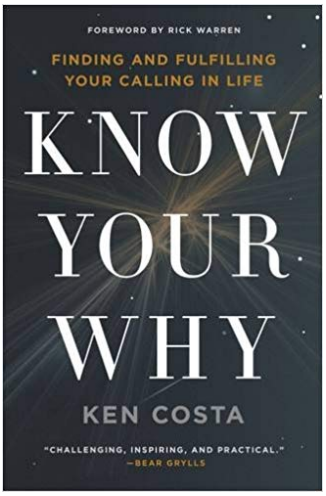
Review: Know Your Why – Finding and Fulfilling Your Calling in Life

Sometimes I read an excellent book that I find deeply frustrating. This is one of those times.



Ken Costa's *Know Your Why* is well written, right-hearted, and helpful. **This is a book about vocation.** If you are interested in what it means to live according to the calling of Christ, especially if that calling is within the marketplace of the "secular" world, this book would likely bless you. Costa is not only successful in the world of finance and investment, he is one of the key leaders behind Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) and the Alpha movement. *Know Your Why* could easily be the "Beta" course – a follow-on curriculum about introductory discipleship for real people in the real world. What's not to like?

Yet I find myself set on edge. In this review, therefore, I am taking a lead from my own reaction. I need to be clear about that. I'm not trying to whinge or tear down. I'm exploring my response and attempting to articulate my disquiet. I am checking myself for a critical spirit!

I must admit a bias. I didn't know Costa's background when I ordered the book, and when I made the HTB connection I found myself wearily sighing. Why? Maybe the pages of endorsements

from the pantheon of Christian celebrities provoked my cynicism. Nevertheless, why so critical, O my soul? On the face of it, HTB and Alpha should be "my team" to cheer for. They are the face of charismatic Anglicanism, and it's *not* the skin-deep prosperity-peddling Trumpist forms that have a similar appearance in other places. The HTB/Alpha movement has birthed or nurtured new Christians, new church fellowships, worship leaders I admire, and even the current Archbishop of Canterbury. Why can I not sit with this book, that *is* full of some decent wisdom and pastoral guidance, and savour it freely like a fine refreshing tonic? I should be reading books like this as if it is from a friend to a friend. But I can't. And if I try, I'm pretending.

Here's the thing: Every time I find myself walking in proximity to the HTB hegemony, I don't feel like a fellow-pilgrim, I feel like a *customer.* I read books like this looking for resonance with my own journey. I hope to find some guidance, some solace, or even some rebuke and correction from the steadying hand of an elder in the church. Instead, I have come away from it weary, feeling the same as I do after sitting in a conference room all day.

Am I just being grumpy and over-critical? Perhaps I'm just being a reverse-snob, smarting at receiving crumbs that have fallen from a table set in the shadow of Harrods? Maybe. I do have a reflexive reaction against the presumptive and proud professionalist proclivities of the Western church. But I don't think it's just me. There *is* some substance to my deconstruction.

I can pull apart this book, and **I find gem after gem after gem of really good stuff.** But when I take a step back to gather the bigger picture, I realise that there is something crucial that is obscured. I can't see the cross. **I see very little of the cruciform life.** This book is about *vocation* and *calling.* In it, I can learn about success from someone successful. But **true vocation rests not on success, but on surrender, death,**

and undeserved grace. Vocation, in the end, navigates a wasteland of Christ's sufferings and those who walk it need help to die and live in the desert everyday; we only flourish as a desert rose. To extend that analogy: This book is a manual on English gardening techniques. It is pleasant, useful, *correct*, aspirational, lovingly intended, and frequently applicable; but it overlooks what green English middle-class gardens always miss, that living water *costs* you.

Let me show my working:

The good in this book is really good: "At the heart of the Christian faith is a big, fat *why,"* Costa says (page xx), "A calling for us to be *here*, in this place and at this time… to live out our faith and values in the rough-and-tumble of our everyday existence." If only more Christians and more churches would be moved in this way! Costa's pastoral heart is passionate and clear: "I have longed to strengthen those who try to make the very best of their lives" (page xxiv). I would *love* to have a coffee and a long chat with Ken.

