AN ESSAY ON TRUTH AND DISCIPLESHIP

A CULTURE WITHOUT EYES TO SEE

The Cry for Help, the Burden of Seeing, and the Covenant Responsibility to Notice the Wounded

> *"A cry for help inside the Church does not always appear in the form many might expect."*

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Introduction

A cry for help inside the Church does not always appear in the form many might expect. It does not always look like rebellion, withdrawal, loss of faith, or open despair. In many cases, especially among covenant people, a cry for help may first appear as silence.

It may look like a faithful member who continues attending meetings, fulfilling assignments, sustaining leaders, serving others, and speaking the expected language of belief, while inwardly becoming less and less whole. It may look like the person who is still present but diminished. Still obedient but exhausted. Still believing but burdened. Still serving but no longer nourished.

This is one of the great dangers of a religious culture that has learned to measure outward function more carefully than inward condition. A person may be visible in every administrative sense and yet unseen in every spiritual sense.

The question, then, is not merely, Who is active? The deeper question is, Who is suffering while still appearing active?

The Lord's people must learn to ask that question. Leaders especially must learn to ask it. For if a covenant people cannot see those who suffer quietly among them, they will eventually become a people who notice pain only after it has escalated. And when pain finally becomes visible, they may mistake the expression of suffering for the beginning of the problem.

But often it is not the beginning. It is only the first moment the culture can no longer ignore what has long been present.

The Cry Before the Cry

A cry for help often begins before words are ever spoken.

It begins when a once joyful servant becomes merely dutiful. It begins when someone who once participated freely grows quiet. It begins when a person who once lingered now leaves quickly. It begins when testimony becomes harder to bear aloud, not because the testimony is false, but because the soul speaking it is wounded.

It may appear as fatigue, irritability, bluntness, tears, numbness, distance, over-involvement, or sudden sensitivity to careless words. It may appear as a person who says, "I am fine," while everything in their countenance suggests otherwise.

Such signs are easy to miss in a culture that rewards manageability. The quiet sufferer often remains acceptable precisely because he or she does not disturb the room. The person continues to attend, continues to serve, continues to answer correctly, and therefore others assume all is well.

But outward order is not the same as inward peace. The Lord warned against judging merely by appearance:

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. - John 7:24, KJV

Righteous judgment requires more than noticing whether a person is physically present. It requires discernment. It requires charity. It requires a willingness to ask whether the person before us is whole, not merely whether they are useful.

A suffering Saint may not be asking to be rescued from the Church. He may be asking to be seen within it.

That distinction matters.

The Doctrine of Seeing

The doctrine of seeing is woven throughout scripture. The Lord does not merely act from distance. He sees, hears, knows, and then delivers.

When Israel suffered in bondage, the Lord declared:

I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry... for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them. - Exodus 3:7-8, KJV

This is a divine pattern: seen, heard, known, delivered.

The Lord does not minimize affliction. He does not begin by correcting Israel's tone. He does not accuse the suffering people of negativity because they groan under bondage. He sees their affliction, hears their cry, knows their sorrows, and acts.

Those who lead in the Lord's name should tremble before that pattern. Christ's mortal ministry also began again and again with sight. Matthew records:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them. - Matthew 9:36, KJV

Luke records the Savior seeing the widow of Nain:

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. - Luke 7:13, KJV

In the parable of the good Samaritan, the merciful man does not begin with explanation, suspicion, or analysis. He begins by seeing:

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. - Luke 10:33, KJV

He saw. He had compassion. He went to him. He bound up his wounds. He bore a cost. That is not sentimental kindness. That is covenantal seeing.

Among the Nephites, the resurrected Christ again demonstrated this divine pattern. He perceived weakness before the people fully expressed it:

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words. - 3 Nephi 17:2

He did not shame them for weakness. He adjusted Himself to their condition. Then He asked:

Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. - 3 Nephi 17:7

And the record says:

He did heal them every one. - 3 Nephi 17:9

The Lord perceives. The Lord invites. The Lord heals. A Church culture that bears His name must seek to do likewise.

The Covenant to Notice

Mosiah 18 gives one of the clearest descriptions of covenant life. Those who enter the fold of God covenant not merely to believe correct doctrine, but to bear the burdens of others:

Ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort. - Mosiah 18:8-9

This covenant requires spiritual sight.

