

MOVING FROM WARRIOR TOWARD LAMP Flourishing through a lifetime of Ministry

SESSION ONE:

Introduction –

1. Carolyn and I do not profess to be authorities on this. And We doubt there is a ‘one size fits all’ way of lasting in ministry.
2. But will share ‘Our Take’ with you:
 - a) Observations from the journey
 - b) Advice from others
 - c) Light from the Word of God
 - d) Our sense of trembling awe in the presence of t
Profound mystery.
3. And we will use a Metaphor based on **II Samuel 21:15-17**

For years David had been sitting firmly on the throne. His wealth mounted. His power grew. His empire was expanding. Another battle broke out on the Philistine front, and the old warrior buckled on his sword and, as usual, headed for the action. However, by this time David was more than sixty years of age. He had run out of gas. The old stamina stalled and the magnificent reflexes failed.

Spotting David in his exhausted state, an opportunistic cousin of Goliath seized the moment – and would have killed David had not Abishai come to the old man’s rescue. How much humiliation can a proud warrior handle in one day?

17 Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle...

“Thanks, Abishai. I blew that one. Could have taken him easily, but the worn cleats on these old war boots . . . I slipped, Abishai. *Abishai?*”

How could it be? Where is David the warrior? Is this David, son of Jesse, who felled Goliath? Is this the man who brought two hundred Philistine foreskins in a sack and slammed them down on

Saul's desk, double dowry for the king's daughter, while the women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7)?

In his prime David had been no ordinary fighting man. He terrorized the countryside. Around him were six hundred crack troops, led by thirty mighty men, each with the strength of a hundred men. All had been afraid of David. Is this David tired? Does this warrior need help in a fight with just one ordinary Philistine?

We feel an awkward silence fall. As David's officers quietly encircle him, gathering the courage for a long overdue confrontation, which spoke first? Abishai? Joab?

"My Lord, my King. We . . . we're all your friends, so aside with the formality. David, the time has come for you to hang up your sword. Go home. Close the book. This chapter of your life is finished. We all swear to you, David; you need to go home. Now. For your own good. And for Israel."

The eyes of his officers, first avoiding David's face, were now leveled directly at him. This circle of men loved him, but somehow their combined fixed gazes, for the first time in his life, were intimidating.

"But I just slipped. Go home? Ah, yes, I guess. Sooner or later. Now?"

More silence. The leveled eyes of David's lifetime friends sealed the question. How does an old warrior feel at such a time? He hesitated, and then slowly slid his rusty sword into its sheath for the last time. In resignation, he exhaled a long breath, stumbled toward the chariot and stiffly dragged himself up. Wheels rumbled on rocks. David's lone figure sat slouch-shouldered as the chariot bore him over the horizon toward Jerusalem, sent home from his last battle, defeated. Gold watch. Forty-year pin. Golf clubs. David, go home—and stay there!

A glance in the mirror confirmed their advice. No young redheaded warrior stared back from David's looking glass, but an aging man with silver locks and furrowed cheeks. Where great plates of muscle once spanned David's chest, now ribs showed through and loose flab sagged at his middle. The warrior was gone!

David the Lamp

But wait! Did our old soldier go home to sulk away his later years? Not our David. He was already dreaming bigger dreams than

ever. But they were quieter, richer, deeper dreams than simply winning wars. He loved more deeply, enriching his relationships. Most important, David, in his sunset years, grew increasingly alive to God. Yes, he prepared for the temple, bought land, drew plans, and equipped personnel. But he also trained musicians and arranged psalms toward the time when praises of Yahweh would ring day and night in the temple courts.

Still, more importantly, some of David's finest poetry flowed from his pen during his golden post-warrior days. His wisdom deepened. Perspective enriched his insights. He would write:
The righteous will flourish like a palm tree . . .
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green.

(Psalm 92:12–14)

Why did this old warrior not “retire” and vegetate after the “useful years of his career” were over? What made David different from most millions? The answer lies in the last half of a sentence we interrupted a couple of pages ago. True, David's men did tell him, “Never again will you go out with us to battle,” but that was only part of what they said! The last half of the sentence explains: **“so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished.”** (2 Samuel 21:17).

