

# The Reformer:

### God's Leader for a Broken World

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The Reformer: God's Leader for a Broken World by

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#### **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the Glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ and through His Church.



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#### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Great Reformers who have inspired me in my life. The two most prominent reformers that inspire me are the Apostles Paul and Peter. Their writings and the story of their witness captures my heart and imagination. I cannot wait to meet them personally.

I especially would like to thank F. Scott Brown who is the original inspiration for this book as this work first appeared as the forward of Out of the Valley, Creation House, 2008 and is used with his permission to God's glory.<sup>i</sup>

I also would like to acknowledge the people of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Lake Mary FL who continue to inspire me by their faithful witness in this world.

#### Introduction

Good is the enemy of Great.ii

Consider the operative word of that phrase coined by Jim Collins in the opening sentence of his book *Good to Great*—enemy. Great leaders, by pursuing greatness for their organization, business, church, can become the fall guys for the very organizations they love and are seeking to reform.

On a deeper level, "God works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose"—true greatness from God's perspective does not always equal success in the worldly point of view.

I have had the privilege of being the priest to many great leaders and reformers during my tenure as Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Lake Mary, FL. Through my relationships, I have seen the challenges these leaders face and confront daily. As the pastor, I am often invited behind the scenes in a person's life into their soul life. Such a relationship is sacred.

No human being can ever really know the soul of another human being. Only God has such knowledge. But my privilege and honor has been to glimpse a measure of the spiritual life of leaders and their families and to walk with them in the journey of faith as they confront the frustrations and challenges of leadership in a fallen world.

#### The Character of the Reformer

Indeed, we live in a fallen world. Great leaders must have the character of the reformer at the core of their being. Their heart and gifting from God must be to take that which is broken, mired in mediocrity, or even merely good, and to transform it into something truly great.

Jim Collins talks about the unique individuals among us who exhibit a quality of leadership that can move an organization, family system, business, or whatever from mediocrity to greatness. Collins calls these leaders "level five leaders."

He describes these unusual individuals as those leaders who "build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will." From politicians and business leaders, to teachers, pastors, and even parents, the paradoxical level-five characteristics must be demonstrated at the leader's core.

In order to reform any organization of people, no matter how big or small, the reformer must have a steel will to persevere. In my circles, it is called faith—faith to see what should be and have the perseverance and endurance to see it realized in the face of opposition and sabotage. Courage, self-control, and backbone are fundamental to the Reformer's character.

The secret is not only "steel will," but the added characteristic of deep humility and love for people.

Deep humility enables the Reformer to take personal responsibility for everything that needs improvement or reform and to give credit to God and others for everything that is praiseworthy. Collins uses the illustration of the "Window and the Mirror." The leader

sees the bad reflected on self as from a mirror and identifies the great by looking outside of self as if through a window.

The character of humility gains the leader trust from team members, allies and followers. When credit is given to mentors, co-workers, God's providence and fortunate circumstances, the task of reform is authenticated as greater than the ambitions of one person.

The example of the humble leader inspires others. His employees love him, not only because he believes in their capabilities and credits them, but because he steps into the trenches with them; down and dirty on the shop floor rather than sequestered in a lofty office. Her family members call her blessed because of her willingness to serve rather than be served. The reformer demonstrates by example what it means to work hard and care about giving your all for the sake of reforming the corrupt and fallen, for the sake of building something truly great.

#### The Call of the Reformer

Not every effort to reform is met with welcome arms. Sometimes the forces Indeed very few are. The reformer will learn the meaning of sabotage and pain. Sometimes the forces that the reformer is seeking to change are more powerful (at least from a worldly point of view) than the reformer himself.

The leader goes to work seeking to make the business or organization better by building the right team, restructuring, and clearing dead weight. But then quickly realizes that he has met one of the most formidable challenges of his life.

