

Honest Appraisal

(March 24, 2023)

Dogs are extremely proficient at understanding calming signals between each other, which is very honest and truthful. It's how dogs live and how they avoid problems whenever they can. The majority of dogs do not want to fight and argue. If only people were as good at seeing and understanding signals from other people. We just aren't and the reason we aren't is due to our own duplicity, sadly enough, which stems from our resident sin nature. We are all duplicitous to a degree. Dogs, on the other hand, live by instinct and their calming signals are an honest guide for how they live, not only with other dogs, but with *people*.



Can you guess what these two dogs are saying?

Unfortunately, people often send out mixed signals to other people, which is why there are arguments, disagreements and grudges so often. This extends, unfortunately, to Christians and fellowship. We have a tendency to do or say one thing, while thinking another thing. I'm not sure dogs *can* do that. They are honest. My dogs cannot be angry with me while pretending to love me. It's impossible. What they are on the inside is what I see on the outside. Their consistency is obvious.

Believe it or not, all of this has helped me understand why God has never moved me into the pastorate. Remember, from before, when I said I thought I've sensed a call into "ministry" over the years and never understood why God has not chosen to put me into the pastorate? Over the months since I mentioned that here, I've come to realize in all honesty that it has to do with several things. This honest appraisal of myself has helped me quite a bit and I think the question is behind me now forever.

First, while I do enjoy people, I need a break from them and the sole reason I need breaks is because of my Type A personality, not people themselves. It becomes work for me to be around people for long periods of time unless I know them well and share a certain camaraderie with them. Even with that, being in crowds of people is taxing so I'm better with a few at a time. I'm just being as honest as I can be.

It's sometimes awkward for me in situations where I meet someone for the first time. To make it easier on myself, I've learned to simply focus on *them*. I ask them questions about what they do, where they live, how long they've lived here, etc. I really don't want to talk about me. It's boring and by talking about them I can then repeat their name back in conversation three or four times until the name sticks in my head. I hate having to go back to someone later and ask, "*I'm sorry, what was your name again?*"

Another reason and actually, the biggest reason I need to take breaks from people is because it is taxing on my emotional stamina due to a recurrent Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV), that I contracted years ago and has never gone away. According to the medical community, it will *never* go away. It'll go to "sleep" for a

while, but will always come back at some point. There is no medical cure. There are only things I can do to help EBV go back to sleep and relieve me of symptoms.

When my EBV is "awake" it creates a multitude of problems for me. I find myself in the middle of the day being so fatigued and brain-fogged that I can hardly keep myself awake. I've written articles (or tried to), during those times that I'm glad I never published because they made little sense!

If I'm home when fatigue hits, I'll nap on the couch, which helps. Because of that fatigue, irritability rises. If not for the energy from irritability, I'd have no energy at all. But that's not fair to export to others, like my long-suffering wife.

My body also becomes "inflamed" meaning my muscles and joints hurt and even standing up can make me dizzy and my systolic blood pressure rises. Weak places in my body like my left shoulder (with a slight tear), and the heel spur area on the heel of my left foot also becomes severely painful so that I walk with a limp and the left side of my neck becomes very inflamed due to pain radiating up from my left shoulder. As if this is not enough, I find myself becoming extremely negative with my thinking and I tend to think, "Ah, to heck with everything and everybody!" The only thing I can do at that point is to repeat Scripture to myself and throw myself at His mercy to help me through it. I say none of this to draw pity. If you want to pray for me, that's fine. I'm not asking you though. I would actually ask that if you want to pray, that you would ask I would be more aware of symptoms when they start instead of waiting days or even a few weeks before it dawns on me. Catching it sooner than later is key.

Going through periods of great stress in my life so that it weakens my immune system, allowing my resident EBV to rise from sleep and exhibit the symptoms I've just noted. Fortunately, the Lord led me to a specialist who helped me get back on track with my EBV. I know what I'm supposed to do when my symptoms start to become clear. Stupidly though, I will forget and become fatigued etc, only to not realize my EBV is back. Once on medication, I see improvement in a day or so.

Now, imagine me as a pastor, trying to perform pastoral duties while I'm dealing with extreme fatigue, brain fog, irritability, lack of energy, bodily inflammation, and the rest. Can you imagine me being a pastor with the amount of stress that pastors often experience? Imagine the "signals" I may end up sending to people while I'm dealing with all those symptoms? It wouldn't be good nor would it be fair to anyone, so that may be the main reason why I'm not a pastor. I'm okay with that.

Through all of this, the most important thing I've realized is that God loves us immensely, something I cannot really accurately measure. God loves me. He loves you. I've come to a point in my life where the most important part of living for Jesus is to literally love as He loved, in how I live; what I do as well as what I say. I'm certain I don't do that as well as He would have me do it and I know that's true because of my own physical issues with EBV.