The guidance he offers is focused on Jesus, and responsive to a God who cares and gives us his attention (page 3, *Called to Passion*), and in whom we have our fundamental sense of self ("Identity comes before destiny", page 16). He confronts our need for salvation and restoration, and pushes back at the shames and fears that will turn us from God's heart and lead us into stumbling and falling.

> *This realization that life is best savored when lived for Christ is the key to living well. It moves the center of gravity from me to him, and, in that shift, is the very basis of finding my real calling. (Page 17)*

Costa is dealing with *vocation*, and that's not a churchy thing. **He doesn't just break down the sacred-secular divide, he cuts across the premise of it.** "There is only one sphere of influence: the kingdom of God", he says (page 23, *Called to*

Engage). “The world tries to atomize society, but we are called to draw together the spiritual, ethical, and vocational aspects of life” (page 27).

I particularly appreciated his dealing with the problem of *distraction* (page 127, *Called to Focus*). This is a standard, but necessary, theme for discipleship in this generation. Here his experience may make him slightly blind to those for whom money issues are not matters of *distraction* (page 132) but actual *existence*. But he takes it to the right place, including the need to turn and be captured by a desire for Jesus; i.e. to *repent* (*metaonoia* in the Greek).

> *No calling is complete without a true understanding of metanoia. Page 138*

But the essential thing is missing or obscured. This is what has frustrated me.

The heart of vocation is cruciform. All vocation takes us to a moment of death, surrender, and abandonment of self into the hands of God. It is there in *every* vocational story in the Bible. It’s Abraham with a knife on Mt. Moriah. It’s Moses-of-Egypt shuffling around Midian with his sheep. It’s David staying his slaying hand in a cave. It’s the rich young ruler facing his idol. It’s Peter weeping at the sound of a rooster. It’s Paul, blind and helpless in Damascus. It’s Jesus hungry for bread in the wilderness, and hungry for life in Gethsemane.

The *exercise* of vocation needs wisdom and skill and Costa is a great help with those things. But the *foundation* looks more like Bonhoeffer, who literally knew the Cost of Discipleship: “When God calls a man, he bids him come and die.” In my own experience, and in walking alongside people over the years, vocation is knowing how we are to be “living sacrifices.” Any sense of success is a gift and a grace. I don’t quite see this essential dynamic in Costa’s book.

The examples he uses, in the main, attach to career prospects and business or philanthropic projects. These are good points of application, but vocation is so much deeper than that. Moses didn't come back down from the burning bush excited about his career shift from shepherd to liberator, feeling equipped with a new-found maturity. Jonah's careerism wasn't *enabled* by his refinement in the belly of the whale, it *died,* and was *vomited* back to life, on God's terms! David wasn't moved by his future prospects in the wilderness, he was spiritually rent asunder until the fragments rested in the Lord his God: "You, God, are my God… my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water" (Psalm 63).

Throughout this book, I kept falling into this gap between the exercise of vocation, and its cruciform foundation.

As one example, consider the prophet's wife in the days of Elisha who needed a miracle of provision; she had nothing but a little oil in the house. Costa wants to turn this into a lesson about recognising what we have, even it is little (page 50, *Called to Flourish);* we should be "prepared to live by an exception." But the story is actually about someone who is at the *end* of herself, and receives a *miraculous* provision. She didn't walk away from her time of indebtedness grateful for her lesson about looking on the bright side; she came out with a testimony of "I had nothing… but God…" Her family had died, so to speak, and had been restored back to life.

