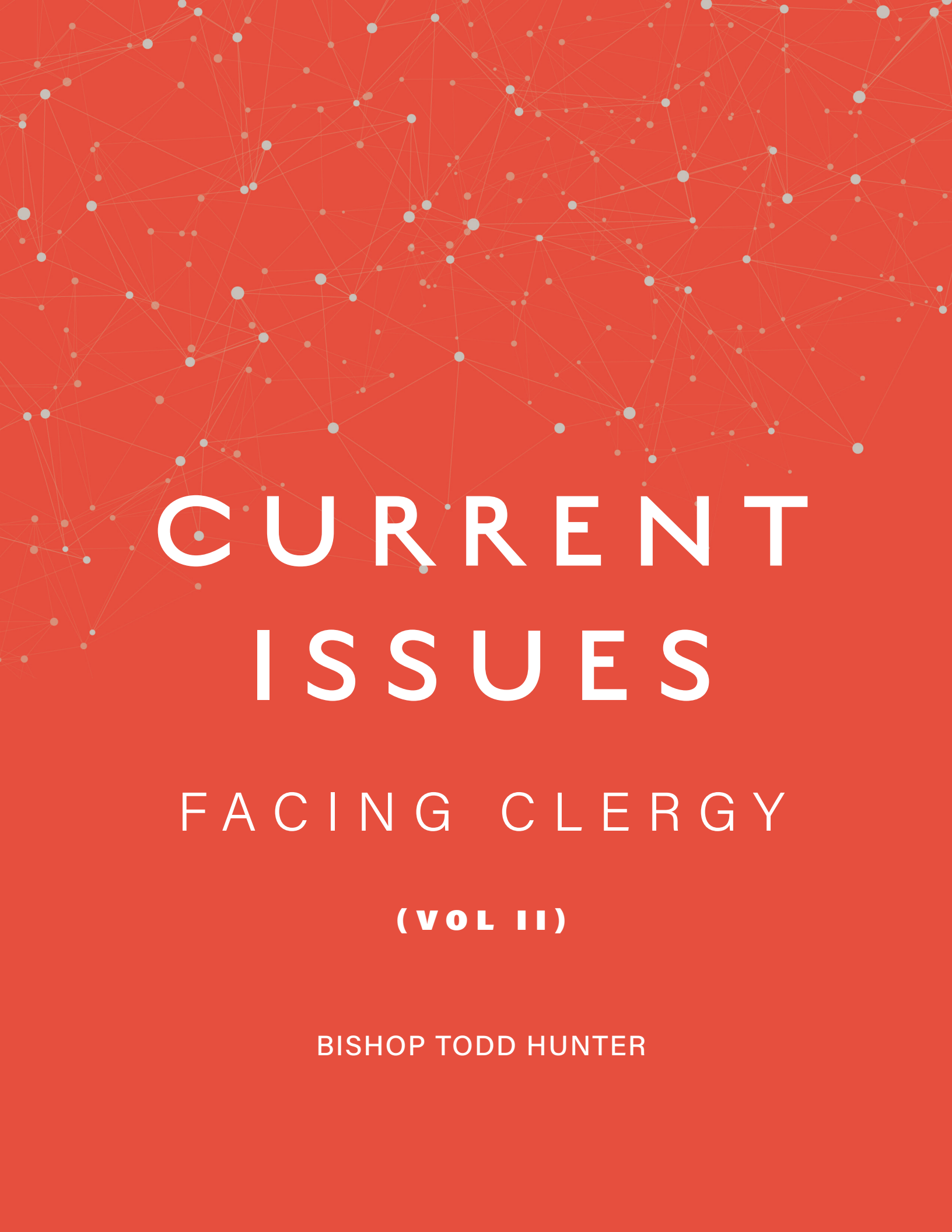




CURRENT ISSUES

FACING CLERGY

(VOL II)

BISHOP TODD HUNTER

A

few months ago, we looked forward to summer, thinking June and July would be the COVID-19 downtime, the reprieve before the predicted, but hoped-against, “Second Wave.” We are here now, and

rather than a downturn, we are having some of the worse days of the COVID crisis. We are also having profoundly needed racial conversations in the midst of heated politics—which is bound to increase as the election nears.

