

“AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, I AM SENDING YOU”

Introduction

I have been informed that the theme for this conference is based upon the key scripture that says: *“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”* (John 17:18). This statement was a prayer to the Father found in Jesus’ great high priestly prayer on the Thursday evening just a few hours before he was arrested. He obviously was crucified the next day. So this was one of the last prayers that Jesus ever made.

Interestingly, this was not a request kind of prayer. Rather it was a simple statement that Jesus made to his father and he was concluding his ministry on this earth. It was more of a report than a request. In fact, starting from 17:6 through verse 19, Jesus is giving something of a report about the disciples he has been training. There are a few “requests” through in but it is primarily a review or summary of his activities with his disciples.

Jesus gives a slight variation of this statement to his disciples four days later. Jesus had been arrested that night; he was crucified and was buried the next day. We know that he arose from the dead on Sunday morning. Jesus appeared to several people on that resurrection morning. During that evening—Sunday evening, while ten of the disciples were gathered together, Jesus appeared to them. He showed them his hands and they were overjoyed to see him. At this point Jesus said to them, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* (John 20:21). That which he had spoken to his father in the presence of his disciples four days earlier, he now speaks to his disciples in the presence of his father.

What a person says near the end of his life is usually important. Jesus is concluding his earthly ministry. This statement was first made about 18 hours before he died and was one of the last things that he said on this earth. The statement was made the second time 16 or 18 hours after Jesus had been raised from the dead and was one of the first things he said after his resurrection. Such a statement repeated like this in these places requires our attention.

I will now go backwards a bit and look at this statement in a broader context. I am going to take some time to think about the conference theme during this session. After that I am going to look at the implications of this theme in the life of Jesus, in the life of Paul and in our own lives. I am going to begin with an explanation of some general principles of the way God works on this earth.

Principles of God’s Work (How does God work on this earth?)

Whenever God works on this earth, he always works through human beings.

For reasons we do not fully understand, God has chosen to work on this earth through human beings. Nearly everything God ever did on this earth, he has done so through the work of human beings. For example, when he wanted to destroy the earth and start over, he required an old man to work for 120 years to build a boat and round up all those animals in order to preserve a remnant of the animals and people on this earth. If I were God and had all the power that he had, I could have done it much quicker and easier.

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

If we move forward and even look at the miracles that God has done on this earth, we will see that humans were always involved.

- The greatest miracle in the Old Testament is the crossing of the Red Sea. The waters did not open until Moses stretched out the rod.
- The first miracle that Jesus did was the turning of the water into wine. It did not happen until the servants went and got the water and distributed it to the guests.
- The most popular miracle of Jesus—at least the only one found in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus could have created an instant meal in front of every person there but he did not do that. Jesus required the disciples to do research; organize the people; take the food to them and clean up afterwards. It was only after the disciples had done their little bit of work that Jesus blessed their weak and imperfect efforts and did the miracle.

Therefore, if God is going to build a nation on this earth, he is going to work through human beings to do it.

Whenever God works on this earth, he works the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the progressive way, the way that is opposite of the way we would do things.

If I had wanted to destroy the earth and start over, I could have done it much quicker than God did it. If I had wanted to create a nation, I could have done it very quickly. I am an American. I believe in the most efficient use of resources and time. However, it seems obvious to me that God is not an American. He does not do things the way that we do them. He does not seem to be very efficient with his resources at times. God almost seems to enjoy putting obstacles in the way of his people who are trying to do his work.

There are many examples. When God wanted to preserve a nation from destruction from a famine, God went to a lot of trouble to get Joseph down to Egypt and then kept the people down there in captivity for 400 years. When God wanted to prepare a prophet for Israel, he selected a barren woman to be his mother. Had I been God, I could have done things much more efficiently. Have you ever noticed that when God wants to prepare a special person, he selects the mother of the person to be an old lady or a barren lady or, in the case of Jesus, a virgin?

Those who were going to do the work of God will have to pass through many difficulties in life. Things will usually start small and go slow. It will usually be a long time before there is any success.

The following two verses illustrate this point very well.

- *“He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches,” (Matthew 13:31-32)*
- *He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Matthew 13:33)*

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

These two parables illustrate the way God does his things on this earth. He does things the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the way that is different than the way we do things.

If you do not understand these two principles, you will not be able to fully appreciate the Bible and, in fact, you will be confused about doing the Lord’s work.

Description of the Drama of Redemption

I will now attempt to describe the Bible in the form of a drama.

A Word About Dramas

Dramas are made up of acts and scenes. If the Bible were a drama, it would be made up of three major acts with dozens of scenes. In ancient dramas, the producers of the drama would often send someone out on the stage to read a statement that would “set the stage.” In other words, it would provide the audience with enough background information that the audience understand who the main characters were and enough of the context that they would understand what was going on in Act I, Scene 1. This was called the prologue. It is still done at times today but most of the time today, we will put that information in a written form in the program.

If the Bible were a drama, Genesis 1-11 is the prologue. The drama has not really started. The narrator has come out on the stage and given us the basic facts that you will need to know to be able to understand the first scene.

- God created the world and everything in it.
- The world fell into sin with the consequence that the people were scattered all over the world.
- The world got so bad that God attempted to correct it on one occasion by sending a flood to destroy the corrupt human race.
- Unfortunately, that solution really did not solve the problem of sin and corruption in the human world so the Lord decided to try another method.
- This corruption began to spread after the Tower of Babel

A long list of names are given which eventually leads to a man named Terah who became the father of Abram and the grandfather of Lot. They were cattle farmers who were from Ur of the Chaldees, which is in the modern country of Iraq.

That is the background. That is the information you have to know to be able to appreciate the beginning of the drama. Now the rest of the Bible is going to be a description of the unfolding drama of redemption.

Original Promise

The statement about the Father sending Jesus and Jesus sending his disciples is a fulfillment of a promise that Jesus gave in Genesis 12:1-3:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

This statement stands at the beginning of what God is doing on this earth.

Act I, Scene 1

The curtain opens on Act I, Scene 1. Here is Abram out in the bush. We are not given all the details as we are later given the details of God speaking to Moses. However, we may assume that the communication was in a similar dramatic form. The Lord speaks to Abram and makes the statement quoted above. We can divide the statement many ways but it appears to be divided into two general parts:

- God promises to make a great nation out of Abram: *“I will make you into a great nation.”*
- God promises to make Abram a blessing to all the people of the earth. He says, *“I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* Actually, the Lord makes several statements here but the summary of it all is that God is going to make Abraham a blessing to all the people on the earth.

After God makes that speech, the curtain closes on Act I, Scene 1.

Act I; Scene 2

The curtain opens and we see Abram with all his possessions packed up on the backs of his cattle and camels. We read,

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there” (Genesis 12:4-5).

Remember God promised to make a great nation out of Abram. When he got to the land of Canaan, had God fulfilled that promise to make a great nation out of him? Not yet.

So that we will know when God has fulfilled his promise to make a great nation, we need to identify the characteristics of a nation. What are the characteristics of a nation?

- Land
- People
- Laws/Government
- Leader

When Abram got to Canaan, he had the land but not enough people to be considered a nation.

Subsequent Scenes in Act I

There was a famine in Canaan so Abram went to Egypt. This appears to be a step backward. They have left their land that God has given them. Abram and his nephew, Lot,

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

separate, appearing to even weaken the chances of God creating a great nation. Lot and his family are attacked by other tribes and carried away to the north. Abraham has to go rescue him. These scenes suggest something else that we need to interject here.

Abram was married to an old woman, beyond the age of child-bearing. Have you ever noticed that when God wanted to prepare a special person, he would select as the mother an old woman or a barren woman or in the case of Jesus, a virgin? We know the drama associated with getting a descendant for Abraham. We eventually see a small amount of progress when Abraham’s grandson, Jacob has 12 sons. But that is still far from a nation.

The nation building seems to go backward again when the children of Abraham all go down to Egypt. They have now even lost their land. When we come to the end of Genesis, is there a nation yet? It has been almost 200 years since God made the promise to build a great nation out of Abram. There are only about 70 people and they are all living in a foreign land.

Note the beginning of Exodus: *“Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them”* (Exodus 1:6-7). It is estimated that two to three million eventually left Egypt to go back to Canaan. That means there is remarkable progress. There is now a large enough group of people to make up a nation.

In the early part of Exodus, is there a nation yet? No, the promise to build the nation has not yet been fulfilled but there is progress.

Starting in Exodus 20:1-17, we read about the giving of the Law, which not only includes the Ten Commandments but a large portion of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Law is essential to forming a successful nation. However, having a law does not necessarily make a nation. At the end of the Pentateuch, though there has been a lot of progress, God’s promise to make a great nation out of Abraham has still not been fulfilled. Joshua leads people into the land of Canaan. So, now the people are in back in their home land?

Is there a nation yet? Not really. We know this because of the Book of Judges. Throughout this last section of Judges, there is a reoccurring theme found in one form or another four times in the last five chapters of the book (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). In fact, the book concludes with the refrain, *“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit”* (Judges 21:25).

Eventually, Samuel anointed King Saul who became the king over Israel. And when Saul became a king, finally everything was in place.

- They had plenty people.
- They had their land.
- They had their laws and government in place.
- They had a leader that would keep them going.
- They had become a nation.

Amazingly, it was almost a thousand years from the time God had promised he was going to make a great nation until the time that God actually fulfilled that promise. Act I continues until the kingdom reached its peak under the administrations of David and Solomon.

Act II

Act II, Scene 1 opens with Rehoboam meeting with his advisors about how he should run the kingdom. We know that story very well. From this point onwards, the kingdom starts going downhill. We will not take time to go through the various steps and scenes but Act II basically covers the rest of the Old Testament. It is largely a description of the deterioration and almost destruction of the powerful nation that God made.

Interim

Often in a drama, there is a brief interlude or intermission so the audience can take a little break and the players in the drama can get some rest. In the case of the drama of the Bible, there is a 400 year intermission.

Act III

The curtain opens on Acts III, Scene 1. Here is an old priest doing his work in the Temple when an angel appears to him, telling him that he is going to become a father, even in his old age. Another scene comes along when the angel of the Lord speaks to a young virgin girl, informing her that she is going to become the mother of the Messiah. Eventually the child is born and grows up. The curtain opens at a wedding feast and we see Jesus performing his first miracle. Jesus continues his ministry over the next three years.

There is one scene in this drama that is worth noting. After Jesus had been with his disciples at least two years and was somewhat within sight of the end of his ministry, he took his disciples on a little tour up north of Galilee for one last time of being alone with them. Jesus was near Caesarea Philippi and sat down beside a little river one day and asked his disciple who they thought he was. Various disciples gave various answers.

- Some thought he was Elijah returned in the flesh.
- Some thought he was John the Baptist.
- Some thought he was some other prophet.

Jesus wanted to be more specific and asked them who they thought he was. Peter replied, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16). Jesus was very happy and said to Peter, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”* (16:17-18).

Note that Jesus makes one very interesting statement here. He says, *“I will build my church?”* Does this suggest anything to us? Does this remind us of anything? This reminds me of the Genesis 12 passage when God said to Abram, *“I will make of you a great nation . . . and all of the people of the earth will be blessed through you.”* Here Jesus is making another promise. He is promising to build his church? How did God build the nation of Israel?

- He did so through human beings.
- He did so the hard, difficult, slow, painful way.

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

I would guess that Jesus is going to build his church the same way. He is going to build his church with human beings and it is going to be hard, slow, painful and difficult.

Purpose of the Drama

Before we complete this survey, let us think for just a moment about the purpose of this great drama. Remember, God promised to build a great nation out of Abraham and make him a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Jesus promised that he was going to build his church and the gates of hell could not prevail against it. What was the purpose of the nation of Israel and what was the purpose of the church? What was the purpose of the building of the nation of Israel? As strange as it may seem, it had one basic purpose—to provide the one who was to be the Savior of the world.

Why did God take so long to do it and go through so much trouble to do this? I don't know but it is consistent with the way he does his things on this earth. Remember, God does things the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the painful way, the way that seems to be opposite of the way man would do things.

What was and is the purpose of this second body that Jesus came to build? It is to spread the news that the Savior has come to this world. If the Savior of the world has actually come to this world, there must be some mechanism to make sure the whole world learns about the Savior. The method that Jesus chose is a bit clumsy and slow. However, it is consistent with the way that God does things.

The Major Scene

Now, let us return to the text that you have chosen to be the major theme of this conference. Jesus is just about to complete his ministry on this earth. He has died on the cross to provide salvation for humanity. He has arisen from the dead, thus showing that the sacrifice has been accepted by God. He has returned to the earth to spend just a little more time with his disciples before permanently ascending to heaven. It is in this context that Jesus says to his disciples, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

In these two statements we see something of the purpose for each of the two major bodies that God used during this drama. This statement looks two different ways: First, it looks backwards. Jesus said, *“As the Father has sent me.”* This is a summary of the Old Testament, Acts I and II. All that we saw in the Old Testament was a preparation for God sending the Savior to the world.

Second, Jesus turns and looks forward. He says, *“I am sending you.”* This represents everything about Christianity from that point onward.

- This is what the book of Acts is all about.
- This is what the epistles are all about.
- This is what all of church history has been about.
- This is what the SIM mission is all about.

All that we have done in the name of Jesus for the past 200 years has been in fulfillment to that simple statement that Jesus was sending us to this world.

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

Application to Missionaries

God’s Work is not Going to be Done Quickly.

The drama I told you about took a long time and is still going on. It took a thousand years before God fulfilled his promise to make a great nation. It has taken 2000 years and Jesus is still building his church. Few if any projects that you know about sprang up overnight. Certainly SIM, which has been one of the most effective missions organizations in the twentieth century, was not developed overnight. Have you noticed that you never read any missionary biographies of short-term missionaries? It takes years to build a lasting ministry.

What does this mean? You should prepare yourself for a long ministry. The most effective ministry is where you go somewhere and stay and make a contribution over a lifetime. You are not going to make too much lasting impression by bouncing around doing things a few months at a time.

