

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 56

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Topic: The Initiatives of Heaven - Part 2

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God creates opportunities for us to minister and then expects us to seize them. On the other hand God also expects us to be systematic – such as when Jesus asked his disciples to go two by two throughout the villages of Israel, or when Paul returned to the new churches to see how they were going and to strengthen them. Yet as we go about our systematic daily ministry we should also be prepared for God's surprises, God's divine appointments.

There is this dynamic balance between spontaneity and order. For instance in 1 Corinthians 14 there is much teaching on prophecy and tongues and worship but also the admonition that God is a God of order and of peace, and not of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Lets take this down to the level of preparing a weekly sermon. I always advocate having a 12 month preaching plan (or even longer) so that both the pastor and the church and the worship team all have a good idea of what to expect. For instance you might pray over what to teach for that year and decide to preach on the gospel of John chapters 1-11 for 22 weeks (half a chapter per week) and then add in Mother's Day, Father's Day and a few other occasions, some missions sermons, some devotional material from the Old Testament (say 6 Psalms) and twelve weeks the book of Ephesians (again half a chapter per week).

Now is this excluding God? Not at all – as long as you remain sensitive to His prompting. Preaching God's word faithfully and systematically blesses His people and honors His name. Another thing I recommend is that pastors write out their sermons word for word. This assists with having a well-structured sermon and tends to prevent waffling, repetition and poor logic. After it has been written out then put the main points into PowerPoint and preach from that as the Spirit leads (don't just read the sermon). The fully written out sermon can then be posted to the church website for the whole world to read and to be blessed by, even many years later.

Now the Holy Spirit can create many ministry opportunities out of this systematic presentation and work. The Holy Spirit may use that well-prepared sermon to convict people, or to lead someone to Christ, or to create a counseling opportunity later that week, or an Internet ministry opportunity via email. Thus there is no inherent conflict between 'flowing in the Spirit' and being systematic, orderly and properly prepared in ministry.

There is a dynamic balance between the initiatives of Heaven and your responsibility to be a faithful steward of the grace of God, who accurately divides the Word of God. God may suddenly send you to Nigeria, but when you arrive, you must preach the truth!

On the other hand, order without inspiration can become suffocating. If we are not receptive to the initiatives of Heaven we can miss major ministry opportunities and fail to reap in the more fruitful fields of Harvest. God always wants to send us into areas of maximum effectiveness. He does not want anyone sitting around, going nowhere with a stale, unproductive ministry:

Matthew 10:11-15 ISV *"Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you leave. (12) As you enter the house, greet it. (13) If the house is receptive, let your blessing of peace come on it. But if it isn't receptive, let your blessing of peace return to you. (14) If no one welcomes you or listens to your words, as you leave that house or town, shake its dust off your feet. (15) Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town!"*

Since the Harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37), it makes sense that God would want His laborers where they can do the most good! It is also very evident that many of God's servants are NOT where they should be at all.

Huge harvest fields have hardly anyone ministering in them! And some areas are so over-populated with workers that Christians complain that there are simply no opportunities for ministry!

It seems to me that the Church is listening to its own voice instead of God's voice and to its own organizational priorities rather than God's Harvest priorities! We need to unplug ourselves from our agendas and start listening to God's Agenda! When God's people catch the initiatives of Heaven a far greater percentage of Christians will be in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results.

We just don't see the world the way God does. We cannot see into human hearts and know which ones are ripe and ready for salvation. And we do not know what is about to happen with nations and how a door for the gospel that is now open, may soon be closed, unless we act very quickly. Our judgment is so far from optimal that we simply should not be running the show. Even if we had perfect missions statistics and cultural analysis we would be far short of the mark. Ministry MUST be God-directed. Without the leading of the Holy Spirit we will simply be fruitless and hopeless ministers of the gospel seeing few saved and even less transformed and matured in Christ.

So the question then becomes: "How do we end up in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results?"

Step One is to give up your own initiative, will and judgment just as Jesus gave up His own initiative, will and judgment in deference to the Father (John 5:30, 8:38, 12:49,50)

Step Two is to actively watch and listen to the Father using your spiritual senses such as your spiritual eyes and ears (above verses plus Hebrews 5:14) which are part of your conscience. Check what you receive against Scripture and general wisdom.

Step Three is, as soon as you are sure its the Lord, then act on the leading.

Let's see how this applied to the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:

Acts 8:26-29 MKJV *And the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south, on the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is a deserted place. (27) And he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) was returning. And sitting in his chariot he read Isaiah the prophet. (29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join yourself to this chariot.*

A great revival in Samaria had just concluded with many saved, delivered, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostles were heading back to Jerusalem when an angel taps Philip on the shoulder and tells him to go to a deserted area. In 'the natural' this was a rather bizarre command, but Philip gave up his own will, judgment and initiative and obeyed the angel.

Philip arrives to find a chariot of an important Ethiopian official and the Holy Spirit then prompts Philip to join the chariot. Now given that this important financial official probably had numerous bodyguards there may have been some risk in this! But Philip overcame any shyness and trepidation and obeyed the Spirit. At this point the Ethiopian eunuch asks a question about Isaiah 53 and Philip's well prepared ministry skills take over and he leads the eunuch to Christ, eventually baptizing him in water. The ministry in the deserted place being completed the Spirit moves Philip to more fruitful areas:

Acts 8:39-40 MKJV *And when they had come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached the gospel in all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

This simple witness to a single individual eventually led to the founding of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church! Spirit-led obedience is like the loaves and the fishes – it seems to have blessing, multiplication and power built right into it.

Philip:

- a) Gave up his own will and understanding of the situation
- b) Followed clear leadings from God without hesitation
- c) Ministered faithfully and biblically and
- d) Ended up being in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results.

Blessings,

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