



Christian Mentoring

JOHN MALLISON MINISTRIES

MY SEDUCTIVE MISTRESS

Mike Robinson: *Encouragement to return to our first love*

I was standing before a large group of my fellow pastors and I was to deliver the annual address of our Pastors' Conference. The element of challenge found its focus in the question, "How can I outflank their professional communication skills and their ability to anticipate what they think I'm about to say? I decided to take a risk and begin with a confession that would need more than a little explanation! (Here is a summary of what I shared).

I begin tonight with a very difficult confession before you, my fellow Pastors. There is no simple or easy way to say this; so I will just say it: I have been guilty of having an affair.

I can almost hear you ask the question, "How can one who is supposedly committed to the Lord Jesus and to his own wife ever allow another relationship to develop to the point where these two holy relationships are endangered?"

As best I can determine, it began with a flaw or weakness in my own character that was (and is) wide open to exploitation. Like many of you, I have a need to be needed and to be affirmed - sometimes I think that need is above and beyond what might be considered healthy. I further acknowledge that I am at my most vulnerable when there is an absence of encouragement and affirmation in my emotional diet.

My mistress was very subtle. She knew my emotional need for praise and affirmation in my life and she was quick to meet that need. Time and again she was ready to speak warmly of my qualities as a person and my endeavors as a Pastor. In return, she seemed to require so little - initially, at least. She repeatedly assured me that our developing relationship need not negatively affect my relationship with Bev, my wife, or with the Lord. At first she had told me she would be satisfied if I only offered the time that was left after my prior personal responsibilities. It seemed that I could have my cake and eat it, too! It all seemed so legitimate...so rational...so inviting...so fulfilling...just too good to be true!

But as time passed, this seemingly free liaison became increasingly demanding. I began to realise that I was becoming both enmeshed and addicted to the relationship.

My mistress was demanding more and more of my time. She began to begrudge the time I gave to Bev and my family. She also began to make demands on the time I had initially reserved for the Lord.

I began by confessing to you that I had a mistress. I deliberately made that statement in the past tense. I did so partly as a statement of fact and partly as a statement of hope. It is a statement of fact inasmuch as, at this point of time, I do not have a mistress. That destructive relationship is now broken and is part of my history. I have owned it and I have been forgiven.

It is a statement of hope inasmuch as I fully realise that I am capable of re-commencing that liaison at any time; particularly during those periods of emotional weakness when others seem insensitive to my needs. I know that she is always there, ready to meet that need.

I now name her in your presence because, as I have listened to fellow pastors talk over the years, I believe some of you also know her and you may want to join me in my confession and atonement. Her name is 'MINISTRY'.



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Ah, yes! I can see from the looks on some faces that there are those of you who are acquainted with her. That being the case, perhaps you might like to journey with me a little further as I try to explain the process of recovery and restoration to my wife and to my God that has happened for me.

Let me explain first how the Lord Jesus moved to expose and correct what had become an idol in my life.

As I think back now, one of the factors that led to the emergence of this form of idolatry was the confusion that developed when I lost sight of the fact that God had called me to Himself before ever he called me to “the ministry”.

I have been challenged again by the call of the early disciples recorded in Mark 3 where the purpose for which Jesus called His disciples was “...that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach...”

That sequence has now become so important to me. God has called us first of all to Himself. He first says, “Come to me...” before He says “Go into all the world...” All ministry must flow out of that reality.

I am challenged by the basis of Jesus’ joy. “At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure’”. (Luke 10:21). Here is the heartbeat of Jesus in terms of His relationship with His Father. His source of joy was in the other two members of the Godhead - the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Maybe that is why we never see Jesus centered upon the results of His ministry as thought that was the beginning and end of everything. He never allowed “ministry” to become His mistress. He knew how to say “No” without feeling guilty. He knew how and when to serve and how and when to retreat...even in the midst of the demands and expectations of those about Him. Luke records these simple but telling words in chapter 5:16, “The news about Him spread all the more so that crowds of people came to hear him and be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”.

Prayer retreats in the midst of human need! What kind of Pastor is this?

The answer is simple and disturbing. Jesus was a Shepherd/Pastor who knew what His Father wanted Him to do and He did it - nothing more, nothing less and nothing else. He was the kind of Pastor who, at the end of His earthly ministry could say, “I have completed the work that you gave me to do “! (John 17:4). He fulfilled God’s agenda for Him, not the expectations of countless other people. He was the kind of Pastor who found his joy in His relationship with God, not in what He did for God!

Part of my restoration process has been to set aside every Wednesday afternoon for a personal retreat time when I go away from my office and my home and I spend time with Jesus - not Jesus, my employer but Jesus, the lover of my soul. That’s our time. I try not to talk “business” with Him in that setting...if you understand what I mean.

Knowing my own initial response to God’s call for that time to be set aside, I am fairly certain that there are those of you who are now assuring yourselves that there is no way you can afford to be so extravagant with your use of time. In your priorities, such time allocation, while perhaps desirable, is not possible. You are busy telling yourself that the demands on your time are such that they exclude any possibility of 3 or 4 hours spent with the Lord each week. Brothers and sisters, those words are being seductively whispered in your heart by the



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mistress... "ministry". I know because she has seduced me time and again with the same rationale. There is so much to be done, isn't there?

But what about that other prior relationship in all this...my relationship with my wife, Bev? As I look back over the 31 years that I have been a Pastor, I can say that my wife has been very understanding about many, many aspects of what it means for me to be a pastor and her place as my wife. But she has been less than understanding about my mistress!!

In our sixth year of pastoral ministry, Bev first tried to speak to me about how "ministry" was coming between us. Bev was teaching school at the time and, because I had relatively little time for her, she began to apply herself in her work to the point where, on one day of rare enlightenment for me, I found myself thinking that she seemed to care more for her work than she did for me! Suddenly my eyes were opened! I organised a holiday just for the two of us. We had a great time away together and a new start in our relationship when we came home.

Over the past 25 years since that first realisation, I have sought to give to Bev the time commitment she deserves as my wife but it has been with varying degrees of success and failure. My "mistress" is always waiting to seduce me.

I feel free of her at the moment but I know that I need to daily monitor her attempts to seduce me and my response to her. I have come to accept that I will live with this tension for the rest of my pastoral life. It will involve daily choices for me. Somehow, I feel at peace about that prospect now that the "enemy" has been identified and her tactics are out in the open. I am also encouraged by the fact that the antidote to her poison has also been identified - a daily yielding of my life to my Lord and to my wife.

REFLECTION:

1) Consider Luke 10:38-42. *Who are you most like - Mary or Martha? In what ways is this evident in your life and ministry?*

2) Consider Luke 10:17-20. *Where is your security? In ministry success or in your relationship with Jesus? How has this been influenced by what you have learnt and/or experienced in the past?*

3) *"All Christian ministry is an extension of Jesus ministry". What more can you learn from the way Jesus fulfilled his ministry - his "seductions", his priorities, his resources, his relationships? What lessons are there for you here? In what ways could your life and ministry more fully reflect Christ in the way he lived and worked?*

4) *Reflect on your relationship to your spouse and family. Choose words to describe those relationships. How would you describe your feelings when reading through this list? What strengths can you celebrate? On which aspects of these relationships do you need to work? What would be involved? With whom could you talk this over?*

(This resource is supplied by Rev Mike Robinson of the Baptist Church, Bathurst, NSW, Australia. The full text is available from him. email: mikebev@ix.net.au)

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