The Big Ass in the Road

Chris Staples 10 February 2025



I once heard a story about a man driving his car down a twisting, narrow, country road. As he approached a bend, a lady shouted at him from the side of the road, 'Big ass!' Angered by her rudeness, he immediately shouted back, 'Big ape!' He then turned the corner, and there lying in the middle of the road was a big, grey ass. Swerving to avoid the beast, the man crashed into a field and totally destroyed his car.

This story reminds me of a character in the Bible called Diotrephes, in the third letter of John, who also ignored warnings about the direction in which he was heading. It seems that Diotrephes was a leader or very influential member of the church. John calls attention to Diotrephes' refusal to heed his warnings, 'I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to put himself first, does not accept what we say and refuses to recognise my authority'[i] (3 John 9, AMP)

A critical point here is that Diotrephes was so self-absorbed that he would not accept what someone else said to him – even if that person was the very disciple who rested his head on the Saviour's chest and was an eye-witness to Jesus' resurrection!

> A word of warning...could be what protects us from an ambush designed to rob us of our full destiny in God.

Love Warns

I have often heard the argument that speaking a word of correction must only be done 'in love' (Ephesians 4:15). Sadly, people often quote this Scripture as code for warning others to stay away from speaking into their lives. We know John as 'the apostle of love', but he did not shrink back from speaking strongly to Diotrephes, and clearly not by invitation!

The question is: what is truly loving? The apostle Paul wrote, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and **admonishing** one another in all wisdom…' (Colossians 3:16). To admonish literally means 'to warn'. If we think of a challenge from a brother or a sister as criticism, or a 'telling off', then we will become defensive. However, if we think of it as a potential warning of danger ahead, it can be easier to hear.

> Could pride in us be what is preventing us from listening to a loving warning?

Would you feel aggrieved if someone warned you not to go in a certain direction because a thief was laying an ambush ahead? I suspect not. Rather, you would be deeply thankful. There is actually a thief laying an ambush ahead in our lives. Satan is a thief. A word of warning, if properly received, could be what protects us from an ambush designed to rob us of our full destiny in God.

How do you know when you receive one of these warnings? In my experience, it is often when it addresses the very thing that triggers your defences and flags on your offence radar! Consider Peter; when Jesus warned him that he would deny Him three times, Peter's immediate response was to be offended. Did Jesus' prediction perhaps strike at Peter's pride, in that he did not heed the warning and ask Jesus how he might avoid this happening? Could pride in us be what is preventing us from listening to a loving warning?

Embracing Warnings

It is worth remembering that a 'blind spot' is something that we cannot see for ourselves. Moses was warned by his father-in-law, Jethro, 'What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you!' (Exodus 18:18-19a). Moses wisely heeded the warning and was saved from total burnout. 'So Moses listened to the

voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said' (v.24).

Many years ago, as a proud, young Christian, I failed to heed any warnings and drifted away from following Jesus. Then I joined a tiny church where the pastor loved me enough to challenge me about unseen obstacles in my life. I thank God that he loved me enough to encourage and warn me!

Sometimes we are much closer to Diotrephes and the car driver than we care to admit. The best thing you can do today, is to pro-actively invite the person in your church to whom you are accountable to speak into your life. Walking in the full blessing of God means being open to listening to warnings.

[i] The Holy Bible: The Amplified Bible. 1987. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

This article was reviewed on 10 February 2025. It was originally published on the Four12 Global website on 19 February 2016.