Another example: I truly appreciate how Costa devotes a chapter to the seasons of delay (page 63ff, *Called to Wait.*) For Costa, these seasons are a "a kind of spiritual workshop" (page 64). We might learn, alongside the footballer, Pelé, to imagine ourselves "performing like an irresistible force" (page 67). At this point even he realises that he is in danger of slipping into the "power of positive thinking " (page 67). His response is a subtle deflection, to **cover self-actualisation with a Christian aesthetic** rather than deal with

the principle: Perform, but of course, don't forget that "the source of our hope and our ability to deliver come from the Holy Spirit" (page 68). Yes, "we need to be firm, positive, and inspired to believe the promises of the Bible" (page 68), but that is the *fruit* of the wilderness experience, not the path that takes us through. The wilderness isn't an object lesson in having our "dreams and determination run together" (page 75). Rather in the waiting we learn to lay it all down, until the Holy Spirit grounds our inspiration in God and not ourselves. If we seek to save our life in the wilderness, we've lost it.

These gaps matter. "I am no longer the arbiter of success in my life" (page 17), Costa wisely says, but the measure of success he applies in his anecdotes are usually, frankly, *worldly*: measures of numbers, influence, and *size*! If it is that, and not the cruciform way, that seizes our vocation, then we are undone. Costa is borrowing his vocabulary (e.g. the sting of "satisfactory underperformance", page 56) from his mercantile world, and that is not without merit. But the *allure*, the *pursuit*, of 'success' is a subtle idolatry that needs sanctification, not succour. Performance-drive *undermines* vocation. In the church world, especially, we must confront it. One of the ugliest parts of evangelical culture, the wounds of which I encounter time and time again in my walk and in others, is the invalidation of brothers and sisters; their vocations have been weighed and found wanting by some cold measure of performance that is actually extrinsic to the vocational walk of faith. Fairly or not, in caricature or otherwise, the HTB ecosystem is often that measure.

Those with a prophetic vocation would be *least* helped by this book. Costa rightly recognises that he buys into a framework for expressing calling that is "a privilege of the few, and we should always see it as such" (page 81, *Called to Choose*). He is also wise to affirm the simple serving tasks of being a "cog in the bigger machine" (page 58). This book isn't an

insensitive triumphalist treatise! For those who are playing the game, this book will help them win it with integrity. But, for some, the game is rigged. Sometimes the machine needs breaking. At that point the prophetic vocation needs nurture and wisdom. Their "why" would collide with the milieu of this book, I think, and fall through the gap.

I admire his vulnerability in talking about fear and anxiety (page 105, *Called to Courage*). In fact, I found this chapter to be quite therapeutic as I brought to mind some of my own "disappointment and dashed hopes" (page 106). But again, the gap is evident, even in his **theology of failure**. It is good to talk about mistakes, especially painful ones, but, in the end, they are merely *mistakes*. It is *shame* that must be confronted, and Costa *avoids* it. "We will all fail at something at some point, we will never *be* failures" (page 109), he says, and skirts the issue. We can't cover our failures with a Christian aesthetic of "There, there, think about Jesus realise that you're *not* the failure." Rather, it is *precisely* at the cross that shame gives way to life. I need the cross when I *am* broken and wrong – when I *am* a failure, and not simply when I've mucked something up. Christ took my shame, and all my *being* is now a gift from him. This is how vocation is built on his grace, and not our own sequence of little discoveries of how to do things better next time.

I appreciate how Costa may struggle with "determinist philosophies" (page 83) such as that of Marx and Freud, but he should also be wary of the opposite extreme of **self-determinism**. He urges us to "set [our faces] like flint" (page 121) as we "throw all that we have into this struggle." But he is quoting from Isaiah 50:7 and the rest of it says this: "*Because the Sovereign Lord helps me*, I will not be disgraced, therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame." The proactivity is not from us and our flinty faces, it is from the Lord. We realise our vocation when we realise our *utter existential* dependence upon God.

Costa gets *close* to it when he acknowledges that "there could never be a shaking so severe as to dislodge the life that Christ wanted to have in and through me" (page 122) and when he affirms an ethos of "not sink or swim but saved" (page 123). But he presents this as if its our "emergency braking system" (page 124) or some sort of safety net. It's not; it's our *foundation*, and the essence of all that we are and do.

