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### **ROOTS, CORE, AND SCAFFOLDING**

(Phil Strout, National Director of Vineyard, USA, was one of the outstanding speakers at the recent Regional Conference held at our church. Following are the notes I took of his message:)

“My wife and I live on a small farm in Maine. I have four apple trees that are my pride and joy. A year and a half ago, in the spring, they were flowered and leafed out, and I was mowing the weeds and grass around my trees with my John Deere tractor. The trunks of the trees were about 10 or 12 inches thick. I accidentally nudged one of the trees with the fender of the mower, and that beautiful apple tree snapped off at ground level! I was shocked. And I heard God’s voice, “Pay attention!”

When I examined that tree I discovered that it had no core. Inside the bark was about one-fourth inch of wood, and the entire center of the tree was rotted out and empty. It looked like the cross section of a basketball. That tree looked like the other apple trees, but it had no core.

What’s at the core of your life?

Last fall there was a high wind warning for our area of Maine. At 5:30 PM the wind blew at over 80 MPH, which is unheard of. In just a few minutes it died down to a breeze. We lost 12 big trees, including a White Pine which was about 100 years old. When I saw that tree fallen to the ground I heard God say, “Pay attention!”

Three questions I need to ask:

1. How deep are the roots?
2. How developed is the core?
3. How deceptive is the scaffolding?”

Paul says in Ephesians 3:16ff: *I pray that God will strengthen you with power in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love may have power...to grasp and ...know the love of Christ.* We need to be rooted and grounded in God’s love!

- “My husband just left me!”
- “My son has abandoned the faith! I thought the Bible promised that *If you raise up a child in the way he should go....he wouldn’t depart from the faith?*”

In March I brought this word to the national leaders of Vineyard. Two men came and said they had received a prophetic word for me. The first man said he had received a word about a coming windstorm. The other man said he had had a dream about a tornado.

That 100-year old White Pine tree that blew down had no roots! (Phil showed us a photograph of him standing in front of the root system of the tree. It looked to be maybe 30 or 40 feet in circumference, but there was no tap root. The root system simply grew along the surface of the ground in a big circle around the tree.) When that White Pine fell it crushed 27 small saplings that were growing around the big tree

How developed is your core? What’s on the inside? What is being formed? Is Christ strong on the inside?

We can’t bypass discipleship. Discipleship includes our theology and our character!

The third question is, “How deceptive is the scaffolding?” The scaffolding is the external shell – the ladders, the platform, the external skeleton – on which the carpenters, brick masons and painters stand to do their work. The scaffolding is temporary. It doesn’t support the building.

Paul tells about his scaffolding in Philippians 3:4ff: *If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

That was Paul's scaffolding. Paul came to understand that is no foundation at all, it's temporary and will all come down. He said he only wanted to *Know Christ, and Him crucified*, and to rest on the love of God.

(We all have scaffolding. There was a humorous article in yesterday's newspaper. An inebriated 32 year old woman in Bluffton, South Carolina, sped through a stop sign at 60 MPH and told the officers they shouldn't arrest her because she's a "very clean, thoroughbred, white girl." She said she should not be arrested because she had been "a cheerleader, a dancer, and a sorority girl who graduated from a high accredited university." The officer said he asked the girl what that had to do with anything. Exactly. What is your scaffolding? It might be your race, your family, your university degrees, your job, your membership in the right denomination, your tithing, your service to God. If all of that were to be removed in a moment by the storms of life, what is on the inside?)

There is a reason that people blow around from my church to your church, from the Baptist Church to the Nazarene Church to sitting at home with no church. You need to understand: When you say "yes" to Jesus you say "no" to the devil, and he says, "Game on!"

Since March there have been four earth-shattering falls in the Vineyard fellowship that I am aware of. These were people, leaders, I knew that I thought had a core, but they did not have a core.

- I got a call when I was in Australia from a pastor, a strong man that I knew well. He said, "I have been carrying on an eight-month affair with a woman who is in the hospital with Stage 4 cancer. She is a young single woman with kids." That doesn't make any sense at all, does it? There was great collateral damage with this fall – the man's family, church family, friends, and community. (Remember the pine tree that fell and crushed 27 saplings?)
- Another call was about a business man, a friend of mine for 38 years. As a very poor young man, he started a restaurant and it grew into a chain of restaurants. He has made millions and has been very generous with the church. Two months ago he walked away from his business and walked away from his wife of 40 years.
- Another call was about a pastor who is a leader in the Vineyard Fellowship. He abandoned his wife and took up with the wife of the worship leader.

All of this was prophetic. God had said to me, "Pay attention!" The scaffolding is deceptive. The question is, "How deep are the roots? And how developed is the core?" My dear friends, we need discipleship! We need for Christ to be formed in us. We need a culture of love and trust and Christian character.

There is a big difference between discipleship and assimilation. We can lead people through Vineyard 101, 201 and 301 and teach them about giving, serving, and stewardship - - and assimilate them into church, without truly discipling them. But in three years they get bored. We're not calling them to anything.