There is nothing wrong with young people or any other age person getting exposure in several different kinds of ministries. However, we should remember . . .

- The most effective ministry is when you go somewhere and stay.
- The most effective ministry is when you become a real expert at something.
- The most effective ministry is when you can train younger people out of a lifetime of doing something.

Vance Havner said, “We love to sing the song, “I will go where you want me to go but too many of us are not willing to say where he wants us to stay.”

When I look back over the ministry of our organization, IICS, those people who are the most effective are those who have gone there and stayed.

If you want to be successful in your ministry, be prepared to go somewhere and stay. Be prepared to commit your whole life to this project. And remember that even after you have committed your whole life to a project, the success may not come until after your ministry has ended. We are not going to complete all the ministries that are needed in the church in your lifetime.

Being reminded of these things should be a challenge to us. It also should enable us to relax just a bit. God’s whole kingdom is not dependent upon what I do in my lifetime.

God’s Work is not going to be Done Easily.

God’s work is going to take hard work.

There is nothing easy in this world. We who are Protestants do not believe that we are going to be justified by our work. However, we do believe that God’s kingdom is going to be built by our work. We are the creators of the “Protestant Work Ethic.” We believe that God is going to take our weak and imperfect efforts and multiply them like the loaves and the fish.

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

God’s work here in Nigeria is going to be different from the way you did things where you came from.

- Building is different.
- Surgery is different
- Even preaching will be different.

And many of the ways that you do things are much more difficult and stressful than the way you did them before.

One of the things that I had to get accustomed to was the way we do exams in the university. We only give essay exams which makes marking them very tedious. We then put them on a grid and submit them to the department. The department goes through all of the marks and approves them. They results are then forwarded to the faculty. The faculty has to approve them. The results are then forward to the Senate and the Senate meets for at least a week approving results. To me it is the biggest waste of time possible. However, that is the way it is done.

However, God has called you to be here. And if God has called you to be here, he has called you to be here in the midst of these difficulties. Here is a good rule of thumb. ***You should change the things that you can reasonably change and accept the things over which you have no control.***

We have little or no control over the traffic. I used to get very frustrated with the traffic. I would sometimes believe that it is my job to teach all of the foolish drivers how to behave. However, the traffic is out of my control.

We can do a little about the lack of power in our houses. We can get long-life batteries for our laptops. We can get battery backup systems. There is no particular reason to do things “the old fashioned way” if we can figure out a better way and that better way will not interfere with your ministry. The point is that to do God’s work in Nigeria will require a lot of hard work.

God’s work is going to take overcoming difficulties.

We would like to think that since we are doing God’s work for him and since God is all powerful and since God loves us, he is going to make our work very easy. And, in some ways, that is the case. Jesus did say, “*Come unto me, all you who labor and are weary and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” Here are two observations about that statement.

- There is still a yoke and a burden in the formula.
- Our yoke is easy and our burden is light in comparison to those who ignore God.

I was in Port Harcourt recently to attend an anniversary of a friend. He told about his attempts to get power using juju. The juju is a hard task master. He required him to produce 15,000 pounds sterling. When he took it to him, the juju priest threw the money in the fire.

I heard of another deputy governor who tried to hold his power through juju means. One juju required him to trek through the bush in the middle of the night, strip off all of his

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

clothes and sit on an ant bed all night with the ants biting him. Those are hard task masters. Jesus is not going to treat us like that but we will still have burdens.

One of Job’s friends declared, *“Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”* Life is filled with difficulties and God’s ministry is certainly filled with difficulties. Therefore, we are going to experience many problems as we serve God.

- Serving God will take solving inter-personal conflicts.
- Serving God will take resolving misunderstandings.
- Serving God will take working through budget deficits.
- Serving God will take perseverance.

When troubles, come your way do not think that you are necessarily under the judgment of God. Remember these are the normal troubles of life.

God’s Work is not going to be done by angels.

God is not going to send angels to do our work. God is going to use human beings. For reasons that I do not fully understand, God has almost totally limited himself to working through human beings on this earth. This means that God wants to use you. You are one of God’s creations and He wants to use you to accomplish his purposes. This is an awesome thought—that God has created each of us to be his partners in work.

Sometimes we think about the littleness and unworthiness of humanity so much that we fail to remember that we are redeemed human beings, chosen by God to do his work. Don’t forget, you are one of God’s instruments and he is going to use you.

What does that mean?

- Human beings are weak. Therefore, we must learn to support one another.
- Human beings have different opinions about the best way of doing things. Therefore, we must learn to respect the opinions of others and work together.
- Human beings are at different levels of development and understanding. Therefore, we must be patient with one another.

If you are going to do God’s work, you are going to have to work with human beings. And it is an amazing thought that if God’s work is going to get done on this earth, it is going to get done through human beings. Even something as serious as the evangelism of the world—which involves the eternity of human beings—even that God has left into the hands of human beings. I read yesterday where Jesus made this amazing statement to his disciples, *“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”* (John 20:23).

Remember we are God’s representatives on this earth. He expects us to do his will.

God’s Work is not going to be done alone.

When you review this drama of redemption, you will see that God used individuals but those individuals always worked with others.

“As My Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”

- Moses had Aaron.
- David had Nathan and many other advisors.
- Paul had Timothy

Because this is a hard, slow difficult work, it takes the willingness to work with others to give support and continuity to a project. One of the things that I fear for certain ministries is that they are not preparing for the next generation. In light of this, here are some observations:

- Make sure that you have partners with whom you are working.
- Make sure that you are mentoring someone to take your place.
- Make sure that you are working across denomination lines.
- Make sure that you are working with other missions agencies.

We are all part of God’s kingdom and we must all work together if we are going to see God’s kingdom built on this earth.

Conclusion

God sent Jesus to do a certain job. And Jesus is now sending us to do a job. I hope that we have some better idea about how we are going to go about doing that job.

presented to the SIM Spiritual Life Conference, Miango, Nigeria 7 January 2009
by Prof. Danny McCain, University of Jos

Serving with Balance: the Model of Jesus

Introduction

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere (Luke 9:1-6).

Perhaps the most important task that Jesus had when he was here on this earth was to prepare his disciples to implement his teachings and way of life. It was good for Jesus to believe and do things but if these only were done during his lifetime, then his life would have been a failure. Therefore, he had to prepare his followers to carry on his ministry. He spent a lot of time teaching them what they would need to know.

As a good teacher, Jesus knew his students needed more than just information. They needed experience to be prepared for the task they would be responsible to complete. Therefore, Jesus required them to complete a practicum, a semester of student teaching, a field-testing exercise. What were these disciples going to do during this field exercise?

The method of teaching was to have a student attach himself to the master and follow him around until he absorbed his mentor's knowledge and philosophy. Students did this by listening to his speeches, by asking questions, and by observing the way he responded to situations (both positive and negative). However, a person could learn only so much from observation. The student must have practical experience. He must attempt to duplicate what he had heard from the lips and seen demonstrated in the life of his master.

When I had a roofing business, I would have my new workers just watch me a while. Then I would explain; then I would give them a chance; I would then have to correct them but after a time, they could do the work my way.

This is what Jesus was doing. His disciples had been with him for a number of months. They had heard his teachings; they had observed the way he had responded to the situations; they were especially observant of his supernatural ability. Now was the time to determine exactly what kind of students they were. Were they only going to be reporters of what they had seen and heard in the master? Or were they going to be able to do the same things he had done? Were they going to be theologians or practitioners or both?

Jesus' Two Kinds of Ministry

When Jesus gave his disciples their instructions, he told them that their practicum was to be a reflection of what he had been doing. They were to "*preach the good news of the kingdom*" and they were also to "*heal the sick.*" Those two phrases represent the two kinds of ministries Jesus had developed during the few months he had been leading his disciples. I want to explore those a bit more and attempt to demonstrate the balance in Jesus' ministry.

Preaching

The first ministry of Jesus was a ministry of communication that focused to a large extent on Jesus' philosophy or theology. It was primarily teaching and preaching about the kingdom that Jesus came to introduce to the world. It had a heavy concentration on information.

Immediately after the baptism and temptation of Jesus, those events that indicated Jesus was now ready to begin his public ministry, Matthew tells us: "*From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'*" (4:17). Mark begins his description of Jesus' ministry immediately after the call of his first disciples: "*They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach*" (1:21). Since the disciples did not know this information, Jesus had to spend a lot of time simply transferring the information from himself to them.

Jesus came to introduce a kingdom that was going to be different from what the disciples and the multitudes were expecting. Therefore, he had to spend a lot of time explaining the details of the kingdom. This was done through preaching and teaching. All throughout his ministry, Jesus was teaching about the kingdom. At times, he devoted major blocks of time to teaching about the kingdom or some aspect of the kingdom such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) and the Upper Room Discourse (John 13 – 17). Jesus was a master communicator and spent a large percentage of his time preaching and teaching about the kingdom.

I should point out although we sometimes make a difference between preaching and teaching, for our purposes here, there is no major difference between the two. They are both oral communication. When Jesus was preaching he was also teaching.

Preaching and teaching the truth is one of the most noble professionals in the world. In fact, most of the major universities of the world started as schools that considered theology to the "queen of sciences." I cannot overstate the importance of preaching in our lives. We as pastors must work very hard to understand the truths that Jesus taught. That is not something that we can do casually. We must devote the whole of our lives to that process.

We must work very hard and preparing our sermons. A lawyer would never go to court unprepared. A legislature would never address the national assembly without being as prepared as he possibly could be. Neither should we mount the pulpit to declare the truths of God's word without being as prepared as we can be. Your method of preparation may be different from mine. However, you should spend the necessary time preparing for whatever sermon you are called upon to present.

I am grateful that Jesus came to this earth preaching the gospel. In so doing, he left a wonderful example for us.

Healing

On the other hand, Jesus was not just an academic. He did not deal only with ideas and information. When Mark describes the first time Jesus taught in the synagogue, he adds that a demon-possessed man began to disturb the congregation. Jesus immediately cast the demon out of the man, much to the amazement of the crowd (Mark 1:25-27). Immediately

after Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue they went to the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was sick but Jesus healed her instantly and so completely, she was able to get up and minister to them (1:30-31).

These were only the first of the many practical kinds of ministries in which Jesus was involved. In addition to healing the sick and casting out demons, Jesus did many other things:

- He raised the dead (John 11:43-44).
- He helped pay taxes (Matthew 17:27).
- He fed the hungry (Matthew 14:15-21).
- He interacted with children (Matthew 19:13-15).
- He counseled the confused (John 3:1-21; 4:7-30).
- He assisted with income generation (John 21:1-6; 11).
- He assisted the homeless (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20).
- He relieved the embarrassment of the disgraced (John 2:1-10).
- He became friends with the most rejected (Matthew 9:10-13; 11:19).
- He defended the abused (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; John 2:13-17).

I believe all of these activities are summarized by the phrase "*heal the sick.*" The word "heal" is the Greek word *therapeuo*. It is a summary of all that Jesus was doing. When he was casting out comforting the grieving, he was healing. When he was feeding the hungry, he was healing in one sense of the word. Even when Jesus was addressing injustices in society, such as the time he dealt with the unscrupulous businessmen in the Temple, he was healing the society.

Thus, when Jesus sent out his disciples with the instructions to "*heal the sick,*" that was a summary phrase indicated the disciples were to be involved in the whole range of compassionate and constructive ministries they had witnessed in their master.

These two kinds of ministry—speaking and doing, the theoretical and practical, were part of Jesus' ministry from the beginning and made up the two arms of his ministry. Therefore, in this presentation, I will use "*preaching the good news of the kingdom*" as a summary phrase of Jesus teaching ministry and "*healing the sick*" as a representative phrase of the other practical ministries in which Jesus was engaged.

The Balance of Jesus' Ministry

When people have multiple responsibilities, it is hard to keep them in balance. We tend to focus too much attention on one aspect of our ministries or, we get diverted from one of the ministries we should be doing. For example, I am a husband, a father, a son, a brother, a preacher, a university lecturer, a missions director, a consultant, a writer and a few other things. It is hard to keep all of those responsibilities in balance. However, Jesus managed to maintain this delicate balance between preaching and healing—between communication and practical ministry.

We learn about balance in Nigeria. You go to the market and see the girls put things on their head pan. They get the balanced just right. They then wrap up their little clothe and put in on their head and then ask you to help them lift that load up on their head. They will adjust it a couple of times to get it balanced. And when it is balanced, they can do practically

anything. They can walk; they can run; they can stoop down and pick up things. They can act almost like the things in not up on top of their heads. The key is getting the thing balanced.

We want to focus a bit on getting our ministries balanced.

The Balance Between the Words for Teaching and Healing

According to my calculations, the word “teach” is associated with Jesus 62 times, not counting the 45 verses where Jesus was addressed as “Rabbi” or “Teacher.” The word “preach” is associated with Jesus another 14 times. Adding these together, we see the gospel writers using “communication language” of Jesus 76 times. The word “heal” is associated with Jesus 58 times. Also Jesus is described as “touching” people” or people touching him for healing 29 times (including the touch of the coffin that raised a young man to life, Luke 7:14). By adding all of these together we see the gospel writers using “healing language” of Jesus 87 times. Although this is not an exhaustive list of synonyms for either communication or healing, nor is this a highly sophisticated way of evaluating the balance that Jesus had in his life, this does demonstrate to us that Jesus spent about an equal amount of time communicating the gospel and addressing the physical needs of people.

The Balance Between the “Red” and “Black Verses” in the Gospels

Another way of looking at this is to evaluate the amount of the gospels content devoted to Jesus’ communication and the amount devoted to describing his activities. A simple way of doing this is to count the number of verses where Jesus is speaking, as demonstrated in the red letter versions of the Bible compared to the times when the Biblical characters are not speaking as reflected in the black letters in the red letter editions of the Bible.¹ The following chart gives us this information in a visual form.

