

## *The Safety Net*

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### *Preventing Cynicism in the "Terminated"*

Dear ones,

We have come to the end of another season of terminations. As I've said before, churches hire in the Fall and fire in the Spring. The rationale seems to be that they want to get a new family in place by the time school starts and new Fall programs begin.

I've never questioned the right of churches and/or their leaders to ask a preacher to move. But I've certainly questioned the ethics of the way it is often done. This year has been no exception.

I won't go into gory details. But I have seen a lot of insensitivity. There are always the situations where a preacher shows up at his office and finds that the lock has been changed. It's not unusual for an unhappy church board to hire a new man before terminating the old one. Several years ago in Texas, Edna Mae and I showed up with our moving truck, only to find out that the previous preacher and his family were still in the parsonage. They hadn't been given enough notice to get out.

The shortest notice I've heard this year has been two weeks. What preacher can wind down his work, find a new job, and get out of the parsonage in two weeks?

Financially, the longest severance time I've heard of this year has been six months and the shortest is zero. It's not uncommon for elders to make a severance agreement but to add on the demand that the preacher talk to no one in the church with the threat that if he does, the severance will not be paid. There must be a religious word for extortion but I can't think of it at the minute.

My limited observation is that churches know a lot more about hiring than firing. When there is hiring, broad-based input is sought from as many of the members as possible. Weeks and even months are spent in discussion and prayer. Concessions are made and an air of reasonableness prevails. The process is punctuated by smiles and generosity.

But termination is another story. Decisions are made in a hush-hush fashion behind closed doors. The only opinions that are sought are those that agree with the terminators. The majority of people are in the dark and ask, "What's going on?" when the news is announced. And if they ask anything, it is assumed that the preacher and his family are behind the questions in an effort to "split the church."

This year I've seen good men terminated in their first year and in their thirtieth year. And all years in between.

Reasons are seldom stated. On occasion there are moral issues or doctrinal differences at the heart of the fracture. But my observation is that those things are only true in a small handful of situations.

More often the problems are simply "people problems." Jealousy, pride, control-issues, and intimidation. Some people just don't like you. Some people never did and wanted someone else when you came. They lurk like vipers in the shadows, waiting for you to slip up or waiting until they can gain some other dissenters.

So what do I do at Higher Ground when these men and their families come here?

There are the things I don't do. I don't try to fix churches. I don't encourage "elder bashing." I know I'm not hearing the whole story.

Neither do I try to keep men in ministry that have been terminated. That's not up to me.

But I DO try to bind up the wounds. I listen, I sympathize, I weep. Sometimes I get mad.

For a moment.

But then I try to get back to healing. And that means looking to the Lord, seeking His peace, and turning loose of things that discourage and destroy.

I never want to minimize a person's pain. So there is great need to listen and to feel.

But helping people find protection in the Rock of Ages is always in order. No one understands pain better. No one has been more mistreated. No one has been more criticized.

But He arose! And so can we.

Like Moses' friends in the midst of battle, I try to "lift up hands." God gives victory when that happens. And we suffer defeat when we're so weary and downcast.

The enemy uses cynicism to steal, kill, and destroy. So I fight cynicism with all the might God gives me. I have to fight it in myself as well as those to whom I minister.

One of my favorite friends is a large print book that only includes the Four Gospels and the Psalms. Though my favorite scripture version at the moment is the English Revised, this book is in the King James. I read it daily. And am blessed.

In the Psalms, and in the Gospels, the Living God sustains my soul. I try to share that sustenance as generously with others as it has been shared with me.

So, with God's help, I try to give those who have been fired a reminder of what they had when they were hired:

Smiles.  
Hope.  
Promises.  
Patience.  
Faith.

They need it more now than ever.

In Christ's love,

Silas