



...For I'm trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ's explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty. —Paul. Philippians 4:12-13 [The Passion Translation].

THE SERVANT'S INITIATIVE TRAINING FOR NET MENDERS

What does an initiated, servant, net mender, leader type, look like?

Mark 1:14–20

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

And straightway he called them...

Of the twelve men Jesus called, at least seven were fishermen. To be a fisherman, one must possess patience and perseverance—qualities as valuable in fishing for men as in fishing for fish. I find it interesting that Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea when Jesus called them. On the other hand, James and John were mending nets. The ministry of Peter and Andrew was evangelism, as evidenced by Andrew repeatedly bringing people to Christ, and Peter preaching the sermon on the Day of Pentecost that “caught” three thousand people in the net of the gospel. The ministry of John and James,

by contrast, was that of mending people through their emphasis on both the heartfelt and practical nature of love. Whatever your temperament personally, watch the Lord use it in your own ministry and see it in the rhythm of an outflow of Jesus' ministry. He was a net mender on a mission! Jesus epitomizes Servant leadership and the rhythm of net mending everywhere He goes! Now, If you have read leadership or management journals, you know that a real trend has been for every organization—whether business or ministry—to issue a Mission Statement, a succinct description of its vision or mission. We find Jesus' Mission Statement in the first message He preached in Nazareth when He said:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.... Isaiah 61:1, 2. (The Mission Statement of a Net mender!)

Some commentators have suggested that the year Jesus began His public ministry was the Year of Jubilee—a year of celebration and liberation when all debts were canceled and all slaves set free. If this be the case, Jesus' message would be especially fitting, for He was about to set people free from religious domination as well. Net Mending!

In Jesus' day, the rabbis taught that there were 613 commands in the law. Consequently people struggled under a heavy burden of what they were told constituted true religion and holiness. No wonder, then, that they would marvel at the gracious words Jesus spoke to them (Luke 4:22).

But as He continued speaking to them of their need for Him, their marvel turned to wrath. "How dare He give a word of correction to us?" they asked. "We know Him. He grew up here. This is just Joseph's boy." Jesus caught these people off guard because quite possibly there were boys in the town who were much better candidates to be Messiah than He. After all, the other boys wore phylacteries—boxes worn on the forehead or around their wrists which contained Deuteronomy 6:4. Jesus, evidently, never did (Matthew 23:5). It's not conducive to net mending!

Now, because I like the idea of taking my Bible with me wherever I go, But I don't! Phylacteries have always seemed like a good disciplined idea. Obviously, the scrolls were too big and bulky to carry about, so phylacteries would seem to be a

wonderful way to express the importance of the Word of God. I'm sure I would have spotted the guys wearing their phylacteries faithfully and said, "There are our leaders, right there." But that's because I'm a closet Pharisee. I'm impressed with signs of spirituality—phylacteries, prayer shawls, suits and ties, and all the rest. Now catch this! Jesus, models something entirely different. As they watched Him grow up, the people in His hometown didn't say of Him, "Now there's a spiritual young man." No, they wanted to kill Him (Luke 4:29). You wouldn't want to kill a man you thought was qualified to be Messiah.

Not only did Jesus not carry a Bible, He evidently never gave a formal Bible study to His disciples. I look for every opportunity to hold a formal or an informal Bible study. That's what the Pharisees did too. Endlessly. They unrolled the scrolls. They had discussions. They prodded and pontificated. But although Jesus knew the Word better than all of them by the age of twelve (Luke 2:47), His approach to spiritual life and Bible study was entirely different. And because Jesus was able to move about without a big Bible in hand, impressing people with His knowledge, He was able to do incarnational ministry that was completely non-intimidating as when He would derive a succinct lesson on spiritual life simply from seeing a man casting seed into a field (Luke 8:5). You see he was mending the religious holes in the nets of the pharisee's that the down and outer's had fallen through. the meek who needed a little good news; surgical dressing of the brokenhearted, liberating those who had been held captives, to their sin, and releasing those who were in-prisoned and bound in their shame, fear, and loss. And to proclaim to them that the acceptable year of the LORD / Salvation had come to them.

I am anything but concise. I don't make my points quickly. I love to go on and on. Jesus did just the opposite. When Thomas doubted, Jesus didn't say, "Let Me give you five reasons why the Resurrection is true, fifteen Old Testament prophecies that shed light on what is happening before you." No, He simply said, "Touch My wounds" (see John 20:27). (And He mends another net!)

