

Bleeding into Nothingness

July 2024

In June, I may have taken my last trip to Egypt after 22 years of being blessed by this mighty nation in our world today. In all my travels, I have never encountered a more vibrant and devoted community of Christians than in Egypt. As I inch closer to my retirement with Frontier Fellowship in the not-so-distant future, I have wanted to raise up a new team of workers in the US to continue serving the dynamic partnerships I have been blessed to oversee these past two decades. Therefore, I took a team in late June to attend a missions conference just outside Cairo, which was attended by hundreds of on-fire, Egyptian Christian mission workers from the Middle East. The Egyptian Church is nearly 2,000 years old dating back to the time of Pentecost. It has faced phenomenal resistance these past 1400 years because of Islamic expansion and aggression. Yet, it has miraculously survived and thrived in many ways. When I am in Egypt, I always ask myself, why are these Egyptian Christians so full of love, passion, peace, and purpose – while people in my own country are headed in the opposite direction, flirting with and now increasingly participating in atheism, rancor, hatred, loneliness, and purposelessness?

When Christians are a minority group, especially if they are facing active resistance, they are more apt to treasure and cherish the freedoms and mercies they have found in Christ. They are more apt to teach the faith to their children and attend church on a regular basis. When Christians are a majority group, facing minimal resistance, they run the risk of taking the grace of our Lord for granted, attending church only when they feel like it or when their schedules are free. They fail to see the vital need to take their children to Sunday school and teach them the ways of Jesus. Christianity demands self-discipline which leads to self-control. When there is no self-discipline, the Church bleeds into nothingness, a lack of self-control, and begins to resemble more the kingdom of the world rather than the kingdom of God.

When we were attending the Egyptian missions conference, we heard one heart-wrenching story after another. Half of Syria is still displaced; Iraq is still recovering from the devastating effects of ISIS terror; Lebanon is teetering on economic collapse because of increasing control by Hezbollah; and Yemen and Sudan have starving people in the streets due to awful and tragic civil wars. But what tore at my heart more than anything was hearing the stories of Egyptian missionaries being beaten, killed, and jailed in northern African countries such as Libya, Algeria, and Mauritania. Many of these countries are aggressively attempting to eliminate Christianity from their societies. Yet, despite all these tragedies, budding and growing underground communities of Christianity have never been more vibrant and



fruitful in modern Middle Eastern history, and the Egyptian Church is often at the center of these recent, dynamic developments and activities.

Jesus called his followers to be humble, but persistent salt and light in their societies, helping to usher the kingdom of God into their world. He was hesitant to suggest that his followers become active in local politics, join governmental rebellions, or take up popular causes. He taught them to be cautious about worldly power structures and the potential effects that they may have on them. Clearly Jesus wanted his followers in wise and positive ways to influence public policy, join constructive social causes, but he never wanted them to pursue these things in ways which might compromise their Christian values and callings. Jesus knew how easily our hearts can be swayed by social power structures or political parties to the point of making them greater priorities and allegiances than simply serving God, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and sharing the Good News of the kingdom of heaven with all people.

The heart of Christianity is love. It is the only religion in the world that claims that God is love. Under no circumstances are violence, hatred, pride, ridicule, cheating, stealing, lying, loving money more than God allowed for anyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus. These are violations of the kingdom of God; yet, these destructive and clearly ungodly practices are often overlooked, allowed, and even in some cases promoted by people who call themselves Christians. Too much of this is going on in our world today. These people have tragically lost their bearings and forgotten their way home to the heart of Jesus.

The only effective way I know to guard against our precious, Christian faith bleeding into nothingness today is to study the Bible with other sincere and eager followers, seekers, and learners. Most of what we see in the news today of Christians promoting hatred and increasing violence is spearheaded by individuals who have a paper-thin understanding of what Jesus taught and lived. They tend to gloss over all the wisdom Jesus imparted about suffering for the faith, respecting and even loving enemies, and remaining quiet when someone insults you. In general, Americans don't cozy up easily to the idea of suffering for their faith. They would rather skip over those teachings and go right to the good stuff like blessings, riches, and safety. However, Christian maturation requires changing our ways, often holding our tongues and being quiet, washing our enemies' feet, and confessing our pride and insecurities. If we avoid maturing through suffering and pain, we will lose our saltiness and light, blend into our surroundings to the point of becoming indistinguishable from those with worldly pursuits, and tragically become a broken branch unable to bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

Let us, therefore, take seriously the following words of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Christians in Rome, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." (Romans 5:3-5)

The only true and effective way to change our circumstances, environments, or the societies in which we live, is to drop to our knees in the silence of our own quiet rooms (not with great fanfare on television), confess our sins to God, and humbly ask him to guide us into the powerful but peaceful ways of the Holy Spirit for our daily bread and assignments to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we lose our connectedness with Jesus, we have lost everything, including our minds. We will increasingly make no sense at all. This is why on the night before he was crucified, Jesus said the following words to his disciples, “Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are thrown into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings much glory to my Father.” (John 15:5-8)



During this terribly important time in our country’s history today, Americans need to strive to be more united, respectful, forgiving, and love filled as never before. In our hearts, God’s kingdom needs to be above all other kingdoms. We need to take the teachings of Jesus seriously and literally, not bend them to meet our own selfish needs and desires. Before we go much further as a nation and lose ourselves completely, can I ask you to consider doing two important things: join a Bible study group with your friends or church, and lock arms with the global Church, especially in areas of the world where people are putting their lives on the line for the sake of the kingdom of God. I have discovered that both these exercises are wonderful medicines for what ails Americans today.

Lord, we do not want to bleed into nothingness. That is the last thing you want from us. We are to be a beacon on top of a hill. We are a distinct people with a clear mission to bless all the people of the world with your grace and love. Yet, we need your help and mercy as never before. Please keep us close to your son, Jesus, our Vine and sustenance for life. And please keep us on our knees in prayer with your Bible in our hands. Amen.

