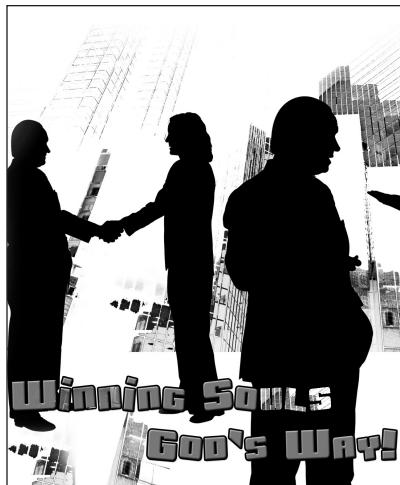


Keith Shady

PRESSIN' IN

The Teaching Letter of **Toward the Mark**

In 1987 I was invited to do a concert by a Church in Roanoke Virginia for the purpose of reaching out to the young people in their city. As the event date drew near, I can remember specifically asking God if He would fill the auditorium on that evening with hundreds of unsaved teens. After all, everybody knows that the more people one can draw into their meetings the more successful their ministry must be. Right? I regret to admit it but it was largely due to this misguided and sadly popular frame of thought that I became a bit more focused on drawing crowds to my concerts than I was on the lives of the people that attended them.



Even though I believe that my motives were pure, I was unknowingly well on my way to becoming desensitized to reaching out to folks for the reason God wanted to reach them. Was I doing a good

thing? Without a doubt! Was I doing the right thing? Not nearly as much as I should have been!

I had been in prayer for only about ten minutes when the Lord said something that would forever change my life and especially the way that I would conduct my ministry. He said, “Keith, do you know why I was so successful at reaching the masses during my earthly ministry?” I replied, “Why Lord?” He said, “because my passion has always been for

loving people on a personal one on one basis, first! If a crowd assembles to hear you share what I have placed in your heart for them, then that gathering should be held for no other reason than for those in attendance to receive My word of direction, correction, encouragement or affirmation for their lives as individuals first, then as a group. Always remember, I never call an assembly for entertainment, I only call solemn assemblies.”

In this age when a church’s success is, for the most part, determined by the number of people that are in attendance or how much money is in its coffers, it is no wonder that much of the body of Christ in America is in the impotent state that it is, especially where winning the lost for the right reasons are concerned. Jesus said, “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer (permit) ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence (a false show) make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte (a convert), and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” (Matthew 23:13-15) I know that this may be a bit hard to swallow, but Jesus could just as well be addressing the vast majority of churches in this country today with that same message.

Before we can truly become effective at reaching people for the reasons that God wants to reach them, we must understand that He hates it when we put anything before our loving Him first and then loving people! Contrary to popular belief, God is not at all impressed with our buildings, bank accounts, programs or any other thing that secular society and many in the church today deem an outward indication of spiritual maturity. On the contrary, it is in great part due to a lack of spiritual maturity functioning in the lives of leaders that we see the Church operating in this secular frame of thought.

Why have these things become more sought after in our churches

than the will of God for people? In short, it is because the Church today has allowed itself to become more affected by popular culture than popular culture has been affected by the Church. No matter what Church growth experts or anyone else may tell you, God's passion is having an intimate relationship with each one of us individually. I'm not saying that money and facilities are bad, I am saying, when the pursuit of these things hinder our ability to demonstrate God's love for people then we have, as I like to say, "put the cart before the horse." Think of what the church in this country could do for the cause of uniting God with His people if each of its members possessed God's passionate heart for them and had access to the millions of dollars that are being squandered away on things like the construction of facilities, the purchase of buses and other equipment and programs that, for the most part, are never fully utilized for the purpose that they were acquired. This is just bad stewardship!

The church in this country has got to sober up and put on the mind of Christ where people are

concerned. Church leaders have to drop their own agendas, get on their faces before God and become a part of God's plan for people as individuals first. People and the promotion of their relationships with God must be as important to us as it is to Him. That's the bottom line! Folks in the church have got to stop favoring only those who can finance or facilitate the fulfillment of their dreams and visions and must learn to love all people, no matter what color their skin or their social standing. The church in this country has had this thing backwards, or contrary to the will of God, for way too long.