Jesus is the model Reformer. His work of cleansing the Temple of the Lord stands as the testimony to the steel will and courage that Jesus had in boldly and righteously confronting the religious, political and

economic corruption manifest in the Holy City, Jerusalem. Jesus is often thought of in purely loving and genteel terms. Indeed Jesus' heart was for the restoration and restructuring of Jerusalem around God's original purposes. He wept for the city of Jerusalem over its corruption.

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Yet his heart was also for righteousness and reform. Jesus did not love sinful systems and corruption in the Lord's house. Stern words followed with decisive actions signaled an end to the reign of the corrupt leadership.

Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side.

They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'viii

His witness to the truth cleared the way for a new reality and a new leadership to emerge based in the New Temple, the Church.

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, 'It is written,

"My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers."

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.ix



Jesus clearly condemned the corruption of the political, economic and religious systems of his day. We are responsible for the religious, political and economic systems of our day.

Behind the scenes of the Reformer's endeavor lay an unrevealed system that refuses to be reformed. The organization itself becomes a crucible which will test and prove the character of the Reformer to the core. The

organization's resistance will often lead to the Reformer's crucifixion—Jesus being the first.

We live in a world of human systems, whether we are talking about a family, business, government, or a congregation. Humans organize and develop systemic patterns within human relationships. These systems of relationships can be healthy and great or they can be sick and dysfunctional.

Healthy and great organizations bring blessing and abundant life to those connected with them and served by them. Sick and corrupt organizations are corrupt everyone involved and ultimately lead to destruction and death.

The heart of every great organization is a foundation built on Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. Sadly, the builders of the world have chosen more often than not to reject God's foundation stone. Yet God remains steadfast in identifying Jesus as first and primary to human organizational life.

# The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. —Psalm 118:22

The Reformer's high calling is to take corrupt and destructive worldly systems and make them alive and glorious to God. His holy vocation is to dig down deep to find the Rock. Beginning with the Chief Cornerstone, the godly leader of reform will then establish all structures and systems upon a firm and solid foundation.

When it works, nothing is more rewarding or more fulfilling, not only for the Reformer, but also for he many people liberated and enriched by the reforms.

#### The Adversary of the Reformer

When a human system is unhealthy, broken, and mired in mediocrity, there is usually a reason.

Human sin and worldly corruption are often present at the heart of the matter. It does not take long for a corrupted system to either seek to corrupt its reformer, or, if not possible, to eliminate him. Behind the individual sin and systemic corruption is an even more sinister force, the demonic realm.

The Apostle Paul writes of this unseen enemy:

"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."x

The Reformer is called to awareness of the evil behind the evil. More is at stake than can

be seen and the requisite strength to overcome these forces will be greater than the Reformer can muster in and of himself. This is also why the work of reform is not for the faint in heart. It requires courage and will.

Recently I read a book called The Shack that is about a personal reform project of the life of one man. In a very perceptive and profound reaction, the God character in the book, Papa, reflects on corruption in human systems within creation:

"Creation has been taken down a very different path than we desired. In your world the value of the individual is constantly weighed against the survival of the system, whether political, economic, social, or religious—any system actually. First one person, and then a few, and finally many are easily sacrificed for the good and the ongoing existence of that system. In one form or another, this lies behind every struggle for

power, every prejudice, every war, and every abuse of relationship. The 'will to power and independence' has become so ubiquitous that it is now considered normal."xi

The history of the People of God is littered with the martyrdom of great men and women who saw a better future for their people or the human systems under their concern and yet found themselves thrown under the bus by the very people they were seeking to help.

One such Biblical figure was the first deacon of the Church, Stephen. He asked the people who were stoning him, "Which of the prophets did you not stone?" xiii

Thank God there are people of integrity who take a stand for what is right. There are many heroes who are committed to doing the right thing in every sphere of our society. Such people are the great lights of our race.



Unfortunately, history betrays and reveals our true nature with respect to such heroes of the faith, to such reformers of society. Far too often they are attacked and even destroyed by the human systems for which they have been ordained by God to reform.

In order to reform mediocrity, one must be willing to stand with a stern will; but even the strongest of wills cannot carry a body through the fires of persecution or the assassin's bullet. Sometimes in this "world of devils filled", evil seems to triumph over good.

