Containers, We Are

This reading could be utilized as a solo reading, duet, or group reading.

Reader 1: “For we do not preach ourselves.”

Reader 2: We don’t strut our talents.

Reader 1: We don’t flaunt our riches.

Reader 2: We don’t tout our strategy.

Reader 1: We don’t sell our style.

Reader 2: We don’t rely on our wisdom.

Reader 1: We preach “Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves” as the 21st-century representatives of Christ.

Reader 2: Anything more is tainted;

Reader 1: anything less is obsolete,

Reader 2: We speak Jesus into the darkness of a lost, chaotic world.

Reader 1: “For God, who said,”

Reader 2: “‘Let light shine out of darkness.’”

Reader 1: That same God “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Reader 2: So who are we?

Reader 1: We are the containers:

Reader 2: we are the tank,

Reader 1: we are the glass,

Reader 2: we are the bowl.

Reader 1: We have our cracks;

Reader 2: we have our imperfections;

Reader 1: we have our nicks.

Reader 2: Where is our value?

Reader 1: Where is our worth?

Reader 2: Where is our glory?

Reader 1: Look inside our hearts?

Reader 2: If you see Christ at work,

Reader 1: if you hear the sound,

Reader 2: if you feel the beat,

Reader 1: if you see the shine of Christ,

Reader 2: you've seen our glory.

Reader 1: "We have this treasure in jars of clay"

Reader 2: "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

Reader 1: We don't boast in anything outside of Christ.

Reader 2: How foolish,

Reader 1: how unthinkable,

Reader 2: to claim that we are anything outside of Christ.

Reader 1: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed."

Reader 2: Who can crush the power of God?

Reader 1: We are perplexed from time to time:

Reader 2: we doubt,

Reader 1: we disappoint,

Reader 2: we fail,

Reader 1: we have skinned knees

Reader 2: and calloused hands.

Reader 1: We run into our share of walls, obstacles, and predicaments:

Reader 2: “perplexed, but not in despair”;

Reader 1: down, but not out;

Reader 2: “persecuted, but not abandoned”;

Reader 1: “struck down, but not destroyed.”

Reader 2: Because we are vessels of God’s glory.

Reader 1: So, it’s OK if I fail.

Reader 2: If we speak the truth, and no one accepts it.

Reader 1: If we run through the fire, and we are left without a friend.

Reader 2: If we are far from the applause of our peers and families.

Reader 1: If no one sees a thing we do for Christ,

Reader 2: it doesn’t matter.

Reader 1: We don’t have to obsess over how we look,

Reader 2: what we accomplish,

Reader 1: where we are sent.

Reader 2: The only thing that matters, at the end of the race, is what we carry, and into whose arms we fall when we gasp our last breath and cross the finish line.

Reader 1: As long as “we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,”

Reader 2: “so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

Reader 1: We are infinitely more than what we could be on our own.

Reader 2: “For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.”

Reader 1: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away.”

Reader 2: The sands of time keep pouring down.

Both: “Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

Reader 2: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

Reader 1: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.”

Reader 2: “For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Reader 1: The glory of Jesus Christ.

Reader 2: The passion of the call.

Reader 1: The freedom of His grace:

Reader 2: His time,

Reader 1: His plan,

Reader 2: His heart,

Reader 1: His home.

Reader 2: So what do you say, oh jars of clay?

Reader 1: Let’s pop off the lid and let His power flood every corner of our souls.

Reader 2: It’s not a cakewalk,

Reader 1: but it’s not a funeral dirge, either.

Reader 2: It is eternal.

Reader 1: It is thrilling.

Reader 2: It is the real thing.

Reader 1: It is beyond us.

Reader 2: It is through us.

Reader 1: It is for us.

Reader 2: It is before us.

Reader 1: So open wide every chapter of today;

Reader 2: open the windows

Reader 1: and fasten your seat belts.

Reader 2: You contain the heart,

Reader 1: the DNA,

Both: the mind of the everlasting Champion!