It's not that He didn't know the prophecies. It's not that He didn't have a grasp on Scripture. But it's as though He had distilled them to the point where the people He cared about could be effectively reached without being intimidated by His knowledge. His was an incarnational natural ministry, led by the Spirit, that amazes me.

Nonetheless, I find myself asking, “Couldn’t You have given some Bible studies to Your disciples and recorded them in the Word? Then we could use them as a model for how Scripture is to be taught?” Oh, Jesus did a bit of a Bible study on one occasion—on the road to Emmaus. But, being that this is the only time such teaching is recorded, it was the singular exception rather than the rule—and even then, it was given to two individuals who were outside of His inner circle of twelve.

Not only do we find an absence of recorded Bible study in the Word, but there is not one recorded instance in the New Testament where Jesus prayed with His disciples. There is not one recorded instance when He gathered His boys around a fire and said, “Let’s spend some time in prayer,” not one time where He said to His disciples, “It’s a great night. Look at the stars above. Let’s talk to the Father together.”

Finally, after a year and a half, His disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray. John does. The Pharisees do.” Indeed, the Pharisees did pray: in the parking lot, on the street corner, in the marketplace, they loved to give long prayers. I like that. That’s spirituality. That’s holiness. If I were Jesus, I would have taught on prayer, given seminars on prayer, called special meetings for prayer. But what did Jesus do? In response to His disciples’ request to teach them to pray, He not only repeated the simple prayer He had taught them a year and a half earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, but He shortened it by five words.

Jesus’ disciples knew prayer was the foundation of His ministry. Seeing Him slip away before the break of day morning by morning (Isaiah 50:4), they knew He was a man of passionate prayer. And yet He didn’t necessarily pray with them. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, “You stay here while I go and pray” (see Matthew 26:36).

Why? I suggest it was because, although prayer is a glorious privilege, it can also be very intimidating to people. Whenever I tell a congregation to break into groups for conversational prayer, I can feel the tension that fills the room. Evidently, Jesus was so kind, so gracious, so loving that He would not put that kind of trip on anyone. I like to pray with people—but when was the last time I spent all night alone in prayer? Jesus reversed the entire order. He talked about a prayer closet, about praying in secret, as if to say, “Forget the outward expression

because it intimidates people. They're burdened by your seeming spirituality, but I came to set them free."

As a result, common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). They were drawn to Him like moths to a flame not because He was well groomed or well attired (Isaiah 53:2), but because there was evidently something in His eyes that welcomed them, something in His voice that warmed them. Something about Him that was relational and mending to their souls. I'm sad to admit that I used to look for guys who are sharp in appearance as leadership material. Or meet old school standards. The Pharisees did too. The best-dressed men of their day, they came across as very polished and sophisticated. But they also came across as stern and unapproachable. Not Jesus. I think back when before I was ever a member of this church and praying that God would send someone that did not fit the religious mold and loved Jesus with all of their heart. Someone who would sooth this congregation with an outflow of genuine love. That young man has been our pastor now longer than most pastor types last these days and has mended nets even in the life of this long time shepherd.

Back to the Rhythm of Jesus.

So easy was He to be with that for His inaugural miracle, He made wine for a wedding party. History tells us that in Jesus' day, when a baby girl was born into the family, her father would annually make a batch of wine for himself and one for his daughter's marriage celebration. Therefore, if the bride at Cana was fifteen or sixteen, there would have been presented to the happy couple sixteen years' worth of wine. But after drinking all sixteen years' worth, the wedding party in Cana ran out of wine. So what did Jesus do? Did He give them a lecture on the danger of overindulgence? Did He make a bottle or two? No, if you do the research you will find that He made one hundred eighty gallons of better wine! (John 2:6).

Now, If I were Jesus, I would have kicked off my public ministry with a nice healing miracle or by bringing someone back from the dead. Instead, Jesus said, "Here's a young bride and groom who are embarrassed. I want to help them." He gave no teaching; He got no glory. He simply provided wine with no strings attached. In fact, in studying His miracles, very rarely do we see Jesus make application to the people He touched, healed, or helped. With the exception of a

couple occasions, no tracts were given out, no teaching was given. It was all a life of loving net mending that was an outflow of who He was.