The triumphal return of Jesus Christ could take place at any moment now and it's the church's responsibility to inform the lost. It all boils down to this, it is time the church in America finally wakes up and becomes the Church of Jesus Christ! We must throw off any garments that have been stained with the putrid stench of

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religion and seek God's thoughts and God's ways once and for all. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

(Jude 1:21-23)

Just how do we win the lost God's way? We start by becoming Christ-like! How do we do that? By diligently pursuing Him, not for what is in His hand, but for who He is and for what is in His heart! We must make our own close and personal relationship with Him our major objective in life. Jesus teaches us, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) If our desire to reach out to others is born out of anything other than our deep and abiding love for God first then our efforts will not only be in vain but will also be misleading to those that we are trying to reach. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8) These are key foundational steps that one must take in order to win people with the love of Christ! Remember, it is not our love but Christ's love that breaks bonds and in order to give His love away we must acquire it from Him first. Anything else is counterfeit.

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him (Jesus) a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40) So, how do we reach people God's way? By loving them the way He does! As simple as that may sound it is really much more difficult for most people to do than you might imagine. Why? Because winning the lost God's way entails befriending people, all people. Not just rich people, but people. Not just pretty people, but

people. Not just the popular people, but all people!

Why is this so difficult for most? Because we live in a day and time when insecurity and self-hatred in the church has sadly grown into a full fledged epidemic. What does this have to do with loving others? Everything! In order for us to successfully love people, we must first love ourselves. If we don't, all we can do is perpetuate a false show of love, which is not love at all, it is manipulation! It is really an attempt at receiving from people, or the arm of the flesh, what can only be received from God Himself. You see, anything we do that is outside of the love of God ultimately misses the mark.

This is a deep rooted spiritual problem in the Church today that is a direct result of people not knowing God enough to know just how much He loves them. Believe me, when a person finally sees themselves through the eyes of God and realizes how much they mean to Him, healing and

wholeness will soon follow. I believe that most of the church in America has become impotent where winning the lost, God's way, is concerned because the vast

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majority of its members do not have an intimate relationship with God. As a result, they are like the blind leading the blind.”

Our churches are filled in large part with thousands of precious people who are bound in chains of self-hatred that are trying to love others and that will not work. It's just a fact, you simply cannot give to another what you do not have to give, whether it be God's love or anything else. The only cure for this terrible problem is a close and personal relationship with God! We must abide in God if we are ever going to be able to love and befriend others for the reasons that God wants us to!

Let's take a look at the word “abide.” To abide simply means to dwell or reside. Thus, abiding in God means that we live our lives on a 24/7 basis in God. This is not a geographical location like a house with a street address, but a state of being. “And when he (Jesus) was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God

should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20) This message is to be found in this passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 14:17)

Righteousness, peace, and joy are inward qualities of the heart. They are within us. Furthermore, they are not qualities of human nature, but are the fruit of the spirit. As Paul notes, these are “in the Holy Ghost.” This was also the point that Jesus was making when He said, “Abide (reside or live) in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15:4-10)

The Love of God is the expression and the fulfillment of the Great Partnership between God and the believer. Without Jesus Christ, we can do nothing. Through Christ, we can do all things, because He strengthens us. You see, it is only through being in “partnership with God” that we can fulfill His will and plan for our lives. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being;” (Acts 17:28) We will never be able to win people to Christ the right way without being in partnership with God! In Him is where we must live, not only visit periodically!

Question, if we do not abide in Jesus Christ and believe in Him

wholeheartedly, how can we ever expect to introduce people to Him effectively? After all, how can we successfully lead someone to a place where we have never been? The place that I am speaking of is in partnership with God Himself. For example, I spent many years selling large ticket items like corporate level graphic services, Motor Yachts, sport boats and Recreational vehicles to name a few. It was early in my career that I realized that there are two primary keys to becoming successful in the sales profession. First, you must wholeheartedly believe in and have a firsthand knowledge of the product or products that you are selling, and second, you must be able to successfully communicate that information passionately to a perspective buyer. If you don't believe in and are not passionate about the product that you are trying to sell them, your customer certainly will not believe in it either.

How did I obtain my confidence and knowledge about the products that I was selling? I invested a lot of time making long and sometimes grueling trips to each factory where the products that I was selling were manufactured. Once there, I went to the production line and spent time at each point of that product's construction. I would then spend time with the factory sales rep. and the engineers that designed the products. By the time that I left the factory, I had an intimate knowledge of every phase of the product's features, benefits, construction techniques, materials that were used and more. On top of that, I brought specifications sheets home at night and memorized as much information as I could about each product. It is common knowledge throughout the sales profession that the person who truly believes in the product that they are selling and has the most knowledge of that product has the best chance of making the sale.