Book	Total Verses	Red Verses	Percentages
Matthew	1067	643	60.2%
Mark	678	302	44.5%
Luke	1151	594	51.6%
John	879	422	48.2%
Totals	3775	1961	51.9%

This analysis demonstrates that Matthew focuses more on Jesus speaking than any other book with 60.2 percent of his material being devoted to Jesus’ specific communications. Mark, on the other hand, focuses more on the actions of Jesus with only 44.5 percent of his gospel devoted to things Jesus said. When all verses in all four gospels are taken together, it is discovered that 51.9 percent of the verses refer to Jesus speaking while 48.1% refer to the deeds of Jesus.

Whether this was deliberate or unconscious on the part of the gospel writers, this suggests to me that the gospels portray almost an equal balance between “*preaching the good news of the kingdom*” and “*healing the sick.*” In other words, the writers did not just focus on the teachings of Jesus or the activities of Jesus. They gave about the same emphasis to both

¹ In this analysis, I used the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation (second edition)*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 2004) for the red and black verses. Any verse that had any part where Jesus was speaking was considered a communication verse.

types of ministry. And, since we as Bible-believing Christians accept the scriptures as having been inspired by the Holy Spirit, we accept this ratio as being the balance desired by God. Jesus sent out his disciples to essentially replicate his ministry, as illustrated by the statement that they were to go and “*preach the good news of the kingdom*” and also “*heal the sick.*” These two statements, then, become something of a formula for the way the followers of Jesus should be investing their time.

Two Kinds of Christianity

Right-Handed Christianity

Throughout church history, there has been tension between these two aspects of Jesus’ ministry. Some have focused on the “message” side, particularly the good news that repentance will lead to eternal life and that learning and following the teachings of Jesus will produce holiness, meaningfulness, and fulfillment in one’s life. This might be called the “spiritual” part of the gospel message.

This was the emphasis of the particular branch of Christianity in which I was reared. My people tended to separate the world into two classes of people. There were the believers and unbelievers.

- Among the believers, there were the regular people and the full-time Christian workers.
- Among the full-time Christian workers, there were pastors and evangelists and others and then there were the missionaries. Missionaries were always in a category of their own.
- Among the missionaries, there were the medical people and agricultural people and engineers (well drillers) and the administrators and then there were the “real missionaries.” These were the evangelists, church planters and those who taught the Bible. These were the ones who were doing the real work of the Lord. All others were in a supporting role. They were there to help the evangelist win that person to Christ.

We believed that you were working for God whenever you were preaching or teaching Sunday school or passing out tracts or praying. To us, the good news was that Jesus would forgive our sins and take us to heaven. We believed that evangelism and missions were practically synonymous. A missionary went to the mission field primarily to present the good news of repentance and faith and forgiveness and eternal life. We also believed in sending medical doctors and people to dig wells and provide education. However, their role was always a supporting role. They were there to aid the “real missionaries” to do their jobs. The primary reason that one would start a hospital or perform some other ministry of compassion was to get people who were sick and needing help in other ways to see the goodness of Christianity and respond to the gospel. The compassionate ministries were all preparatory, supporting and secondary to the preaching side of Christianity.

In other words, almost the total focus of our Christianity was on the spiritual part of the gospel. We listened carefully to the teachings of Jesus. We loved the red letters in the gospels and built our theology on them. We loved the stories about the deeds of Jesus but we were convinced they, too, were only there to support his message.

On the other hand, we were aware of those who promoted the “social gospel.” They were involved in leprosy ministries and providing food for hungry people. They started schools and hospitals; it did not appear they were evangelizing. It seemed they were doing compassionate ministries as an end in themselves. We always viewed these people against the background of Jesus’ statement “*What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*” (Mark 8:36). This verse convinced us that it was the “soul” that was important and not so much the body. Did not Paul say, “*bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things*” (1 Timothy 4:8 KJV). These verses suggest to us that we should minister to the body to reach the soul.

I recognize that I have overstated the case a bit but I am doing so to make a point.

This kind of Christianity has helped to create what we now call “secularism.” It was the French who first developed this. When the USA was first formed, our founding fathers decided that, unlike many of the old countries from which they had come, they did not want to formulate a “state church.” Therefore, they built into the constitution a very mild form of “separation of church and state.” However, in the last several decades, this has been interpreted in a much more narrow sense than it was originally intended. The part of our religion that the government recognizes as continuous is the “believing” part. You believe what you believe 24 hours a day. However, the government recognizes the “doing” part of our religion as things like praying, reading the Bible, and worship. This is the spiritual part. And in the minds of most people, this is the religious part. However, the government does not recognize that “*healing the sick*” is a religious function.

Unfortunately this philosophy has even affected missions. Some of our early missions works was influenced by this “secular” philosophy that divided our lives into two parts. However, this is not a Biblical description of Christianity. True Christianity is wholistic. It touches every part of our lives.

- It affects our work.
- It affects our education.
- It affects the way we care for the needy.
- It affects the judicial system and the penal system.
- It touches all parts of our lives.

Any time we are trying to correct or address a problem in life, we are “*healing the sick*” and fulfilling the mandate of Jesus. And this is part of our faith.

When we believe and practice this kind of “secular” Christianity, we are like a boxer who had one arm tied behind his back. We were right-handed Christians. It is true we had a strong right hand but, by failing to develop both of our arms, we have believed and practiced and reproduced a weakened and unbalanced form of Christianity.

Wholistic Service

When studying the life of Jesus, we cannot help but notice the balance between the spiritual ministries and the practical ministries. This reflects very much of a wholistic philosophy of life. God is not just concerned about one aspect of our being, the soul or spirit. God is concerned about the whole person. To use the illustration used above, God is concerned that we develop a two-handed understanding of Christian service.

This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the balance of Jesus' ministry that I have demonstrated. Certainly God is concerned about truth and is very interested that we communicate the truth of the kingdom as clearly and forcefully as we can. Jesus spent a whole lot of time preaching and teaching. He said, "*you will know the truth and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:34).

However, God is also concerned about our bodies. God is concerned about sick people. God is concerned about the handicapped, the poor and the downtrodden. And God expects His followers to have the same attitude toward these people that Jesus Christ had. To only preach and never engage in compassionate ministries is to be a right-handed Christian. To only be engaged in compassionate ministries and never link these acts of mercy to the big truths of God's kingdom is left-handed Christianity. God is calling us to holistic Christianity.

John captures this balance very well when he says, "*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*" (1 John 3:17-18).

Application

How does this truth apply to us today? How can we develop and maintain this balance in our lives? There are three specific areas of application I want to present. Before I make these points, I will make some qualifying statements.

Qualifying Statements

First, I understand that not everyone can do everything that Jesus did. Though Jesus predicted the total body of Christ would see all of the things he did (John 14:12), it is highly unlikely that any one person will ever be able to do all the supernatural things Jesus did or achieve the balance Jesus achieved in his life.

In addition, the Apostle Paul states clearly that God has given to some people gifts associated with communication such as wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, (1 Corinthians 12:8, 10b), and teaching (12:28a) while others have been given gifts associated with service such as healing, miraculous powers, the gift of miracles (12:10a), helping others and administration (12:28b). Some seem to be more capable of focusing on what we might call "spiritual ministries" while others are more comfortable working in what we might call "compassionate ministries." And this is perfectly legitimate.

Therefore, this presentation is not a call for us to abandon the gifts and training that enable us to concentrate and be effective on one side of the divide or the other.

Second, I understand and have actively taught over the years that the sharper the focus in ministry that a person or organization has, the more likelihood of success. An old proverb says, "If you shoot at nothing, you will likely hit it—nothing."

We have many entrepreneurs in Nigeria who are trying many different kinds of work to make a living. Sometimes, I will have a person come to my house to solicit work. He will give me a complimentary card that reads something like this:

Chinedu Boloadé Danjuma

Building Contractor, Road Contractor, Importer of Medical Supplies,
Business Consultant; Management Consultant; Health Consultant;
Education Consultant; Communication Consultant; Book Printer,
Binder and Distributor; Dealer in Spare Parts; Seller of Food, Used
Clothing; Automobiles, Computers and Cell Phones

And when the person comes to see me, he probably came in public transportation. The fact that he was supposedly a specialist in many things actually proved that he was a specialist in nothing.

When we try to do too many different things, we guarantee mediocrity in all things. The point is that our likelihood of success is often directly proportionate to the how sharp our focus is.

Therefore, this presentation is not a repudiation of that truth nor a call to abandon focus in our lives, in our ministries or in our organizations. Rather it is a call for all of us to examine our lives and see if there are ways that we can be more balanced in addressing the spiritual and practical needs of those we are serving.

Application to the Church

It seems abundantly clear from the scriptures I have discussed above and from the overall emphasis of the New Testament that God is calling the church to “*preach the good news of the kingdom*” and also to “*heal the sick.*” Did the early church have a balance between preaching and healing? Certainly the early church preached. Peter preached the gospel at Pentecost and 3000 people were converted. There are seven sermons recorded in the book of Acts and several other short speeches and testimonies that are designed to communicate truth.

However, the church was also involved in “*healing the sick.*” Immediately after Pentecost, we read (Acts 2:45), “*Selling their possession and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*” The first internal problem in the church was over the distribution of food to the needy widows that resulted in the creation of the office of deacon (Acts 6). Note: there was an organization to take care of widows before there was a missionary journey.

One of Paul’s first responsibilities after he joined with Barnabas in Antioch was to take gifts from the church in Antioch to the people in Jerusalem who were experiencing a famine (Acts 11:27-30). Thus, the example of the early church is clear. They were clearly involved in preaching but they were also involved in healing and helping the needy.

- That means that we, the worldwide body of Christ, should be concerned about theology and ministry—about communication and application.
- That means that individual denominations should be involved in preaching the gospel as well as addressing the practical needs of humanity.
- That means every local church should also be involved in both kinds of ministries.

Our church is incomplete and unhealthy if we are only using one arm.

Application to the SIM Mission

What is the ministry of SIM Mission? It is to continue the ministry of Jesus—the whole ministry of Jesus. This obviously includes evangelism, church planting and training Christian leaders. SIM has been doing this from the beginning. This obviously includes compassionate ministries as well including:

- Healing the sick people
- Making communities more healthy
- Making life more comfortable and convenient for people
- Addressing issues of justice in society.

I think that SIM has done a very good job at that as well, from the very beginning. And I believe that SIM is continuing in that same balance.

Are there any weaknesses in the SIM approach? I will only point out one thing that I think that SIM and most missions overlooked. We have not done very well in teaching about politics and governance. Is this not an important part of society? Does government not address issues of justice for the society? And was not justice a very important issue in the Old Testament and even in the ministry of Jesus?

I do not want to overstate the case and I do not want to second-guess our missionary forefathers who did an outstanding job of planting the church in Africa. However, when the missionaries came to Africa and got converts and started training them, naturally, they encourage the bright ones to go into the “ministry.” Therefore the best and brightest were selected to become our Christian leaders. That meant that the second echelon was left to go into “secular work.” I believe we are now paying a big price for that neglect or that omission.

I want to encourage the SIM mission to think seriously about what it can do to help ECWA and the body of Christ as a whole address the issue of

- Civil servants
- Political officers
- The philosophy of governance.

I believe the recent Jos Crisis grew out of a failure to have a Biblical view of governance. Unfortunately “Christian” politicians were willing to use manipulation and fraud to rig the election so that a “Christian” would become the Jos North local government chairman. Unfortunately, the other side was willing to use violence to make sure that their man got that position. Why did this happen? Because neither side had a proper understanding of governance. And hundreds of people paid for that lack of understanding with their lives.

I challenge the SIM mission leaders, here in the field and in Charlotte to think through your goals and your policies to make sure that you are developing and implementing a holistic and balanced ministry.

Application to Individual Christians

I recognize a strong case can be made for individuals focusing on more specialized ministries, consistent with their gifts, training, experience and calling. Having said that, I

have a growing conviction that all Christians should have at least some exposure to both the communication side and the compassion side of our faith. We need to use both of our arms in promoting God's kingdom.

Jesus' disciples were a fair representation of all future followers of Jesus. As far as we know, none of them started out in "communication" professions. However, when Jesus sent them on their first assignment, they were instructed to communicate as well as do practical ministries. Preaching and teaching became an important part of the ministry of the apostles. The apostles are referred to as preaching two times and teaching eight times in Acts.

On the other hand, Paul was a professional communicator before becoming a believer. He was a rabbi and rabbis are primarily teachers. Though Paul wrote most of the New Testament and is referred to as preaching 15 times and teaching 8 times in Acts, he was also involved in practical ministries. He healed several people including the lame man in Lystra (Acts 14:9), Eutychus, the young man who fell from the window (20:9-12); and Publius' father (28:8). He was also said to have been able to perform "*miraculous signs and wonder*" (14:3; 15:12) and "*extraordinary miracles*" (19:11). I assume most of these miracles would have been associated with helping people. Paul was personally involved in delivering funds to people suffering from a famine (11:28-30) and later took up "*gifts for the poor*" (24:17). Although he was a trained rabbi who had a right to receive his remuneration from his teaching and preaching (1 Corinthians 9:7-14), he chose to work with his hands in making tents to subsidize his ministry (9:6; Acts 18:3).

What these examples show us is that the earlier followers of Jesus did not so specialize that they got out of balance. All of them were involved to some degree in "*preaching the good news of the kingdom*" and "*healing the sick.*"

I believe that the most healthy Christians are those who know how to communicate the gospel but are also aware of and involved in helping to address the practical needs of people. It is likely and even good that we concentrate on one of the other of these kinds of ministries. However, when concentrating, we should not ignore the other.

I am a right-handed person. I will always be a right-handed person. My right arm is the strongest arm and the most skilled. However, I use my left arm every day and would be considered a handicapped person if I could not use my left arm. Do you have the same balance of service in your life that Jesus had? Is God trying to tell you that you need to use one arm more than you have been using it? Do you need to "preach" more? Or do you need to do more practical ministries?

Personal Application

Few if any persons in Jos has been more focused on "*preaching the good news*" mandate than I have been, including literal preaching and preaching as a metaphor for communicating the gospel. I would guess that I preach more than any other expatriate in this area. During the last six months, I have preached 50 sermons. Though it is almost a joke that I am involved in so many projects, when you examine them carefully, they have all been tightly focused. Believe it or not, I have said "no" to a lot of things over the years because they were not part of "*preaching the good news*" as I understood it. I have pushed the communication part of the gospel as much as I could. I have preached sermons; I have taught

classes; I have made speeches; I have written books; I have helped to develop curriculum; I have created training programs.