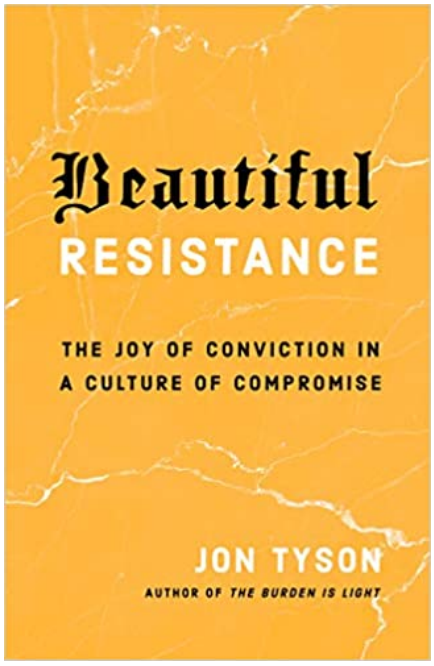
Again, I appreciate how he doesn't ignore the *cost* of calling. He quotes Paul's overwhelming challenges (page 156, *Called to Persevere*). But Paul, in fact, rests his perseverance not in his "indominitable *conviction*", but in *surrender and being strong in weakness*. "When we are cursed, we bless", Paul says, "when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment." (1 Corinthians 4:12-13). Paul is compelled not by self-confidence, but by Christ's love (2 Corinthians 5:14). Once again, the difference between Paul and Costa, is cruciform. All visions die; if they don't we achieve them in our own strength. **All perseverance is grounded in our total reliance on Jesus.** We don't "celebrate because our plans are completed" (page 161), we celebrate because, *he* has led us, and *his* plans have become *our* plans. *Our* plans have died, *his* have been completed. To *God* be the glory.

My frustration here echoes a broader angst. These various gaps – a tendency towards self-reliance and performance-drive, deflection by appeal to Christian aesthetics, diminution of the prophetic voice and so on – are a subtle but real characteristic of the wider church culture. They are often manifest in the nuance, and so I hope I am not reading them into Costa's book or picking the nits. There is so much good in what Costa writes; I just want him to bring it all the way in. The gaps are subtle, but they do need addressing. Anyone who takes up this book will gain much from it. But start with Christ and the taking up of your own cross first. That is

where the grace of vocation is rooted and grows; and it has deep joy.

Review: Beautiful Resistance – The Joy of Conviction in a Culture of Compromise

There's a few ways into Jon Tyson's Beautiful Resistance. Here's one way:



We've been encountering, for a while now, the phenomenon of committed Christians who are "done with Church." This isn't the cliche of people backsliding from faith, it's more vocational than that: We were a generation that encountered Jesus and pursued the gospel and his Kingdom. Many of us did this; we gave ourselves to the institutions, submitted, learned, did our bit, and some of us were even "successful." Inevitably, however, comes the time of deconstruction. Church and gospel collide. We have that moment when we look towards Jesus and the path of discipleship and we realise that we are looking *away* from his people, and not towards them. At that

point there is a crisis. We weigh up whether to throw in the ecclesial towel or not, *because* of our love and hope, not against it.

This book speaks to our generation.

> *For the better part of two decades, I have had a complex relationship with the institution called the church. Jesus called her a bride, one of my atheist friends called her a wench, and I have experienced her as both… I am also grieved by my failures and personal contribution to the staining of her reputation. (Pages 9-10)*
>
> *I'm sure that you have felt the same desire to escape the drama of the church in our modern life of faith. At night you probably have deep questions about whether staying involved is worth it. Worth the misunderstanding, worth the heartache, worth the credibility hits, worth the sacrifice. And I am sure that some around you have come to the conclusion that it is not. They have wavered and shrunk back, preferring spirituality over religion, and given up on the institution known as the church. Maybe you are reading this at a time when you are struggling to see the point of the church when she is stained by so much compromise. Maybe you would like to retreat to that easier place of spirituality without religion. But I'm guessing that deep down in your heart you actually long for more. (Page 166)*

Here's another way in:

Our generation has struggled to find its native leaders. We have leaned back into older faces: the likes of Packer, Wright, Stott, Willard, and Chalke (depending on where you see your home). Those are good giants with good shoulders, but the road to our own voice has been complicated.

