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## 2003 Missions Conference

### A Call to Integrity

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My name is Stan Parker and I serve with a ministry called Mission Nebraska. It is my privilege to share a brief moment of challenge with you, and to start out, I want to ask each one of you a question. Obviously I don't want you to respond verbally, but I do ask that you would engage in this question—that you would think about it and process it through in your mind and try to really grapple with the answer for yourself.

The question is this: **Do you have an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ?**

Now I have a follow-up question for you: **Would God agree with your answer?**

As I pondered these questions, I thought about how there are numerous places in Scripture where someone thought they were in a particular place in relationship with God, only to find out that God thought something very different. I could quote several different Scriptures, but one I decided to use is out of Malachi. It was during a time in Israel's history where they thought God was pretty pumped about the type of sacrifices and worship they were offering to Him, only to find out that He had a very different perspective.

**Malachi 1:10: "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you." (\*NASB)**

They were in a very different place than where they thought they were. So how about you? When it comes to your relationship with Christ, do you have an accurate reading of it—one that God would agree with? Would you say you have an *authentic relationship with Christ*?

Now, I didn't ask you if you were a Christian. I didn't ask you if you had come into a saving relationship with God at some point. I'm assuming that for the predominant amount of people here today that would be true—not all, but for many that would be true. But I asked if you have an authentic relationship with God.

Let me define those two words, *authentic* and *relationship*.

Relationship: the condition or fact of being closely associated or connected with

Authentic: true to what is claimed

So, by saying that you're in a relationship with Jesus, you are saying you are closely associated with Him—that you are connected to Him. So the question is: Are you living true to that claim?

There are probably a number of legitimate indicators we could have used to try to get an accurate read on where any of us are in our relationship with God. But there is one that I chose to use today because of the season that we're in of looking at missions.

**1 John 2:5b-6: By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**

To be closely associated with or connected to someone is to be deeply influenced by them, and not only influenced in your person, in your values, but also in the course that you set—the things that you do. In this 1 John passage, the application they are using is one of love. It says that if you say that you love God but you hate your brother, that's an inconsistency. That can't be true. And I'm convinced that the same application can be made and the same verse can be applied in the area of mission.

If you say that you are in relationship with God—if you have an authentic relationship with God—but you are not on mission with God, that’s an inconsistency. You see, God is on mission, and so to be in relationship with Him is to be on mission yourself.

As I thought about these things, I was thinking about a time with my wife early in our engagement period. I remember driving down Cornhusker Highway and having this conversation with her. I said, “Rachel, if you’re marrying a guy that you think is going to pursue the American dream of a house, a white picket fence, 2.5 kids and whatever that is made up of, you’re marrying the wrong guy.” I had a sense that God had me on this adventure, this mission, and I knew for her to marry me would mean that is the type of life she would have to be in.

Now, it’s been 18-19 years since that time. If you were to walk up to Rachel today and ask her, “Rachel, in the last 18 years, even the last 5 years, has your life been an adventure? Have you been on mission?”—if she would say no, we’d have one of three options. Either she never did really marry me; or she married me, but at some point down the road I changed my course and began to settle for going after comfort instead of after mission. Or the third is that she married me; I didn’t change my course; but somewhere along the way either intentionally or unintentionally she checked out of the relationship. The authenticity would have left our marriage.

If I were to walk up to any of you and ask if the past year of your life was one of mission, and if you said no, again we would only have a couple of options. Either you actually didn’t come into a relationship with God a number of years ago like you said you did. Or if you did, then the only other option really would be that somewhere along the way you checked out of the relationship, and you don’t have an authentic relationship with God. Though you might have a saving relationship with God, you don’t have an authentic relationship with God—an intimacy.

The third option could not be an option, because God does not change His course. God is on mission. He was on mission at the very beginning when Adam sinned. In Genesis 3, it says that God was looking for him and said, “Adam, where are you?” God was on mission, and He is going to be on mission until the end of the age.

