

## Advocacy, Not Acrimony

'I will not leave you as orphans...The Advocate, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you...Peace I leave with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.' (Jn. 14:18; 26-28)

Freedom from our 'pastor wounds' frees us to advocate for shepherds. They need advocacy! When we pray for their immersion in 'living water', we flush out whatever bitterness (acrimony) still tempts us to bite them and we become conduits of the Holy Spirit. I love that! Rather than pine for pastors' empowerment of me, I can advocate prayerfully for renewal of their strength. That is how St. John continually defined the Holy Spirit—the Advocate, or mighty Counselor, who makes Jesus known to His own, including pastors.

Our spiritual authority to advocate for shepherds is a great empowerment. We kneel child-like yet ferocious before the One who hears and acts when we rebuke the accuser who shames our shepherds constantly; we invoke that Spirit who reminds pastors of who they are as beloved of the Father. We bind away any familiar spirit of discouragement and ask the Father to woo these ones 'beside still waters' where He just wants to love them. There He reenergizes His shepherds for all the glorious impossibilities before them.

Their purposes are essential. God has called these ones to function differently than we do. They have assumed the weighty task of re-presenting Jesus to us. That is one big sacrifice! When they do it well, we grow; when they flounder, we are confused, even scattered. We can pray: 'Good Shepherd, open the eyes of \_\_\_\_ heart to know You well this day, to walk in step with You, to heed Your whispers. Whatever burden You ask \_\_\_\_ bear, may (s)he bear it gracefully with You whose yoke is easy. Reveal Yourself through \_\_\_\_ today.'

Not only have they a weighty purpose, they bear that weight in their personhood. (Yes, yoked to Jesus, but also in their humanity.) Some began to pastor unaware of the weaknesses that could cave under pressure; some pastored as to displace or deny those weaknesses. Surprise! Ministry, like marriage, exposes our cracks. We can cry 'hypocrite!' over our divided shepherds, or we can cry out for mercy for them, that 'living water' might invite them into wholeness. Ask yourself: what invited you to heal, the accuser or the kindness of God? 'Jesus, lead these ones into trustworthy friendship with persons who can love them truthfully, well.'

More than anything, pastors need to live out of the loving Presence of Jesus who called them in the first place. 'Having begun in the Spirit,' shepherds often proceed in the flesh to do the impossible. They readily bear too much weight which breaks down their lifeline: intimacy with the Father through Jesus. We pray for His Real Presence to come quickly and gather these ones in His arms. 'Father, would You draw Your shepherds like lambs and carry them close to Your heart?'

We take heart. Like the bold and persistent man who sought bread for his friend at midnight, so we

cry out as advocates for our shepherds. We know that You, Good Shepherd, hear and act: 'If we who are evil give good gifts to our children, how much more will You, our Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask You.' (Lk. 11: 5-13). 'Pour out Your Spirit like rain upon our pastors, we pray!'

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