We are all trying to anticipate the coming months carefully and make the best-informed, wisest, difference-making decisions possible. None of us will get it totally right. A columnist in [The Atlantic](#) puts it this way: *What will the recovery look like? At this fraught moment, no one knows enough about consumer sentiment and government ordinances and business failures and stimulus packages and the spread of the disease to make solid predictions about the future.* I think she is right. I would add to her list the crying need to pay attention to racism wherever it’s found and the probability of the toughest, meanest, most decisive election cycle in generations.

Another [columnist](#) muses: *We have an election in four months. Resentments are festering. Some centuries old. Some decades. Some months. All of this is going to get worse. Social media escalates the tensions. It’s a hotbed of anonymous trolls, agents of chaos and bad-faith arguments. It brings out the worst in us because the algorithm rewards us for being tribal, divisive and emotional. It preys on our worst instincts. The algorithm doesn’t want to be fed compassion, nuance and reason. Peace isn’t profitable. Social media demands the scalps of the canceled. It wants nothing less than our souls and war.*

Whew! How is a leader supposed to engage all of that with kindness and generosity while seeking truth? I get the *how* question, and there are many sources of answers to those questions. But as you know, I trust your calling and gifts and the local knowledge of your leaders. I am always happy to think alongside you, but I am convinced that my most important role in this season is to work on the *who* question. My work and prayers center around helping you stay grounded, firm of heart, soul, will, mind, emotions, body, social relationships. (If you

were not able to participate in my “Soul Care: Peace for Caregivers in Troubled Times” series that I designed for clergy, or if you want to revisit the episodes, find them for free at Toddhunter.org.

What kind of persons do we need to be to lead through multifaceted disruption? We are seeking, as a first priority, clear-eyed union with Jesus. Events of the coming months will likely require more than our gifts, skills, talents and experience will be able to provide. But our God never lacks provision or capability. Thus, we seek union with him. We seek first the kingdom of God, knowing that all other things will be given as well. Our vision in these days is to: *Steep ourselves in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. We’ll find all our everyday human concerns will be met* (Luke 12, MSG).

What Would Dallas Say?

Last week, because I wanted to ask him about the key issues of the day, I was having an “I wish Dallas Willard was alive” moment. I so cherished the times I could call him or go see him in L.A. and question him about whatever was vexing me at the moment. He always had something to say that was truthful, meaningful, loving and freeing.

Instead, I reached out to a mutual friend who was one of Dallas’ philosophical students and is now a highly regarded professor at a Christian university. I told my friend what I was thinking. He replied: “I don’t know for sure what Dallas would say about a given issue, but I can imagine him saying that the best place to start with any issue is *to come to love those with whom we are in effective contact.*” I immediately agreed. I could hear Dallas’ baritone voice saying it.

I felt settled in an earthquake of reasons to feel disquieted. At least, I had a place to begin fundamental alignment to Jesus: Love your neighbor and enemy. This, of course, includes both personal



and civic versions. All of us have effective contact with persons; not all of us have access to levers of power. Thus, we do what we can with what is nearest to us to halt or prevent structures of injustice.

Note the words to *come to love*. They imply ongoing *renovation of our being*. They allude to our formation in Christ such that we *come to love* both neighbor and enemy. Loving others, cherishing and treasuring them, would be a great ally in our present social issues. What else besides systemic love—*willing the good of others*—will mend race relations? What else will help us do what we can to stop the spread of disease, heal divisions or care for those in economic need?

Our will involves the human capacity to create what does not yet exist: to choose courses of action—words and deeds. Since the capacity to determine actions can lead to good or evil, our wills need to be steeped in love. Think of our social discourse: What would stop name calling, belittling and assuming the worst of others? What kind of person would seek fair dialog and honestly seek truth, even to the point of realigning his or her own viewpoint? Answer: a humble person. And humility is the posture belonging to, and overflowing from, those filled with love of others—a will bent away from self and toward the good of others.

