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Ministry Leaders with Spiritual Friends: Retrieving the Great Tradition's Wealth for NextGen Church Leaders

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**Ministry Leaders with Spiritual Friends:
Retrieving the Great Tradition’s Wealth for NextGen Church Leaders**
Capstone Senior Trip, Chicago, IL
Rev. Dr. Hank Voss

“Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. . . and Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”
I Samuel 18:1-3 (c. 1000 BC)

“You and I are here, and I hope that Christ is between us as a third.”
Aelred (c. 1167 AD)

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- a) A unique contextual issue to the present generation might be the way social media and cell phones are changing how youth pastors address addiction, sin, and grace
- b) A perennial pastoral problem might look like that same youth pastor addressing issues of identity, loneliness, friendship, and community with the teens she shepherds.

B. Retrieval of Spiritual Classics Provides a Way Forward for Congregational Leaders Working Among the Poor

1. Historically, leaders like John Wesley (d. 1791), Elizabeth Fry (d. 1845), C.S. Lewis, and A.W. Tozer have used spiritual classics as a way to address both unique contextual issues and perennial pastoral problems.
2. Jim Houston provides a contemporary example. He uses Julianne of Norwich as a resource relating to God's Love when working with victims of sexual abuse. This semester I have found this text helpful in that regard as well.
3. Aelred provides an example of both a pastor theologian who used spiritual classics and of a spiritual classic which can be used today to help Christian leaders understand spiritual friendship.

II. AELRED AS MODEL FOR PASTOR-THEOLOGIANS AMONG THE POOR

Aelred's spiritual classic, *Spiritual Friendship*, has helped thousands of pastors over dozens of cultures and across many centuries to thrive in Christian leadership while serving in challenging ministry settings. One reason for the fruitfulness of Aelred's work over the centuries is that it is a well-balanced text addressing four areas: reason, Scripture, Christian tradition, and personal experience.

A. Wisdom from Creation: Reason and Cicero

1. Cicero's work on Friendship represents some of the best thinking on Friendship that human reason can deduce. It displays the common grace found in Creation. Aelred begins his text with serious engagement with this creation wisdom.
2. He discusses Cicero's definition of friendship at four different places in *SF*, the threefold structure of the book echoes Cicero's structure, and he cites Cicero some 96 times in a relatively short text.

B. Wisdom from Scripture

1. Scripture is Aelred's "Mirror." It is the source and measure of all understandings of true friendship.

3. **Can One Become a Friend Without Loving Oneself?** No. One must also know oneself if one wishes to know God. the limit of self-knowledge is your limit of God-knowledge.
4. **Can One Love God Without Loving a Friend?** No. Your love for a friend is also the limit of your love for a friend, and vice-versa.
5. **A Pastor Must Love Everyone in His Congregation, but Must a Pastor Like Everyone in His Congregation?**
 - Aelred teach us that we must understand the difference between Christ's command to love (*agape*) everyone, even our enemies, and the way Christ entrusted his innermost soul to a select few—namely John, the three, the twelve, and his inner circle of disciples (including women).
 - He would teach us that we must love everyone, but choose very wisely and carefully our friends.

B. Imagining a Christian Vision for Same-Sex Friendships

1. Covenant Same Sex Friendships

David and Jonathan provide a case study of what covenant same-sex friendships among Christian Leaders can look like.

2. Faithful Christian Friendships Between Same-Sex Attracted Friends

Christian leaders desperately need a positive vision of same-sex friendships when they or those they pastor experience same-sex attraction.

A resource here is Wesley Hill's text *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Brazos, 2015) and the group that blogs with Hill at the website of the same name.

C. Imagining a Christian Vision for Cross-Sex Friendships

1. Christian Marriage as Covenant Friendship

Aelred cites both Adam and Eve and Ruth and Boaz as examples of spiritual friendship. The description of spiritual friendship is a model relevant to all Christian marriages and an antidote to the cultural poison much of the North American church has imbibed in relation to Christian Marriage. One contemporary writer who develops this theme is Paul Stevens in his *Marriage Spirituality* (Regent University Press).

2. Faithful Christian Friendship Between the Sexes as Evidence of God's Kingdom Come on Earth