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An Example of Faithful Ministry:
Rev. Mark and Arleta Baker

Cal Ripken, Jr. played 21 seasons and had a career batting average of .276. He played some third base but mostly played shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles from 1981 to 2001. During his career he won two gold gloves. However, his greatest achievement is playing 2,632 consecutive games. Surpassing Lou Gehrig's consecutive game total of 2,130. ([Cal Ripken Jr. - Wikipedia](#))

We have witnessed a similar "Iron Man" streak here in Davenport, Iowa. Our pastor is Mark Alan Baker. A small Bible study was formed into a church, back in the sixties, and in 1972 this new church, Berean Baptist, called a young man and his wife Arleta to Davenport, Iowa from Dallas Theological Seminary. They began their ministry, the first Sunday in July of that year (July 4, 1972). Since that Sunday they've continued to serve here at Berean. "The Streak" continues today as Pastor Mark has not missed a message on Sunday, except for vacations for almost fifty years!

Cal Ripken's father previously played for the Baltimore Orioles. Similarly, Pastor Mark's father, Robert Baker was a pastoral example. Mark's father pastored churches here in Iowa: Calvary Baptist Church, Union, then Nevada Baptist Church, then Grace Baptist,

Harlan, and finally “retired” to Florida to pastor Gulf Coast Baptist, Pensacola, Florida. Robert and Marjorie Baker served the Lord faithfully and instilled hard working, sacrificial qualities in Mark as well. To quote the elder Pastor Baker, “the key to ministry is, “In the Word and with the People.”

The Lord has called His servants to be faithful to the calling (Matthew 25) with the anticipation of hearing the words of our Lord “Well done...!” Like a baseball streak there is a lot of training, skill, playing through pain, toughness, joy, study, sacrifice, commitment, and team work to make this happen. Mark and Arleta continue to minister faithfully through all the wins and losses that each season brings.

The Apostle Peter, as he ends his first epistle closes with a chapter to his fellow major leaguers and then concludes with some encouragement to the minor league players. I have seen these qualities in Mark and Arleta Baker through the years. The Apostle Peter, in his first epistle, emphasizes a few of these positions and skills that are needed for a long, faithful ministry.

SPIRITUALLY SEASONED - I Peter 5:1 (NKJV) “To the elders among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder...” Peter addresses these leaders as a “fellow elder.” Even as an apostle he humbles himself and begins with the leadership term connecting with them in ministry. Even so, the term “elder” does imply maturity. This is a special maturity or experience in spiritual matters. The Apostle Peter knows what they are going through.

He identifies with their position in the community of believers. Elders are like a player/coach. Peter also knows the past as a “witness of Christ’s sufferings” and the future to “share in the glory to be revealed.” Great leaders understand the necessity of suffering but keep their eyes on the goal. Great leaders also have a partnership in the ministry with other elders. Through the years the fellowship of other pastors from sister churches in the GARBC, Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois have been a great encouragement.

SERVING SHEPHERDS – I Peter 5:2-4 (NKJV) “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...” Every morning of every day, 24/7, 365, year after year, you are called to Shepherd! It’s your calling, your identity, your vocation! The rest of your life you will be a Shepherd! When you’re sick, tired, exhausted, frustrated, angry, whatever, you are to “Be a shepherd of God’s flock...” Please notice that it is not your flock but His! He is the Chief Shepherd (v. 4) you are an under-shepherd. He has entrusted His flock to “your care.” One side point here, you don’t get to pick your flock either. Notice it says “which is among you.” Whoever, He has chosen to be in this flock is who you are to care for. Mark and Arleta care for all those who come across their way. Many times, they’ve been taken advantage of because of their love and sacrifice. They’ve taken people into their homes or found places for the wandering ones to rest. He still visits in the jails and is called by those who are on the streets for a ride or help. The line between helping and enabling is hard to judge but they have always erred on the side of grace. Yes, they leave the ninety-nine as good shepherds often do.

SPECIAL SUPERVISION – I Peter 5:2 (NKJV) “Serving as overseers...” implies a responsibility for the administration and details of all the various ministries. These “must” things are done willingly, “not by compulsion but willingly.” It takes a special person to be detailed oriented with gracious oversight of all the delegated tasks that make the ministry function day to day. The implication seems to be that of a coach, director, or CEO. This characteristic seems to have the most pressure attached to it because it works with people dealing with all the details. And with God’s grace and wisdom you deal with the “musts” because you are willing. Whatever it is!

Mark and Arleta have been leading through all the changes that have happened through the years. Their wisdom and gracious tenacity have led the church through up-grades in technology, building projects, remodeling areas, property upgrades and much more. And the Lord has provided for each phase and the church is debt-free!

