

## A Molting Season for Many in Ministry

### *Jack and Trisha Frost*

We want to share with you about some interesting observations drawn from conversations with several international leaders, who have been in ministry for many years. They shared with us that they have never before seen so much marital crisis, pain, and betrayal in ministry. We, too, are alarmed at the number of ministers with whom we are talking who are in pastoral burnout, marital, moral, or financial crisis, and/or experiencing increased strife and division among their church leadership or people.



So many are responding to the insecurity, pain, and despondency of the hour by seeking to become stronger through increased religious discipline and activity. Others seem to be growing weaker, realizing that there is nothing to comfort them during this season but Father's loving nature. Trisha and I believe that we, as many other ministers, are in a molting season. But this time we are not choosing to strengthen ourselves, but we are opting for weakness!

We identify with the molting eagle, described in similar accounts on several Christian ministries' websites, which enters into a season of molting in order to renew its strength. Molting eagles usually gather together with others in the same condition on some area of the mountain range where the sun shines all day upon them. Molting eagles' feathers fall out and they are unable to fly. Their vision weakens and they lose their ability to see. Calcium builds up on their beaks and they can hardly hold their heads up. They may scrape their beaks and talons off upon a rock. They lose their desire to eat because they prefer fresh kill. They take on a foul smelling odor. In their desperate state, molting eagles often peck on each other, occasionally killing another molting eagle.

Trisha and I are finding that the strength and inner fortitude that worked for us in daily life and ministry in the past and helped us to soar in the 80's and 90's are no longer sufficient and comforting today. Similarly, other ministers are feeling the insecurity of the hour, resulting in increased feelings of agitation, despondency, discouragement, loss of clarity or vision, an inability to feel any spiritual strength, feelings of failure in family or ministry life, and/or a loss of self confidence in ministry. Some are responding with increased religious striving, believing that somehow through their gifts, talents, position, or human effort, they can regain what they feel they have lost. In many, this is leading to spiritual burnout. Recently, as I asked about 300 people (many were ministers) if they felt they were in the midst of molting season, almost 50% raised their hands. How about you?

In the past, Trisha and I sought to strengthen ourselves. But in this molting season, we are choosing weakness in order to expose anything that has its identity in our youthful zeal and passions and that is not rooted and grounded in God's love. It is no longer sufficient for us to minister out of self-reliance, independence, intellectual

understanding, position, or anointing. We are being depleted from our strength being found in anything of ourselves and are becoming more desperately aware of our need for deeper intimacy with each other. We feel that we are being made weak so Father's love and strength can be perfected and released more freely within us. (See Isaiah 40:27-31; 2 Corinthians 12:9; John 5:19-20)

## **Being Fed during Times of Weakness**

Molting eagles would starve to death if not for the older eagles that fly in and drop them fresh kill to eat. Younger eagles do not do this. Only those who themselves have been through a molting season and know what others are experiencing. It is in this season that Trisha's and my independence is being exposed and we are being made aware of our need for deeper relationships with others. Our ministry is to flow from interdependence that is the fruit of open, caring, and supportive relationships. We thank God for the senior eagles (spiritual fathers and mothers) with whom we are in relationship that are comforting and feeding us during this season of transition. We need them more than ever before so that our strength can be renewed and so that we are further prepared in our spirits and marriage to minister to the nations from the comfort that we are receiving during our time of need!

It was Andrew Murray who said, "Humility before God is measured by humility before man!" Interdependent relationships are not possible without humility: a willingness to be known for who we really are. With the increased visibility, Trisha and I are being reinforced by God that our ministry is to flow out of intimacy with Him that is best demonstrated by the humility and honor we express to one another and toward others.

For those who have never experienced a molting season, it is impossible to understand what many of us in ministry are going through right now. You may be tempted to ignore our need, as younger eagles often do. Some that are going through this season may be tempted to peck and accuse those around them who are experiencing similar trials, aggravations, and discomforts instead of seeking to encourage one another. Presently, Trisha's and my biggest challenge is to not peck on each other during our molting season as we move from death into new life.

For many years, I prided myself upon how strong a man I was. Growing up in an alcoholic home that ended in divorce, I learned to survive and not to let pain and insecurity get to me. Then I learned to be strong and self-reliant as a commercial fishing boat captain who survived many storms at sea on a 44' boat with winds up to 70 MPH and seas 30' high. I carried that inner strength, self-reliance, and fortitude into my marriage, Christian walk, and ministry. I thought that I had to appear strong and wise and without needs in order to be respected by others. Then in the 90's, personal crisis helped me realize that when I fellowship with others around my strengths, I compete with others. It is only when we fellowship with each other around our weaknesses, that we complete each other.

## **Love That Finds Me in My Weakness**

It has been our friend, Ed Piorek, who has helped us understand that, "In our strength, it is difficult to find God's love; but in our weakness, Father's love finds us!" Jesus made it so clear that we find the Kingdom when we have nothing in ourselves - when we have no self-assertion, a lowly heart, and when we recognize our need for comfort

(see Matthew 5:3-5). It has been difficult for Trisha and me to find the Kingdom when we have needed to appear wise and sought to hide behind religious intellectualism and aggressive striving, acknowledging no need. God's love is now finding us as we seek to dwell in a place of simplicity, innocence, and a willingness to be known for who we really are (see Matthew 11:25 -30). Perhaps that is why Trisha and I have had to go through several molting seasons. The inner strength of our youthful years, our religious indoctrination, and learning to rely upon our gifts, survival techniques, and religious discipline have made it difficult for us to choose weakness and a deeper dependency upon others over what we ourselves are capable of doing.