All of these are related to “information.” They involve transferring ideas from one person to another, which is a fair definition of communication. In my communications, I have explored all kinds of ideas related to the Christian faith. I have been very happy “*preaching the good news of the kingdom*” and have resisted and even resented attempts to get me to do other things.

Helping the Needy Focus

However, God is a master teacher. He knows exactly the path along which He needs to lead us and the things to which we need to be exposed in order to become the persons He wants us to become. Living in Africa has forced me to be more concerned about other people. For example, in a six month period, I am sure that I can count on both hands the days when we have not had some non-family member eat a meal at our table. In addition, God has particularly given me a lesson in supporting the weak and needy and vulnerable people in society. A couple of years ago, I kept track of the people who came to me seeking assistance. From September 9 through September 17, in a nine-day period, I had 11 people come to me seeking assistance. The following is a sample of those needs and my gifts:

- 10 September N 500 to the security guard who came to request money because he and his family were “hungry” and his money “did not reach.”
- 13 September N 2000 to a former prostitute, Cynthia, who is HIV+ and came to request money so she could “go back to the village and die”
- 15 September N 1500 to a former student for who came to request money for his wedding preparation
- 15 September N 500 to, my neighbor’s brother who came to request money for his children’s education
- 17 September N 500 to a university messenger who claimed that two of his children were sick and had been taken to the hospital.

During that 9-day period, I gave a total of 8800 Naira to the 11 who presented needs to me. And amazingly, that was not a particular unusual nine-day period.

You cannot live in Africa without either becoming very hard and cold to suffering people or else becoming more and more responsive to the needs around you. God has given me a very thorough course in being compassionate by bringing many needy people into my life. I pray that I am being a good student.

AIDS Focus

In 1999, God brought another opportunity into my life. I was overwhelmed with conviction that I had to get involved in the AIDS battle. AIDS ministries represent the “*healing the sick*” part of Jesus’ ministry. Prior to that time, I had left the AIDS problem up to others. However, I became convinced that I could no longer minister in Nigeria with only my right hand. I felt like Paul when he said “*Woe is me if I preach not the gospel*” except my conviction was “Woe if me if I do not get involved in the AIDS battle!” I did not know much about the AIDS ministry. In fact, when I first mentioned my interest in this to my wife, she had to remind me of who was doing AIDS ministries in Nigeria at that time. However,

believing that I was called to do this, I jumped into it with all of my heart. I have tried to bring all of my theological training, pastoral experience, negotiation and communication skills together to help fight this battle. And now AIDS ministries occupy a good percentage of my time.

Wheel Chair Focus

In 1977 Ron Rice came into my life. Ron came to Nigeria to help us “*preach the good news*” by developing teacher’s manuals for the teachers of Christian Religious Knowledge in the public schools of Nigeria. He later met Ayuba Gufwon and the ministry to handicapped people was born. It has provided over 700 wheelchairs to handicapped people. Though I have tried to stay out of it and allow this to be a Ron Rice ministry, it is impossible to stay out of a ministry that is being run out of your house.

It is even more impossible to run away from a ministry when you see glimpses of hope in these little children as they drag themselves along on the ground to occupy a wheelchair being given to them. And most of all, it is impossible to stay out of this ministry when I continue to hear in my heart the simple words of Jesus: “*heal the sick.*”

Summary

During my first 10 or 12 years of ministry in Nigeria, I would guess I was focusing 99 percent of my time on “*preaching the good news of the gospel*”—preaching and teaching and communicating theological truth. However, during the past six or eight years, that has gradually changed. I am still not as balanced as Jesus was but I estimate that during this past year, I spent perhaps 20 to 25 percent of my time on “*healing the sick*” ministries. During this next year, I hope to get much closer to the balance that Jesus had by obeying the command of Jesus to “*heal the sick.*”

Conclusion

Jesus said, “*As my father has sent me . . .*” We have gained a little insight into what it meant for the Father to send Jesus. The Father created the whole person so the Father was interested in the whole person and the whole society in which he lived. Therefore, when the Father sent Jesus to this world, he sent him to minister to the whole person and the whole society in which he lived. The implication of that is that as certainly as God sent Jesus to minister to the whole person, Jesus is now sending us to minister to the whole person and the whole society.

Peter declared: “*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps*” (1 Peter 2:2). Paul wrote: “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1). According to the verse that I read in the beginning, Jesus sent his disciples out to “*preach the good news of the kingdom and to heal the sick.*” And they did exactly as they were told. A few verses later we read: “*So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere*” (Luke 9:6).

In 1969 when I was 18 years old, I started attending a Bible college in Florida. This college was associated with a missionary organization that worked in the Bahamas which was not too far off the Florida coast. I was invited to go one weekend to the Bahamas to do some

“ministry.” We flew over there in a mission plane. The plane was being flown by a man named Mark Vernon, who had just gotten out of the Army after serving two tours as a helicopter pilot in Viet Nam. However, this was his first flight as a “missionary pilot.” He had never flown over water, to the extent that he could not see the shore. When we arrived and started packing the little Cessna 172, it was obvious that he was nervous. He took our little possessions and stored them in the back, adjusting them two or three times. He also experimented with one person sitting in one seat and then he would say, “No, I think you better sit on that side.” What was he doing? He was trying to achieve balance. He knew that when he took off, he was going to be out over the water where there were no land marks. He did not want his airplane to be out of balance which might cause it to veer off to one side. We finally took off, we crossed to cast and in ten minutes we were out of sight of the Florida coast. There was no much conversation in the vehicle. Mark was constantly checking his compass and his radios. We droned on and on. Would we hit West End in the Bahamas or would we have veered off too far to the north or south. I remember after about fifty minutes of flying, a big smile came on Mark’s face as he pointed out to the front of the plane and said, “There it is. I can see land.” It was relief to all of us. We had balanced up our plane well. We had successfully made our trip. We were happy.

The point of this little story should be obvious. We are all on a journey. We are heading to the heavenly city. We want to make sure that our ministry is balanced because we all want to reach our destination in good time and in good shape.

Here are some questions for your consideration:

- Is your church or ministry committed to wholistic service to the whole person?
- Are you as an individual committed to serving the whole person?
- Are you involved in ministries that will reach out to people who are less fortunate?
- Are you only a right-handed Christian?

And here are also some challenges:

- Let us see that serving whole person is a part of our duty if we are followers of Jesus.
- Let us make a deliberate effort to reach out to those who are less fortunate than we are and thus fulfill the command of Christ.
- Let us restore something of a balance in our churches and our lives—the same balance Jesus had when he “*preached the gospel of the kingdom*” and “*healed the sick.*”

presented to the SIM Spiritual Life Conference, Miango, Nigeria 8 January 2009
by Prof. Danny McCain, University of Jos

PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF MINISTRY

Introduction

One of the major reasons that Jesus was sent into this world was to prepare his disciples to be sent out to complete the work that Jesus began. So Jesus spent much of his public ministry preparing his disciples for their public ministry. In Acts 1, we see these disciples starting to come together and beginning the first tentative steps of fulfilling that mandate of being sent out by Jesus. However, apparently these disciples that he had spent three years preparing were not adequate to fulfill the task that he had for them.

Therefore, Jesus decided to call and prepare another disciple to fulfill that task. This person was a young man named Saul when we first met him. In fact, when we first met him he was an enemy of Jesus. However, somehow in God's infinite wisdom, he knew that he wanted this young man to be someone he could send out to accomplish a very important ministry. Paul gave his testimony to King Agrippa on near the end of the Book of Acts, after many years of ministry. And this is part of what he said that Jesus said to him during his conversion:

*“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them** to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26:15-18).*

Jesus had been sent by his Father. We saw earlier that Jesus came to this world to do two things. He preached the gospel of the kingdom and he healed the sick. And now Jesus promises Paul that he is sending him to the Gentiles.

What was this young man going to do after he was sent out? We are given a little hint in the passage above. He was to open the eyes of the Gentiles. How did the sending work out in his life? There are many details we could talk about. However, I want to look at one particular aspect of his ministry. This is a two-verse section that gives us a hint about the way Paul was sent out and the strategy he used to fulfill the purpose for which he had been called.

On his second missionary journey, Paul had visited the Corinthians and planted a church there. He stayed and worked in that area for 18 months. He left Corinth, went to Jerusalem, reported back to Antioch and then traveled to Ephesus where he stayed several more years. Ephesus is almost directly across the Aegean Sea from Corinth so Paul had regular contact with the church at Corinth while he was living and working in Ephesus. Paul actually wrote at least three and possible four letters to the church at Corinth while he was in Ephesus.

It was in one of these epistles that Paul gives an important testimony. In these two verses Paul outlines the strategy that he had used in being sent by Jesus to fulfill his responsibility. *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. I praise you for*

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you” (1 Corinthians 11:1-2).

In this passage, Paul is writing to the Corinthians who were fairly recent converts, not more than three or four years removed from paganism. They are still learning what it means to become Christians. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul had been dealing with a difficult issue. The obvious issue was the eating of meat offered to idols. A more basic issue was offending other people or causing others to stumble. Here was what Paul was saying that led up to the words of our text:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

Paul then says that the Corinthians should follow his example. In other words, he is explaining to them that when it comes to issues like eating meat offered to idols or other controversial issues, since he is attempting to follow the example of Jesus, they should just follow his example and, in so doing, they will be following the example of Christ.

So here is what we see so far: The Father sent Jesus to fulfill a certain ministry. A part of the ministry of Jesus was to send Paul to fulfill a certain ministry. And the ministry that he was to fulfill was to imitate Jesus. And now Paul is saying that a part of the ministry of the Corinthians is to imitate Paul as he is imitating Jesus.

This is not the last time that Paul is going to make such a statement. Some years later, when he was languishing in prison in Rome, Paul wrote to the Philippians and said,

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice.** And the God of peace will be with you.*

The first part of this paragraph is extremely convicting because it raises a very high standard for our thought life. However, verse 9 once again urges a group of Paul's converts to imitate him. Whatever they have learned from him or received from him or see in him, this is what the Philippians are to do.

This is the way that the gospel of the kingdom is being spread throughout the world. The Father sent Jesus who demonstrated what he wanted us to do. Jesus then sent Paul who demonstrated what Jesus wanted him to do. Paul then gained converts and sent them out to do what Jesus wanted them to do.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul actually concludes the point of the previous paragraph and 11:2 actually start the next discussion. However, in these two verses, Paul is almost incidentally pointing out to us something quite strategic about his ministry—about fulfilling what Jesus had sent him to do. We might even call this Paul's formula for promoting and spreading Christianity. It involves two steps:

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

- **Example.** Paul says, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*”
- **Teaching;** He also says, “*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the **teachings**, just as I passed them on to you.*”

The initial approach to the Corinthians is described in Acts 18:1-18 so we will consult that passage to see what kind of example Paul left and what he taught. Please note that these two things overlap a bit. Paul taught what he practiced and he practiced what he taught. In this presentation, we will primarily focus on Paul's example of ministry.

What were some of the things that Paul had demonstrated to them? We have to go back to Acts to see them. Here are four preliminary thoughts:

- I am going to be basing my remarks on some small portions of scripture. However, I think that I will be able to demonstrate that there is a good reason to make such big points on such few words.
- I want you to know that some of the things that I am going to say may be a bit controversial or unconventional. Please note that there is nothing personal about any of these comments. These are simply things that I am learning and feel that it will be helpful to share with you.
- I do not share these things with you as if my thoughts are the final answer to the problems that I will raise. I share them with you to encourage thought and discussion and evaluation. I know that SIM is continually discussing and planning about the best way forward and I will be happy if some of these thoughts will be a part of the discussion or, perhaps more accurately, add my insights to discussions that are no doubt already going on.
- Please understand that in a short presentation like this, I do not have time to say everything that I do not mean.

What did Paul do? What was his example? I will now make several observations about Paul's initial visit to Corinth described in Acts 18:1-18. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he refers to his own example. What kind of example did he provide when he was among them? Specifically, what kind of example did he provide for us as twenty-first century missionaries?

Paul Lived in Corinth.

Exposition

*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he **stayed** and worked with them (Acts 18:1-3).*

Note these important phrases:

- 18:3: “*he **stayed** and worked with them.*”
- 18:11: “*So Paul **stayed** for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*”

The key word I want to focus on a bit is the word “stayed.” This implies that Paul lived in Corinth and while he lived in Corinth, he lived with Aquila and Priscilla.

According to 18:11, Paul was forced to live in the pagan city.

Corinth was one of the most pagan cities of the ancient world, filled with all kinds of idols and evil. To live in a pagan city, Paul experienced many things. He had to meet and establish relationships with new people. As far as we know, Paul had never been to Corinth. He knew no one there. Therefore, he had to start from the beginning to meet people and establish relationships with them. He had to sort out what to do about eating meat offered to idols. This was a question that later arose from the Corinthians. However, Paul had to have sorted that out in his own mind long before that. He had to know how to relate to people who understood only part of the truth.

The Jews who lived in the city understood part of the truth. Paul usually began his ministry in a new city with them. I will talk more about this later.

He had to learn to live with opposition. Even in Corinth, there was opposition. I will talk more about this later.

He had to learn all of the normal things one has to learn in a strange city.

- Where the market is
- Where to get clean water
- Who are the people who can advise him
- What the taboos of the culture are and how to avoid them

In one sense of the word, this was a cross-cultural experience. Each of these city states of the ancient world had its own kind of government and its own religions and its own customs. Therefore, since Paul stayed in that city for 18 months, he had to learn all of those things. Paul did not just visit Corinth. He “stayed” in Corinth which means that Corinth became his home for the next 18 months. It is likely that when Paul went to that city, he did not know how long he was going to be there. Therefore, he was forced to settle down and prepare to be there as if he were going to be there the rest of his life.