That is reflected in the Great Commission when Jesus said:

**“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** Matthew 28:18-20

To walk with God intimately, authentically, is to be on mission with God. As I thought about that, I thought about how Peter and John found that out. Peter and John were very normal guys, just typical guys of the day. But as they walked with Jesus they found themselves on this mission that became very world-rekknowned, and the impact they went on to make was significant. But it wasn’t because they were anything; it was because of their relationship with Jesus. Acts 4:13 says:

**Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John [who were on mission], and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**

Henry Blackaby, in his much read book *Experiencing God*, comments on this section of Scripture by saying this:

All the persons that you see in Scripture were ordinary people. Their relationship with God and the activity of God made them extraordinary. Any one who will take the time to enter into an intimate

[*I would say authentic*] relationship with God can [*and I would say “will”*] see God do extraordinary things through his or her life as they follow Him in mission.

Any one who will take the time to enter into an intimate relationship with God *will* see God do extraordinary things through his or her life as they follow Him in mission. Saying that you love God but you hate your brother is an inconsistency. Saying that you are intimate with God, saying that you are in authentic relationship with God, but not being on mission is an inconsistency.

I’m going to close our time by reading a portion of an article that was written by William Booth, who was a founder of the Salvation Army many years ago. In this article he was depicting those who had come to know Christ as people who were on a platform or on the shore, who had come out of this angry sea. And he also depicted those who were still without Christ in the sea, drowning and struggling for their lives. He says this:

But the thing that seemed to me the most amazing was that those on the platform to whom He called, who heard His voice and felt they ought to obey it (at least they said they did), those who confessed to love Him much and were in full sympathy with Him in the task He had undertaken—who worshipped Him or who professed to do so—were so taken up with their trades and professions, their money saving and pleasures, their families and circles, their religions and arguments about it, and their preparations for going to the mainland, that they did not listen to the cry that came from this Wonderful Being who had Himself gone down into the sea. Anyway, if they heard it they did not heed it. They did not care. And so the multitude went right on before them, struggling and shrieking and drowning in the darkness.

And then I saw something that seemed to me even more strange than anything that had gone on before in that strange vision. I saw that some of these people on the platform, whom this Wonderful Being had called to, wanting them to come to Him and help Him in His difficult task of saving these perishing creatures, were always praying and crying out to Him to come to them!

Some wanted Him to come and stay with them and spend His time and strength in making them happier. Others wanted Him to come and take away various doubts and misgivings they had concerning the truth of some letters which He had written to them. Some wanted Him to come and make them feel more secure on the rock—so secure that they would be quite sure that they would never slip again into the ocean. Numbers of others wanted Him to make them feel quite certain that they would actually get off the rock and on to the mainland someday; because as a matter of fact, it was well known that some had walked so carelessly as to lose their footing and had fallen back into the stormy waters.

So these people used to meet and get up as high on the rock as they could, and looking toward the mainland (where they thought the Great Being was) they would cry out, “Come to us! Come help us!” And all the while He was down (by His Spirit) among the poor struggling, drowning creatures in the angry deep, with His arms around them trying to drag them out and looking up—oh, so longingly, but all in vain—to those on the rock, crying to them with His voice all hoarse from calling, “Come to **Me!** Come and help **Me!**”

- “Who Cares?” by Gen. William Booth (1829-1912), Founder of Salvation Army; put into modern English by Keith Green.

God is a God of mission. To be in authentic relationship with Him has *got* to mean that you, too, are a missionary. Again, not necessarily going to Africa or some other country, not necessarily being a supported missionary even within the States, but surely being who you are, being where you are—among those you know—and realizing that God is there seeking and saving those among you who don’t know Christ. And He is calling *you* to be a part of that.

Live a life of integrity. If you say that you know God, then give your life away to mission.

\*Scripture quotations are from the NASB (New American Standard) translation