Our voice fledged twenty years ago or so. Remember the battle of the "Mars Hills"? We had Rob Bell who drew us in with Nooma

but sold out and faded out with Oprah and insipid universalism. We had Mark Driscoll who drew us in with keeping it real and relevant and somewhat M-rated, but who badgered us like the bully on the school bus and ran headlong into his own belligerence. The leadership of our generation, sitting at the pivot point between the Boomers and the Millenials and beyond, needed to grow up.

I think we're beginning to find those maturer voices now. The sort of voices with a couple of more decades in them that have been through some wastelands. I'm thinking of people like John Mark Comer and Pete Greig and others of similar ilk (nominate your own in the comments). These voices speak fluent postmodern – truth is to be *experienced* not just *thought* – but have avoided the naivete of intersectional deconstruction. They speak to formation, and not the reductionism of getting numbers onto pews, or into heaven. They are beginning to hit the balance between winsome relevance and being prophetically distinct. Jon Tyson is one of these voices.

It might be confirmation bias on my part, though! Like me, Tyson is Australian. Like me, he is called as a missionary to the Western world. Like me, he has left his hemisphere and set up camp in a foreign land. He's been a lot more successful than me, but good on him; unlike other ex-pat Aussies, it doesn't seem to have gone to his head.

This book is Tyson's significant contribution to a spirituality of mission that takes the context of the Western church seriously. It hits the sweet spot between pastoral call to individuals, and apostolic call to churches to live out and pursue the truth of the gospel. He makes us ponder if "Christ or culture will have the ascendancy in our generation" (p1).

The *resistance* Tyson speaks of, is therefore *responsive* to *who* we are as God's people and *where* we are in this broken world. He frames the whole book with an anecdote from Bonhoeffer countering the power of Nazi Germany with the "beautiful

resistance" of humble discipleship. In the same light Tyson ponders about "*our* cultural moment and the compromise rampant in our day" (p4). The chapters he leads us into summarises what follows:

> *Worship Must Resist Idolatry*
> *Rest Must Resist Exhaustion*
> *Hunger Must Resist Apathy*
> *Hospitality Must Resist Fear*
> *Honor Must Resist Contempt*
> *Love Must Resist Hate*
> *Sacrifice Must Resist Privilege*
> *Celebration Must Resist Cynicism*

The chapter on **worship** recognises that our Western world has no "reference point for idolatry" (p24) and therefore offers no guidance for our desires and passions. The unresistant church adopts the same passions as the world, and we end up with a "church more informed by… cultural preferences than [God's] Word" (p33). Tyson's exploration of this issues touches my centrist heart; his ability to identify and counter the idolatry of both left and right extremes is admirable. He has the cultural insight of a missionary; he has had to come to grips with the "ecosystem of power and approval" in his context of New York similarly to how I've has to wrestle with a sense of the English middle class. Tyson envisages the beautiful resistance:

> *The church exists as a counterformative community to confront our idolatry. So we don't go to church for entertainment. No, what we're really working for here is transformation into the image of Jesus. (Page 38)*

The chapter on **rest** speaks to how we "ache for peace in the world, but many of our lifestyles are a form of violence to ourselves and those we love" (p46). There are many people speaking right now about the weariness and pressure and

distraction of contemporary life. Tyson takes us to the difference between mere "relaxing" and true "rest" which comes with a movement "from fear to trust… from anxiety to peace.. from control to surrender" (p54).