Someone could understandably wonder: Is the spirituality I am suggesting escapist? Dualist? Does what I propose mean that we don't care about, and are not fully engaged with, the broken world? I think not. We are not dualists who deny the material world. As is said of the Desert Mothers and Fathers, we don't flee *from* the world, we flee (in solitude, silence, Sabbath, and forms of self-care) *for* the world. Henri Nouwen explains:

Silence, solitude and prayer allow us to save ourselves and others from the shipwreck of our self-destructive society. The temptation is to go mad with those who are mad and to go around yelling and screaming...to drown in the agonies of those we are trying to save (*The Way of the Heart*, 92).

The first and most important issue facing leaders

today is in the mirror, not in the news. I pray daily that both you and I would experience the strength, grace and power of God. That we would consistently be gracious, generous, generative people—and that those qualities would naturally flow over into our various tasks of leadership.

Here are a few questions that are, or will be, before us as clergy. They are in no particular order, and I make no claim that this list is exhaustive or that my answers are faultless. It is just what I can see and want to lift up for our mutual consideration. You may be asking questions that are not named here—just run them through the grid of Jesus and the kingdom. Know that whatever the issue is, it is best handled at the intersection of *reality* and *coming to love*.

How should I think about the issues of our day?

Reading Tom Wright's [God and the Pandemic](#) prompts me to give you his take on reframing the issues of the day: *Put Jesus in the center of the picture and work out from there*. We don't start thinking and responding via the frame of anything else—political parties, political theories, theological action groups, or even extra-biblical theological constructs and schemes—and then try to fit Jesus and the kingdom into those frames. It distorts, pollutes and marginalizes Jesus every time.

It is in the Christ-event that the world finds its sense of self, its orientation, its telos. The cross puts human idolatry, injustice, tragedy and wickedness in its defeated place. The resurrection is the sure sign that God's new creation is in fact coming, even though it comes within a plotline that includes all manner of human brutality and disasters of every kind. This reality does not set Jesus aside, it puts him at the center. As Bishop Wright says in his book, *Jesus is the summons to repent and the clue to what God is doing in the world*.



He continues:

If God wants to alert us to things that are wrong in the way we have been running the world... they will come to us Jesus-shaped. Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom is the gold standard.

If you want to know what it means to talk about God being 'in charge of' the world, or being 'in control,' or being 'sovereign,' then Jesus himself instructs you to rethink the notions of 'kingdom,' 'control,' and 'sovereignty' themselves around his death on the cross.

Those ideas help us ask: What do the people Jesus created—the Church—do in times like these? We empathize. In biblical terms, we *lament*. But as the people of God, we lament in a very unique and Christlike way (John 15:11). This allows us to be a positive, faith-filled presence to the brokenness we lament. We lament, mourn and pray in pain, but not without trust that hope and joy are in the very air we use to pray. It is not an either/or proposition. We may feel hope/joy and lament/mourning in what seems like cycles or alternating moments. But lamenting simultaneously *in* and *with* trust is crucial to our wellbeing and our ability to lovingly and effectively be present to and lead others.

What I am proposing may seem difficult to you—it is not automatic for me. I work on it. Sitting with texts like these helps me see the both/and reality of lament with hope and joy:

HOPE

Paul encourages Christ-followers to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (Romans 12:12).

Paul prays that the God of hope [will] fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him (Romans 15:13).

The Psalmist declares: May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you (Psalm 33:22).

Paul commends endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

We are encouraged to...hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

JOY

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Habakkuk 3:17,18).

God fills us with joy in his presence (Psalm 16:11).

The joy of the Lord is [our] strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

The kingdom of God is a matter of...joy... (Romans 14:17).

Joy is constantly flowing toward us by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

I know a list of Scriptures can seem tedious or cliché. But I set them before your mind so that, led by the Spirit, you can pick one or two from each list to become a part of your work within and through lament. I want to help keep you standing, as Bishop Wright puts it, in *tears and toil, lament and labor*. [For] that is our vocation in the present time. To stand consistently steady and strong, you will need joy and hope. That is not cliché. It is the lived testimony of 2,000 years of church leadership.



How do I get to the bottom of the divisiveness—which side is right?