These are some lessons we have learned when love has found us in our weakness. Perhaps they will help you, also:

God's love finds us during our weakest and most embarrassing hour (see Luke 15:17 - 20)

God's grace (ability) frees us from self-sufficiency and self-reliance (see 1 Peter 5:5-7)

God's wisdom follows after us and guards us in times of persecution (see Proverbs 2:10 -12)

God's provision feeds us when we are too weak to feed ourselves (see 1 Kings 19:1-8; 2 Kings 4:1-7)

God's rest floods over us during times of crisis and tribulation (see Romans 8:31 -39)

God's compassion fills us for others who are in need of grace and mercy (see Luke 23:39 -43)

God's power flows through us and strengthens us in our weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

## **Positioning Ourselves during Times of Weakness**

Below are a few practical things that have helped Trisha and me experience God's comfort during molting seasons so that later on we are able to comfort others during their time of need (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We are not talking here about acts performed, but a positioning of our hearts.

1. We seek to trust in Father's loving nature and not the present circumstances. It is Graham Cooke who often says, "We may not know what God is doing but we can always know what He is like." What God is doing changes as often as the seasons, but His loving nature never changes. God is always good and everything He does is because His love is always seeking to draw us more deeply into His presence. For Trisha and me, the way has often been through the wilderness where we become more sensitive to our need for Him and He then increases His fruitfulness in our lives. (See Exodus 33:13-34:7; Hosea 2:14-15; John 15:1-5)

2. We seek to make hourly choices to refrain from pecking on each other and those who may be in a molting season and who in that moment may not smell too good themselves. We realize that many are also going through increased agitations, feelings of insecurity, no sense of comfort, and a loss of vision. Molting seasons can be very destructive for all involved if we do not respond with humility and grace to others who

do not understand our condition or those who are experiencing a similar transitional crisis. (1 Peter 3:8-11)

3. We seek to spend time soaking in the Son. During molting seasons we have often found it difficult to even pray or have any sense that God exists. The Word at times seems completely lifeless and appears to offer no encouragement. Therefore, we seek to increase time spent in solitude, silently waiting upon Him and being content with knowing that God has not left nor forsaken us. We've not lost our salvation. God is not ashamed of us. He is not condemning us. We seek to be still and play gentle music about God's loving nature or meditate upon one verse that is a comfort to us. (See Isaiah 40:31; Hebrews 2:11 ; 11:16 ; 13:5; John 5:22; John 3:16-18; John 12:47-48; Roman 8:1, 31-39)

4. We seek out senior eagles and close friends that have experienced this season before. They have fresh food for us that younger eagles cannot provide. We would not have made it through these seasons without opening our hearts to receive spiritual mothers and fathers and searching out those who have tread the path of the "valley of weeping" before us and learned to make it a spring where others may follow and drink. (See Psalm 84; Corinthians 4:14-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

5. We seek to take time off from ministering to others and enter into a season of receiving. It often takes as long as a month of doing no ministry at all to clear the fog and to cease striving so that we can reconnect with God from the posture of being a little boy or girl instead of one who spends our life being the answer for everyone else's need. We try to take four weeks off from any ministry at the end of each year just to be normal and to cease from helping God manage the universe. Even as I am writing, Trisha is away from all responsibility attending a month-long Leaders School of Ministry so that she may be renewed in spirit. We recommend it highly to anyone in ministry. You can find information on that school at [www.tacf.org](http://www.tacf.org). You can also go to our website and find information on our month-long school in January ([www.shilohplace.org](http://www.shilohplace.org)). (See Psalm 46:10; Matthew 18:3-4)

6. We have also found the devotional books, The Spiritual Guide, by Michael Molinos, and The Seeking Heart, by Fenelon, to be helpful during seasons of weakness.

In recent years, experience has taught us that the more inadequate we feel, the more we deny ourselves and become dependent upon God's grace (ability) within us. High profile in ministry, people's unrealistic expectations of us, and stepping into a realm of spiritual authority that we did not seek or feel prepared for has often left us feeling like we have been dropped from a boat 100 miles from shore with no hope of finding home in our own strength. This has been depleting us of our self-sufficiency and is making us more dependent upon God's loving nature and upon others being called alongside of us to help us fulfill what God is calling us to do. Our independence is being displaced by interdependence - our strength being displaced by weakness so that His power is perfected within. The result: greater fruitfulness of lives being impacted in the nations than we could have ever imagined before. What an adventure! Every day now creates new opportunities for God to miraculously meet our need and to reveal to us what an awesomely good Father He is! This is His plan for any of you who are also in this season of molting. In our weakness, His love is finding us, and releasing greater measures of His healing to the nations!

In Father's love,

Jack & Trisha Frost

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