> *We need a framework of Sabbath that makes Jesus's invitation to rest a reality in our lives. (Page 51)*

The chapter on **hunger** is about "confronting our spiritual numbness" (p64). This is a topic that should be talked about more in church circles! The age-old conundrum for anyone pursuing mission is this: How can we get people to simply *care* more? We pursue techniques and programs, and we have forgotten that it is, in the end, a *spiritual* task. Tyson's advice is to "begin again with fasting" – literal, physical fasting – as a resistance to the stultifying culture that wraps everything around what we feel, and what we want (p71). It's a worthy thought; "we have tried every other type of solution… "this kind" will come out only through prayer and fasting" (p75).

> *I urge you – let your hunger resist your apathy. (Page 77)*

The chapter on **hospitality** addresses a culture of *fear*. This book, although dated as 2020, was written pre-pandemic and before the death of George Floyd; the relevance of it has only increased. Tyson explores the process of exclusion (p82), again with admirable centrism that sees the fear-centre of both the progressives and the conservatives. He allows the scandal of an inclusion, exclusively centred on Jesus: "…hospitality wasn't one of Jesus's strategies; it was *the* strategy… Jesus was able to model what our culture is craving – spaces of welcome where strangers, enemies, outsiders, and others can become our friends (pp86-87).

> *Jesus created pockets of love in a culture of fear that formed a new kind of community in the world, something he called "the church." The church was to exist not as a haven*

> *from the world but as a place of hope for the world. (Page 87)*

The chapter on **honour** is in the same vein. It recognises the complexity of shame and dysfunction within Western cultural contexts: "the elderly are dismissed, traditions are mocked, the past is erased, hopelessness settles in, prejudice is assumed, and conflict is inevitable" (p110). This is the cultural minefield set before anyone who seeks to engage in community life. In answer, Tyson takes us to Jesus' "filter of honor for all he encountered… regardless of the contempt their culture showed them, he saw differently" (p105).

> *I can't help but imagine the power and beauty of a community that saw everyone through an honor filter. What would happen if every person's story, calling, sacrifice, gifts, and future were held in view? If people were seen as crowned with glory and coheirs with Christ? I believe conflict would be transformed, young people would be filled with vision, the elderly would be respected, teh marginalized would be empowered, adn the invisible would be seen… This community would be unlike any other – this community would be like the kingdom of heaven on earth. (Page 109)*

The chapter on **love** takes us to the countercultural sense of *agapé*, or "enemy love." It resists hate, but not in the sense of current rhetoric where "hate" and "love" are weaponised in the culture wars. Rather, Tyson would have us follow Jesus into these societal battlegrounds, with surrendering love: "The arena can be transformed again. But only if we're ready to act on our faith" (p122). There is suffering in this type of beautiful resistance.

> *Our enemies hurt us. Our enemies abuse us. Our enemies do violence to us. This can cause horrific trauma and require deep healing, boundaries, and grief. Jesus, however, experienced all this suffering and still insisted on love.*

(Page 126)

The chapter on **sacrifice** counters the prevalence of unseen privilege. His exploration is both *honest* and *gracious;* he recognises the reality of privilege, but avoids language which *shames* in response. Toxic privilege is rooted in fear, the answer is humility and grace. "We can serve without fear because the kingdom is a gift, not something we earn. From that position of security, we can humble ourselves without any anxiety" (p137). We are shaped by the mind of Christ in Philippians 2; where we have privilege, we give it away. "Servanthood resists privilege, and the kingdom takes root" (p141).

> *Jesus redefined greateness as the distribution of our unearned cultural advantage on behalf of others. Rather than fighting over rights and responsibilities, Jesus calls us to redirect our privilege for others. (Page 139)*

And finally, the chapter on **celebration** is a resistance to *cynicism*. The sentiment of pointlessness is pervasive in our community, and our churches. I certainly encounter it, not just in myself, but in a younger generation; what have we bequeathed? They are launching from the nest into a cloud streaked with GFC, climate crisis, and pandemic. The answer is not pesudo-idealism, the "telling of positive anecdotes that will makes us feel better" (p144). The answer is hope, in the service of a "joyful God" in which we put our confidence, including confidence in his truth (p150).