Division of many sorts are all around us. They are increasing in frequency and becoming more intense. Without intending to blame any one source, but just to cite an example of the forces of division among us, I recently read an [article](#) by Maureen Dowd in *The New York Times*: “The Wall Street Journal had a [chilling report](#) a few days ago that Facebook’s own research in 2018 revealed that ‘our algorithms exploit the human brain’s attraction to divisiveness.’ If left unchecked, Facebook would ‘feed users more and more divisive content in an effort to gain user attention and increase time on the platform.’”

An [article](#) I saw in *The Washington Post* asserted that we are now *living in a big anger incubator*. A Pew [study](#) reveals that *just 12% of Americans are happy with the state of the country; 71% are angry; 66% are fearful*. I can’t recall where I saw this quote, but C.S. Lewis once warned us not to “mistake the lack of charity for zeal.”

It helps me to always stop and think: There is no *media*, just human beings who work in media. There are no *politicians*, just people with better or worse motivations and ideas. We are always, at bottom, dealing with human beings. Human beings are the only ones who can take roles in human life. We are stuck with *us*—and the beams in our eyes. When we label each other with no sense of particularity or nuance, we engage in dehumanizing attitudes that in turn justify the brutal ways people are treated.

When feeling pressed for a given reason, or when we feel it can be justified by “how much I care” or “how passionate I am” about an issue, *condemnation of others* becomes a go-to response. But Jesus taught (Matthew 7:1-5, 12) that we should not judge one another, but treat others the way we want to be

treated:

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged.
For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Jesus does not mean “have no thoughts” or “lose the human ability to make things distinct” or “give up knowing right from wrong.” He means we need to temper our views of others by realizing that our observations of them are imperfect. We have a plank in our eye. Furthermore, if we were wrong about something, had a blind spot, or were somehow deceived, we would want others to help us see the truth of things with respect and love.

A biblical anthropology shapes my fundamental imagination for how to treat others. A biblical anthropology relates human beings first to God, then to all that God created—most especially those created in God’s image: our neighbors, who sometimes are our enemies. A biblical anthropology sees all people, of every kind, as primarily defined by the virtue of being created in the image of God for the purpose of being his creative, cooperative friends. By God’s initiative, each person, whatever their ethnicity, has a destiny to which they are summoned. Each human being is invited into the mission and purposes of God. Within the intention of God for humanity, we are all one in a doubly powerful way: first, we were created as one blood, and second, we are re-created and sent as a one-blood people because of the shed blood of Jesus. Paul’s dream always got my attention. Today it excites me and calls me forward into our divisive times:

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:5).



There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

[In Christ] there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Colossians 3:11).

But, regarding Paul's vision, sin has distorted and broken us in multi-directional ways. We then distort and break others. The cycle goes on and on—now helped along by powerful technological devices. But the problem is not our social media platforms. Today Jesus would have said: *Out of the overflow of the heart does one tweet*. We are trapped in the brokenness of the fall until we give ourselves to Jesus as his apprentices in kingdom living, learning to love God and his ways, our neighbors and our enemies.

Instead of knee-jerk condemnation rooted in judgment, we need to cultivate, model and teach the practical goodness of restraint, of humble tentativeness, of listening, of seeking first to understand and then to be understood. This does not mean we don't have clarity about injustice, morality/ethics or social policy. It just means that I can't think of a time Jesus justified "going off on someone" in the sinful ways so routine today. (Some people might see Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers as him "going off." Rather, I see it as a dramatic, intense prophetic act. I guess such things are possible for his followers, but we must be careful, as we don't have Jesus' perfections.) Jesus saw reality without a beam in his eye. He accurately saw the truth of the full panorama of human sin and error. Yet it did not lead to rationalizing hateful words. Rather, love rationalized peace and patience.

There are things in human life that are degrading of people, and they need to change *now*. But as we work for change, we must consider this: Incalculable harm has been done to human beings in the name of doing good—just recall the various "isms" of the 20th century that led to wars. We don't merely see in the scriptures *what needs to be fixed*. We see God's idea about *how to fix it*: It is cruciform in presence and resurrection in hope. We work against injustice best when we work from a transformed inner life.

In a world of misinformation, how do I know what is true?

Lack of trust in our leaders, media and experts is at an all-time high. Conspiracy theories and misinformation flourish. As the lockdown has dragged on, tensions have [risen](#).

