

## **ECLIPSING THE STAR OR TENDING THE COWS?**

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I noticed it was 11:30 p.m. as I stiffly rose from my crouching position beside the paper-maché cow. Any good humour I had once possessed was gone and wishes of “Peace on earth and goodwill toward men” that were so appropriate for the season had deteriorated into an egocentric attitude that sounded more like, “Back off and give me some space and I will try to be civil toward men”. All I could think of was that I had spent a long evening “up close” with nativity props, fingers stiff with cold and wrist deep in slimy paper while tomorrow’s instructional plan begged for one more read through. My sense of mission was missing. I had given all I could give. In the lead up to major school or class events or even personal demands it is not uncommon to find ourselves thinly stretched and looking for personal reserves that just don’t seem to be there.



A life dedicated to service whether teaching or leadership requires support from a deeper place than skills, a body of information or a commitment to professionalism. In our professional work, we pride ourselves in meeting the need of the moment, dealing with the unexpected and being flexible to meet the demands that arise during the day. Our busy professional lives make it easy to rationalize a re-ordering of our personal priorities “on the fly” so that our personal imperatives become the urgent and displace the important. In the push to reach our objectives it is easy to eclipse the Star in our story. Busyness can crowd out our devotional life so that we lose those personal reference points that allow us to ride out the storm in rough or demanding times. For many of us the undernourished devotional life is the uncomfortable topic we politely agree to avoid discussing.

Jesus spent an evening talking with another teacher who had all the credentials of a “teacher in Israel” but who lacked security and rootedness in God. Jesus pointed to the obvious, “Nicodemus, do you mean to say that you are a teacher in Israel and you don’t know the basics?” What God presented in the stable and later unwrapped and fully revealed at the cross plays out in our lives through life in the Spirit. (John 3) Regularly holding and reflecting on this completed gift is what will nurture and sustain us.

Like Nicodemus, in the privacy of an audience with God we must face the need of our own lives. If we are to have reserves on which to draw in our service to students, if we are to serve well, we need to tend to our relationships beginning with our relationship with God. At times I have ignored the “elephant in the room” only to be called back to the simplicity of receiving and living in the Spirit. The Christmas season is here again calling us back to living life under the Spirit. Controlled by Him. Defined by Him. Surprised by His unpredictable and unanticipated ways with our hearts and lives. Saved by Him and sustained by Him. Teaching to the prescribed learning outcomes is imperative. Differentiating instruction is the only way to deliver our craft well but when I, as a Christian teacher or leader, do not live by the Spirit of God I find myself building paper-maché cows to sustain what has already slipped through my fingers.

I invite you to join me in daily celebrating and living in the light of the cross that illuminates the baby in the manger. Sustained by His life we can pursue excellence.