A Day in the Life of a Friend

This is a light sketch on prayer.
Kristi: Oh, dear friend. I love You! I love You! I love You! You have been so, so good to me. Love You! Love You! Love You! I'm alive! I'm alive! I'm alive! And I love, love, love You!

The Friend: Thanks, I love you, too, and I was…

Kristi: I'm so glad You're my friend. You are such a sweet friend.

The Friend: OK, but I thought maybe we could…

Kristi: How do I love Thee? Let me count the ways!

The Friend: I just thought maybe we could have some time together to talk about…

Kristi: I lift my voice to honor You, O great and wonderful friend.

The Friend: How are you doing? I noticed you've been struggling in several different relationships and…

Kristi: You are above it all! *(looks at her watch)* Oops! I have to be going.

(Kristi exits. Erin enters, then notices the friend.)

Erin: Oh, Hi! Hey that reminds me. I had a couple of things I need to talk with You about "like my finances. Do You think You could get me that raise they've been dangling over my head for the past two years? My sis- ter is freaked out over her marriage. Jim's driving her nuts, and they might get divorced.

The Friend: I see, but I wanted to…

Erin: And I have a crick in my neck. Could You work on that for me? And the missionar- ies…I hear they need some help.

The Friend: Which ones?

Erin: All of them. Right? Oh, there's my cell phone. *(talking on the phone as she exits)* Oh, Hi Joe, I'm glad you called back. I'm bored stiff with you out of town. Let me catch you up on what's going on in my life.

(Erin exits. Carly enters.)

Carly: OK. Here it goes. I don't have much to talk about. Just the same old same old. I only have a few seconds before I need to get back to work. It's important stuff I'm dealing with today, so make it snappy. Anything? I'm wait- ing. Good. Hopefully we can meet again tomorrow.

(Carly exits. Jerry enters.)

The Friend: *(to audience)* Now there was a girl with an agenda.

Jerry: Hi. It's me. Here's my list: new tires better job help Bob heal toe Aunt Tabitha and her spleen the weather our preacher good grades for Michael all the third world countries, and the stock market

The Friend: But I need to talk to you about something that's…

Jerry: Hold on. Let me check my list. Did I mention heal toe?

The Friend: Yes. I heard that one.

Jerry: That's the right big toe "some kind of wart thingy.

The Friend: I'll see what I can do. *(Jerry exits. Pat enters.)*

Pat: Oh, Thou my friend of all friends. Thee whose holiness and righteous bulwarks are thus numerous upon Thy earthen sod. Wilt Thou, as the great being of my life, giveth grace to all who need Thee. And causeth all sundry blessing to fall before

Thy throne.

The Friend: Say what?

Pat: Amen and Amen.

The Friend: *(to audience)* That’s Greek for over and out. *(to Pat)* Is that all?

Pat: Yes, quite. *(Pat exits.)*

The Friend: Good. Have a nice day. *(Karie enters)*

Karie: Good morning. It’s me again. I have so much I need to tell You! Can You come with me?

The Friend: *(to audience)* Finally. *(to Karie)* I thought you’d never ask. Let’s go.

Farewell, My Son

(A fun back-to-school sketch.)

Wife: Don’t forget to email us from school, son.

Husband: We love you!

Wife: Keep your head on straight.

Husband: That’s right. Use your head.

Wife: Honey, I’m concerned about him. We’ve invested so much of ourselves in training him, and now he’s going away.

Husband: I know. It saddens me, too.

Wife: There are just so many questions. Did we buy him the right computer?

Husband: I did lots of research, and I think he'll be competitive.

Wife: What about food? What if he doesn't have enough to eat?

Husband: He has our credit card.

Wife: Oh, right. I forgot. (pausing, still looking into the distance) What about his clothes?Students these days are so fashion conscious. I don't want him to feel ridiculed because he doesn't have the latest look.

Husband: And there are so many other issues, deeper issues: evolution, sexual orientation, situational ethics, racism, atheism, and the occult.

Wife: Do you think we're wrong by not insisting that he choose a Christian school?