One cannot bear a burden one refuses to notice. One cannot mourn with those whose grief is dismissed. One cannot comfort those in need of comfort while insisting that they first express their pain in a form that does not inconvenience the listener.

There is no covenant to rush people past mourning. There is no covenant to explain away burdens. There is no covenant to preserve cultural comfort at the expense of wounded souls.

The covenant is to bear, mourn, comfort, and stand as witnesses of God.

That means the cry for help inside the Church must not be treated as an irritation to be managed. It must be received as a summons to covenant faithfulness.

The Need for Courage

To see suffering is a burden. But seeing alone is not enough.

A leader may perceive that something is wrong and still fail to act. He may sense that a person is carrying more than they are saying and still avoid the uncomfortable conversation. He may know that a wound exists and still choose silence because responding faithfully may disrupt peace, expose weakness, invite criticism, or require personal repentance.

For that reason, the prayer for eyes to see must be joined with a prayer for courage. The Lord commanded Joshua:

Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. - Joshua 1:9, KJV

Paul taught Timothy:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. - 2 Timothy 1:7, KJV

Courage in spiritual leadership is not harshness. It is not recklessness. It is not public drama. It is moral strength governed by charity.

Doctrine and Covenants 121 describes righteous influence in terms of persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge. It also speaks of reproving when moved upon by the Holy Ghost, followed by an increase of love.

By persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge. - Doctrine and Covenants 121:41-42

Such leadership requires courage because true gentleness is not cowardice. True meekness is not avoidance. True love is not the preservation of smooth appearances. Sometimes love requires a leader to say:

I should have seen this sooner.

I need to understand before I counsel.

I will not treat your pain as disloyalty.

I may have contributed to this, and I am willing to examine that.

I do not yet know how to fix this, but I will not dismiss it. These are courageous sentences. They are also deeply Christian ones.

When a Culture Does Not See

A Church culture that continually fails to see those crying for help eventually teaches its people that suffering must either be hidden or dramatized.

If quiet suffering is ignored, people learn that silence leaves them unseen. But if honest suffering is punished, corrected, minimized, or labeled as disloyal, they also learn that honesty is unsafe. Thus the wounded are forced into a terrible choice: suffer quietly and remain acceptable, or speak plainly and risk becoming the problem.

That is spiritually destructive.

It creates a culture of appearances. Peace becomes confused with the absence of complaint. Unity becomes confused with the absence of visible grief. Activity becomes confused with conversion. Order becomes confused with health.

But the absence of complaint does not always mean the presence of peace. Sometimes it means the wounded have stopped believing it is worth speaking.

When a people fail to see suffering early, pain often emerges later in sharper and more disruptive forms. Then the culture may ask, "Why are they so angry?" or "Why are they so difficult?" But the better question may be, "Was this truly the first cry, or merely the first cry we could no longer ignore?"

A culture without eyes to see often protects itself from grief. It prefers explanation to mourning. It prefers correction to understanding. It prefers institutional comfort to spiritual honesty. It may speak often of love, unity, and faithfulness while quietly becoming less able to sit with sorrow.

This is how a people can become hard-hearted while still sounding religious. The Savior rebuked a religious culture that preserved outward precision while neglecting the weightier matters:

Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. - Matthew 23:23, KJV

They had religious seriousness. They had observance. They had structure. But they lacked the weightier matters. That danger remains.

A culture may keep the vocabulary of discipleship while losing the tenderness of discipleship. It may speak of ministering while failing to notice the wounded. It may speak of unity while silencing grief. It may speak of sustaining while leaving the broken unsupported.

This is not Zion.

The Indictment of Failed Shepherding

The Lord speaks with great severity toward shepherds who fail to care for the wounded. Ezekiel records:

The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken. - Ezekiel 34:4, KJV

The indictment is not merely that the shepherds actively harmed the flock, though that may also have occurred. The indictment includes neglect. They did not strengthen. They did not heal. They did not bind up. They did not seek. They did not restore.

Failure to see is not a small thing in the eyes of God.

It is a shepherding failure.