SATISFIED SERVANTHOOD – I Peter 5:2b-3 (NKJV) It is interesting at this point that Peter includes two negative admonitions, two side-bar “not” statements that are very important. I’m sure Peter saw and experienced two contrasting character flaws in those that serve in ministry.

The first is “dishonest gain” or greed. Ministry is not one of the top-paying occupations. In fact, in most churches if it were to be analyzed a pastor’s pay by the hour; it would be at or just above minimum wage. History also records pastors who are “successful” and

get paid rich salaries that it is just a matter of time before corruption is discovered and they must resign. The apostle Paul said he had to learn to be “content.” So, Peter makes this his first warning. Then Peter gives the solution “but eagerly” to serve. Time after time God promises to provide for those who, as Matthew 6:33 says, put God first, “and all these things will be give to you as well.” Being satisfied is really a matter of trust and putting God first by continuing to “eagerly” serve.

Next is the issue of “being lords over those entrusted to you.” I think pastors want to honor God and be successful by having their church and ministries grow numerically. In fact, some of those that serve want it so badly that they try to make it happen. The “lording” has a shadow of the “Lord” but without Him. Sometimes this takes on the form of manipulation, control, deception, anger and complaining to get their way. Even in this little phrase Peter reminds them of the principle that the people you are “lording” don’t belong to you. They are “entrusted to you” as stated previously. It’s easy to forget! The cure of course is to be “examples to the flock.” You don’t force people, you lead them. Are you willing to do the humblest tasks yourself? “Lording” is proof that you are far from the Lord. Jesus was the perfect example for us of a servant-leader.

Mark and Arleta still live in the same home, not far from the church, in which they raised their four children. Through the years, there have been lean times, when offerings were very small and no salary was taken so church bills could be paid. Personal salaries sacrificed so other staff members could be paid. They have an unwavering faith that God will provide. He always does and He always has. They can testify to that this truth.

At this point I would like to remind everyone that “Satisfied Servanthood” is really trusting the Sovereignty of God. Your church or ministry may never grow huge or be “successful” in the eyes of the world. “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who make things grow.” (I Corinthians 3:7) It’s Him that we are to be faithful too.

SHEPHERDS SHARING - I Peter 5:4 (NKJV) “And when the Chief Shepherd appears...” Christ, the Chief Shepherd, is “the True Shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:11-16), “the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14) and “the Great Shepherd” (Hebrews 13:20). When Christ returns, His faithful under-shepherds will share in His glory (I Peter 5:1) and receive unfading crowns (cf. 1:4)” (Bible Knowledge Commentary, pg. 856). And then... whether Christ returns, or a minister goes to his final reward...he finally gets to rest and rejoice! And this crown “will never fade away.” What a promise!

Until then, the game continues. They keep playing and training until the Chief Shepherd says the game is over. Ministry continues; people are being saved, baptized and joining the church. Also, people are growing in the Lord and returning to the Lord. Through this many years of ministry, as you would expect, the seed of God’s word has been spread widely in our community. Some seed is just beginning to sprout as people from years past suddenly begin to return.

The mayor of Davenport, Iowa showed up at the church during Mark and Arleta's 50th wedding anniversary with a proclamation from the city making May 26, 2018 "Mark and Arleta Baker Day". A vibrant, growing church makes a difference in a community. As expected, they were humbled and deserving of this honor. And someday, in another city, they will share in the ultimate honor.

SUBMISSIVE SECOND-STRING – I Peter 5:5-9 (NKJV) "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders." And "be clothed with humility" toward one another, because, "God resists the proud but give grace to the humble."

If you are on the same team, you wear the same uniform. Across the chest is the word HUMILITY. Play the best you can at the position you are assigned.

If you were to practice ministry every day with Mark and Arleta you would develop humility, see God's mighty hand, learn to cast all your anxiety, be self-controlled, learn to resist the devil, stand firm, recognize others who are suffering too.

SEASONS SUMMARIZED – I Peter 5:10-11 (NKJV) The Apostle Peter, concludes with a short paragraph of promise for all the shepherds on His team who have been serving well. He writes in verses 10-11, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The baseball World Series does not compare with “eternal glory.” Nothing on earth can compare! Peter had just written previously (4:13), “but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

Berean Baptist Church, Davenport, Iowa will be celebrating Mark and Arleta Baker’s fifty years of ministry with a special service on June 5, 2022. We hope they will be “glad with exceeding joy” as we celebrate this milestone in ministry. And they are not retiring. The streak continues!