To be clear, I'm not talking about setting doctrine aside and just hugging each other singing Kumbaya, so that everyone *feels* good about everything. There are too many groups doing that and it's wrong because they are not being true to who God is, but promoting syncretism. I'm talking about dealing with people as *gently* and as *graciously* as possible if it appears they're holding onto some form of doctrine that does not square with Scripture. That is very difficult, isn't it? Because we know we are "right"

therefore we feel the need to share it. So people debate all kinds of things - the Sabbath, Arminianism vs Calvinism, the sign gifts, aspects of Eschatology, yada yada yada. Is it because we want people to be "right" or is it because we want them to see that we are "right"? Again, not talking about fundamentals of the faith like salvation, deity of Jesus, etc., but even there, can we ever express too much grace, humility and love even as we share our opinion?

We have a very good friend we've known for over 30 years. He's not a Christian. We've talked to him about it and we pray for him. At one point, apparently our message was getting too close and in frustration he said, "I'm FINE!" We continue to be his friend. We continue to pray for him and let him know that. We remain friends and he with us.

I've seen churches split over the most asinine things and you may have as well. I understand that in this day and age, we are experiencing a tremendous upsurge in deception leading to heresy that makes many really wary so we need to know what we believe and be ready to give a reason for the hope we have in Jesus. But sometimes we can make things worse. My 91 year-old mother-in-law is a Christian, yet she grew up in and remains part of the Roman Catholic Church. Some Christians will call her a heretic, but the reason she stays is due to her friends who are also Roman Catholics who have not seen the light yet. She is a witness to them of God's actual love and grace. She tried so hard to witness to her sister as her sister lay on her deathbed insisting that the sacraments were all she needed, along with the last rites from a priest. That's so heartbreaking isn't it?

Wouldn't it be nice if people were always as honest as dogs, meaning what you see is actually what is there? I'm talking about how we *behave*, how we *live*, how we *think*. Dogs are honest. God is honest. His Creation is honest in spite of being cursed. Human beings tend not to be, even after we become believers.

We see a great example of this in **Genesis 3**, where Adam and Eve entertained the idea of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then, Eve went for it at the lie of Satan and also gave to her husband Adam to eat of it as well. Both sinned and the result of course was a broken relationship with God.

Those two people were so used to walking and talking with God in the cool of the garden without fear or condemnation. It was true, unfettered, honest fellowship, the likes of which no one on earth has ever really enjoyed except Jesus. Moses came very close but his sin nature still got in the way.

What I find interesting is that after Adam and Eve sinned, God continued doing what He had done previously. He came into the garden to walk and talk with the first two human beings. When they were not there expectantly waiting for God as usual, He called out to them, "*Where are you?*" (**Genesis 3:9** NKJV) Of course, God did this, not because He had no clue where they were, but because He wanted to show them He still loved them; that they should absolutely *still* come to Him. Had God not called after them, they would have remained forever hidden from God's physical Presence. How tragic that would have been!

God loved Adam and Eve that much, even though they were now deathly afraid of their Creator. How sad is that? Sin creates fear in us of judgment, but God still reaches out to us in love, showing us that receiving His love and salvation can change us into what He originally created us to be.

Are we doing that with others? Have we embraced God's absolute love for ourselves as well? This is what God did in the Garden of Eden, by calling out to Adam, drawing him and his wife out of the shadows forced their by their sinful failure to believe and obey God out of love, not duty. God chose to provide a solution to their sin problem.

So what God did in the Garden is really the establishment of the Gospel and shows us the love and grace God has for His Creation; all of it, including of course people. We see the kernel of the Gospel presented when God speaks of the woman's seed bruising the serpent's head (in a fatal wound; verse 15). This clearly foreshadows Jesus as Savior.

To approach God, we must be *honest*. He sees our dishonesty anyway, through our lies and excuses just like Adam and Eve. The serpent is the only one who did not offer an excuse. In fact, never replied to God and note God never asked the serpent a question. Both Adam and Eve had excuses for their sinful behavior. Yet, God's love was abundantly apparent. He gave them *eternal* hope that day in the garden, that they would be extricated from their circumstances and it would come through a Savior.

Being a Christian starts and ends with honesty. In fact, honesty is the thing that allows us to realize our need for a Savior, it's the thing that causes us to grow in Christ and it is the thing that ultimately brings Him glory. Without honesty we will never come to Him in repentance because we will never see our need for Him. Without honesty, we will never grow in Christ because we will never see the areas where we need to grow. Without honesty, we cannot please God. An honest appraisal of ourselves is not a once and done deal. It is needed every step of the way until we see Him face to face.