I've been reading some obscure church history about people who understood what it meant to be disciples of Christ. One was an American of Polish descent named Walter Ciszik, a Jesuit priest. In 1929 his superiors in the Jesuits assigned him to go to a Polish town on the border next to Russia and serve the simple people. He was there when Communist Russia invaded his town and swept him up in their persecution. They sent him to solitary confinement in a prison where he was regularly tortured. This went on for five years. Then they sent him to the Gulag in Siberia for fifteen years. He was worked 16 hours a day, and he ministered everywhere – in the hovels, fields and coal mines. He was pastor of ten thousand people.

He was finally released by the KGB and sent to a town in Siberia. He planted a church and started preaching, baptizing and having funerals. The KGB learned what he was doing and said, "You can't do that!" and sent him to another town. He started preaching, baptizing and having funerals. After a year they said, "Stop that!" and sent him to another town. He planted another church. The KGB finally realized they were sponsoring evangelism. The KGB called him on the carpet and threatened him. He said, "What are you going to do, send me back to my ministry in the Gulag?"

In 1963 they finally expelled him back to the United States. Reporters learned about his life and interviewed him. They asked him, "How did you survive those years of suffering?" He was incensed. He said, "Survive? I didn't survive. The Polish people needed a priest and I got the assignment." When all the scaffolding was stripped away, Walter had a root that reached down into Christ and a core that was strong. He died in 1984.

We Vineyard leaders and people in the pews are facing an issue about our root and our core. The core has to do with our Creed and our Character. Many of our people don't know the Bible, they don't live Scripture-based lives, and they don't understand what it means to have a Christian character. They blow along with the cultural winds. There is no passion for Christ in our churches. We are half-baked disciples. We are fearful to call people to follow Jesus.

*Die to yourself, take up your cross and follow me!* That's Jesus talk. What are we calling people to?

I don't want to lose one more leader in Vineyard. If your temptations and addictions are overwhelming you, get help. Talk to somebody.

Let me close with this word of admonition: In the past several months the Lord has spoken to me again and again and told me that I need and we need three things:

1. **Wisdom**
2. **Courage**
3. **Kindness**

I asked, "Lord, why do I need wisdom." He said, *Because you don't know what you are doing.*

I asked, "Why do I need courage?" He said, *Because if you obey me not everybody will like you. There will be persecution.* (The reason we leaders don't call people to true discipleship is our lack of courage.)

I asked, "Why do I need kindness?" He said, *Because if I give you wisdom and courage but you don't have kindness you will hurt people.*

Dear friends, let us pray for wisdom, courage, and kindness.

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## YOGA

(Following are notes from a Christian reviewer – whose name I have misplaced, but with whose conclusions I agree – on the subject of Yoga in our nation.)

"Over 30-million people in the United States are practicing some form of Yoga. Yoga studios advertise themselves as providing "a technique to improve fitness and reduce stress." But they do not tell people that from ancient times Yoga has been a religious practice whose purpose is: "To awaken the Kundalini spirit and allow it to take possession of the body."

Are there physical benefits to the practice of Yoga? Yes. But can Yoga be separated from its ancient religious roots? I don't think it is possible. In my investigation I found altars in many studios; statues; posters; images of Ganesh, the Elephant God, of Hanuman, the Monkey God, of Shiva, Krishna, Kali, Durga, and Buddha.

In many classes, the instructor led the students in a ritual bow in front of the altar to start and end the session. Often, one or two Sanskrit mantras were chanted and incense burned. At the end of the session, the participants said, "Namaste," and bowed to one another. This literally translates: "I bow to the divine within you, and you bow to the divine within me." In other words, "I am God, and you are God."

One definition of Yoga is: "A method to attain union with the divine; a means to attain a higher state of consciousness and become enlightened." It is also defined as a means to pay off Karmic debt and achieve self-realization, which is really self-worship and self-idolatry.

Hindu writings picture and teach about: Yoga poses, breath-control, sense withdrawal, inner contemplation, meditation, asceticism, and Samachi (oneness with the Hindu god Brahman).

Other Hindu writings connect Yoga to: Union; yoking yourself to Hindu gods; "Salutation to the sun" – bowing to and worship of the sun; Hinduism is "A polytheistic religious system that recognizes 330 million Hindu gods; basic postures or positions are called asanas; their purpose is to permit the flow of vital energy, called prana (which is really talking about a spirit); Yoga exercises copy nature, and its poses copy cobra, cat, dog, crab, eagle; a teacher said "Become the cobra." Hinduism is also pantheistic and identifies God with the universe. The natural world of stars, planets, animals, humans have become little gods to be worshipped. See Exodus 20:3-6; I Cor 10:14; I John 5:21; Isaiah 46.9-10.

