

Sitting Right Seat

7-27-2004

“Just exactly what is it that you do?”

That’s what an airplane mechanic asked me a couple weeks ago. He’s a kind Christian gentleman who has worked on the 1975 Baron we often use for the ministry. I knew we were at the end of our brief conversation, so I didn’t want to bog things down with a long explanation of Paraclete Ministries.

I said, “I’m a pastor to pastors.”

“What does that mean?” he asked politely.

I searched for something in the background of this brother with which he could readily identify. I knew he had years of aviation in his blood. So I decided to connect some dots until they formed a line on the bigger picture.

“Do you remember when you were studying to be a pilot? You went to ground school. You did all that book work, learned how to read aeronautical charts, studied the theories of aerodynamics, learned about the instruments, and how to interpret them, and about the aircraft controls and how they work?”

“Uh-huh”

“Then you took the written test and passed it, right?”

“Barely,” he quipped.

“What if your instructor congratulated you after ground school, and proceeded to give you the keys to the Cessna 152 and said, ‘Now go fly safely, son’?”

“I’d have crashed and burned in about five minutes.”

“That’s exactly what some of our precious pastors are doing...crashing and burning. We put them through courses; require a certain amount of evidence of doctrinal purity; sometimes show them how other people fly; and then strap them into the airplane and say, ‘Fly safe now.’ Pastors, just like pilots, sometimes need someone sitting ‘right seat’; someone with some flying experience who can show them how to handle the controls, how to interpret the weather ahead, and how to deal with Air Traffic Control.”

The elderly gentleman at first nodded his head in approval and smiled. It all made perfect sense, now. Then he dropped his countenance. “I wish you’d been sittin’ right seat for our pastor. He resigned a few months ago in total discouragement. Last I heard, he’s left the ministry altogether.”

That sad story, which has become all too commonplace today, is what I’m called to prevent. For too long we’ve watched ministries crash and burn. For the world, it’s a

shame. For the media it's entertainment. But, for the church, it's tragic. I will not park the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, waiting to pick up the pieces. I am building godly hedges of protection at the top of the precipice. There is an old saying: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I would rather invest my energy in the preventative side of maintenance than pour precious limited resources into costly repairs.

Recently I counseled with a pastor who is being restored after a lengthy process of rebuilding his life, marriage, and ministry from a place of catastrophic failure. The cost of this failure, though not a moral failure, is incalculable. The toll it has taken upon the church, upon his family, and upon the testimony to the world is enormous. Though he has repented in all sincerity, he feels the weight of the past upon him like a debt he's unable to pay back. I was able to help this brother see the fault lines that began the seismic shift in the foundation of his life. He now has hope that he can indeed walk sure-footed, with eyes wide open to boundaries of safety provided by the Spirit and the Word.

Though most of our ministry is on the road, our home has become a haven to the hurting. When I left the pastorate I never envisioned how much we would need a home office, a comfortable place where we can open hearts and pour in truth and healing balm. I never realized how many pastors want to get away from the "system" to find someone to talk to...someone who can sit "right seat." Someone who will stand beside them and walk with them down *Paraclete Pathway*.

That's what the word "*paraclete*" actually means: "one who stands beside." It's one of the names of the Holy Spirit. That's why it's translated "comforter," or "counselor," or "advocate." But what it means, in aviation language, is, "the one who sits right seat." I would never be so arrogant as to think I could take the place of the Holy Spirit. I'm neither omnipotent nor omniscient. I've nearly killed myself a few times trying to be omnipresent...but that is not in my job description either. What is my responsibility is to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

John, in his epistle says, "{14} We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. {16} We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:14, 16 NASB)

Already, since launching this ministry May 1, 2000, we have been in tiny churches, medium sized churches, and mega churches. We've helped young pastors, and those many years our senior. We've ministered in young churches, barely through their foundation stage, and others nearly a century old. We've been in cities and rural communities. In the weeks ahead we will minister in Canada, Fiji, Tonga, and China, not to mention California which tends to be a state all its own. The common denominator in each of these venues of ministry is this: People need one another. The body of Christ needs related members. Young believers need veteran saints. The elders of the faith need to be needed. Mature members need to be parents, and spiritual children need guardians. Sheep need shepherds. But shepherds often need shepherds, too. The guy flying the plane needs someone to sit "right seat"...a *paraclete*. That's what I think Jesus would do...so that's what we're doing.

Helping the Brethren, M. Wayne Benson