“Sell your goods and follow Me,” He said to the rich young ruler (see Matthew 19:21). But when he couldn’t do this, Jesus didn’t say, “Let’s get together for coffee and rethink your decision. I want to take you through Ecclesiastes and explain to you the emptiness of riches.” No, He simply let His invitation stand.

Reformers intrigue me. Reformers are intense, single-minded, committed. Yet the fire in their eyes and the determination on their faces can cause people to be intimidated, to back away, to feel bad. Reformers can be uptight. Not so with Jesus. Why? He trusted the Father that in due time the rich young ruler would see the truth of His words and the depth of His love and come back.

Even when He cleansed the temple, John makes it clear the scourge Jesus made was a small scourge and that He took care to protect the doves (John 2:15, 16). There’s never any panic or frenzy seen in Jesus. Rather, He moved with serenity, certainty, and tranquility. As a result, although He was referred to as a glutton, a winebibber, and the friend of sinners, no one ever accused Him of being too busy.

“Master, all men seek for You in Capernaum. That’s the hot spot of the northern region, the epicenter of the area outside of Jerusalem. What an invitation!” That’s where we need to go to build our ministry!

But what did Jesus say?

“For this reason came I forth,” Note! He wasn’t speaking about His coming from heaven, but from His morning prayer time—“to go to a little un-walled village to talk to the villagers there. And that will about do it for today fella’s” (see Mark 1:38). Are you catching the flow and rhythm of net mending in the life of Jesus?

Jesus cared about one thing: His Father’s will. That’s all. That is how He was able to move around with serenity, focus, and a complete lack of busyness. “My burden is easy and My load is light,” He said (see Matthew 11:30). And He lived this out in such a way that no one ever once suggested or implied He was busy.

Jesus truly breaks the mold of what we perceive holiness and spirituality and ministry to be. Although we think this is seen in the fact that He hung

around publicans and sinners, I believe it is seen more clearly in the fact that He dined with Pharisees. To be sure, He spoke harshly to the Pharisees because He knew that's what it would take to get through to those about whom He genuinely cared. But when they invited Him to their gatherings, He went.

You see, at the home of Simon, Jesus ministered to the Pharisee and prostitute alike and at the same time! (Luke 7:36–39). We understand so little of this. How easy it is for church congregations to say, “We want more young people. What can we do to be more youthful and vibrant?” Or, “We need some more tithers. Can I let you in on a little insight. I’m seeing the Lord do more in a bad economy with less tithers than He ever has. How can we appeal to the older set?” Or “We want more Gen Z. We want to have the same ‘Movement’ thing as they are having over there.” Or “We want to reach problem solvers, church builders, good teachers, skilled worship leaders. That’s what is current.” Or “We want to be diversified. We want our church to be one about which visitors say, ‘Wow, the people in your church are varied and cool.’” Jesus was completely not interested in this. Pharisee, prostitute, women, men, young, and old—He loved anyone and everyone the Father sent His way.

“Master, we saw Your disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath day. This ought not be” (see Matthew 12:2–4).

“Have you not read of David stealing the showbread from the temple in order to feed his men?” Jesus asked, as if to say, “There are laws, and there is love. But when love and the law collide, love always has precedence.”

Did you know that Jesus dealt with the woman at the well without ever dealing directly with the issue of her living with a man who was not her husband. If I were Jesus, I would have made sure she understood the importance of getting out of that relationship, of making things right. But in recording the story, the Holy Spirit seems to say to any who question this, “That’s none of your business. You don’t need to know whether Jesus dealt directly with that issue or not.”

Could this be because, knowing this woman had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married, she would have obviously been branded as an immoral woman whose only option to survive financially was through prostitution? Could it be that Jesus was saying, “What the religious are concerned about, I’m not all that concerned about. And what the religious aren’t

concerned about, namely love, concerns me to the utmost”? Another net mended!

“I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,” Jesus said it in the most magnificent Mission Statement ever conceived. And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, and completely.

Jesus blows apart every idea I have about spirituality and ministry. And in so doing He sets us all free from the burdens and baggage of grumpiness and condemnation, of fear and intimidation. Revisit Jesus—this laid-back lover of people whose intensity was private and personal, who didn’t put pressure on people. Reacquaint yourself with the Friend of sinners, the Man who spoke gracious words continually, who healed unconditionally, who loved sacrificially, who was the great net mender—for although He is unrecognized by most religious people, He alone defines what it looks like to live in holiness and at the same time be a servant to all!