

Leadership Letter

Are you teachable?

I found myself reading Luke 11 on the plane a few weeks ago. I knew the passage pretty well. I had often used it to show the negative values of the Pharisees – they are so easy to see. Jesus pronounces 6 woes and it's pretty heavy. This was straight talking and probably one of the speeches that caused a reaction from the Pharisees to plot together to get rid of this travelling Rabbi. As I read the woes over again, I felt that uncomfortable whisper in my spirit. Are you a Pharisee? Hmm. I wasn't expecting that. "Me a Pharisee?" So instead of thinking of the people that Jesus would have directed these woes to today, I asked myself the questions about the woes and allowed conviction to fall.

1. I was day dreaming the other day during worship and suddenly felt the gaze of someone's eyes on me. As quick as lightning, I re-engaged and started mouthing the words to the song again. Not that I was immediately worshipping but at least it looked like I was. I sometimes pray in tongues and give a reassuring um or yeah, to prayers being prayed, that somehow makes me feel that bit more spiritual. I've even put an offering in the basket just because it's expected and not because it's an act of worship. Whenever I'm following a 'rule' or fulfilling an expected behaviour just to make me look good, I've fallen into the mould of the Pharisee.

Then the Lord said to him, Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

2. I travel a lot to many countries every year but there's certain YWAM bases I go to where I enjoy some special treatment. I get picked up at the airport instead of having to use buses, trains and taxis (which I don't especially like!). I often get little gifts and always have drinks offered at any time of the day. Some could see it as perks or living with some status because of my role. The temptation comes when I wish I could be treated like that all the time.

⁴² Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.

3. I have always been very *responsible*. It's way up there on my "strengthfinder" list. If a job needs doing, I will stay up all hours to finish it. If I commit to something, I follow through with it. All sounds good, but if you push a strength too far, it becomes a weakness. Responsibility can become workaholism - where what I do, becomes an extension of who I am. As a leader, others watch me and some may perhaps feel this is a godly example and follow me down a workaholic path.

⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market-places.

4. In my earlier years, I liked everything fitting into boxes and having clear categories and systems. For that to happen, as the base got larger and new operating locations emerged, I needed to set policies. If you're not careful, more and more guidelines are set for every eventuality and you have started down the road of control. Responsibilities, roles and burdens are laid on people and soon the 'system' controls. Flexibility is gone, personal attention is lost, and dialogue becomes a dream.

⁴⁴ Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it. ⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also. ⁴⁶ Jesus replied, And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

5. Being English has its strengths and drawbacks. If I didn't travel out of the country, I wouldn't see the national spirit so clearly. Living in Scotland for 26 years and now in Spain for the last 5 years, I see only too clearly the negative traits of my culture. Arrogance probably being number one. It's only as I read history and visit the nations that my forefathers exploited, that I begin to cringe at what my culture has done in the world through the 'empire'. Do I repent? Am I aware of the injustice and arrogant leaders of the past who were English? When I stand unmoved and oblivious I hold a Pharisaical attitude.

⁴⁷ Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. ⁴⁸ So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' ⁵⁰ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

6. When asked, "How are you?" my response is often, "fine". "OK". When I came into YWAM, I had my theology together. I could debate well. I had years of experience in open-air evangelism and using apologetics with my classmates at school. I was always ready for a discussion. I was a typical judgemental, reformed thinking Brit, who thought he was right, had all the answers and basically believed he had it together. When comparing with other cultures, I considered my own culture superior. When comparing with other church traditions, they went off track in a number of areas. When comparing lifestyles, I was trying to follow God's way! In other words – A Pharisee.

⁵² Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.

I don't know how many times I have read those woes of scripture. I have to confess sadly, that for so many of those readings, I applied it to others and not myself. A teachable heart is always open to being convicted and recognises that there's always things to learn. We never arrive but as long as we are living we are on the journey! As we read scripture, let's read it with an open heart, ready for the Holy Spirit to whisper in our ear and reveal those blind spots and bring revelation for growth.

I am reminded that whenever I am tempted to point a finger at others, there are three fingers pointing back at myself. As Jesus says – beware of the Pharisees, especially the one that has the same name as me!

Until next month - Stephe