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## WILLIE NELSON, ROLE MODEL

The lead article and photograph on the cover of the July AARP Magazine, The Magazine for Old Codgers, is about Willie Nelson. The article is by Rich Cohen, a life-long admirer of Mr. Nelson. The introduction, in all-caps, says: “For 60 years, the country music outlaw has set the bar for being true to yourself. At 85, he knows the secret to a life well lived.”

Oh, boy!

My monthly newsletters tend to be biased toward Christianity, and in the interest of fair play I am presenting another view of life and reality by a man who has lived his dream. Get ready to have your worldview challenged or confirmed, as the case may be:

“Willie Nelson turned 85 in April, and he still tours, drinks, vapes, writes and golfs, but he’s smart enough to know that he is on the back nine of life. Willie notched his first hit as a songwriter in 1960 with a tune called ‘Family Bible.’ In the following decades he has performed on 24 platinum or gold albums, released over 100 albums, composed dozens of pop and country hits (such as ‘On the Road Again’ and ‘Always on my Mind’), appeared in more than 40 movies, and headlined thousands of sold-out concerts. He smoked a joint on the White House roof in 1977, organized Farm Aid, the annual benefit for American family farmers, owns his own satellite radio station, and has his own brand of weed, Willie’s Reserve.

Willie is an icon. He is known by presidents, has worked with scores of famous entertainers, and is loved by millions of fans around the world. He is married to his fourth wife, has five living children, and is a millionaire many times over.

After a long interview, Rich Cohen asked Willie the secret of life. ‘**It’s simple,**’ Willie said. ‘**Do what you want to do. If I don’t want to do it, forget it. But if I do want to do it, get out of my (God’s name and a curse word) way.**’

There you have it. Willie Nelson is one of the world’s most successful people. He is famous, loved and admired by the public, wealthy, and enjoys his life.

It is a life that we all should look up to and aspire to, unless there is a God, and a hereafter, and a final judgment.

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## GOD AND THE NATIONS

In view of the trials and tribulations that seem to be coming on our nation and on all the world, I’ve been searching the Bible, looking to see what God would show me about His relationship to the nations. Following are some things I see in the Bible:

1. After the time of Noah and the time of the tower of Babel, God scattered mankind on the earth and apparently assigned to different ethnicities specific lands on which to establish their nations. (See Genesis 9 – 11)
2. From the beginning, God loved all mankind, *God so loved the world....*; therefore, God loved the nations of men and chose to bless them. God called Abram to bless the nations: *I will make you a great nation. I will bless you....and you shall be a blessing....and in you all the peoples on earth shall be blessed.* (Genesis 12:1-3) *Abraham will become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.* (Genesis 18:18) NOTE: God always blesses us so that we might bless others.
3. Based on God’s evaluation, He may bless and enlarge nations, or He may curse and destroy nations, even choosing at times to remove a nation from its land and obliterate it: *God makes nations great (raises them up); and God brings them down (destroys them); He enlarges nations, and disperses them.* (Job. 12:23) Moses instructed Israel: *The Lord your God will...destroy these nations (the Canaanites) before you, and you will take possession of their land.* (Joshua 31)
4. The exception to the possibility of God removing a nation from its land forever was the nation of Israel. *I give to you and your descendants after you all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.* (Genesis 17:8) God renewed this promise many times to Abraham and his descendants. And, of course, God removed even the Israelites from their land during the seasons of: exodus, dispersion and return.... the final dispersion lasting 2,000 years!

## What was the basis of God's judgment on nations?

- a.** The way nations treat Israel, God's chosen people: *I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.* (Genesis 12:3) The Bible has multiple examples of this declaration.
- b.** Sexual depravity and perversion. Sodom and Gomorrah. (Genesis 19)
- c.** Failure to help the poor: *This was the sin of Sodom: arrogance, careless ease; they had abundant food and did not help the poor and needy.* (Ezekiel 16:49)
- d.** Nations that do not know, seek, acknowledge the one true God. *Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you (NKJV)/acknowledge you (NIV), on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.* (Psalm 79:6)
- e.** Nations that worship false idols/false gods. (Multiple scriptures throughout the Bible)
- f.** Abominable practices, especially the sacrifice/burning of little children to Molech and Chemosh. (Leviticus chapters 18 and 20; also verses in 1 Kings and 2 Kings and in Isaiah and Jeremiah)
- g.** Detestable or abominable practices. The most concentrated list of these practices of the nations, which Israel also fell into, is found in Deuteronomy 18:9-14. This list includes: *Those who sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire* (think about abortion in our day), *those who practice divination, sorcery* (includes use of alcohol and drugs), *omens, witchcraft* (consider Yoga and New Age practices), *spells; spiritism, consulting the dead.*
- h.** Idolatry, which Jesus identified specifically as love of money: *You cannot serve both God and Money.* (Luke 16:13)

Based on the list above, I believe we can see that God's judgment is overdue on our beloved nation.

Yes, God's judgment is on the nations, but His arms are open wide to the nations, and He has commanded you and me to call them back to Him: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.....* (Matthew 28:16-20)

God Bless  
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