David was not sent home because his usefulness was over. Rather, contrary to modern view of forced retirement, David's men sent him home *because of his usefulness*. He was too valuable as a lamp in Israel to be risked as a warrior in battle. Be careful not to miss this. David saw his own core identity clearly, so he did not pine away in oblivion. He did not define himself by externals as “warrior.” Soldiering was *something he did* for a certain period of his life, but *not who he was*. Rather, David saw his real identity as “*Lamp of Israel*.” That's who he was.

But he also became a “lamp” for all men, everywhere, for all time. When hearts ache for comfort and eyes long for sight, to what pages have God's people for centuries turned to read? Have they flipped through the battle legends of the “warrior”? No. They have slowly savored the poems and songs radiating from the “Lamp of Israel” and carefully reflected on the depths. They still do.

To their great credit, David's men saw that the true heart of the kingdom was a spiritual heart. They valued his spiritual resources over his physical energy. They clearly understood that the hope of Israel lay with the spiritual lamp at its heart, not with the sword

swingers at its frontiers. As a result, David mellowed and deepened with age, an all generations of believers since are the better for it!

- a) Warrior - 'Transitioner' - Lamp.
- b) These "seasons" of life will frame my sessions this week.

And, now to us!!!

THE WARRIOR YEARS

Early ministry

In 21st century Western culture, **our value system** is turned bottom side up. Progress is productivity. Productivity requires power, so we place our priority on youth, energy, looks and ambition—a total reversal from David and his men. For Christians, this dehumanizes the aging. Some aging men cling desperately to youthful positions, finally losing their grip and their dignity. Others merely retire meekly to oblivion.

What is worse, the community of believers loses its lamps. Our adjectives betray us. Dynamic. Aggressive. Energetic. Active. Successful. These describe Christian leaders and churches. Thus, too many would-be "spiritual leaders" feel they must validate their usefulness by busyness. To stay overcommitted is to look young, energetic – and "useful." Unfortunately, in our day the Christian communities – even those who call themselves "shepherds" – place priority on physical vigor and high-energy "productiveness." We want warriors, not lamps. So when youthful vigor declines, we cast old lamps aside and stumble on in the half-darkness. Triple tragedy results:

First, the elderly are left to sit and wait—for nothing.

Second, the organic body of Christ often becomes distorted until it resembles a corporation.

Third, and most tragic of all, the community of believer's attempts to operate on the "arm of flesh," running fast but not deep. It ignores its richest resources – the lamps at the heart of God's people.

All this, in spite of the fact that from God's perspective, only age can generate the real soul-curing valuables. Youthful energy produces important things, all right, but it does not produce the deepest, richest and most lasting values. My dear fellow brothers and

sisters, **we must rediscover the difference between a lamp and a warrior.** Real spiritual growth is not geared to productivity, creating careers and consuming youthful energy. Rather, the church is a family, which grows through enriched relationships. The healthy community of faith moves at a measured pace. And runs deep. It is not a corporation, but it is a body with eyes, heart and soul. The community of faith does not so much need to be jump-started, as it needs its darkness illuminated by the lamps of Israel.

I. **When were my “Warrior Years: 1957 - mid 1970’s**

- A. Harding – Marriage, Preach, BA, Revivals, Michele
- B. Memphis – HGS –Parma- \$ For B.C.
- C. Salmon Arm – Plant church, Lonely, Faith crisis, 2 kid. \$
- D. Lepanto – MA thesis, 1 son, Preach, \$&Peeps for B.C.
- E. Kelowna – 5 years, Media, ‘Mayor,’ Kiwanis, WCC, US Ministers, Revivals, 26 Sundays on Rd. (depression)
- F. **To Abilene** – Culture Shock, Celebrity, Fired, Teach, Criticism, Crisis, Depression, Dark place

II. Some Warrior Traits:

In Our Day: (Yes, this is an over-stated caricature - but you may see some ‘kernels of truth’ here.)

**Warriors like short, black and white answers – and quick fixes
Transitioners discover they don’t work.**

Lamps aren’t looking for answers; they don’t expect to find answers to profound questions

Warriors love action.

Transitioners can’t escape action, but when they begin to suspect that their action may be futile, they may slide toward disillusionment, even burn out. –

Lamps have discovered that the most significant ‘lamping,’ flows from quietness. As the British poet, Browning said: “...those who best love God, they serve him best.’

Warriors rarely give much thought to self-differentiation, and when they think they think they are ‘taking action’ they may often be only ‘reacting.’

Transitioners begin to wonder who they really are, and what drives them and begin seeking new levels of self-discovery and self-awareness.