> *Jesus insisted that the work of God demands celebration. He is in the world, bringing good news, welcoming the outsider, restoring the lost, binding up the broken. The question is, Will we join the feast or issue excuses? (Page 155)*

Throughout it all, there is a common thread. This book is a

work of *applied ecclesiology*. **This is a book about how to be the church**, without guile.

I found it fanning some lingering embers back into flame. The Church *is still* the temple of God, a place for his presence (p13). The Church *is still* the body of Christ, existing to express God on earth (p18). Indeed, "there is a rumour going around the West that, in spit of the avalanche of change and often-repeated accusation of irrelevance, a church has actually survived. Yes she is stained; yes, she is broken; but she is here. Her Lord is working within her. The bride is becoming beautiful; his presence is becoming tangible; the body is becoming functional. Beauty is rising and resisting the brokenness" (p20).

Tyson prays "Lord, bring your body to life" (p20), and I remember praying the same thing years ago, in the sweet land of immature zeal. Now, in the present, wedged between ecclesiastical nihilism on one side and triumphalism on the other, I, for one, need to re-voice those old and true prayers, from lips now tempered with struggle and salted with sweat and tears. Tyson is a brother to me at this point, giving me some words to use, and thoughts to think.

I read this book while on a recent holiday. During this we visited the Holy Island in Northumberland and chanced upon Cuthbert's island, just off-shore, accessible only at low-tide. In its day, it was a place of solitude, a place of prayer, a place of spiritual travail. You could feel it in the rocks.

I don't know much about Cuthbert. But I know he prayed there, at and soon after a time of collision in the British church between the Roman body and the Celtic spirit. Cuthbert

invested himself at the Lindisfarne Priory as the Irish monks retreated, and answered the call to a spiritual travail for the soul of nation and church.

We found ourselves praying there, reflecting on the collisions we see in church, world, and between the two. It was something of a vocational recommitment for me. Tyson's words were in my reflections and I realised I had found something anthemic in them. It isn't complicated. It's just that we need to be God's people.

It is time.

We are God's people, we are disciples of Jesus. Within this broken, loved world, it is our time for beautiful resistance.

On Drooping and Tottering

Just a short reflection from one of those mornings when God seems distant and despondency seems close. I have learned over the years that such moments are cues to run towards Jesus, *no matter how much you don't feel like doing that.* And so I turned to where I'm up to in my readings, which happened to be Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12 is all about how God in his love *disciplines* his people. It applies to times of trial, adversity, difficulty, despondency. "Endure trials for the sake of discipline," it says, "God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?" (Heb 12:7 NIV)

Which, in and of itself, can feel of no great immediate encouragement. Although I have come to know over the years that it is true, that "discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11 NIV), what does that mean for the immediate moment? That I should just wallow until it's over?

But Hebrews 12 *does* have an imperative in it, a true exhortation that hadn't really seized me before. It's in verses 12 and 13. Let me quote it using the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) version, because it makes it very clear:

> *So, strengthen your drooping arms, and steady your tottering knees; and make a level path for your feet; so that what has been injured will not get wrenched out of joint but rather will be healed. (Heb 12:12-13 CJB)*

This is an exhortation that looks towards the fruits of the discipline: Strengthen yourself, steady yourself, level off your path. These are both self-caring exhortations and looking-ahead and keep-moving exhortations. They are exhortations that recognise that the *hurt* and the *injury* of the season is real. Something has been *injured* (the NIV talks about that which has become *lame*) and now the task is to move forward in a way that will allow it to heal and not be wrenched out of joint and possibly permanently damaged.

The chapter then goes on to talk about avoiding bitterness and living in peace with one another: the exact sort of thing that would cause an injury to fester.

Today this is encouragement. Despondency can be real. But by God's grace it is not devoid of purpose. And there is a constructive task which is both valid and graspable: to *steady myself*, *move forward* and so embrace healing. God is good.

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