The Lord's judgment in Matthew 25 is equally sobering. He identifies Himself with the overlooked and the neglected:

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. - Matthew 25:45, KJV

This means unseen suffering is never merely an administrative concern. It is a Christological concern. The way a people respond to the unseen sufferer reveals how they respond to Christ when He comes disguised as need.

A culture that cannot see the wounded becomes less like the Shepherd whose name it bears.

The Good Shepherd does not merely count sheep. He notices when one is missing. He notices when one is wounded. He notices when one remains physically inside the fold but is no longer whole.

The Burden of Those Who See

When a culture does not see, those who do see often pay a dear price.

They may feel isolated because they are noticing what others dismiss. They may hear phrases that sound faithful but function as avoidance. They may recognize when unity is being used to quiet grief rather than heal division. They may perceive when order is being protected more carefully than souls.

And once they see it, they cannot easily unsee it.

This can change a person's relationship to the room. Ordinary meetings may become heavy. Familiar language may begin to ache. Cultural reflexes that once seemed harmless may begin to appear spiritually dangerous.

The one who sees may begin to wonder whether he is too sensitive, too intense, too sorrowful, or too unable to move on. But perhaps the deeper question is not whether he sees too much. Perhaps the question is whether the culture has learned to see too little.

Isaiah described a people who had the outward capacity to see and hear but lacked spiritual perception:

Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. - Isaiah 6:9, KJV

That is a frightening condition.

A people may observe distress and still fail to perceive what it means. They may hear pain and still fail to understand what it requires. They may remain religiously active while becoming spiritually dull.

The Book of Mormon warns against people becoming past feeling. Such a condition does not always appear as open wickedness. It may appear as functional religiosity without tenderness. It may appear as a people who can still speak reverently, meet regularly, and preserve order while losing the capacity to be pierced by the suffering of others.

Moroni's warning is direct:

For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. - Mormon 8:37

This is not only a warning against materialism. It is a warning against misplaced religious affection - loving the appearance, adornment, and preservation of religious life more than the wounded people religious life is meant to gather, heal, and redeem.

The person who sees this may suffer. Not because seeing is wrong, but because seeing disrupts the comfort of blindness.

Seeing as Witness

The burden of seeing must not become bitterness. It must not become contempt. It must not become accusation for accusation's sake. But neither should it be buried under false peace.

The question is not, "How do I stop seeing this?" The better question is, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me do with what I have seen?" Seeing, consecrated to Christ, becomes witness.

It becomes a witness that says: We are not yet as whole as we claim. We are not yet as tender as our covenants require. We are not yet as careful with the wounded as the Savior is. We must stop calling blindness peace.

This kind of witness may be uncomfortable, but discomfort is not the same as contention. Confrontation is not always contention. Naming what is broken is not the same as delighting in brokenness. In fact, sometimes naming what is broken is an act of love.

The Lord Himself names blindness, hypocrisy, neglect, and hard-heartedness. He does so not because He despises His people, but because He loves them enough to call them back to reality.

A covenant people should be able to receive holy seeing without immediately labeling it disloyal. Sometimes sorrow is evidence that love remains. Sometimes grief is what remains when sacred things have been wounded but not abandoned. Sometimes lamentation is the language of faith when praise alone would be dishonest.

Conclusion

A cry for help inside the Church may not look like a person walking away. It may look like a person still sitting among us, still serving among us, still believing among us, while quietly becoming less whole.

If such cries are missed long enough, a culture may become trained in blindness. It may become a place where suffering must either remain hidden or become disruptive before it is taken seriously. It may preserve order while losing tenderness. It may speak of unity while failing to mourn. It may sound faithful while becoming less like Christ.

The remedy is not softer doctrine. It is deeper discipleship.

It is leaders and members praying for eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand, and courage to act. It is a renewed willingness to bear one another's burdens, mourn with those that mourn, comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and stand as witnesses of God in both senses of the word: witnessing of Him, and witnessing truthfully what is happening among His people.

Seeing is a burden. But it is also a gift.

And when consecrated to Christ, it becomes a holy witness - not merely against blindness, but for healing; not merely against neglect, but for covenant faithfulness; not merely against the culture as it is, but for Zion as it must become.

Because the Church should be the very place where a soul can say, "I am not whole," and not be treated as a threat. The fold of God must be more than a place where sheep are counted.

It must be a place where the wounded are seen.