Lamps either become more and more self-differentiated or they continue to regress; they become fearful, critical and defensive and meaner. (Not 'lamps' but 'ashes.')

Wait, did I just say that sometimes old preachers make ashes of themselves?

***Bill Waugh**, "What business-men think preachers ought to know?" He said," "Everything is broken. Nothing fits, nothing works, and nothing is going to get better. And the sooner you accept that fact, the happier you will be"*

When faced with this scenario, Warriors often operate on 'bravado' – issuing from a 'witches brew of narcissism and insecurity'. They think they can win – or pretend to think so.

Transitioners begin to realize that "Nothing fits, nothing works, and nothing is Going to get better" they may feel overwhelmed; feel a sense of futility, some, begin to 'lose their nerve' or, - then either burn out – or act out - or 'double-down' on 'sword swinging.'

Lamps feed on quietness, mystery – even ambiguity. They discover that the most significant 'lamping' flows out of quietness. So they relish Lamp issues over Warrior issues: Quiet over Combat.

Warriors often regard this gradual Shift among Lamps as 'going soft,' loss of passion. & Evangelistic urgency. Lack of conviction, indifference

So, sometimes Lamps tend to retreat into themselves and protect themselves by remaining aloof, on the one hand/ Or on the other hand, Lamps can sometimes forget how important their warrior years were – and can undervalue current Warriors.

While 'Transitioners' sometimes become so overwhelmed with 'minding the store' that both Warriors and Lamps drift off their radar – and their efforts miss out on a wealth of both energy and the experience.

In their efforts to make the gospel more 'marketable' **Warriors** can sometimes be seduced by a **pragmatism** – that drifts toward the shallows and distorts the message. Or as Randy Harris puts it, "Walmartize' the church/". .

While in the **Transition years**, we become more aware that sound bytes don't carry much substance: Transcendent concepts. The way of the cross. In an environment of 'the vanishing attention span.' How do we teach a self-denial message through an escape medium?

III. **Challenges of the Warrior Years:**

A. Self-discovery – Our Motives: - **T.S. Eliot** – "greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason." Our worst wounds are mostly self-inflicted: so – don't resist this search! Those who do resist this process usually don't grow, many bail. Some are '*Hiding something*' – that eventually destroys their ministry: If we are not 'self differentiated' we tend to be insecure, afraid to be ourselves. - Sooner or later, everyone around you will pay a price! **Shakespeare:** "To thine own self be true, thou canst not then be false to any man."

B. But How Can we discover & face our 'stuff'?

1. Examine: "The Leader's **Journey**," *Harrison, Creech & Trisk*. "A Failure of Nerve," *Edwin Freidman*
2. Listen: to those who know us best & love us most: - Carolyn **confronting** me. **Share your Story:**
3. Therapy: (sometimes)
4. Scripture: Hebrews 6:4
 - John 5:44 – "How can you believe "if"
 - John 12:37 – they '*would not* believe
 - John 12:39 – therefore they '*could not*' believe
5. Establish discipline & rhythm

Conclusion: Above all, Value Spiritual Depth:

The straight message for those people who are younger is this: Be grateful for your energy, (missions and church planting is "a young man's game." But value spiritual depth over high energy.

As Russ Blowers says,

“Being old doesn’t automatically confer infallibility.

It does, however, furnish one with considerable experience in the trenches. If the elderly upset you by giving unsolicited advice, do not roll your eyes and sigh condescendingly. Listen. You may learn something from some brother or sister who has been there, done that, someone who knows how to navigate the whitewater of shepherding. Timothy was listening to Paul and learning. He knows he won’t have Paul around much longer, and he wants to soak up the riches of his advice and teaching.”¹

The young may also want to revamp the very structures of the church, and – if possible - of society, for that matter. Create forms and systems, which tap the resources of age rather than sideline it. One retired physician who was also an elder in our church, resigned from being an “elder,” he said, so that he could “do more ‘shepherding.’” How ludicrous! This man, and many other spiritual giants, retires from church leadership as age advances because they “don’t have the energy to attend a hundred meetings a year.” What has that to do with anything?