According to 18:3, Paul apparently chose to live with Priscilla and Aquila.

I am not sure exactly how this worked. However, it is not unlike what happens in Nigeria today. In fact, just a few minutes before I left my house to come out to Miango, a young man came to see me. He is from Cameroon. He had gone to Cameroon for Christmas. On his way back, his money was stolen in the train. However, when he got to the town where he was going to get off the train, he found a pastor that could help him. He stayed with him a couple of days while trying to get money. And on his way back, when he got to Gombe, he realized that he could not get back to Jos before the curfew. He remembered he had met someone from Gombe so he phoned him and the man accommodated him overnight. This kind of thing happens every day in Nigeria.

This is what Paul did in Corinth. He went down to the market where people sewed and repaired tents and he found a fellow tentmaker who was in the same kind of business. After talking a short time, Paul started working with them and, at the end of the day, when it was obvious that Paul had no other place to go, he was invited to stay with them. What was the result of Paul living with them?

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

- Priscilla and Aquila were converted to Christ.
- Priscilla and Aquila became Paul's first disciples in Corinth.
- Priscilla and Aquila were so committed to serving Christ and following Paul that they left Corinth with Paul and went to Ephesus where they remained behind and represented Paul until he could get back a few months later.
- Priscilla and Aquila were able to teach Apollos some basic facts about Christianity even though they were relatively new believers.
- Priscilla and Aquila also eventually established a church that met in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19).
- Priscilla and Aquila later returned to Rome and Paul greets them in his epistle to the Romans and identifies them as "*my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 16:3).

All of these things happened as a result of Paul living with Priscilla and Aquilla. In this case, Paul's strategy was to demonstrate Christianity before talking about Christianity. Paul did not isolate himself from the people that he was seeking to influence but rather chose to live with them—to interact with them—to converse with them—to eat and sleep with them—to be with them in an informal setting.

Why did he do this? Paul believed that his life and work would earn him the right to speak about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

This is exactly what happened in Philippi some years before. Paul was arrested and beaten in Philippi. He and Silas were thrown in prison and locked in stocks. However, at midnight they started singing. The jailor had heard many strange sounds come from his prison but he had probably never heard songs of praise coming from prisoners at midnight who had been beaten the day before. A little later when the earthquake came and shook open the doors of the prison, he prepared to kill himself because it was a crime punishable by death to allow a prisoner to escape. However, there was this strange man Paul standing in the open door saying, "No, don't hurt yourself. We are all here." This was such an amazing response that it got his attention and after reflecting on all the other things he had seen in the life of this man in the previous 18 hours, he cried out to Paul, "*What must I do to be saved?*"

The point that I want to stress here is that Paul understood that a significant part of his ministry was simply living—particularly living with the people that he was attempting to evangelize and minister to.

Application

By living in an area, people can see what kind of person you are and what kind of religion you practice and what a difference it makes in your life. Therefore, it seems to me that a very important part of our evangelism and missionary strategy must be to "stay with" people—to simply live with people. Jesus is the first great illustration of this. This is first illustrated when he came from heaven and lived on this earth. However, it is also illustrated with the way he trained his disciples.

How did he train his disciples? He invited them to follow him and live with him. Wherever Jesus slept, the disciples slept. Wherever Jesus ate, the disciples ate. And to say it another way, wherever the disciples slept, Jesus also slept. Whatever the disciples ate, Jesus ate. Jesus did not sleep in a different hotel than his disciples. He did not have a different diet

than others. He simply “stayed with them.” Jesus lived with his disciples and the living itself was a part of his ministry.

Specific Application to Missionaries

I am convinced that there is something for missionaries to learn from Paul's practice of living with the people. The “missionary compound” is an old institution. It developed at a time when missionaries lived in the villages and were usually given land by the local people where they built their houses, their clinics, their schools and other facilities. It was an adaptation to the culture and the environment. And it has proved to be very useful to establishing the church in Nigeria and many other parts of Africa.

However, my question is this: Has the traditional missionary compound outlived its usefulness?

- Are we cutting off part of our ministry by isolating ourselves behind big walls and strong steel doors?
- Do we not fail to provide people opportunities to see us and interact with us in a natural and informal setting when people have to pass through so many levels of security and bring people into a rather unnatural and even foreign atmosphere?
- Are our interactions in our work and in our worship all that is necessary to teach people about what true Christianity is?
- Would we not be able to minister more effectively if we lived closer to the people that we are attempting to minister to?

I know that every missionary organization and every missionary leader carries twin concerns. (I have those same concerns and responsibilities.) First, we are concerned about fulfilling the ministry that God has given us to do—which is building God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Second, we are also concerned about the welfare of our people, including their needs for social interaction and their needs for safety. How do you balance those two things? Unfortunately there is no formula. It takes wisdom to do these things.

Let me share a little bit of my own experience with you. My own experience was absolutely planned by God. We had no preparation for coming to Africa. We just showed up. As a lecturer in the university, we were given accommodation on the campus. Therefore, I lived in the same kind of house that my colleagues lived in. I enjoyed the same privileges and suffered the same privations and limitations that they experienced. My children played with the local children on the campus. Our friends were our neighbors. We learned to live in Africa from Africans. That was sometimes good and sometimes bad. I will not tell you that it was always easy but I think it was a very important part of our strategy. Our home became very open to Nigerians. My children had to learn to receive and interact with Nigerians. We had to adapt to so many new ways because we had no choice. And by living where they live, I was able to develop a rapport with my colleagues and neighbors that I do not think I would have been able to develop any other way. I lived with them.

One of the biggest concerns that missionary administrators have is for the safety of their staff. This is very understandable. However, let me narrate my own experience a little more. In 2001, during the first Jos Crisis, we were living in the university community which was very vulnerable to attack by Muslims. In fact, about 200 Muslims managed to penetrate the front gate to the UNIJOS Senior Staff quarters. They fought a pretty major battle there

and managed to burn the first house inside our university compound. We chose to stay in our community and for the next several days operated a refugee camp at our house, feeding and accommodating about 150 people. In addition, I was meeting daily with all my neighbors in our local security meetings. And an amazing thing happened. I got to know my neighbors far better than I had ever known them before. And perhaps even more important we were able to demonstrate the love of Christ to dozens of people in a way that we would have missed had we not been in that environment.

Here is more of the story. We do not have a fence around our house. It is quite vulnerable. Just a little over two years ago, armed robbers came in my house when I was in Abuja. They were able to get away with some money and Mary's cell phone. However, what they left behind was the opportunity to demonstrate how a Christian responds to an armed robbery. I am proud of the calm and gracious testimony that Mary had during that time and I also grateful for another very rich opportunity to develop even more intimate friendships with our neighbors. Three of our other neighbors had been attacked within a six month period so to see that we the foreigners were not exempt and accepted what had come our way, was a part of our testimony in the community.

As you know we experienced another crisis just six weeks ago. In our particular area, it was perhaps even more intense than the first one. Instead of just one church being burned, seven churches within a mile of our house were burned. There was more black smoke and more gunfire this time than last time. And there were more opportunities to minister. Another 150 people came to our house for food and accommodation And some other people came.

- The Acting Vice Chancellor came.
- The State Government came.
- The NGO's came.
- The pastors came.
- The press came.

These people came with words of appreciation and thanksgiving. Since we had gone through this before, they also came seeking advice. They came looking for direction and leadership. The reason that these people came is that we lived among them. And by living among them, we had gained their respect and I do not underestimate the need for safety and security and companionship. However, I cannot also ignore the benefits of living among them.

Summary

Paul lived with Priscilla and Aquila and that greatly enhanced his ministry. Again, there are no formulas here. We have to have God's wisdom. However, this is what is obvious.

- Living among them is not as safe living among ourselves.
- Living among them is not as convenient as living among ourselves.
- Living among them is not as fun as living among ourselves.

However, remember that your living is part of your ministry. What should you do? I will allow you to think through that. I think it is ideal when people live with the people they are working among. I think it might be time to start phasing out our missionary compounds and start to live among them.

Paul Worked in Corinth.

Exposition

*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and **worked** with them (Acts 18:1-3).*

Paul worked with Priscilla and Aquila in tent making. And I believe that Paul recognized that work was not just a necessary corollary to his ministry. His work was a part of his ministry.

Earlier, I talked about a holistic approach to ministry. In a holistic approach to ministry, we believe that all aspects of life are a part of our ministry. There are two key verses in Colossians three that give us some insight into the concept of holistic ministry:

- 3:17: *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
- 3:23-24: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

Interestingly, the first of these verses is given against a context of exhortations about teaching and worship.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (3:16-17).

However, the second of these verses is given in a context of work—particular the service of a slave to his master.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men (3:22-23).

The work of a slave was not spiritual work. It was not evangelism. It was farming and cooking and cleaning and doing other kinds of work. These passages tell us that all of our work, whether it is tent-making or whether it is preaching in the synagogue, is to be done for the glory of God and to be done as a part of our ministry.

Application

One of the best ways to demonstrate faith is to demonstrate it through work.

Work has many advantages.

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

- It puts you with unbelievers in a non-threatening situation.
- It demonstrates one's faith in real-life situations.
- In times of stress
- In times of blessing
- In times of need
- It provides you with the necessary income to be able to share with others.

I am sure that many people have been brought to the Lord by fellow workers. However, the application goes beyond this.

We do our work as a ministry because nearly all of our work is a service to humanity, which is, according to the story Jesus told in Matthew 25, a ministry to Jesus himself.

When we are working in farming or the food industry, we are working to produce things that will sustain God's creations. When we are working in the health field, we are working to prevent disease and to help people recover from things that will weaken their bodies. When we are working in the education field, we are helping people to discover the truth that God himself has created. All of these are not just jobs. They are ministries because they are helping to provide benefit and blessing to other people.

Specific Application to Missions

How does this apply to missions? Interestingly, the Lord has this amazing way of getting us to do the right thing. Many of our missionary organizations are seeking ways to get into the Muslim world. They cannot go as traditional missionaries. They cannot go as evangelists. They cannot go as teachers of the Bible. However, they can go as academics; they can go as medical personnel; they can go as technical people; they can go as agricultural people. And, in going to work among them, they are following very closely a missionary strategy that Paul developed in the early days of Christianity.

Is it not time for SIM to start thinking about recruiting professionals who will go to another part of the world, not to preach the gospel but to live and work among them?

A number of years ago, one of my friends went to a communist country to teach in a university. It is against the law to proselytize in this country. One can go to prison for attempting to convert one to Christianity and foreigners would be deported from the country. However, my friend went and lived and worked in this university for several years. After about three years, he decided to go home for a short break. His department decided to have a party for him before he went. During the party, his dean stood up and introduced my friend and said, "Professor, all of us have observed that there is something different about you from other foreigners who have come to our country and our university. You are truly different. I am asking that you stand up here and tell us what it is that has made you like you are and particularly what are the experiences in your life that have affected you the most?" My friend stood up and said, "Although this may sound strange, the single thing that has affected my life the most is that I met a man that many people consider to be dead." He then went on and gave his testimony about how Christ had changed his life. And the last I had heard, he and his family had won 28 people to Christ in the communist country.

"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12).

Here is one additional application. Work in all disciplines is good. We, as missionaries, must help the church to appreciate the fact that there is Christianity ministry in practically every profession.

A few weeks ago, Gbile Akane came to the University of Jos for out an outreach. While with us, he met with the Christian academic staff. He described how many of the lecturers are seeking to become pastors. Some want to start their own churches where they can minister to 20 or 30 people. And yet, they often have hundreds of students in their classrooms that they see and teach every day. It is rather short-sighted to think that ministry in a church building is more important or more strategic than teaching in a classroom.

We must teach our Christian friends who are not involved in full-time Christian service that their work is their ministry. They do not go to work and they after that do their ministry. Our work is our ministry. Learn the lesson from Paul, he went to Corinth and met Priscilla and Aquila where he “*stayed and worked with them.*”

Paul Focused His Ministry Where There Were Open Doors.

Examples

When Paul arrived in Corinth, it was probably on a weekday. Therefore, he went down to the market, to the tent-making session to see what would happen. There the Lord orchestrated a meeting with Priscilla and Aquila (18:2-3). This was the beginning of his ministry in Corinth. The meeting with Priscilla and Aquila was in some ways beyond his control. He did not know who would be in the market when he went there but he went with an open heart and met this couple.

When the Sabbath day came, Paul went to the local synagogue (18:4). He no doubt dressed in his rabbinical regalia and as soon as he arrived there, took advantage of the standing invitation that a visiting rabbi would have in any synagogue, and addressed the local congregation. Since Paul was a Jew, he knew the Jew's language and buzz words and was able to communicate effectively with them. This, too, was an open door of ministry—that was open in nearly every city he visited.

After a few weeks, the leaders of the synagogue turned against him and, at this point, Paul went to the Gentiles (18:6b). It is instructive that Paul did not continue to waste his time with the Jews when God opened a door to the Gentiles.

So in the little information we have about Paul's ministry in Corinth, we see him simply following the open doors that God had given to him.

Principles

Paul started his ministry where there were open doors.

This is a very natural thing to do. This did not mean that Paul did not have a strategy. In fact, Paul did have a strategy. It was to start where there were natural opening and there usually were natural openings in the market place and in the synagogue. This is related to the next point, which is just a continuation of this point.

Paul anticipated and helped to push open certain doors.

Corinth was not the first place Paul had ministered. Going to the market in Corinth was not the first market he had gone to. Going to the synagogue in Corinth was not the first synagogue he had gone to. In other words, Paul did not necessarily look for a unique open door in every new city he went to. The opened doors in one city gave him ideas about possible open doors in other cities. The things he learned in one place would be useful in another place.

In fact, it is obvious that Paul even helped to push open some of the doors. Open doors are not always supernaturally opened. It simply takes observation and wisdom to see open doors that have already been open. We need divine wisdom to take advantage of the open doors that God gives to us.

Between 30 and 40 years ago, SIM brought literally hundreds of missionaries to Nigeria whose primary ministry was to teach Bible in the mission schools and the emerging public schools. However, when the government took over the schools, SIM largely got out of the secondary school business. However, there is an absolutely amazing open door in the public schools of Nigeria and that is the ability to teach the Bible in the public schools and be paid to do it.

