

A Time to Take Inventory

When called to account, you won't get by with "Sorry, I didn't mean it."
- Ecclesiastes 5

From my background in manufacturing and logistics, inventory control (and accuracy) goes without a second thought; operations' management and periodic accounting require the review and reconciliation of inventory by value, quantity and other measures. When the inventory is controlled, inaccuracy and costs are minimized; and while inaccuracy and costs grow in some proportion, left un-checked it will *eat-away* at profits. Having inventory has both its pluses and minuses; but effective inventory control is always a plus. Within this ability is a *honest set of scales* – which is somewhat metaphorical to suggest some reverence to honesty as well as accuracy; for to deliberately or even inadvertently produce inaccurate results or records results in even greater costs that may not be recoverable let alone redeemable.

Greater than all other forms of inventory is that which applies to the soul or character. The title or phrase, “taking a personal account (or inventory)” might be thought of as figuratively looking into a mirror and seeing things beyond the surface or superficial; things that are deeper and less obvious than on routine reflection. How often do I earnestly take such an inventory; and then still, with an *honest set of scales*? On one end is the possibility that I'm pretty good – or even better than most (but than who is “most”...and what is good?); while on the other end, is self-loathing and deprecation to the extent that I am worse than the illusive “most”. On the one end is the risk that I'm fooling myself; covering my faults and failures with a false sense of self – a pride and preoccupation; while on the other end is further disgust at my self-pity or self-centered disposition. To begin the inventory is not without doubt as to my ability, or wonder as to my willingness. After all, I don't have a *real picture* of what I could discover or see; and whether the result or outcome is accurate by some impersonal or impartial measure.



If I had some form of gauge or metric by which to measure this inventory – as with tools and techniques of inventory control – than the result or outcome could be qualified as

an *honest set of scales*; but since there is no such device, such an appraisal would have to come from someone else.

Whether solicited or not, the value of someone else's appraisal might have its own uncertainty; as lack of information and other limitations could yield misinterpretations and other mistakes. Such input or advice – as even a complement – has its merit whether right or wrong; but it also has its limitations as being a true or accurate account. First, the sender or appraiser may have some hidden agenda – and is *going through the motions* for some personal gain or advantage. Second, the appraisal may be well intended but lacks either the credibility or the credence to be convincing. Third, desperation and despair on the part of the receiver may lead to credulity – such that any appearance or attention of respect – such as a platitude – may be magnified far beyond the incident or intent. Besides these three possibilities or predicaments are many more – which is not to discount the value of another person's points, but to consider the errors that can emerge from any point along his points. Friends are good – and even great – when the need arises; but the needs of an appraisal go much deeper than friends can deliver if even venture.

Whether such friend (and counselor) is possible can be disputed – as I'm sure that others can testify having experienced either (or both) the role of appraiser and the appraised; but I do think a friend (or all friends) is not enough to tip the scales in favor of fairness or fullness. To count on this friend (any and all friends) as a singular and complete source of appraisal is unfair because it imposes too high an expectation on the friend and too high a risk on the receiver – both of which can put the friendship in jeopardy. As close a bond of friendship found in marriage, the same holds true; no one person or group can complete the appraisal whether as on-request or through some extension of love and good will. True friendship – being bound in love – gives way for such expectations or extensions to have some relief in the form of acceptance that people are not perfect.

From the inspiration of this story as well as the rest (of the stories) that comprise *For a Time & Season*, the wisdom of King Solomon describes a friend as someone that can help you face the worst...as a *chord of three strands* has great strength. Friends offer a shoulder to cry on, an ear to hear or listen, and a heart to express sympathy and compassion; but even the closest of friends have their limitations as does friendship in general. As these limits are realized (and accepted), the value of the relationship grows without all the restraints and

regrets of unrealized expectations and preconceived notions of what the other can give – and should, for that matter. Again, people are not perfect – and I am one of them.

People are not perfect and therefore, cannot be trusted – which is why they cannot be fully responsible for the appraisal; people should not place complete trust in others – which is why they should not rely strictly on another’s appraisal. As much as we want to trust – and to be trusted – the truth is that trust cannot be fully given or presumed between people; and to commit this practice is to invite irreparable risk to the relationship of both the created and the creator.

