them even as the under-shepherd knows the voice of the Chief-Shepherd and follows Him.

I'm not Charles Spurgeon. When I was very young and occasionally even now I fantasize about what it would be like to preach to thousands and have people in foreign lands snatch up and read everything I write. There is a lot I'm not sure about but one thing I know: "I'm not Charles Spurgeon, or Charles Stanely or Charles Swindoll." I'm just Ken, the village parson. You will probably never meet the great Charles Pastors, but if Evangel is your church home and you need me I will do my best to be there for you and I will pray for you by name continually. I will pray for your children. I will pray about the state of your soul and try to shepherd your heart godward every week.

The heart of all of that is prayer, personal, frequent, faithful prayer by name for each of those who are in my flock. How do I know what people need? How do I know what temptations they face? How do I know who needs help, when and what kind of help they need? All this begins in the morning when I mention them by name one at a time to the Lord.

Would God Confirm This Direction?

I was sure God was at work in my heart. I asked Him to give me a confirmation that this new emphasis on faithful, fervent, frequent prayer was what He wanted me to emphasize in my ministry. The week of my experience on the porch I began to create prayer lists of all the families in the church and I began to pray for them by name, dividing the list so I would pray for about 50-60 families a day. I created files on Evernote so the lists would always be with me on my phone and they would be easy to edit.

While I was praying that first week I came upon a name and had a sense that I should connect with this young husband and dad. Later that morning I called him. I said, "The Lord put you on my heart today and I wondered if you would like to grab coffee sometime?"

He said; "Well, I've been pretty busy and I've been working six days a week so I'm not off work until Saturday at 2:00." Then he said something that surprised and humbled me. He said; "So i could meet you at 3:00." The first free hour he had after a long busy week of work he was willing to give to me, because I prayed for him and I cared about him

We met for coffee. We had a great talk. I learned a lot about him and his little family, his dreams, frustrations, temptations, pressures and successes. It was a good meeting.

Sunday morning when I stood to preach he and his wife were in the front row. I had prayed that week for a clear confirmation that this emphasis on prayer was the direction that God wanted me to take for the flourishing of the church when I saw that couple in the front row I knew the God had confirmed the direction He gave me.

That week I spoke to the people about what God was teaching me about prayer. I told the people this; “Today I am going to just tell you what God has been teaching me. I want you to let me know if any of you feel He has been saying the same thing to you.”

Often people are slow to adopt new ideas and lacking in enthusiasm about any new emphasis. In this case one after another the people have come to me to tell me they believe God has been saying the same thing to them. Over and over God has confirmed to me that this emphasis on prayer is Biblically-sound, pleasing to God, and universally applicable to any church anywhere at any time.

Lesson Five:

You're not Spurgeon

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