I estimate that there are about 10,000 public teachers in Nigeria who teach the Bible as a full-time career in the public schools. In the northern part of Nigeria, they average teaching 249 students each. In Lagos, they average teaching 363 students each. The curriculum they teach is excellent. And they are actually paid a salary to do this. And yet few churches see this as an open door. Our church leaders are often critical of the CRK teachers because they are corrupt and sleep with their students. Those things may occasionally happen but those are distractions to keep us from seeing the absolutely amazing open doors before us.

If we are wise, we can see other open doors.

- The HIV/AIDS crisis is given us doors of opportunity that we have not had before.
- The Jos Crisis and the potential violence opens up doors for us to try to work with Muslims to solve these problems.
- The corruption in society gives us an opportunity to join forces with other Christians and even Muslims to fight it and this union has other potential benefits.

Please remember that one person's problem is another person's opportunity. Every problem in society is an open door for the person who is interested in solving it.

Paul viewed a closed door as an indication of God's new direction.

When the Jews withdrew their invitation from Paul to speak in the synagogue, he viewed that as God's timing to move on to the Gentiles. I believe that God works in our lives as much through closed doors as he does through open doors. Notice these verses from Acts 16:6-10:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Application

What are the open doors that God has given to you? You cannot possibly take advantage of all the open doors. However, you should be sensitive to the leadership of the Spirit. God is not a static God. He is a living God. And God wants us to be constantly responding to the changing circumstances of life. Therefore, God is going to be opening new doors for us.

- I challenge you to look for those open doors.
- I challenge you to push on the open doors a little.
- I challenge you to take advantage of these open doors.

I have two brief observations I want to share with our young missionaries.

It is more fulfilling to develop something that maintain something.

This is one of the real joys of missionary work—doing something creative and being unhindered by the bureaucracy of the western world. This is one of the mistakes that our young Nigerian professionals make when they complete their training in the western world. They can stay in the West and make a lot more money but they are only maintaining things. However, they could return to their country and make a whole lot less money but receive the joy of developing things.

Do not defeat yourself by anticipating the negative responses of other people.

Most people are comfortable doing what they have always done. Therefore, many people are uncomfortable doing something new and are skeptical about doing something new. Many people assume that everyone else in the world feels the same way that they do so they don't attempt anything new. However, I have made it a commitment in my life that I will not defeat myself by anticipating the negative answers of others. They may not allow me to do it but let them tell me no. I would challenge you to develop that kind of attitude. Attempt new things and bigger things for God and do not allow a spirit of pessimism to discourage you. Many of your projects will fail but some will succeed.

Will you accept the challenge to look for and develop the open doors of the next generation of SIM missionary work in Nigeria?

Paul Started Reaching Out to the Corinthians Through Their Religion

Exposition

Luke 18:4 says, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." Paul was a Jew and had worshipped the Lord as a Jew his whole life. He had been trained as a rabbi so he knew the Jewish religion as well as anybody could. We

must remember that, according to Paul's testimony, the old religion had never done anything for him. He had been very faithful to observe and practice that religion. However, according to Romans 7, it never satisfied his soul. He was left empty and depressed by the old religion. Note these statements from Galatians about the old religion:

- 3:10: *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse*
- 3:11: *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law*
- 3:23: *Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*
- 4:3-5: *So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. ⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*
- 4:24-25: *These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.*

So it is very obvious that Paul considered the old religion—the Judaism as it was being practiced at that time preparatory at best and slavery and bondage at worse.

Even though this was true, Paul was willing to use the old religion as a bridge to tell them of something better. Note that he never ridiculed the old religion. Although he often pointed out the superiority over what Jesus brought to this world, he was not arrogant or abusive toward the older religion.

Here is something that we do not always think about. The religion of Judaism, particularly as it was being practiced at that time, was not really the total truth. There were holes and even errors in the beliefs and practices of the religion. However, Paul had no hesitation in using the religion to take him as far as he could go. Paul did not believe that because there were some holes in Judaism or some outright errors, he needed to completely reject that religion. He used this religion as a bridge to get their attention and to give him an opportunity to explain the truths of Christianity. The Jewish religion became a starting place to introduce this new aspect of religion which was brought by Jesus.

Paul saw an advantage of beginning his evangelistic and church planting work in the religious community. Paul's normal practice when he went to a new city was to go to the synagogue. Because he was a rabbi, he had an automatic invitation to address the group. Paul would present Jesus based upon the Old Testament Scriptures.

And here is another interesting truth: Paul also even *utilized the pagan religions* to some extent as a bridge to introducing people to Christianity. Paul went to Athens and accepted an invitation to speak to a group of pagan philosophers. He did not refuse this invitation just because he believed or practiced something different from what he believed and practiced. Paul was complimentary of them about their religion or at least he began his speech by acknowledging their religion which would have been viewed as positive by those who heard him. He began his speech by saying,

Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this

inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul even quotes one of the pagan poets in his speech (17:28).

Here is the point: ***Paul was willing to take any religion as far as it would take him down the road toward Christ.*** It is only when that road branched off into untruth that Paul would disassociate himself from that religion. Paul's view of other religions was that they could be useful in introducing Christianity, especially in the beginning. There would be time later to sort out what part of the old religion could be retained. However, there was no problem in . . .

- Showing respect for their religion
- Interacting with those who practiced another religion
- Using the objects of their religion to point them in a new direction.
- Finding common ground in the old religion and the new faith he was introducing.

Paul wanted to use the old religions as a starting point or a bridge to the new truth and new way that Jesus had brought to this world.

Application

Is there anything that we can learn from Paul's approach? Here are three thoughts:

We should learn at least something about the local religions where we work.

Most of us live in an area in which Islam is quite prominent. Therefore, I would encourage all of us to learn a bit about Islam. If you learn a bit about Islam, those on the other side will appreciate it and you will gain their respect. And God may use just what you know about Islam as a bridge to reach someone for Christ some day.

We should be respectful and be careful about provocative statements.

Jesus said that we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. That means that all other religions are false to some extent. However, all other religions are held to strongly by their adherents and the best way to lose an opportunity to reach another person to Christ is to abuse his beliefs, particularly his beliefs about his religion. I learned an important African proverb when I lived in Port Harcourt. It is this: "What you have not said, you can always say." We need to practice this proverb when interacting with other religions. We do not have to say publicly all that we think.

We should look for opportunities to relate with people of other religions.

You will never win a person from another religion to Christ if you do not establish some kind of relationship with that person. We need to look for common interests and opportunities to reach out to those persons. There may be ways that we can use the religion or parts of the religion to get the attention or create a bridge to unbelievers.

Here are some questions:

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

- Is it ever good for a Christian leader and even missionary to meet Muslim religious leaders?
- Is it possible that we can find common ground with Muslims?

This is what we have attempted to do with our AIDS ministry. In trying to develop a faith-based AIDS awareness program for public schools, we have deliberately chosen to work directly with Muslims. We Christians believe about the same thing about sexual abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage as the Muslims believe. So why not use their religion as a bridge to create friendships and allow them to see real Christianity? Therefore, we hold joint workshops in which Christians hear Muslim presentations and Muslims hear Christian's presentations. We all eat the same food. We experience the same things. Here are some of the things I have learned in my interactions with my Muslim colleagues.

- ***We are learning about Islam.*** You cannot spend a week working closely with Muslims without learning something about Islam.
- ***We are building relationships with individual Muslims.***
- ***We are helping to create peace in the community through mutually working together on projects.*** Since God is a God of peace, this has to be something that is pleasing to God.
- ***We are doing image evangelism.***
- ***We are changing the perception of Muslims about Christians.*** As you know the perception of Muslims about Christians is not very good in northern Nigeria. All the statements you heard during the crisis about Muslims like "These people are animals," etc., these are the same kinds of statements they make about us for some of the same reasons we make them about them.

Before we can attract any of them to Christ, we must attract them to ourselves.

When I was reading through Acts recently, I discovered a fascinating verse. It occurs immediately after Paul concluded his speech to the Areopagus in Athens. It says, "*At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed.*" (Acts 17:33-34). And we now know that if they started following Paul, they were also following Christ. Paul won them to himself and when he did so, he also won them to his Savior.

Obviously, not everyone will have the same opportunity to reach out to Muslims and even pagans as others. However, we must recognize that using the older religions as a bridge to the new faith was a key strategy of Paul. I would assume that working with the old religions to some extent was one of those strategies that Paul meant when he said, "*Follow my example as I follow Christ.*"

Paul Implemented His Ministry With Teamwork

Exposition

Luke 18:5 says: "*When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*" Silas and Timothy were two of Paul's colleagues and traveling companions. Paul had apparently sent them back to Thessalonica perhaps from Athens when he went on to Corinth. However, in a short time, Paul's team reassembled in Corinth.

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

From the beginning, Paul had worked with a team.

- On the first missionary journey, he had worked with Barnabas and John Mark.
- On his second missionary journey, he started out with Silas.
- When he got to Derbe, Timothy joined the team.
- When he got to Troas, Luke joined the team.

Paul worked closely with other people. He recognized that he could not do all of these things himself. He needed partners in the ministry.

Application

Proverbs 4:9-12 says:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three stands is not quickly broken.

One of the secrets of success in any enterprise is to get good people to help do the work. Paul believed in this philosophy. Jesus had earlier sent out his disciples two-by-two. This is a very useful practice to modern missionaries as well. One needs the encouragement, companionship and courage, which a companion gives. There are several applications of this concept of partnership to missions.

Individual missionaries should work in teams.

Whether we like it or not, few of us will ever be totally absorbed into the culture or feel totally and completely and permanently a part of the culture. Therefore, it is good to have people with whom we can associate and support. Jesus understood this principle and sent his people out “two by two.” In a simple word, it is good to have fellow missionaries in our work.

- We need the support we get from each other.
- We need to balance we get from one another.
- We need the correction we get from one another.
- We need the fellowship we get from one another.

Make sure you are spending the necessary time and energy to build up and support your missionary team.

Individual missionaries need to partner with their Nigerian colleagues.

There are few if any jobs that you as a missionary are doing right now that someday a Nigerian will be doing. Therefore, it is important for the missionary to be spending time right now with their local colleagues preparing them to take over the ministry whenever he or she is gone. Working closely together with our local colleagues is one of the most rewarding things that we will do.

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

I have had a lot of ideas throughout my life and ministry and have written up quite a few proposals. I have started a whole lot of projects. However, the only ones that have really been successful are those in which I have been able to get others involved.

- We have a Diploma in Christian studies program at the University of Jos.
- We have a good CRK ministry to day because I got Prof. Ilori involved.
- We have a good AIDS ministry because I have gotten others involved.

To the extent that I have been able to get local people involved in projects, to that extent they have succeeded. When I attempt to do these projects myself, they may last for a while but they usually do not last.

I cannot think of a much greater ministry that you can have than to invest your life in the lives of your Nigerian colleagues.

Missionary organizations need to partner with local bodies.

It is unlikely that any missionary organization is going to come to Nigeria and work successfully without having a local partner. The local partners that I work with are not Christian organizations. We work with universities and ministries of education. Obviously, SIM works with ECWA. This is the way it should work. If we attempt to bypass the local people and the local organizations, we may be able to satisfy the donors who sent us here but we are not going to create a very successful long-term ministry.

About five or six years ago, a church in the US decided to sponsor a big outreach program here in Jos. They spent well over a million dollars planning this big event at the Polo Field. Their advertising and initial public relations efforts were brilliant. There were about a quarter of a million people who attended the event. Interestingly, they worked closely with PFN, CAN and New Life for All in planning this event. All of these bodies worked very hard to get out the people and it was very successful. However, from my perspective, that was about the only thing they did successfully. From that point onwards, they pretty well did everything on their own.

- They brought in their 250 person choir to do the singing.
- Their people did all of the preaching and teaching in the supplementary programs.
- The only Nigerians on the platform were translators.
- When the program was over on Saturday night, instead of their people fanning out and going to local churches, they all met together and none of them even visited a local church.

I think the organization made many mistakes but perhaps their biggest mistake was to ignore the huge contribution that the local body of Christ would make to their efforts.

Here was Paul's words to the local body with which he worked in Philippi:

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **because of your partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-5).*

Make sure you maintain strong partnerships with your local partners.

Missionary organizations need to reach out beyond their own comfort zone and make a deliberate effort to work with others.

In the early days of missions, certain areas were zoned to different groups, especially in the north.

- The CMS worked on the plateau.
- The Danish Lutherans worked around Numan
- The Church of the Brethren worked around Biu and Mubi.
- The Evangelical United Brethren, who later became the United Methodist, worked around Jalingo.
- The CRC worked around Takum
- The Dutch Reformed Church worked in Tiv land in Benue State
- SIM worked in Egbe and southern Kaduna and then around Billiri and Kaltungo and other places.

That was probably a wise strategy in those days. However, I am convinced that we need more coordination and cooperation in our work today. We must not isolate ourselves from the rest of the body of Christ. We must seek to engage and cooperate with other bodies that go beyond our primary partners.

Certainly SIM has not done that in some of your ministries.

- The Challenge bookshops were open to all.
- The various hospitals and health clinics did not discriminate against anyone but served all Christians and even Muslims.
- Even the schools were reasonably open to others.

However, I believe that we must go further.

I want to stress one particular area of partnership and cooperation that I think is necessary for SIM and your partner ECWA today. I believe that SIM and ECWA must make a deliberate effort to work more closely with Pentecostals. Whether we like it or not . . .

- Pentecostals are our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Pentecostalism is here in Nigeria to stay.
- Pentecostals have helped to bring a revival of some sort to the church, particularly in the area of worship.
- Pentecostals make up a large percentage of the bodies in NEMA (Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association) and are doing a lot of the front-line missions in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

We evangelicals have tended to draw away from them for several reasons.

- We do not like their theology. We question their interpretation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and several other doctrines.
- We do not like many of their practices in the church. For example, the practice of so-called prophecy annoys many of us.

