

Open – Kingdom of Priests

When I was at Willow Creek about 20 years ago, I was asked to speak on the topic of absolute truth to a group of seminary students. That day, I wore an all black outfit with a white crewneck t-shirt beneath it. Gary Schwamlein, a wealthy German business man was the guy who set up the affair and introduced me to the class as Willow Creek Priest, Father Mark. Only with his German Accent, I was FAZZA Mahk. From that point on, whenever I ran into Gary – in the halls of church or on international adventures, he always said “There is the priest!” or Hello FAZZA. And it used to bother me until I put it into Biblical Context. Did you know that God calls us to be priests. Every last one of us.

Mount Sinai - **Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” Exodus 19:5**

1 Peter 2:9 - **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

Revelation 1:5- 6 **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**

Turn to the person next to you and brag a little. Tell them “I am a priest!” Was that uncomfortable? It was for me!

Now a priest is someone who intercedes for God. They represent God to the people and they represent people to God. Don’t be intimidated, but this is what YOU do. Every time you pray on behalf of others, you are taking the priestly role. And whenever you go out into the world to eat at a restaurant, work out at the gym, or take a class at the university... you represent God to the world.

And the crazy thing about God’s design for us is that EVERYBODY gets to be a priest. There is not a special class of priests in the Christian faith. WE have made up this dichotomy of differentiation between lay people and professional Christian, but that comes from the Christian subculture and not the Bible. When it comes to representing Jesus, everyone is the same. We are a kingdom and priests!

And our role as priests in the kingdom of shalom ushers in the presence of God to a world that needs it in six ways.

Diagram 2 – The Good, the True, the Beautiful, the Just, the Prosperous, the Sustainable

- Goal – I am a priest. What I do all day contributes to the kingdom. When you are writing an expense report, when you are checking out a customer, when you are writing an email... you are not just an employee or a mom or a politician. You are a priest. You represent people to God and God to people. And you are critical in bringing the kingdom!

- I want you to embrace your calling as a kingdom bringer!

The Just – Police, Military, Lawyers, Government officials

Well, the bringers of the Just **Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.** Romans 13:1-2

- Police – I am so grateful for that thin blue line. For the people who run TOWARD problems when everyone else is running away. For people who go after the murderers, drug dealers, theifs and abusers. Can you imagine a world without police? Yes you can, it is the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone or CHAZ in Seattle three years ago. As a result of police giving six square blocks to a police free “summer of love” (as the mayor called it), there were a slew of murders, rapes, arsons and property destruction. Gangs gained power and over 100,000 emergency calls were not responded to in a matter of 14 days. Friends, we live in reasonable peace, security, and freedom from danger largely because there are those who step into the most dangerous places. Police, you are kingdom bringers.
- Lawyers - I want to talk a little bit about lawyers – because generally, I make them the butt of jokes, but not today! Isaiah 1:17 says **Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.** I want you to imagine a culture without lawyers to defend the fatherless and the widow. The truth is that the powerful people and the powerful organizations can always trounce the little guy. Unless there is a law against it and a lawyer to advocate for them. God says we need that. We need lawyers to stand for those unjustly accused and to prosecute the guilty. We need lawyers to be sure that injustices are made right to the full extent of the law. Lawyers, you are kingdom bringers.
- Government leaders – I know, I know... how in the world can I include politicians of all people? Aren't we scraping the bottom of the barrel? NO!!! I actually pray that God will raise up bright and talented people to be the tour de force in the world of laws and judges and executives to bring about the good in the structural environments of leadership. I love when Christians act like Jesus in the halls of power.
 - William Wilberforce –a British politician, writer, and social reformer who lived from 1759 to 1833. He believed that all people were created equal in the eyes of God and that it was his duty to fight for the freedom of those who were enslaved. So he dedicated his law career, then his time in parliament – to the abolition of slavery in the British empire.
 - **So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the [slave] trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition.” William Wilberforce (with pic)**

the Abolition Bill was introduced in 1804 by William Wilberforce, which called for the immediate abolition of the slave trade. Although the bill was defeated, it helped to bring the issue to the forefront of public consciousness.

The turning point in the movement came in 1807 when the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which made it illegal to trade slaves throughout the British Empire. This was a significant victory for abolitionists, but it did not go far enough in ending slavery altogether.

It took another 26 years of campaigning before slavery was finally abolished in most British colonies with the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Wilberforce died three days after this act was assured to pass. He wept in his bed for it. This act freed over 800,000 slaves and marked a major milestone in the fight against slavery.