Husband: No. He's spreading his wings. If that school is where he's comfortable, we really need to back off and hope for the best. We've got to face the fact that, with every passing day, the empty nest is getting to be more of a reality.

Wife: I know, but it doesn't make it any easier.

Husband: True.

Wife: Well, what are we going to do now, until he returns? I can't handle this, Jack.

Husband: Honey, kindergarten ends at noon. We'll see him before you know it.

A Shepherd’s Portrait

Actor #1: “The Lord is my shepherd,” David writes.

Actor #2: But what kind of shepherd is God? Through the years we have asked this question.

Actor #1: The deceiver has painted many portraits of God as shepherd. Perhaps you have one hidden away in the gallery of your psyche. Here are a few:

Actor #2: Imposter #1—

Actor #1: The dictator is my shepherd I shall not want. He leadeth me with his booming voice—

Actor #2: “You foolish creation! How dare you wander away from the flock. You are in trouble, big time! You hear me? Big time! Have I not told you time and time again to be good or else! And wipe that smile off your face. Grow up! Take your vitamins. Stand up straight. You’ll never measure up. What? Now you’re crying! Oh great . . . that’s just great. Stop crying before I give you something to cry about. I can’t believe how insolent you are. You are driving me crazy!”

Actor #1: After this long litany of complaints He grabs you by your wool sweater collar and his eyes bug out.

Actor #2: “You ought to be grateful that I didn’t kick you into the next century. I’m going to count to ten and if you don’t get back into the fold you are history!! 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9- BOOM!”

Actor #1: Lost Relationships

Actor #2: Boom!

Actor #1: Failure

Actor #2: Boom!

Actor #1: Financial problems

Actor #2: Boom!

Actor #1: Depression

Both: Boom!

Actor #2: Imposter #2- The preoccupied one is my shepherd I shall notwant. He leadeth me as soon as He gets off hold.

Actor #1: "Greetings woolen ones!"

Actor #2: "Hi! This is Joe Lamb?" you say. But then you realize its not really him.

Actor #1: "You've reached the shepherd voice messaging system. Thank you for calling. Sorry I'm not in right now. I'm either listening to someone else's bleating or in a meeting. Please feel free to use our automated information system.

If you have a financial need Press 1.

If you are ill press 2.

If you would like to make a request on someone's behalf press 3.

If you wish to report any mad cows press 4,

If you are calling about being attacked by wolves press 5.

And if you are lost please hold and someone will be with you shortly.

Due to the fact that this is a heavy calling period, actual 'on hold time' is four to five days. Response time may vary. We are sorry for the inconvenience. For quicker response visit our web site at:

Actor #2: WWW.Lost sheep @ wilderness/lambscape.http/baabaa.Blacksheep/hoofbeat//rod-

Actor #1: Imposter #3—The “all knowing cynical one” is my shepherd, I shall not want, his pout and rolling eyes they doubt me.

Actor #2: I knew this would happen. I really did. I can’t trust you, can I? You could be like the others. But noooooooooo! You got lost again. Hmmmm. What a shame. Yes shame. Shame on you! Shame, shame, shame, shame. Now am I going to have to put you in the corner of the pin.

Actor #1: Imposter #4— The judge is my shepherd I shall not want.

Actor #2: He leads me into sheep qualification trails

Actor #1: “Oh . . . you again. Yeah, sure I’ll be your shepherd. Are you ready to try again? Remember all you need to do is jump through these three hoops. Then I’ll be your shepherd. If my sheep dog can do it, you can too.”

Actor #2: “But my left front leg is broken and I’m not that fast,” you explain.

Actor #1: “Oh that’s too bad. You’d make a great member of the flock if you would stop making excuses and set aside your personal problems. I run a tight ship and if it is too hot, well then by golly, get out of the kitchen!”

Actor #2: And there are many other shepherds.

Actor #1: But there is only one Good Shepherd.

Actor #2: He’s not the ogre waiting for us to forget to floss so He can swat us with his golden fly swatter.