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

- We do not like much of the “healing” that goes on in the name of Pentecostalism because much of it is hypocritical and fake.
- We are certainly irritated by the emphasis on prosperity that has arisen in many parts of Pentecostalism.
- We do not want to say anything positive about them because our children are already running to the Pentecostals and if they see we have any respect for them, that might encourage them to continue moving toward Pentecostalism.

I am aware of all of those objections. However, the Bible expects those that have to give to those who have not. God expects that those who are strong should bear with and support those who are weak. The Bible assumes that those who have will give to those who do not have.

Therefore, I think that SIM and its counterpart ECWA should sit down and develop a serious and deliberate strategy for reaching out and possibly influencing Pentecostalism here in Nigeria. This is obviously already being done to some extent. Many Pentecostal students have enrolled at JETS and I assume other ECWA seminaries and Bible colleges. However, I believe we can do more.

- We need to take advantage of the energy and enthusiasm the Pentecostals bring to the church.
- We need to take advantage of the hunger that many Pentecostals have for serious Bible teaching. Many Pentecostals recognize that they are deficient in theological training and are eager to make up those differences. Where are they going to go to get the training that they need.

I believe we must look for opportunities to spend more time with Pentecostals and somehow develop a strategy in which we can positively influence them more. We may not need to convince them to stop speaking in tongues. However, we might be able to teach them how to interpret the Bible better. And if we can do that, we will have helped all of those people who have come under their influence. The bottom line is that we should stop complaining against them and stop fighting them and find a way that we can partner with them to build up God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

I am convinced that we are not going to accomplish the goals that God has for us as individuals or as an organization unless we focus on teamwork. Surely Paul also had this in mind when he said, “*Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.*”

Paul Persevered in Spite of Opposition

Exposition

Acts 18:6 declares, “*But when the Jews opposed Paul.*” Whenever you present Jesus in a non-Christian atmosphere, there is normally going to be opposition. What did they do? We have two hints about the kind of opposition that he experienced.

Paul was abused by the Jews.

Acts 18:6 says: “*But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive.*” No one likes to be abused. To be abused implies ridicule; it implies someone who thinks he knows more or

is more important than you are. It is an attempt to humiliate you. And none of us like this kind of thing. However, most of the great saints in the Bible were abused. And if the great saints in the Bible, including Jesus were abused, it is reasonable that we may be abused some time in our lives.

Paul was attacked and arrested.

Acts 18:12-13 says: *“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”* Have you ever been arrested? Please understand that the word “arrest” in Nigeria simply means to detain. I have been arrested three or four times. I have even had my vehicle “arrested.” If you continue to do the work of God, you may eventually be attacked and even arrested.

Paul was taken to court.

“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law” (18:12-13).

I do not like to go to court. However, I have had the unfortunate “privilege” or going to court here in Nigeria because of the gospel. Actually Paul’s stay in Corinth was not too bad. He experienced many other problems throughout his life. Note these statements: Note his testimony in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10:

We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Note his testimony in 2 Corinthians 11:22-29:

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the

Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism

churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

The bottom line is that Paul experienced much opposition in his life. However, in spite of the opposition, he continued his ministry. He did not allow opposition and obstacles to stand in his way.

According to 18:18; Paul continued on even in spite of opposition. "***Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time.***" This was after the opposition. In fact, Paul stayed there until there were enough believers to start and sustain a church. Note v. 18b: "*Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. **Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.***" Even though there was opposition and trouble and court cases and many other kinds of wahalla, Paul continued his ministry until he could safely leave a viable church.

Application

Remember, God's work will always go forward the hard way, the difficult way, the painful way. It is almost certain that you are going to experience pain and obstacles and other kinds of problems during your service for the Lord. However, that is normal. Jesus said in Matthew 10:22: "*he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*" I believe that we could paraphrase to say, "he who continues his ministry to the end, will be successful." Here is Paul's word to the Galatians; "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up*" (6:9).

What is your attitude when opposition comes your way?

Conclusion

Paul said, "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*" Paul's example is pretty clear:

- He lived among the Corinthians.
- He worked among the Corinthians.
- He took advantage of the open doors.
- He interacted with their local religions as a bridge to Christianity.
- He utilized others and believed in teamwork.
- He persevered in the tough times.

Will we learn those lessons from Paul?

presented to the SIM Spiritual Life Conference, Miango, Nigeria in two sessions
on 9 – 10 January 2009, by Prof. Danny McCain, University of Jos

DISCOURAGEMENT: THE ENEMY'S BIGGEST WEAPON AGAINST GOD'S WORKERS

Introduction

Jesus declared to the Father that he was going to send his followers into the world to fulfill his will (John 17:18). However, the followers of Jesus have an enemy who is going to do his part to keep us from being sent. And if we do allow ourselves to be sent, that enemy is going to try his best to keep us from fulfilling the purpose for which we are sent. Unfortunately, this enemy, Satan, the devil, has many different kinds of weapons that he uses to derail us from our ministries. These include:

- moral temptations
- financial temptations
- temptations to the gossip of others
- temptations to anger and unforgiveness
- temptations related to interpersonal conflicts
- temptations to spiritual coldness and deadness
- temptations to laziness and carelessness and shallowness

However, I am convinced that one of the biggest temptations, especially to Christian workers, including missionaries, is the topic for our discussion today.

I will begin this sermon with a statement from Eliphaz one of Job's friends.

*Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking? Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. **But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed.** Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish. The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered (Job 4:1-11).*

Eliphaz was the first of Job's friends to speak. As soon as Job finished his first speech, he began explaining his philosophy which basically assumes this:

- God is just which means that he rewards the righteous, punishes the wicked and forgives the penitent.
- Since there was little understanding of the after life, God had to reward the righteous and punish the wicked in this life.
- When you see a person being financially or physically blessed, that was an indication of God's blessing and therefore a testimony to his righteousness.
- If you see a person who was suffering physically or financially, that was an indication that he was under God's judgment and that was a proof of his lack of righteousness.

Discouragement

Job was suffering under several tragedies. Therefore, that meant that he was under the judgment of God. Note these statements from Eliphaz which reflect that theology:

- 4:7: “*Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?*” The point is that God does not destroy the good. A good God would not allow the innocent to suffer. That must mean that Job has done something that is bringing on the judgment of God.
- 4:8: “*As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.*” Job is now reaping a lot of trouble. That must mean that he has sown that trouble because God would certainly not allow bad things to happen to an innocent man.
- 4:10-11: “*The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.*” This is an interesting figure of speech. Trouble is compared to a great lion. The lions of affliction and trouble roar around us. However, because we are righteous, God is going to protect us from the lions. In fact, the lions will have so little to eat from us, that they will perish and their cubs will be scattered.

In other words, God is going to protect us from the lions of affliction.

This kind of teaching sounds very familiar to us. It takes a little different approach here in Nigeria but we still hear it. Because God loves us and is all powerful . . .

- God wants to bless his people with prosperity.
- Sickness and accidents and privation are never the will of God.
- God wants us to be the head and not the tale.

Here is the record of what God said to Eliphaz and his friends at the end of the Book of Job:

*After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because **you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.** . . . My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. **You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.**” (Job 42:7-9)*

Here is a key statement from the passage we read earlier:

*Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. **But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed.***

The key word here is “*discouraged.*” Perhaps Job’s biggest problem was not the physical pain that he suffered or even the loss of his family but when all of these joined together, they weighed him down with discouragement.

And here is a parallel point: If you have the wrong philosophy or the wrong theology, you will easily become discouraged. Eliphaz says that Job had been doing a lot of good things and apparently things were going quite well but all of a sudden, a big problem comes into his life and he has become discouraged. Then trouble strikes and he becomes dismayed.

Discouragement

The point of this sermon is that one of the greatest tools that Satan uses against us is the tool of discouragement. And nearly always our discouragement arises either because of poor theology or because of a failure to remember or live by our theology. Job's theology and philosophy of life were severely tested during this time. And his questions that arose from his philosophy created discouragement.

I want to look at some things in the Book of Acts that led to discouragement and show you how Satan uses the weapon of discouragement against us. The example of Eliphaz simply demonstrates that poor theology leads to discouragement. The book of Acts demonstrates that Satan likes to use discouragement in our lives. I want to show you how often the enemy tries to attack us with discouragement when we first enter the ministry or after we first start a new project. The devil will hammer us with discouragement.

Discouragement Through Violence

Sometimes the attacks of Satan are quite subtle. He tries to discourage us through confusion. This seems like just a "normal thing." However, at other times the attacks are more direct. Sometimes the devil comes in like a "roaring lion." Why does he do that? He does that to discourage people.

Illustration

When I teach the book of Acts, I always force me students to notice something in Acts 16:8-10:

*So **they** passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them.*

This is the beginning of the "we" passages in Acts. What this suggests is that it was in Troas where Luke joined the missionary team. After joining the team, they sailed across the corner of the Aegean Sea and arrived at Philippi. In Philippi, Paul delivered a slave girl from demons. This caused her owners to stir up trouble. Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten and thrown into prison. This event is described in Acts 16:22-24:

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The missionaries were dragged into court. They were beaten. They were thrown into prison. Their feet were fastened in stocks.

What do you think that this would do to the new missionary Luke? It would tend to discourage him. On Luke's first missionary experience, his leader is arrested and beaten and jailed. It is likely that he narrowly escaped this treatment. What were the questions that you think were going through Luke's mind at that time?

Discouragement

- What have I got myself into?
- If this is the way it is, do I really want to continue this kind of work?
- Why did God not stop this violence? After all, we prayed this morning for God's protection but God did not protect them.
- Perhaps I better just get the next boat back to Troas and return to my normal medical practice in Troas. When I agreed to go with Paul, I did not agree to this.

Unfortunately, Luke was neither the first nor the last to see and experience violence. Peter was arrested and imprisoned just a short time after Pentecost. He was arrested another four or five times. Paul was arrested at least three times that we know of in the Book of Acts and at least one of those experiences resulted in a serious beating. One another occasion, Paul was beaten by a mob so severely he was left for dead. What was the enemy trying to do with these experiences? They were designed to discourage people. When people get discouraged they either do not do their jobs very well or they stop doing them all together.

Application

The Bible gives us many wonderful comforting scriptures that promise that the devil cannot defeat us.

- *the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world* (1 John 4:4).
- *When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Lord will lift up a standard against him* (Isaiah 59:19 KJV).
- *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God may not allow the devil to defeat us. However, in the midst of the battle, sometimes we are tempted to be discouraged and quit.

Many of you have been exposed to violence in the last few weeks. You have experienced the violence of the Jos Crisis. You have seen the smoke and heard the sirens and the gunfire. You have seen the burned buildings and vehicles and some of you have seen the wounded bodies of the victims. In addition, some of you have experienced the violence of armed robbery some time in your missionary career. In fact, I have said for years that it is not a married of if you are hit by armed robbers but when. If you live long enough in Nigeria, the odds are that you are going to experience some kind of armed robbery.

We learn from the book of Job that there are two things going on with regards to the violence you have seen and experienced.

- ***The enemy is trying to discourage and defeat you.*** He wants you to quit and go home and stop the ministry he has given you to do.
- ***The Lord is putting you on exhibit as a demonstration of how a child of God can live through times of violence.***

The same problems that the devil uses to discourage you are the problems that God is going to use you to be a model and demonstration of the way God's people respond to violence.

Discouragement

I met with the members of Emmanuel Baptist Church two Sundays ago. This is a church that has been burned three times in the last seven years. I told them that I don't know of any other church in the world that has been burned three times. Therefore, God has chosen to put them on display. How will the people of a church that has been burned three times respond to that? God's people and the enemy's people are both watching to see how they will respond.

We must remember that it is not just the direct attacks of the devil that defeat us. It is the pressure and the depression and discouragement that come from these things. Have you been discouraged from the various kinds of trauma that you have experienced or witnessed? Remember, the devil is trying to defeat you. But God has chosen you to be a model of how Christian suffer. Therefore, we must not allow ourselves to become discouraged.

Discouragement Through Confusion

Most people like for things to be very straightforward and clear.

- Students like for policies of their schools to be clear.
- Missionaries want the working policies of the mission to be clearly understood.
- Few people enjoy living in an atmosphere of confusion.

Wherever there is any kind of confusion, that tends to produce discouragement. In 1 Corinthians 14:33, Paul discusses worship services. In the KJV, Paul said, "*God is not the author of confusion.*"

- God is not the author of confusion in a church service.
- God is not the author of confusion in our personal lives.
- God is not the author of confusion in a ministry or project.

Whenever confusion comes into a situation, the devil is trying to discourage people and discouragement is one of his best tools. Note these examples of confusion in Acts which leads to discouragement.

Leadership Confusion

The following two sections of scripture introduce an important issue:

- Acts 13:13: "*From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.*"
- Acts 15:36-38: "*Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.*"

Why did John Mark leave the missionary team in Perga? We are not told. However, it is likely that he left the team because of discouragement. There may be a hint of why he got discouraged in the story of the team's activities on Cyprus. Note these verses:

Discouragement

- 13:2: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me **Barnabas and Saul** for the work to which I have called them.’”
- 13:6-7: “They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for **Barnabas and Saul** because he wanted to hear the word of God.”
- 13:13: “From Paphos, **Paul and his companions** sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.”
- 13:42: “As **Paul and Barnabas** were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.”

What is the point? When they entered the island, they were “*Barnabas and Saul*.” When they left the island, they were “*Paul and Barnabas*.” Apparently, the leadership of the team changed while the team was on the island of Cyprus.

John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas who had been the leader of the group. When he saw what was happening—that his uncle was losing his position as the leader of the group, he apparently was confused a bit. Why was this happening? Was this young man, Paul, trying to take over the leadership of the team? The confusion over leadership brought on discouragement. And it is possibly that discouragement that eventually led him to quit the missionary team.

