

Christmas Haiku

Contemplating Winter

by Skip Moen, Ph.D.

*When there was no room...
One was born to let us in.*

This Japanese haiku, written some forty years ago, has a depth of meaning today that I could never have anticipated as a teenager. Certainly the truth of the Christ remains, but what I have discovered is that every winter I am in need of another room at that inn. Now I know that the effectiveness of my vocation, avocation and calling depend not only upon the One Who was born, but also upon the One who must die. He opened the door. But it was not the door I expected. Years ago I thought the door led directly to heaven. Now I know that it leads directly to the grave for I am called, not to live, but to die. And this winter, when we expect to celebrate the birth of the Door-opener, perhaps we should first spend a little time in the ego graveyard. Only then can we exclaim with the angels, "*Shalom* on earth, *Shalom* toward men!"

Biblical leadership does not begin with a course on strategy and tactics. It does not begin with a new mission statement or the current fad of servant language. It begins with a serious reflection on ego-deflation. Why must it be here? The answer is shockingly simple. Biblical leadership is for *losers*. Only those who truly understand their failures, who recognize their dependencies and inadequacies, and who stand exposed before a holy God will ever be fit for the Kingdom. And those who recognize these attributes in their lives are certainly what the world calls *losers*. They are not the celebrities, inside or outside the church. They are not the successful models of spiritual or business acumen. They are the tax collectors, the dispossessed, the hopelessly addicted, the socially rejected, the po-

litical outcasts, the zealous hypocrites and mostly, the nobodies. They are the perfect clay for the Master potter. Everyone else need not apply for everyone else has a personal agenda and a self-proclaimed destiny to fulfill.

Biblical leadership takes me from a fearless inventory of failure straight to the grave. I do not get to pass by the cross and go straight to Park Place. But there is a stop on the way. If I am going to lead like Jesus, I will have to spend an evening in the Garden, struggling with the weight of my sin and the sins of all those under my care. And what I must confront is how utterly unable I am to carry out God's agenda for me *without* His complete dominion in my life.

Winter is the perfect time to enter into this most fearful of exercises. In fact, no matter how many seasons I have celebrated in the joy of the One Who was born, this is still the right time for my confession of failure and incapacity. Perhaps it is the best time because it is a time when the mere activity of the season could easily persuade me that I am important, yes, even essential, to this festival of invasion from heaven. When I start to feel like *I* matter in the great scheme of things, then I must sit among those ancient olive trees and hear the rustle of the Spirit. I must come close to the earth in order to realize that God *invites* me to follow in a plan of His devising. He does not need me in order to complete it, but He welcomes my company in the journey. In fact, the closer I come to appreciate my own insignificance, the more I am amazed at the God Who chooses me. In the process God reveals something else to me. Leadership flows from amazed humility.

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