Actor #1: He’s not a passive god who sits around drumming his fingers on the throne, watching CNN for the latest on world-sized problems while yawning at our infinitesimal requests.

All: That’s not who God is.

Actor #2: The Good Shepherd is walking through the wilderness at nightfall.

Actor #1: His hands are calloused and wounded from caring for His sheep.

Actor #2: He calls out to His lost sheep.

Actor #1: But not a generic, “Hey-sheep-here-I-am call.”

Actor #2: He calls each by name.

Actor #1: As as He does, He weeps because He knows their pain.

Actor #2: He’s not a shepherd who screams,

Actor #1: or shames,

Actor #2: or kicks us back to the fold.

Actor #1: He calls us.

Actor #2: He finds us.

Actor #1: And He picks us up and carries us back home.

Actor #2: That is who God is,

Both: the Good Shepherd.

The Birth and Crucifixion of Christ

A scripture reading that works well for Christmas or Easter.

Scriptures: *Luke 2:6-14; 23:43; Mark 15:12-32; John 19:30*

Reader 1: So it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

Reader 2: And Pilate answered them, What shall I do with this man you call King of the Jews? And they cried out, Crucify Him!

Reader 1: And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Reader 2: And they clothed Him in purple and fashioned a crown of thorns about His head.

Reader 1: And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Reader 2: And they smote Him on the head with a reed and did spit upon Him, and bowing knees, worshiped Him.

Reader 1: And the angel said unto them, fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be to all people.

Reader 2: And Jesus said unto him, truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.

Reader 1: For unto you is born in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.

Reader 2: Likewise, the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, let this Christ King descend from the cross that we may see and believe. When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished. He bowed His head and He died.

Reader 1: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace . . .

Declarations for Every Day

- ***Today*— I'll live a life of celebration.** The brooding life is not holy. To many, it might look holy but a grave-digger and skeptic do not a Kingdom make.
- ***Today*— I'll simplify to remove distractions.** Our inability to hear God is directly linked to the static of modern life. It's perhaps the greatest plague of the church. We are uncomfortable with silence. The things we place before our eyes, the multitude of messages we receive on a daily basis, even the food that we eat potentially blocks our reception of God's voice. We often expel the voice of God through texts, emails, Facebook, radio, TV, and music.
- ***Today*— I'll meditate on Holy Scripture.** Don't just read it. Become preoccupied with it! Stuff your self full of holy words and you'll see it bring a blessing of peace over your life because your eyes and ears are open to His Word.
- ***Today* I'll follow God's heart and not my own.** Keep in mind what God thinks of your heart: It is deceitful. Culture says, "Follow your heart." Please don't. It's a dead-end proposition. Discover the heart of God and follow His. Stop all self-promotion campaigns. We all involved in a throne battle. Ask yourself: "Who will I place on the throne of my life? To which king will I bow down?"
- ***Today* I'll clarify boundaries in my personal world**. The ability to hear God is directly related to our ability to say **no** to lots of things in your life- even a few

good things. We understand that we are not capable of doing everything for everybody. Your closest friends will not understand it. Some will be disappointed in you and others will think you are a prude, but celebrate your boundaries. If you understand the purpose you have been created to achieve, saying **NO** (sometimes in bold and all caps) is not just recommended, it is required.

- ***Today* I'll seek discernment regarding my day.** Every morning, ask for wisdom and courage. You need them both in order to discern the voice of Holy God and to do whatever He tells you to do.
- ***Today* I won't tolerate negativity.** If you find yourself surrounded by negative, whiney, sarcastic people, consider the architecture of you life and think about doing a little renovation.
- ***Today* I'll have faith in the process.** St. John of the Cross, an early church father coined the term: the dark midnight of the soul. "*The journey in Faith—the midnight of the soul when the light has all faded away and darkness has completely descended.*" He concludes that many Christ followers don't wish to endure the power of pain and tragedy that is necessary to pass through before the light shines again. An overriding theme of the Bible is that suffering is not simply to be experienced but celebrated. It produces a deeper intimacy with God.