One of Satan’s biggest schemes is to try to create confusion over leadership. He does this so that we will be discouraged and quit. The enemy was able to get Mark so discouraged that he actually quit his ministry and returned home. Nature does not like a vacuum and when there is either a vacuum in leadership or even a transition in leadership, that is the opportunity for confusion and frustration and that is always fertile ground for discouragement. Whenever there is any kind of confusion over leadership, be very careful. The devil is on the prowl. He is trying to bring discouragement. He is likely trying to attack some vulnerable person.

Doctrinal Confusion

Paul and Barnabas had successfully completed the first missionary journey. They were filled with joy over the success of their journey. Acts 15:1 says: “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’ This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.” This problem eventually caused Paul to write the book of Galatians.

This was primarily a doctrinal issue. Some Christians were insisting that all Christians had to be circumcised whereas Paul and Barnabas were insisting that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. This led to doctrinal confusion. And Galatians 4:8-11, Paul reflects on discouragement.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Discouragement

When you have one leader teaching one thing and another leader teaching something else, that leads to confusion. And confusion leads to discouragement.

At a seminary level, it is good to have healthy debates. And it is good to teach our people to think and to respect the opinions of others. However, we must be careful about allowing too many doctrinal variations to develop in our churches. They will lead to confusion and confusion will lead to discouragement.

I was reared in a church that was very strict. We were always quarreling over small doctrinal or lifestyle issues. The end result was that many of our young people became discouraged and left our faith community, many of them departing from the faith altogether.

Directional Confusion

Timothy apparently was converted in Lystra or Derbe on the first missionary journey. However, he joined the missionary team early in the second missionary journey. Here is a record of the events immediately after Timothy joined the team:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas (Acts 16:6-8).

Paul was a major city evangelist. After revisiting the cities where he had planted churches on the first missionary journey, Paul headed directly towards Ephesus, the major city in Asia Minor. The Lord stopped him from going to Ephesus. He turned to go to Bithynia but the Lord stopped him. So he turned and went another direction. He travels actually looked like a big Z.

How do you think that this directional confusion affected young Timothy, on his first trip with these evangelists? I am sure that it tended to confuse and discourage him.

All of us like for things to go straight. However, very often they do not go straight. We walk through open doors and run up against closed doors. We have to zig and zag until we get to Troas where we can get real direction from God. We should be aware that young people and new people and people who have recently joined the ministry are vulnerable to discouragement when there is confusion over direction.

I am currently working on a project in Southern Sudan. I have made three trips there working on the details of sending three people there. They should have gone there last August. However, there have been delays and “unknowns.” We actually are not quite sure what is happening there right now.

Some of you know Dr. Layne Turner. Although he has worked for a government institution and was entitled to a GO (Government Officer) visa. He had problems with his visa here. He was advised to go back to the US, take his normal break and then re-apply through the normal means. He got all the supporting documents from the college of education. He went back and applied properly. He heard nothing for about two months. He finally had his passport withdrawn. I got another fresh letter from the college and we

Discouragement

attempted again. After two months of calling the embassy and trying everything possible, there has still not been any response. We are now asking the question: What is going on? Is the Lord closing the door for Layne Turner to come back to Nigeria so he can go somewhere else. Or is this the enemy that is causing all of this confusion? The answer is that we do not yet know. What we do know is that there is confusion and where there is confusion there is the great likelihood that there is going to be discouragement.

Application

Is there confusion in your life and in your ministry? If there is, there is also likely a lot of discouragement in your life. Remember confusion is not of the Lord. Resist and reject it and do not allow yourself to get discouraged.

For the last several years, my country, the USA, has been bogged down in a war in Iraq. This is primarily a war against insurgents and radical foreign extremists. These insurgents know that they cannot defeat the US army militarily. The US has better equipment, better trained soldiers, far more money than the insurgents. The insurgents are defeated every time there is a head-to-head engagement. They cannot stand up to the fire power of the US military. However, the hope of the insurgents is not to directly defeat the US and its coalition partners. The hope is to gradually wear them down—to keep killing a few soldiers along and continue blowing up equipment so that the American public eventually becomes discouraged with the war and puts pressure on the politicians to bring the troops home. This is actually a low level engagement, compared to former wars. We lost more soldiers in one hour in certain battles in the past than we have lost in four years of fighting in Iraq so far. However, the strategy of the insurgents is working. The American public are becoming discouraged.

This is exactly the strategy that Satan uses against us sometimes. He knows that he cannot get us to yield to certain temptations. He continues to loose the direct confrontations. However, he is wanting to gradually put enough pressure on you until you eventually get tired and give up and cease doing the work God has called you to do.

We must be concerned about the direct assaults of the enemy but we must not rejoice too much when we succeed because the repeated assaults will tend to discourage us. And discouragement is one of Satan's biggest weapons.

Discouragement Through Isolation or Inactivity

Exposition

When Paul was giving his testimony to Felix, he told about what he had received from the Lord on the day he was converted.

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26:15-18).

Discouragement

What do these verses teach us about Paul? They tell us that Paul knew from the first day of his conversion that God had called him to a significant ministry to the Gentiles. However, what happened to him after that? Paul gives us some information in Galatians 1:15-18:

*But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after **three years**, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him **fifteen days**.*

In Galatians 2:1, Paul adds, “**Fourteen** years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas.” After an amazing conversion and receiving clear direction that he would have a ministry to the Gentiles, Paul went to Arabia where there was nothing to do and stayed for three years. He then went to Jerusalem but stayed only 15 days where he received a cool reception. He then went to Tarsus where he stayed about ten years, essentially doing nothing.

What was happening in Paul’s life at this time? Not too much. Paul was isolated from the main body of Christians at the time and also from those with whom he could minister and from whom he could learn and with whom he could have fellowship. Isolation is dangerous because it leads to discouragement. Remember the earlier point: Sometimes God and the devil use the same events for different purposes.

- What was the devil doing during this time? He was trying to discourage Paul.
- What was God doing during this time? He was teaching him patience.

Application

Has God put you in a lonely place? If he has, there are lessons that you can learn. Has God reduced or stopped the ministries that you were involved in before? However, you must be careful and not allow yourself to become discouraged. Even if the devil is interfering with your activities, remember that the Lord can use these things in your life.

One of my good friends made a small mistake in his ministry. He was then put on suspension by his overseer. He stayed in that condition for three years. However, rather than allowing himself to get discouraged, every time I saw him, he would say, “The Lord is being exceptionally good to me. He is preparing me for something special.” It was this kind of attitude that kept him from getting discouraged.

Beware of isolation if you can help it. However, if God does isolate you for a while, keep your focus on God and your ministry and do not allow yourself to become discouraged.

Other Forms of Discouragement

Interpersonal Conflict

Paul had observed a flaw in Peter’s life which he was forced to confront. Later Paul had a serious disagreement with Barnabas. Of all the problems that we face, interpersonal conflicts can wear you down the quickest.

Disappointing Disciples

Paul was disappointed that some of his new converts from the first missionary journey were departing from the faith. This was so serious that Paul thought that perhaps all the work he had done on the first missionary journey was a waste of time. Paul was disappointed that some of his converts were doing stupid things. 1 Corinthians is full of these examples. Paul was disappointed that some of his disciples were arguing and squabbling with each other. In Philippians 4:2 he writes: *“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.”* All of these kinds of things have a way of weighing down on you and creating discouragement.

Financial Stress

I could not find any examples of financial problems in Acts. However, Paul makes this interesting statement in Philippians 4:11-12: *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be **in need**, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or **hungry**, whether living in plenty or **in want**.”* Do you notice the words *“in need,” “hungry,”* and *“in want.”* There were obviously times where Paul did not have all that he felt that he needed to carry on his ministry. When you don’t have all you need, it has a way of discouraging you.

Legal Problems

Paul was arrested in Philippi. He was arrested in Corinth. He was arrested in Jerusalem. Each of these involved legal problems. Missionaries often face various kinds of legal problems, including immigration, visa. quota and other problems.

Responding to Discouragement

How do we respond to discouragement? I do not have a formula. As I have said before, I worry about formula Christianity. However, I will make some simple observations.

Be sure of your calling.

Make sure we know what God has called us to do. Sometimes we get involved in doing things that are not really our responsibilities. When that happens, the Lord may put pressure on us to get us to return to doing what we should be doing. Knowing the gifts and callings in our lives is a subjective thing. There is no formula for discovering it. However, God has many ways that he can reveal to us that we are indeed doing or we are not doing what he has called us to do.

I heard of one man who moved his family to the mission field. However, after one year, he recognized that God had never called him to the mission field. This was his own idea. Therefore, he had the courage to admit that he was wrong and take his family back to where they belonged.

Vance Havner said, “Many people sing the song, “I will go where you want me to go, dear Lord, but they are unwilling to stay where God wants them to stay.”

Look for the hand of God in the discouraging times.

Even when there is opposition, there are often little markers of God's presence. Make sure you look for them.

Noah experienced the trauma of the flood for weeks and months. There was uncertainty and confusion and worry about what would happen. However, a dove showed up with an olive leaf and that was the reassurance he needed to know that God was with him. Here is the record: "When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth" (Genesis 8:11).

Paul experienced a lot of trouble on his last trip to Jerusalem. He was warned repeatedly before going that there would be trouble. When he got there, he received a lukewarm reception from the church at Jerusalem. At one point he was falsely accused of taking a Gentile into a restricted part of the Temple. He was attacked and almost torn apart. He was arrested by the Roman army and detained. There were assassination attempts and inconclusive trials. Paul's imprisonment eventually lasted for four years. However, the Lord did something nice for him. In the midst of all of these troubles and these discouraging circumstances, the Lord arranged some special transportation for Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. In the midst of a death threat, the Lord arranged for 470 soldiers to accompany Paul to Caesarea. Paul had 200 spearman going before him and 200 swordsmen coming behind him. He was given a horse to ride and was surrounded by 70 members of the Roman cavalry. I am sure that Paul smiled when he saw all of this happening. He smiled because he could see the hand of God on him in the midst of this discouraging and trouble situation and that caused him to take hope and not be discouraged. This was his dove with the olive leaf. This is the indication that surely the waters are going to recede from the earth. We need to look for those appearances of God during times of discouragement.

My wife experienced an armed robbery about a year ago. It was a traumatic experience. However, there was one thing that happened in the middle of the armed robbery that made her see the hand of God. When the robbers first came in the house, they were struggling with the night guard. Mary screamed as loud as she could. She is not a screamer and has never screamed like that. However, later just when the robbers had closed the lid to her laptop and was about to take it, the whistles from the security guards started blowing. Someone on the road had heard Mary scream and rushed down and reported to the security. They came running back up just in time to save Mary's computer from the robbers. And the strange thing about the scream is that the robbers acted as if they had not even heard Mary. This was an indication that God was with her. It was her dove with the olive leaf. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always."

Focus on the Positive.

Discouragement comes from focusing on the problems of life. However, hope and joy come from focusing on the positive things. Paul encouraged the Philippians to think about things that are good and wholesome and pure and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). The more we focus our attention on God rather than the problems, the less discouraged we are going to be. When you are in the ark and there is water all around you, focus on the olive leaf. It is a sign that God is with you and that eventually the floods will go away.

Discouragement

I am sure that it was discouraging for Paul to be detained for those four years. However, good things came out of it. Paul spent some time meeting and encouraging Christian believers. He also spent some time, especially in Rome, meeting with Jewish leaders, evangelizing them. He spent some of his time writing the four prison epistles. And it is almost certain that he worked closely with Luke during his detention to help compile and write the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Therefore, without those four years of detention, we would not have had the prison epistles or Luke and Acts.

When we force ourselves to focus on the positive things that God is doing in our times of trouble, that helps to drive away discouragement.

Remember the sovereignty of God. (Make sure you theology is correct.)

We believe in an all-knowing and all-powerful personal God. Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* We Christians are not fatalist. We do not believe that everything is foreordained and predestined. We do not even believe that God is the author of all the trouble that we experience. However, we do believe that God is so big that he can take even the actions of the devil and turn them around for our good.

Note Paul’s testimony about the thorn in the flesh. *“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me . . .”* (2 Corinthians 12:7). This problem was a messenger from Satan. Note the rest of the statement. *“ . . . lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (12:8). However, this messenger of Satan accomplished good things in the life of God.

- It kept him from getting pride.
- It gave him a chance to demonstrate the grace of God.
- It gave him a chance to demonstrate God’s strength in a time of weakness.

The point is that even if the problems that we face are messengers from Satan, our God is so powerful that he can turn them around and use them for our good and his glory.

Ask God to teach you something during your times of discouragement.

There are often lessons to be learned when we go through difficult circumstances. The Psalmist said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word”* (119:165). I am currently writing a book entitled *But God Provided a Worm* in which I try to show how God used the various difficulties in the lives of Biblical characters to teach important lessons.

- Abraham experienced the worm of examination
- Joseph experienced the worm of direction.
- Job experienced the worm of demonstration.
- The Philippian jailor experienced the worm of salvation.
- Trophimus experienced the worm of unknown origin.

If you can learn a lesson or gain some new insight as a result of your problems, that will help you view them more positively and there will be less room for discouragement.

Persevere.

Don't give up. Hang in there. Keep on doing what God has called you to do. An old American proverb says, "Never get off the train when it is in a tunnel." To continue with the flood analogy: "Don't get out of the ark until the waters have receded." God has not promised us that life would be easy. However, he has promised to be with us in our times of difficulty and stress. Therefore, we must discipline ourselves and continue on doing the right thing even when we do not feel like it.

A number of years ago, my senior son got sick with spinal meningitis. While he was sick, the Lord spoke to my wife and me through a song:

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say; than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled*

*Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
For I will be with thee, thy trials to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and the gold to refine.*

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!*

Although we were tempted to be discouraged, the Lord was with us and helped us to see that the Lord's hand was upon us and would use this painful problem for our own good.

Conclusion

There is a little Nigeria chorus that says, "I serve a very big God-o. And he's always by my side." God is so big he knows all things and can do all things. He has chosen not to remove all our problems from us. However, even when the problems come, God is there also.

Are you discouraged? Maybe you had better take another look at your theology. Most important, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

presented to the SIM Spiritual Life Conference, Miango, Nigeria 11 January 2009
by Prof. Danny McCain, University of Jos