Our pandemic context is reminding me that truth is a gift. Right? Wouldn't you love to know what is really true about the future of the pandemic, the economy and our social unrest? It is powerfully liberating to be able to see things as they really are. It enables intelligent, effective action. Truth is the basis for trust in human interactions: friendships, marriages, work teams, civic life. Truth makes the basic things of life work.

Yet today there is much angst about truth. Does it exist? Can we know it? Where do we find it? Fake news? Social media screeds? We quickly dismiss people today who claim to have knowledge of something. Some people say there is no truth, only constructs. Others would say there is truth—even truth with modifiers on it like *absolute* truth. Some know absolutely that they have it and enjoy the feelings associated with the claim. Others, along the lines of critical realism, are simultaneously more confident (realism) and humble (critical of their knowing).

It is fundamental to a biblical worldview and orthodox view of God that we grasp and do our work from this knowledge: There is *a way that things are* independent of our thinking and feeling about it. Yes, we have imperfect access (perspectives, context, etc.) and imperfect articulation (issues surrounding language) of the way things are, but that does not

mean nothing is real. It means we grapple toward knowledge for the sake of the freedom and capacity-to-act that truth yields. We then use that freedom and power to serve others.

In our pursuit of learning and teaching, I suggest an *epistemology of love*. Are you surprised by seeing those two words put together: *epistemology*...and...*love*? I was. Twenty years ago, I was reading the first pages of Tom Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God*. Tom was laying out his commitment to critical realism and said it ought to be carried out as an *epistemology of love*. It pierced my heart. What a vision—what a possibility! Truth without bullying. Confidence without arrogance. Hope for the possibility of genuine insights. The joy of learning. The delight of teaching and leading—all in love, not “the will to power.”

We are going to find ourselves in the position of teaching, alerting and calling to truth in the coming days. People are growing more and more desperate to know what is real. There are increasing psychological, relational and spiritual issues surrounding the unimpeded march of COVID-19, the need to deal with racism and economic calamity.

I use the following imagination to get me through harsh, judgmental, dismissive and verbally violent times. *Humanity remains God's project*. And human beings are growing in every dimension toward the purposes of God, according to his wisdom and on his timetable. For instance, human beings had to learn how to get warm by fire without burning themselves. There are subtle, embodied complexities there—not like the complexities of cosmology or modern technology, but a learning curve, nonetheless. Like roasting marshmallows: too close they catch on fire, too distant and they don't melt. I wonder if back then, people yelled at each other or belittled each other for what they viewed as dumb behavior. Did they *post* their frustration by scratching on rocks?

Or imagine the hunter/gatherer era, wherein human beings were on the learning curve associated with knowing which berries to eat, those which were poisonous vs. nutritious. At some point, people had to figure out that you really shouldn't eat a blowfish or certain kinds of raw meat. Again: I wonder what

the social psychology was like on these steep, communal learning curves. Did they wear T-shirts with slogans that positioned themselves against their tribemates? One way or the other, our forebearers were making their way to truth, to reality. We too are trying to do so today. It is hard. There are sincere people in the medical, social policy and political arenas who are trying their best. When humans demonize all sources of power, no one is left to help, guide or protect. What if, for a few months, we just put a moratorium on the shouting that demonizes others?

In the same way ancient people learned about fire and food, humanity is presently going through several large learning curves simultaneously. We have been going through a learning curve of human sexuality for several decades now. More recently, we are wondering about gender and bioethics. Soon someone will wonder: Can servants of Jesus have sex with robots? Virtual sex? Globalism is now challenged by various forms of populism. Globalization and the web have created the context in which human xenophobia must be replaced with love-of-the-other or we are in big trouble. We see this presently in US race relations. We have economic catastrophe. A mental health crisis is upon us. We seem to learn slowly. This slowness understandably frustrates us. The moral arch of the universe does truly bend toward justice, but it has been a slow march—a march in which some classes of people have been badly mistreated. Nevertheless, we hope: *Thy kingdom come*.

It is possible to work hard for justice, healing and deliverance without adopting the methods of “the nervous.” Nervous people are often harsh. Such harshness is often motivated by attempts to ensure that the world becomes a place where *I* am in control, a world that gives *me* peace. Thinking like that marginalizes God and others.

