

Private Yearnings of a Public Soul

As I reflect on a half century of life,
So many thoughts fill my mind
But none are louder in my ears
Than the yearnings that have been
From the earliest of years
From the deepest of crevices
From the hidden-most thoughts
From the quietest of whispers
From the playfulness of childhood
The uncertainty of adolescence
The testings of young adulthood
And now, with great surprise
From the reflections of middle age.

The yearnings of the heart
Have always been present
But mostly have gone unrecognized
Perhaps ignored, numbed and forgotten
And yet the yearnings were present.

The yearnings created stirrings in the heart for something more;
They generated hope in difficult situations,
They imparted confidence where none was to be found.
The yearnings presented the dreams of a child
The hopes of the teen
The vision of an adult.

The yearnings of the heart were there
Whether they ever found expression or not.
The yearnings shaped decisions made and actions taken;
They determined responses to people and places;
The yearnings guided thinking and choices;
They governed reactions and feelings.
The yearnings were ever present
But rarely known or recognized.

From my youngest of days I have been a “public” person:
I was the first born and looked upon as the “ideal” child;
I was a studious student – excelling in academics and learning;
I was religiously devout – embracing faith young and participating constantly.

I embraced a calling early in my teens,
A calling to preach, to become a public persona
Presenting the word of God in a demonstrative way.

From the moments of my calling
Everything was open and public about my commitment;
In my home, I was seen as the “preacher”
In my school, I was seen as the “Christian”
In my job, I was seen as the “Goody, Goody”
In my church, I was viewed as a “Called One”
Among my friends I was seen as the ‘different’ one,
To my Mom I was the child of favor
To my Dad I was the child of misunderstanding.
To all, I was different, I was unique, I was special
I had a role to fill and a responsibility to live up to.

I rapidly became a public persona –
In my teens I was teaching Sunday School and leading Bible studies;
I was leading groups of academics in my educational pursuits
In my college years, I lead college students in the BSU (Baptist Student Union)
I was guiding a group of teens in my church (only days, months and a few years younger than I).
I was preaching regularly, among the homeless and down trodden;
I preached often, among the rural and uneducated
I preach occasionally among the learned, schooled and experienced.

As I became an adult, I lead a church in my 20’s
I was public in the pulpit
I was open in my spiritual commitments
I was known for my responsibilities (as a husband, father, pastor, preacher)

With the noise of the public
The visibility of the known,
The busy-ness of the pastoral
The sensitivity and challenges of the personal,
There was something that was behind it all –
Those yearnings...

Unspoken...
Unknown...
Unexpressed...
Unformed...
Unaware...

Those yearnings touched everything in the heart
They shaped the behaviors that shaped my relationships
They touched my longings and desires
They influenced my decisions and my choices
They impacted everything about my journey –
And now in reflection, in contemplation
I begin to recognize those yearnings that lie within

I yearn to be know and be known...

For too long I have tried to maintain
A façade of respectable behavior,
Conforming actions and life to the expectations
Of the differing roles that I have played.
But beneath it all I have simply wanted
Someone to know the real Don, the real man, the real child
And be allowed to be genuine, authentic
I wanted to know another soul in the same way
To genuinely connect,
Heart to heart, soul to soul
Mind to mind, strength to strength.
I have wanted to be known...and to intimately know another.

I yearn to be embraced and embrace...

With the insight that only comes from looking back,
I longed to be held and touched
From infancy to childhood,
From my teens to my adult years,
I have wanted to be embraced
For what is communicated by the embrace is
What was really the longing of the heart –
An acceptance
An affirmation
An assertion that I am welcomed to the life of another.
I yearned to share that with another as well –
And communicate the same with my own embrace.
I have wanted to be embraced...and to embrace others.

I yearn to be secure and confident...

With my calling, people looked to me for spiritual authority,
And with every public perception and every private expectation
There was an uncertainty present in my mind
I wanted to be what others were looking for...but
I didn't know how to be strong, faithful, confident, gracious, benevolent
And so I retreated into the public life – the professional life
And hid my insecurity and my lack of confidence.
I hid it through the activities of the public persona
While privately I yearned for the confidence I demonstrated
Inwardly I longed to feel the safety of relationship –
The safe relationship with the divine and with the parental,
And when the private (the thoughts, the actions, the behaviors)
Didn't match the public, I became more and more insecure
Thinking that none would understand and none would love me
I lost confidence living in the duality of the private vs. public life
I experienced insecurity, uncertainty, doubt and fear
While I have wanted to be secure and confident.

