



Dear Friends,

Christians are to be lifelong learners. Being a follower of Jesus means we have L plates on for our entire lives. That's just as true for pastors as it is for everyone else. It's important that Kev, Annette and I keep growing and learning in character, knowledge and skills.

I am grateful for my College education. It was foundational. I was taught the original biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, spent much time in the Bible (Old and New Testament), carefully studied what the Church has believed over the centuries (Systematic Theology), and learnt how God has been at work in his Church over the past two millennia (Church History).

If there is one thing I came away from College, it was how little I know about the Bible and Christian truth. That was humbling. The main reason for that is God. Getting to know God will last for eternity. Besides, the purpose for knowing God is to worship, love and obey him. It's impossible to fully know another human, let alone the infinite, eternal and all-knowing God.

So, I made it my aim to continue to learn after College. There is also much about doing Christian ministry in the local church that is not covered at College. Ministry is mostly about people. Pastoring people. Caring for people. Loving people. Organizing people. Understanding people. Listening to people. Connecting the truths of the gospel to people's lives.

This includes knowing me. The French pastor and theologian, John Calvin taught me that. He begins his theological opus, Institutes of the Christian Religion, with this sentence:

Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

That statement is profound. Calvin is saying that knowledge is fundamentally relational. You cannot know yourself apart from God, and vice-versa:

... man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinise himself.

Last Tuesday, Kev, Annette, Julia Choi and I attended a conference about how people behave in families, workplaces and churches when anxiety rises in those communities. It was helpful to learn that when we sense anxiety in say, church or family, we tend to default to behaviours we learned in our families growing up. That shouldn't surprise us, though it often does. Our families shape us in profound ways that we are still discovering decades after we have left home.

If you want to find a case study for how families shape future generations, read Genesis. We humans don't only inherit the sin of Adam. We learn sinful patterns of behaving and relating from our families of origin. So, Abraham pretends his wife, Sarah is his sister to save his skin (Gen 12,20). His grandson, Jacob deceives Isaac to take Esau's birthright (Gen 27). Years later, Jacob is deceived by his sons who inform him that their brother, Joseph, was killed (Gen 37).

The good news of the gospel is, while we are influenced by our families, God can change us. Being united to Christ by faith, we have the Holy Spirit living in us. God's Spirit gives you the power to take responsibility for your own godliness, say, when anxiety rises in a family or church. You don't have to default to learned patterns of behaviour. Col 3:12-14 says:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any one of you has a grievance against someone. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

God Bless,
Mark Adams