- Military Leaders, and those who serve. I think these folks are more commonly held as heroes. Like police, they prepare for and run to danger. Unlike police, they do it in theaters of war that often take them overseas. But sometimes not. As we think of the abolition of slavery here in America, it was inspired by that in Britain, but took 32 more years and a civil war to accomplish. It was mostly Christians who led this process, fought for this process and died for it.
 - Civil War Heroes – 360,000 Mostly white, Mostly Christian, Mostly men died in the fight to free slaves. They were so convinced that our darker skinned brothers from another continent were valued by God that they would rather die than let them live in slavery. This is not a small sacrifice to right a terrible injustice. Much of the focus of the 1800s is on the slave owners who tried to justify their horrors Biblically. And they did exist and their transgressions were significant. But the much larger story is the hundreds of thousands who would... and did... die to end this brutality.
 - These are the ‘just’ – and they are critical to bring God’s kingdom

The Prosperous – Entrepreneurs, Owners, HR, Financial Advisors, Accountants, Janitors, Ops, HR, trades

Economic Shalom – Far from the common understanding that business is just “Filthy Lucre” or “Selfish Capitalists”, a healthy and robust economy is one of the most important forms of Justice. When the economy is strong, those on the lowest part of the economic ladder can thrive without handouts and dependence. They can learn skills, grow and move from employees to owners. When a business is run with integrity, employees, customers, buyers, vendors and users are all brought into a thriving life. When business ethics are high, wages are strong and benefits are good, Shalom comes into the world. When managers act like pastors and exhibit Christlikeness, everyone around them thrives.

Now maybe I should say as a caveat that Business is not inherently Shalom. There are corrupt business people just like there are corrupt pastors or principals or Universities. What we are talking about today is not that – it is what Christians in this arena aspire to!

- You know, I never met CEOs until I came to CCC at age 38. I had a stereotype of their selfishness and hoarding of wealth that just got proven wrong. I was invited into a leadership group by CBMC for CEOs only. And since I was a lead minister, they said that counted. And I met CEOs who ran mid sized companies. A tire company, a quilting company, a steel manufacturer, a banker... and I was quite surprised at the things we discussed.
 - These men saw their people like a pastor sees his congregation. They were half business, half pastor. I was struck how often they talked about the facilities guy whose wife just got cancer and whose daughter’s 12th birthday party was coming up. Or the

- way that they were willing to take ALL of the downside risk of their company, but share the profits with their people. The way they balanced keeping prices low and wages high.
- They walked through moral dilemmas in business ethics, Human resources and financial management and applied kingdom principles to whatever they did. I was inspired to be MORE like them and LESS critical of them.
 - Many of you know that I majored in Economics with a specialty in the economics of poverty. A robust economy and efficiencies is the best way to combat poverty. If you can choose robin hood redistribution or a robust economy with safety nets,, take the economy. Why? Because then those who are poor have opportunity to work toward their goals, make it up the economic ladder, make a respectable income for themselves and move toward their dreams. Redistribution is degrading and disrespectful... it only happens for the short run. The creation of jobs, lowering costs of goods, and creating opportunity for growth and promotion IS economic justice!
 - There simply is value to humanity in providing income, making products, serving the needs of humanity
 - Business makes life better.
 - That is why people pay for it! In fact, the very idea that people are willing to pay for something demonstrates its value. If it isn't valuable, people won't pay. Socialist environments and government services just don't have that mechanism. Business – in a capitalist environment – must add value or people won't buy the product.
 - Whether you are an accountant, a manufacturer, work on an assembly line, in Ops or HR... you contribute to the shalom of humanity through your product.
 - Plus, you create value for investors, putting their money to work rather than having it sit around... it connects opportunity for the worker with opportunity for an investor – an everybody wins scenario
 - Finally, it is the prosperous that fuel the other five. The good, the true, the beautiful, the sustainable and the just are all stronger when there are plenty of resources to go around.

Three Examples

- Givers (story) – RG LeTourneau – With a 7th grade education, he taught himself engineering and his earth moving equipment eventually helped win world war II and build the highway infrastructure of modern America. 300 inventions, hundreds of patents. As he succeeded financially, he increased his giving to the point where he gave away 90% of his income. **"I shovel out the money and God shovels it back – But God has a bigger shovel."**
- Mary Kay Ash is the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics and one of the most successful female entrepreneurs in the U.S. Although she has retired from the business, it is still important to look back on how she was able to find success. Ash started with a \$5,000 investment. Her company's motto is **"God first, family second, career third."** This helped her grow her business and provide women with unlimited opportunity for personal and financial success. Her goal, though, was not to make great cosmetics or get rich, but to **develop rewarding opportunities for women**. Mary Kay applied biblical principles to the workplace, even including Scripture verses in the company's monthly magazine.