Happily, we have other options for dealing with the things that deeply concern us. Among the great treasures of life in the kingdom of God are *righteousness, peace and joy* (Romans 14:17). We can have great passion for change marinated in those things. We will then be simultaneously effective and ethical.

No matter what one's lay version of epistemology is, most people have a gut intuition that knowledge is not just for the super-intelligent. Knowledge is not meant to be mysterious or esoteric. It is for average people. We seem to know, notwithstanding epistemological banter about truth, that truth was given to humanity so that we can go about our ordinary decisions regarding the people and activities of our lives. A part of our calling in the days ahead will be to pursue truth motivated by the will to the good. Truth is a gift—humbly discover and receive it. It will make us sources of healing and hope.

What is my unique role as a Christian leader in the days ahead?

As leaders, we are invited to have not just belief, commitment or profession, but specific personal (but not gnostic) knowledge. We are invited to an understanding that facilitates us placing our life in Christ and providing an imagination for walking with him in 2020.

In his book *Knowing Christ Today*, Dallas Willard says, “Our field of knowledge is *real life under God based on first-hand knowledge of him*.” In Christ, we learn there is a way that things are (God, his purposes and his ways). Our goal is to bring our whole selves and those we lead into alignment with God and his kingdom: our thoughts and feelings, heart, soul, spirit and social self. This is the only reliable path to devotion to God.

Devotion to God sets the direction of our lives to the good, the righteous, the love of neighbor and enemy. Mere belief does not have that kind of life-altering, life-shaping power. Only knowledge can give a foundation for action and character development among those we teach and lead. Think of the Apostle

Paul: Do you think he merely believed or professed things, or do you imagine he knew things to be true and thus actionable and livable?

Knowledge is what gives us the ability as pastors to teach, counsel and pray, to give hope, courage and peace. Having knowledge does not imply a bullying sort of certainty. Recall Wright's beautiful vision for an *epistemology of love*. That has shaped my attitude for many years. Truth for the sake of others. Truth that funds loving others, willing and promoting their good.

It is love of God, truth, neighbor and enemy that banishes intolerance, prejudice and racism—and replaces it with the paradigmatic love of the Good Samaritan. We succeed in knowledge not primarily based on writing papers and passing tests, but by cultivating virtue from which come our character and ethical words and deeds. Dallas Willard helps us see that one cannot succeed in an epistemology of love *unless you have abandoned having your way and fulfilling your own desires, as the rule of your life*.

How much longer is this going to last?

It seems to me, based on the most careful reading I can do from the most unbiased sources I can find, that we are only in the first minutes of what is likely to be a long, tiresome game. This era of trouble feels like it is going to be similar to an epic tennis match that goes on for hours, the athletes completely wrung out, having given their all. When COVID-19 first entered our minds, we hoped, “Two weeks to flatten the curve and then all will be well.” We hoped for the summer slump. It didn't arrive. Cases are at their highest as I type this paragraph.

I am trying to come to grips with the reality that our present disruption, in one form or another, is likely

to last well into next year. Some coming problems are not yet discerned. Various thinkers have pointed out other challenges that have not yet made the popular news cycle.

It clarifies reality and motivates me to imagine Serena Williams or Roger Federer on a hot, muggy Wimbledon afternoon, head hung, shoulders slumped, shuffling along on the court between points...the crowd cheering them on. Then, in an almost superhuman fashion, they spring into intense, dramatic action—to serve or return serve—over and over again. They do this to achieve and hold coveted trophies, to make millions of dollars and to cement their place in history. We are captivated as we watch history unfold. Their tenacity inspires something deep in us to pursue the things we most care about.

Here I ask you to bring clearly before your heart and mind ***the most authentic you, plus all the good you wish to do in the world.*** You can do it. You can persevere through this trial and the severe testing of us and all aspects of human life. It is normal to have thoughts flit through our minds like: “Why me?” “What did I do to deserve this?” “I wish I lived in a different time.”

We don’t linger on these thoughts. We take them captive to Christ to obey him (1 Corinthians 10:5), instead of living under the tyranny of our fleeting thoughts and emotions. This is just another, albeit psychological, way of doing life by putting Jesus in the middle of the frame and working out from there.