¹ Russ Blowers, “Farewell to Arms” Leaven Magazine, Fall 2005

SESSION TWO

THE TRANSITION YEARS

Staying Faithful

**BUT FROM WARRIOR TO LAMP IS NOT ONE GIANT LEAP.
WE WILL GO THROUGH TRANSITION YEARS.**

I. **When were my Transition Years?" - (Abilene – Dallas)**

Abilene: - Fired temporarily, 19 yrs.' Highland

- Lynn - Teach, Start writing
- Raised by elders, Spot-light, Stress, Ministry:
- Carolyn, Real Estate,
- Family: Chris starts school, kids through college,
- Marriage adjustments, Issues. Consolidating skills,
- D. Min, All consuming! Depression, Burnout?
- Dallas: Resigned & Moved to Dallas
(Separation grief)
- Empty Nest - Launched HNM - Preston Rd –
- Depression - Carolyn '1st lady, Implications for you?

I. **Transitional Traits** "In my warrior years

..."

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Transitioners discover they don't work.

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overwhelmed; feel a sense of futility, some, begin to 'lose their nerve' or, - then either burn out – or act out - or 'double-down' on 'sword swinging.'

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Plate Spinners syndrome: Many on the brink of burnout (me too) They often become 'Over-loaded and under-powered' – and - drift toward shallows. So as **William Willomen** says, "Burn-out in ministry is not from *over-work* but from *under-meaning*.' (i.e. a feeling of futility.)

III. Challenges for Warrior years

- A. Nurture Primary Relationships
 1. Work at family (Romance your wife)
 2. Peers and friends

3. Life-long friendships. Don't burn bridges

- B.** Be a life-long learner. (EW McMillan in late eighties Said, "I try to learn something new every day
- C.** Begin to Learn (or try to) from Blunders.

SESSION THREE

THE LAMP YEARS

Finishing Well

Introduction:

Paul warned Timothy, “Let no one look down on you because you are young.” But many aging Christ-followers need someone to remind them, “Don’t look down on yourself because you are growing older.” Actually Paul also offered young Timothy words of wisdom that could only be spoken from a much older and more experienced person:²

He was already dreaming bigger dreams than ever. But they were quieter, richer, deeper dreams than simply winning wars. He loved more deeply, enriching his relationships. Most important, David, in his sunset years, grew increasingly alive to God. Yes, he prepared for the temple, bought land, drew plans, and equipped personnel. But he also trained musicians and arranged psalms toward the time when praises of Yahweh would ring day and night in the temple courts.

Still, more importantly, some of David’s finest poetry flowed from his pen during his golden post-warrior days. His wisdom deepened. Perspective enriched his insights.

In our times as well, age can be loaded with spiritual resources. Time supplies perspective. David hints toward this: “I was young and now I am old” (Psalm 37:25). Years on the road gather experience, as blind alleys are checked out, temptations overcome, and skills learned.

With age, serious believers become our valuable, thoughtful mentors that move at a measured pace. Young believers, tempted to defect, can look up and see, ahead of them on the way, a gray head which has felt infinitely more pain, discouragement and temptation than have the young, but is still believing, still traveling toward God.

Those of advanced years supply the rich memories, which are the roots of dreams. Of course, this is why Job reminds us, “Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (Job 12:12).

² I Timothy 4:6-8

Without the lamps of Israel at the heart of the kingdom, warriors on the frontiers may continue to swing their swords awhile, but to diminishing avail. **(No, I don't claim to be "the hope of Israel.")**

I. When were/are my Lamp Years" (Dallas - San Antonio)

- Travel - Carolyn's adjustment.
- Moved from Dallas to SA - 1 yr. Apt. - House, "
- Running deeper, not Faster"- Begin Hand-off HNM
- Ministry: mentoring. Shepherding
- Grandkids - College-Marriages - Great-grands.

II. Your Real Worth

The straight message to the older ones is this: Trust what the Word says about your value to those of us who are younger. We need the energy of your spirits in their deep places where the physical energy of our youth is inadequate. Your advanced years are too valuable to waste, my friends. Don't cling to youth or mourn lost energy. Go home from the wars and be something far more important than a warrior. Be a lamp in Israel.

One of our sons-in-law used to dream of being financially independent by age forty so he could spend the rest of his life, self-supported, in full-time ministry. If at forty why not at sixty-five? Why not retire to full-time, self-supporting ministry? The fact is you have no right to withhold your spiritual resources from the family of God. Your family needs you. They feel better when you are near.

The Greater Value

In an ancient Taoist legend, a carpenter and his apprentice looked at a huge oak, which was very old and very gnarled.
The carpenter said to his apprentice, "Do you know why this tree is so big and so old?"