Alas it doesn't always work. Sometimes the forces to remain the same break the reformer. Which of the prophets did you not stone?

#### The Witness of the Reformer

One could ask whether living as such a person is worth the personal sacrifice and whether it makes any difference: Is it worth it? On one level, the answer is "no". The systems of the world have been and will continue to be corrupt and persistently resistant to change. Why would anyone in a right mind embrace a manner of life that leads to crucifixion? In this way, the work of a Reformer is ultimately pure folly from a worldly point of view.

From another perspective, the answer to the question "Is it worth it?" is a resounding "yes!" We never see the big picture. We never see how God will use our efforts to accomplish his purposes. There are plenty of examples in history where the good guys win. Most recently the Greatest Generation stood up to corruption and despotism of Adolf Hitler and

the Axis Powers of Evil. They gave their lives for the cause of freedom. Was that sacrifice worth it?

While we may not accomplish individual "success", our brokenness and humiliation in the service of God's kingdom may serve to further His Divine plan in some unknown way. This has been the history of redemption through the ages. God uses the folly of self-sacrifice to redeem and transform the world.

We may never know who will be inspired by our stand for what is right, but we should always know that we are always being watched by those around us. We should never underestimate the power of the leader who is upright and walks with integrity to inspire others to the same.

In Christian terms, this is called our witness. Are we willing to make our witness to truth, to patriotism, to good business practices, to greatness...but most importantly are we willing to make our witness to Jesus Christ?

The witness of any one reformer is costly in ways that no other person will ever fully be able to relate, financially, relationally, physically and spiritually. And no one can dictate for another the manner of their sacrifice. The Reformer is free to lay down his life and take it up again of his own volition.

That does not mean that the witness goes unnoticed. For those of us who have journeyed alongside the prophet through his trials and faithfulness are encouraged in the heart. The witness does not go unnoticed by those who are opposition and may even be responsible for his trouble. But especially the witness of the faithful Reformer does not go unnoticed by God.

Whatever the worldly outcome, the Lord knows the attitudes of our heart and he sees in secret. He will reward those who earnestly seek him.

Vindication in this life for the right is a fleeting thing; even if it comes it ultimately is temporary, unsatisfying and inadequate. Vindication is mine says the Lord. He will repay.

There is comfort in that. It enables the victim of injustice to move on with life with peace and grace, to even be praying for the enemies who persecute, even remaining in relationship with them showing them the grace, truth, goodness and love of God. This unusual behavior is the unique mark of the Christian Life, it is the mark of a disciple who has picked up his cross and followed Jesus, it is the mark of the Reformer.

The world will never understand such a way of being human, enemies who receive the grace of those whom they have persecuted often perceive it in negative terms "heaping of burning coals". Yet this truly is how the world is changed and redeemed for God.

The Lord is pleased to use us most powerfully; not in our successes, but in our

failures; not in our victories and vindications, but through our persecutions and losses.

Our world desperately needs men and women who will answer the call to be a Reformer. Perhaps the Lord is calling you. God uses ordinary people to extraordinary things. The key is not in your strength or power but in your faith in Jesus strength. God's power is made perfect in our weakness. Our job is to simply be faithful and stand firm, even if no one else is standing with us. That can feel quite foolish, but it is the right thing to do, and God will honor your faith.

The message of the cross of Jesus lies at the heart of God's plan of salvation of the world. The true Reformer picks up his cross and follows Jesus in the Foolish Call of God.



For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe....For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble hirth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."xiii

#### **End Notes**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> F. Scott Brown, Out of the Valley: One Man's Stand Against Darkness (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 2008), Used by permission.

<sup>&</sup>quot;James C. Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 1.

iii Romans 8:28

iv Collins, Good to Great, Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> Ibid.

vi Ibid.

vii Luke 19:41-42

viii Luke 19:43-44

ix Luke 19:45-48

x Ephesians 6:12

xi William p. Young, The Shack (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), 123-124.

xii Acts 7:52

xiii 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, 25-31