Clearly, we don’t deserve something more or better. We can’t wish away our present life. We simply take our place in the world as it unfolds under the loving, wise superintending of God. It is by God’s design that we are alive at this moment. How and where do we find the goodness of God in July 2020? How do we participate with him there, joining him in the renewal of all things?

Never denying hard realities or cowing before them, we seek first God and his kingdom. We drop out of the culture of condemnation. We pursue spiritual practices facilitating spiritual transformation that yield us coming to love God, neighbor and enemy. We seek truth in order to be agents of healing via

truth. We run, enabled by grace and empowered by the Spirit, to get the prize of becoming humanity as God intended: the cooperative friends of Jesus, living lives of constant creative goodness, for the sake of others, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How can I make a real difference in the world?

I confess that my strong desire to “make a difference in the world” sometimes leads to frustration that I am decidedly not making a big, permanent difference. Who is? It seems that people like Lincoln, Wilberforce and Martin Luther King did. But here we are with deep racial agony in 2020.

When I look back over just my little life, I see that: Chuck Smith tried sincerely to get a whole generation to have genuine confidence in the Bible. But the Bible is less relied upon as a source of knowledge now than when he began. John Wimber tried passionately to help people come to rely on the person and work of the Spirit—but I don’t see a lot of it in church life and certainly not in civic life. I think of the authors I counted on in the area of spiritual formation: Foster, Willard, Peterson, Nouwen. I think of the work their students have tried to do: John Ortberg, James Bryan Smith, etc. Yet it seems that most Americans are more than ever bent toward fear, anger, division and conflict—not gentleness, love, unity and peace. I think of the work of Tim Keller, James K.A. Smith, and Wendell Berry. I remember with awe Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*. It has now sold over 50 million copies. Tom Wright has written more helpful words than I can imagine. I think of Dorothy Day, St. Francis, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham.

You could probably name many other diverse leaders, authors, teachers and preachers from your own life. The point is not the names themselves. It is

this: *Our work does make a difference.* But not the comprehensive, permanent difference we dream of. That sort of difference-making is in the hands of God. None of us can do better than Jesus did, and most people on earth, even religious ones, want little to do with him and his kingdom worldview. It remains true today: Few have *ears to hear* him. They have ears to filter and manage Jesus according to the political, social or theological points of view they currently hold.

Do we then stop writing, teaching, leading, praying, serving? No. Regardless of the size of our splash in the world, no matter how much difference we hope to make in love and justice, our core invitation is to:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to
reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of
instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

This, then, gives us the basis to give up trying to control God and others. We don't have access to the will and timing of God. We can't go into the mind of the Trinity and overwrite code so that what we want to happen, happens. We also do not have direct access to the souls of others. We cannot change the bent of another's will or the determination of their heart. Following Jesus, they can change. But we can't change them. It is the way it is meant to be under God. We are not in charge of outcomes. When we try to be, we often multiply sin.

I do my best when I realize that relative to the big story of God—from creation to telos—I have a small life. This keeps me from striving to make a big splash. We each have sphere of influence. That is where we happily do our work. We have stopped trying to be someone else, somewhere else. God has determined that he does his work through us as we

partner with him, making little local bits of focused contribution among those with whom we have actual interaction. This Divine wisdom keeps us grounded among named persons and free from being mere ideologues who find platforms to shout things at those who hold different ideas.

Conclusion

Complex challenges are growing. Anger, strife and division are sure to spread too. But human difficulty will never get beyond the capability of the Omniscient One. The Kingdom of God and the Church, those alive in the kingdom ruled by the King, are always safe and secure—thus free to serve others, spreading peace, patience and unity. The rest of this year, and likely beyond, is going to be exceedingly hard, but something else is more true: This is our Father's world—and humanity remains his project. No person or event will stop Divine intention.

You are in the center of Divine intention. You can make it through this tough time in human history. You can help others do so as well. Nothing happening around you lessens your God-given agency to act in love and justice for the sake of others.

Even so...come Lord Jesus.

God, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in this moment in human history even as it is done in heaven. From the storehouse of a consummated tomorrow, give us today what we need: Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit; with righteousness, love, joy, hope and peace.