No matter what the day brings, if I rest in these declarations, I will be safely set.

What Kind of Church is It?

We often categorize our churches with fancy titles: Relevant, emergent, classic, reformed, fundamentalist, traditional, contemporary, liturgical, purpose-driven etc… The list is really endless and the subtleties of each model vary. But what kind of church are we? Really…

- Some churches are more like a country club, complete with secret handshakes, special membership privileges, and perks for members based upon you seniority and attitude. ***But we are not called to be a Country Club.***
- Some churches are more like a fashion show where once a week we are concerned more about what the members look like on the outside than who we are on the inside. ***But we are not called to be a fashion show.***
- Some churches are like a spa where healthy people come to be pampered with a painless personality makeover and self-help rallies devoid of the power of God. They'd never think about service or sacrifice because the church is meant only for enrichment—not spiritual warfare. ***But we are not called to be a spa.***
- Other churches are like courtrooms full of authority and judgment. Stern faces and hushed whispers are prevalent. Some believe that these churches are holy because of the formal atmosphere and the lack of tolerance for things like laughter, celebration and dancing. These churches are dead they just haven't gotten the good grace to lie down. ***But we are not called to be a court.***
- And on the opposite side, we find the church of cool, where musicians display their gifts not to the glory of God but rather to the glory of themselves. The tendency toward outlandishness knows no bounds. They are different just for the sake of being different. Messages aren't centered on the God or the Bible. In fact, some sermons might cause you to wonder if there is really is

a point beyond the emotions and the glitz of atmosphere. What is the vibe? This is the main question in the church of the cool. ***But we are not called to be cool.***

- Each model apart from the work of Christ is like a cemetery. You can put flowers on the graves, you can have tea parties next to the tombs, you can pipe in the best music and serve the best meals but without Christ, the cemetery is still full of rot. ***But we are not called into death.***

So what about us? Are we any of these churches? For most churches, we've been all of these from time to time. That's why it is so important for us to be desperate and dependent upon God. Do we want to see people who are hurting and in need come to us for help or are we satisfied with self-serving religious organizations that offer risk-free comfort and predictability. We were made for much great things; things that accompany wonder, miracles, new life and transformation. How far are we willing to go? Who do we chose to exclude? Jesus is still knocking at the doors of churches promising that if anyone hears His voice and opens the door, He will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Let's invite people to the table through worship and become the kind of Church He desires to enter.
**Free use for sermon, bulletins, or websites.

Absalom (Contemporary Adaptation)

Actor mimes holding a baby in his arms, beaming with pride. He speaks to the audience.

This has to be the greatest moment of my life! And I got it all on videotape. The whole process was such a miracle. Michelle did great. *(to God)* Lord, how can I ever thank You

for this child I'm holding? I give him over to You. I promise I'm going to give 100 percent to the task of parenting. You can count on me. I never dreamed being a dad would be so satisfying. I feel complete. I promise I'll be twice the dad my father was to me. *(to himself)* He needs a strong biblical name: I think we'll call him Absalom.

Actor turns his back momentarily, then begins to speak to his son (not seen by audience) in an angry tone.

Absalom! How dare you defy me! You are going to be in hot water when we get home. No laughing or running in church! You are embarrassing the whole family! Can't you see that? You aren't a baby anymore! You are five years old! *(Suddenly turn his focus toward the unseen pastor. He suddenly transforms from anger to all smiles.)* Oh, hi Pastor Ted. Just talking to my boy. Yes, he sure is growing. We all enjoyed your message today.

Actor turns around again and has a seat in a chair. He pantomimes holding a phone to his ear.

I know it's the third night in a row, but this is what they pay me to do, Honey. I'm a manager now, and I think I have a good chance of becoming a vice president. *(Listens)* Well, you certainly enjoy the extra money, don't you. *(Listens)* That's not fair! Everything I do is for you and Absalom. I'll be home in an hour. Michelle? Michelle? *(He hangs up the phone and turns around.)*

When actor turns back around, he is pantomiming a repair.