I yearn to be accepted and affirmed and be affirming...

So many instances were beyond my understanding
So many things occurred that were beyond making sense
I sought so often for someone, anyone to come to my side
And help me sort out my doubts, my fears, my frustrations
I often have felt afraid to share my inner heart,
I have hesitated to open my thoughts and doubts
I refrained expressing my deepest fears
Because of my greatest fear – the fear of rejection.
If anyone really knew, I feared, they would reject me completely.
If anyone know my struggle, they would despise and view me with disdain.
If anyone understood my pain, they would withdraw and flee from me.
So I quietly stuffed the yearning out of fear.
I wanted to be accepted for who I am (not the person I could be)
I wanted to be affirmed for the person I was (not the person I should be)
I wanted another to accept and affirm me...so that I could be accepting and affirming.

I yearn to be pleasing and pleased...

So often I wanted to fulfill what was expected.
What others wanted of me,
What parents expected of me,
What churchmen (and ladies) dreamed for me
What my mother envisioned for me
What my friends thought I was.
I wanted to please them and satisfy their perceptions of me
From the youngest of days, I remember knowing what was expected
But living with the constant threat of disappointment and disillusionment
I knew my doubts (when no one else did)
I knew my temptations (when no one else could)
I knew my struggles (when no one else should)
And I knew (at least I thought I knew) that
If what was hidden was public, I would be judged displeasing
So I played my public part while hiding my private heart.
I longed to please others in my life...and be pleased in return.

And so at the half century mark

I recognize the public man I have become
With the private yearnings of the heart
And am now, only with reflection, realizing
The two, the public and private, must integrate
Instead of two, there must really only be one.

I yearn to be known and to know...

And I am known by my creator and redeemer, and he knows me without reserve.
And I am known by my wife and confidant, and she has known more of me than I ever knew.
And I accept the yearning and the reality

That I can be known by another and not rejected in the knowing,
And that I can embrace another with genuine knowledge and knowing.

I yearn to be embraced and to embrace...

And I am embraced by the grace of my Savior, and showered with his blessing.
And I am embraced by the presence of my friend and companion, and she has not turned away.
And I accept the yearning and the reality
That I can be genuinely embraced by another without reservation or hesitation
And I can embrace one with my heart, my mind, my soul and my strength

I yearn to be secure and confident...

And I am secure in my relationship with the powerful and preserving Almighty
And I am secure in my covenant with the "wife of my youth" who has remained true through and through.
And I can accept the yearning and the reality
That I can be safe, secure and confident in my fellowship with God and another
And I can exude that security and confidence in all my actions and dealings.

I yearn to be accepted and affirmed...

And I am accepted by the Eternal...not because of my goodness, nor because of my performance,
I am accepted because of His great love for me (because he loves me for me and not for what I do)
And I am accepted by the one who is closest to me in this life, my wife
And I can accept the yearning and the reality
That I am accepted and I can accept others, just as they are, just as I have been accepted;
That I am affirmed (through the whisperings of the Spirit and the assurances of my spouse)
That I can be accepting and affirming of others in my journey

I yearn to be pleasing and pleased...

And I am pleasing to the Triune God
 To the Father who has embraced me wholeheartedly
 To the Son who has done his all to redeem me
 To the Spirit who walks with me
And I can be pleasing to those in my life – not living to my perception of the expectation but as I
am living out of the safety of relationship with the divine
And I can accept the yearning and the reality
That I can be pleasing to God and to my wife,
And I can experience God and her good pleasure.

And so this public man can admit his private yearnings...

And in so doing, in the recognition,
Find peace, fulfillment, acceptance and joy.
Because I no longer look to those who have not
(and who really could not) meet the yearnings
I find my yearnings filled by the provision of my God

And in finally knowing my yearnings
And in seeing the yearnings being satisfied,

I find my peace and I am at rest