No matter what it is you are promoting, the sale of a boat or a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you must have an intimate knowledge of both in order to represent them properly and with confidence. If you do not have an intimate knowledge of the inner

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working of the product that you are selling, you run the risk of not only losing the sale but misleading your buyer as well. This will not only result in your customer's disappointment, but more often than not, very costly and damaging legal battles. Misrepresentation is against the law, no matter how you slice it!

Can you see a bit better now why our own personal and intimate relationship with Jesus and His word is the key to our being able win the lost God's way. Misrepresentation of both God and His word is at the very root of why the Church is in the condition that it is today. We must realize that winning a lost and dying generation God's way entails much more than just putting a group of new Christians into a ten step evangelism program and marching them, terrified, down the strip on a busy Saturday night handing out tracks. We live in a generation where hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people who have either made bad life choices or are from dysfunctional backgrounds are desperately looking for God's love. "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

I don't mean these people are just looking for someone to say they love them on occasion. God knows better than anyone that we already have way too much of that going on in the church today. It is because man's love is being expressed verbally much more than God's love is being given to them that so many people are leaving Sunday services each week hurt and lonely rather than encouraged and truly appreciated. "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain." (Proverbs 25:14) Remember, the only love that will bring wholeness to a life is God's love. And the only place that we can get God's love is from God Himself! There are a lot of good sermons being preached and miracles taking place around the country in Sunday services but frankly there is not enough of God's love being given away. As important as good sermons and miracles may be they still fall short of what Jesus has called each of us to do in order to be seen as successful ministers in the eyes of God. We must be vessels used only for the distribution of

God's love to others if we are going to His ministers! Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35) Can it be made any clearer than that?

But just how do we love? Listen to what Paul teaches us.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth (boast) not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

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What people are desperately craving for is that those who really know and love Jesus Christ step up and rescue them from the many prisons in which they are bound. Believe me, there are people

everywhere praying for those who are Christ-like to emerge and prove to them that they are really loved by God. Paul said, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Romans 8:19) What we don’t need today are more evangelistic outreach programs being performed by people who do not know God personally. What we do need is for those who claim to be Christians to start being Christ-like! That’s all it would take! “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering” (Colossians 3:12) Jesus gave us another key to winning the lost God’s way when He said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32) This does not only apply to the time of His crucifixion but applies even more now.

What do I mean? In order to make Jesus visible to others, the members of the body of Christ must lift Him up in their our own lives first. I like the term “magnify the Lord” because when we magnify Jesus, what it means is that we make Him big in the eyes of those who see Him as small. We, as individuals, must magnify the Lord in the eyes of everyone we come in contact with! When they look at us, they must see the love of God in action! The only way that this can take place is by our being in partnership with God. For example, “Philip saith unto him (Jesus), Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” (John 14:8-10) It is our responsibility as individual believers in Jesus Christ to take God’s love and the godly examples that our leaders in Christ have imparted to us and practice them for all to see.

Having said that, I must make this very important point on the behalf of faithful Church leaders everywhere. Contrary to popular belief, it is not Church leadership’s job to go out, all by themselves, and win the lost. It is leadership’s job to teach the body of Christ to

go and win the lost. Sadly, this is not practiced in most churches today because of the successful job that satan has done convincing those in the pews that somehow by paying their tithes and offerings each week they are released from their responsibility of telling others about Jesus. In case you were not aware, Jesus commands us, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:19-20) How can we go into all of the world and teach all nations if the job is left up to only a few faithful Church leaders? We can not! It is each of our responsibilities to do the work and no one is exempt!

Listen to what Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus concerning the responsibilities of Church leaders.

(Please read this very slowly.) “And he (Jesus) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the

“It is each of our responsibilities to do the work and no one is exempt!”

saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:11-16)

You see, if we are going to be effective at winning the lost in these last days we must do everything necessary to make sure that our partnership with God is strong first. I once heard a very wise

man say, "The best thing that we can do for the poor in this country is to not be one of them." The same thing applies where spiritual things are concerned. I encourage you to pick up the phone right now, call someone and speak life to them. Jot down a note and drop it in the mail box or e-mail someone letting them know just how much they are appreciated by both you and the body of Christ. Make it your goal to befriend people who are outside of your own circle of friends and share with them the wonderful things that God has done in your life. The results will bless both you and them! "And they overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." (Revelation 12:11) Now, go win the lost God's way, with God's love! Take the love of Jesus Christ to everyone that you can. Who knows, you may be the last opportunity they have to be introduced to their Heavenly Father! "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30)

When finish reading this please pass it on to someone else.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Would you please stand with us in prayer for the nation of Israel.



Toward the Mark

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