Absalom, hand me that Phillips. Not the flathead, the Phillips screwdriver, son! How was youth camp? *(half listening, but focused mainly on the repair)* What's that? *(listening)* You want me to teach you what? To pray? I thought that's why our church hired a youth minister.

Actor turns, then faces the audience, stooped and older.

Lord, I know I promised I would give You my son. I meant to do that. I meant to take the time out of my schedule to really teach him. I guess I was so wrapped up in trying to make a living that I forgot. I thought if I gave him a lot of material things, you'd handle the spiritual. I was wrong. He's on the west coast now. I haven't seen him in two years. But, what hurts even more is that, even though he is distant from me, he's even more distant from You. "'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you.'" *(whispered)* "'Absalom, my son, my son!'"

Scripture: 2 Samuel 18:33

The 23rd

Based on Psalm 23. This could work in almost any worship experience between songs. Feel free to make it for whatever amount of readers you have.

Reader #1: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

Reader #2: He supplies everything that I need.

Reader #3: There is no void that He cannot fill.

Reader #4: No sickness He can't heal.

Reader #2: For He is my source.

Reader #1: He makes me lie down in green pastures,

Reader #2: I can rest because He is my security.

Reader #4: I can lie down in peace.

Reader #1: He leads me beside quiet waters,

Reader #3: As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for Him.

Reader #2: I drink from the fountain of living water.

Reader #4: It is a peace that the world cannot give.

Reader #3: He is my peace and my provider.

Reader #1: He restores my soul.

Reader #2: Often in times of heartache and disillusionment I've doubted Him. Some days I forget Him. And yet, He still cares for me.

Reader #1: He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Reader #3: He is my compass, He is my lighthouse, He is my Light and my Salvation. And the greatest mystery of all is this . . .

Reader #1: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me;

Reader #2: God is Emmanuel. He is with us.

Reader #1: Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Reader #4: I am comforted by Your discipline. I am being intimately led by a loving Shepherd.

Reader #1: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Reader #3: You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Reader #2: Surely goodness

Reader #1: and mercy

Reader #4: shall follow me

Reader #3: all the days

Reader #2: every day.

Reader #4: He shall not leave me or forsake me.

Reader #3: He will lead me to His kingdom at the moment I draw my last breath.

Reader #1: His word is true.

Reader #2: He is faithful.

All: All the days of my life.

Letting God Out of the Box

I’m always amazed how the church as a whole
is so quick to throw rocks at the sheep in the fold.
We question each other’s theology,
spar over worship philosophy.
We’ve got more fusses than one tongue can tell
while outside the world is going to hell.
We are driven by creeds, and motions, and clocks,
haven’t we learned not to put God in a box?
Would Jesus approve of our political labels
or would He come in and start busting up tables?
Does He tire of us telling Him what He should do,
what gender must teach, what strategy’s true?
Is the Bible the life source or inflexible judge?
Is the church a haven for sinners or a group with a grudge?
Do we think we can settle for boycotts and strife
instead of seeking the lost and giving dead people life?
What were we thinking when in front of the press?
we majored on minors choosing to curse and not bless.

I have to tell you from my point of view
I keep wondering what in the world Jesus would do.
Would He have us disputing which method is best,
or making transformation be our holy quest?
After all that’s what this journey’s about,
not who has more sheep or who has more clout.
I despise the reports of our ugly catfights.
I’m appalled by the task of reading sinners their rights.
When you preach condemnation, consider this fact,
they don’t know Jesus. How’d you expect them to act?
And please understand, I’m not where I should be.
When i’m pointing at you, I’m pointing at me.
There are times when i haven’t lived up to His Name,
when i’ve only the man in the mirror to blame.
But now is the time to reject the mask,
to heed the call, and get back to the task,
to burn the political, decaying façade
for an all out pursuit of our passionate God.
Let’s spend our time living meaningful lives
giving mercy to sinners not dangerous lies.
Let’s bear the cross and drop the rocks,
proclaim the good news and let God out of the box.