- One of my favorite people at CCC is a guy who has moved to Arkansas, but I feel great about using his story because he is no longer employed here. He was in middle to upper management at Union Pacific. He had this view that his life belonged to God and he was a priest to his company. He was overt about his faith, but not obnoxious. Coworkers knew they could trust him and count on him. His faith was real and he often told people he'd pray for their problems. People wanted to be on his team because he was a caring boss and they either stayed a long time or got promoted. Steve told me about many times that somebody who didn't know Jesus would come in his office, close the door and say "Can you pray for me." Steve picked a row here at CCC and asked God "Will you fill this row with new believers from UP." And over the years, his row grew one person at a time. Steve served faithfully at CCC and even became an elder here, but he knew his place of primary impact was where he spent 50 hours a week. He was Jesus at UP. You can be Jesus where you live too.

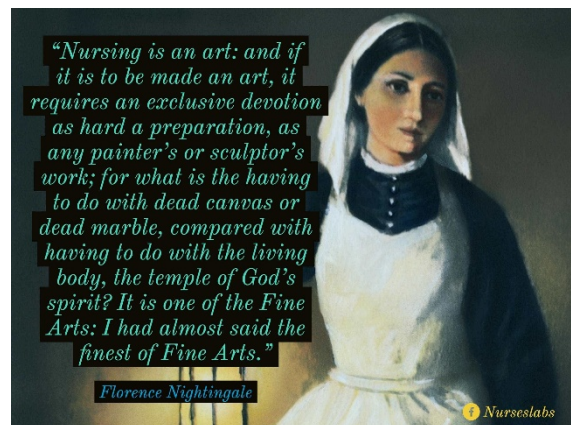
The Sustainable- Agriculture workers, doctors, nurses, counselors, chiropractors, nutrition, trainers

hospital admin which includes all of the arenas that make life healthy and whole. It is the entire agriculture community, the healthcare community, personal trainers, restaurants, –

Jesus is our healer. When he came to the planet, he focused on few things: Here is a summary of his galilee ministry. Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. he preached about the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness. One part of the consequence of sin is disease and bodily destruction. One part of the redemption of Christ is physical healing and wholeness. So, if you participate in bodily healing... through chiropractic, nutrition, food, exercise etc... You are a part of God's plan for redemption in this world. Every doctor, nurse and administrator is a part of God's goodness being thrust into this world.

- Nursing Community
 - I am amazed at Nurses. They are the rubber meets the road health care workers. They deal with burns and blood and bodily fluids not appropriate for sermons.
 - They deal with tragedy, with sickness and with death. They are required to be detail oriented and quick thinking, not to mention working 12 hour shifts.

- But the biggest deal on Nurses is that they love people toward healing. They are the hands and feet of Jesus. They bring healing. And in so doing, the kingdom of Shalom
- quote**



Florence Nightengale

- I could wax eloquent about chiropractors, nutritionists, and athletic trainers. But the idea is that by introducing healing into brokenness, they are bringing the gospel.

- Agricultural Community
 - Cocreating with God – “You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth” Psalm 104:14 ESV
 - Firsthand experience every day of the miracle
 - Super high percentage of farmers and ranchers are Christians – why? Because God is SO obvious in their profession- close to the land and close to God
 - Privilege of feeding the community and the world – naturally good and sustainable

Conclusion – After the great fire that leveled London in 1866, the famous architect, Christopher Wren, was commissioned to rebuild St. Paul’s Cathedral.

One day in 1671, Wren observed three bricklayers on a scaffold. One crouched and slow moving. One half standing and one standing tall and working very hard and fast. He asked each “What are you doing?” Bricklayer one said “cutting bricks to make money for my family.” Bricklayer two said “I am making a wall.” The third bricklayer said “I am a cathedral builder, building a cathedral to The Almighty that will stand for generations.” No wonder he worked with enthusiasm. I’ll bet his work was excellent too.

So how about you, what are you doing? Are you crunching numbers? Dealing with cranky customers? Churning out an email? Or building the kingdom of Shalom?

And now. May the Lord cause you to flourish. Both You and your children!