The apprentice answered, "No. Why?"

The carpenter answered, "Because it is useless. If it were useful, it would have been cut down, sawed up and used for beds and tables and chairs. But because it is useless, it has been allowed to grow. And that is why it is now so great that you can rest in its shadow."

Trees are most useful and beautiful as trees, not as furniture.

My friend and brother Earl Kiser died at the age of ninety-eight. Of course he could no longer be our church custodian, and he died in a rest home. He had read the Word and walked and talked with God virtually every day of his literate life. I am glad he wasn't sawed and

cut into benches, because I needed to sit in his shade. Those last months he could barely shuffle along, but came into the church, pushing that old walker and nodding through my sermons. I felt better when he was in the room. I needed him. The fact that he no longer had the energy to clean our church building didn't mean he had lost his value to our church family.

To Earl Kiser and to all those shepherds who have lived quite a long time, longer than some of the rest of us: We need you—desperately.

We need to sit in your shade. We need you to be our lamps.

Are you approaching what others might call your “sunset years”?

Remember: God has a distinct and growing major purpose for you, no matter what your age, and He will provide what you need to meet that purpose. He is looking for shepherds with hearts moving from warrior to lamp!

III. Traits of Lamp years:

Warriors like black and white answers Lamps aren't looking for answers; they don't expect to find answers to profound questions

Warriors love action.

Lamps have discovered that their most significant 'lamping' flows from quietness. So they relish Lamp issues over Warrior issues: Quiet over Combat, if you will.

Lamps either become more and more self-differentiated or they continue to regress; they become fearful, critical and defensive and meaner. (Not 'lamps' but 'ashes.') Wait, did I just say that sometimes old preachers make ashes of themselves?

A. In the *Lamp* years we are discovering a very **different Spiritual focus** with it's new set of Implications, interests and passions.

1. **Richard Rohr, “Falling Upward.”**
2. Some years ago we began feeling a strong prompting to:
 - a) Run deeper, not faster

- b) To Nurture Primary relations
- c) Find hands-on ministries of service and compassion, outside the church walls and under the radar. It is likely that very few people will know about the most significant things we are doing these days. And many of you have given years to small struggling churches – without fanfare.

Grey's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard, *"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its fragrance on the desert air."*

- B. And then, 6 years ago, **cancer** shaped that even more clearly.

III. CHALLENGES OF THE 'LAMP' YEARS:

A. **New vision of God!**

B. **A Fresh view of His Word**

Aldous Huxley - Dancing In Many Worlds

- 1. *The Bible* is "Multi-media" – Mainline the "Big" stuff straight to the heart (the Psalms)
- 2. Pervasive use of: Story & Poetry.
- 3. Meta-Narrative

C. **New Self- discovery** – With *Cancer my teacher*

I am learning:

- 1. About my own 'idolatry' – cultivating a false persona driven by a witch's brew of narcissism and insecurity!
- 2. That I am in control of nothing
 - a. Not Suffering: (it is what it is)
 - b. Not Security – (retirement can vanish)
 - c. Not Death – (Carolyn and **McQuiggin** – "Death is highly over-rated.")
 - d. Not Significance (I cannot make myself significant – an idolatrous quest)
- 3. A Ministry of Presence and Waiting:
 - a) Poem, Browning "On His Blindness")
 - b) Carolyn and I - most blessed season so far

Conclusion:

1. When **Victor Hugo** was past eighty years of age he gave expression to his religious faith in these sublime sentences:

VICTOR HUGO: “I feel in myself the future life. I am like a forest, which has been more than once cut down. The new shoots are livelier than ever. I am rising toward the sky. The sunshine is on my head. The earth gives me its generous sap, but Heaven lights me with its unknown worlds. You say the soul is nothing but the resultant of the bodily powers. Why, then, is my soul more luminous when my bodily powers begin to fail? Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. I breathe at this hour the fragrance of the lilacs, the violets, and the roses as at twenty years. The nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of the worlds, which invite me. It is marvelous, yet simple.”

2. The Sweet Singer of Israel said it this way –
*The righteous will flourish like a palm tree . . .
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green. (Psalm 92:12–14)*

Psalm 30:

**NOTE: THIS IS A ROUGH DRAFT ONLY, BUT THE CONTENT IS
ALREADY PROTECTED**