By “created”, I mean exclusively people; and by “creator”, I mean exclusively, the Trinity. The created have done great things – much of which I have yet or will ever know – but the creator has enabled the created to do all of it. The created have loved others and thereby have invoked the most powerful force known; but again, the creator has enabled the created to do all of it through *common grace*. The created have shared themselves – and even given their lives for each other and a common cause – which is perhaps the greatest of all these accomplishments since “greater love have no one than to lay down his life for another.” Yet even with these and other accomplishments, the created cannot be trusted because – with all the gain or strides on one side – there remains the other side of the created, the people. The “other side” or terrible things are the chief cause for trusting the creator and not the created – for accepting the creator as the singular-complete source of appraisal, an *honest set of scales*.

In the musical-comedy, *Paint Your Wagon*, the character and forty-niner Ben Rumson (played by Lee Marvin) does a solo of a song that goes something like this: “God made the heaven, God made the sky, God made the people, God knows why? In what seems to be a mix of praise and a dirge, the general tone is disgust over the terrible things that the created have done...to that offered by the creator. In some stretched similarity to Solomon, Ben is expressing a sort-of ecclesiastical view or lament over the terrible things of the created as the proverbial *experiment-gone-bad*. No doubt that trust is something that he has lost: first in the ability to trust others (or to be fully trusted); second in the ability to trust God – since Providence is in question. While he admits that he has “never galled a partner” in all his digging, Ben has lost all hope in trust – it is a dried-up claim.

Yes, it’s only a story (or movie); but can it be the truth that the created cannot fully trust...or fully be trusted? Beyond Solomon – but not excluding him – is example and

verse that supports this tenet of time: Isaiah, the prophet, told the created, “Stop trusting in man”; Jeremiah followed with warning that, “cursed is the one who trust in man”; and still more to underscore that trust in the created is folly. And as convinced as I should be of this truth, my heart tells me to trust once more; it tells me that I should trust as a matter of decency or courtesy, and it urges me to convince others that I can be (and should be) trusted by them. My heart deceives me into believing that the created is a singular and complete source of appraisal – an *honest set of scales* by which to take inventory.

What follows is not only the awareness (or reminders) that trust is misapplied, but that our own heart deceives us; the created cannot even trust himself – his heart. As the truth of this condition becomes more apparent and practiced, so too does the certainty that trust should be left to the creator. In this trust is not only value beyond all measure, but the source of love by which we develop friends and relationships – exempt of complete trust, while accepting that people are not perfect.

In this trust is the pursuit in the creator as a singular and complete source of appraisal – an *honest set of scales* by which to take inventory. It is when we turn to the Lord for an appraisal – through prayer and his word – that we have confidence that the time to take inventory will yield an accurate and authentic reflection in the figurative mirror. Seeing ourselves and our errors, oh yes, but also seeing the growing image of Christ whose blood has covered this error called sin. “Though now we may see a poor reflection, then we will see face to face.”

What we are – and not what we think or how we appear – is what the Lord knows of us; after all, he created us...all of us and each of us. With his knowledge of each of us comes the ever present struggle of the created and the creator – of the present reflection and the developing image of Christ within us as his Spirit. Knowing first-hand this struggle, Christ is compassionate while calling us to him...to the cross...and to Eternity. He knows that the heart remains a threat to our trust in him alone; but also knows that the heart (its condition) is a gauge or metric by which to measure our inventory – by which to evaluate each of us on the spiritual health and readiness to follow him...to change (and be changing) into his image, his likeness. While the heart can deceive, it can also lead – but only through the presence of the *honest set of scales* to give a true and accurate account.

Taking inventory includes both reconciliation and resolution: reconciliation of accounts – actual to book; and resolution of problems causing the inventory imbalances. In

association to the Spirit, reconciliation means: to end hostility or enmity. The scriptures tell us that reconciliation has been received through Christ – or that we have been restored to God through Christ. Resolution is sanctification – or the ever occurring transformation that brings the image (or reflection) of Christ into shaper focus. This transformation comes through the combination of discipline and revelation; and as a Watchman Nee said, mostly discipline.

Each must take inventory; yet, as described previously, none of us are capable of conducting the inventory – whether for ourselves or for another. As looking into a mirror, each must allow the Spirit to unveil the image of Christ in place of our existing reflection; and in some future time, each must give a final account before the throne of God. Solomon tells each that each should fear God and keep his commandments, for the final account or judgment will bring before us every deed such that the excuse, “Sorry, I didn’t mean it”, will not get by...