

Being Sent Out

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:4)

Recently I flew from Atlanta to Tokyo, then on to Bangkok, Thailand and finally to Chiang Mai, Thailand. We were in the air for 18 hours! In order to keep my sanity, I did several things:

- I carried an IPOD filled with my favorite selections, and listened to all of them (3 times!!)
- I took a good book (and finished it)
- I slept (a LOT!!)
- I prayed. For the people we were going to see, for the team that was going, for God's Spirit to prepare the way and open doors, for health, safety, ministry opportunities, relationships to be built, sensitivity to the needs of the people where we would be ministering, the local pastors and church in the area where we would be serving, and for our families back home.

GOING is exciting! There are new experiences to look forward to, new food, new friends, and new opportunities for ministry. The friendships that are built among team members often last a lifetime. But there is one very important thing to remember...as we go, we are being "SENT OUT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT". There is a task for which he has chosen you, and a ministry which, in His providence, He has entrusted to you. He has provided the means for you to go; has prepared you spiritually for your journey, and He goes with you every mile into territory where YOU have never been. However, HE has been there for a long time, preparing hearts and opening doors to make your ministry effective and long lasting.

Spend some time today praying about the ministry to which the Holy Spirit has called you, equipped you and sent you. Thank Him for choosing YOU to go to this part of the world, and entrust all of the details into His care. He has already been there.

THOUGHT: We can't precede the Holy Spirit anywhere!

The Sacrifice of Being Called

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (Luke 10:1 NIV)

My uncle Jerry and Aunt Janet were missionaries in Argentina for 35 years. When they first left the states in 1954, it took over three weeks via ship to reach the field! Over their years of ministry, they sacrificed a lot, humanly speaking. Here is an excerpt from a prayer letter written to their parents and family in October of 1960 concerning two of their children:

“One of the most difficult heartbreaks of our lives came in September when we put Bob and Charlotte on a plane...to Hampton Dubose Academy in Florida. Bob was 16 and Charlotte was 14 and we knew we would not see them again for 5 years- the end of our next term overseas! It was a crushing experience, humanly speaking, and at times seemed more than we could handle....But God saw us through the grieving period victoriously...”

The Southern Baptist International Mission Board has over 5,000 missionary's world wide. Each has sacrificed family, friends, comfort zones, and familiar surroundings in order to be obedient to God's call on their lives. Each has been willing, but that doesn't make those individual sacrifices easy!

The nature of sacrifice is to give something of great value and cost for a higher good. As you interact with God's Servants who have given up personal comfort for the sake of ministry, pray for them, love them, encourage them and thank them. Be motivated by their sacrifice to ask what WE are willing to give up for the sake of the gospel.

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee. (Frances Havergale)

Seasoned with Grace

"Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." (Col. 4:6)

Less than 70 miles outside of Bakersfield, California stands a grove of Sequoia Redwood trees. I used to love to drive up into the mountains to stand in the shadow of these gigantic, strong trees. They grow to over 300 feet tall (a football field standing on end!!!) and live for hundreds of years. The Redwood has one unique feature which applies to the Christian walk. Their bark is soft and pliable, and can be pressed in several inches, but the inside of the tree is concrete solid and virtually impervious to lightning, fire, disease and strong winds.

As we interact with people, and especially when we are tired or stressed, it is easy to become defensive, "short" in our verbal reactions, too sensitive in our response or hurtful to others. As we get to know our fellow travelers better we can slip into unkind teasing, or even a verbally critical spirit. All of these things become hurtful and ultimately damaging to the project focus and goal.

The story is told of a young lady who had said some very unkind things about a friend. She went to her pastor for advice, and he told her two things: That God and her friend could forgive her, and that she was to go to the top of the highest building in town, break a feather pillow and scatter the feathers over the street far below. Puzzled, she did as she was directed, and then went back to the pastor for further counsel. In the second session, he said "Now I want you to go back to the street beneath that building, and pick up every feather. "But", she exclaimed, "That is impossible!! They have blown everywhere by now!!" He replied "In the same way, while you can be forgiven, your words can never be retrieved, and can have a damaging impact from this day forward."

Let your speech be "with grace" today, "as though seasoned with salt", so that your testimony and the testimony of your team will remain un-compromised. Keep your "bark" or the part of you that interacts with others, soft and pliable, while your inner focus and purpose remains as solid and unchanging as steel.

THOUGHT: ""Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless."
-- Mother Teresa

Someone Special

“One of those listening was a woman named **Lydia**, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message”. (Acts 16:14)

Billy Graham was led to the Lord in 1934 at a revival meeting led by itinerant evangelist Mordecai Ham. Little did Ham know that this one person who accepted Christ at his crusade would be responsible for millions coming to know Christ in the years that followed.

In mission projects from El Salvador to Austria and from Ecuador to Africa, we have had the opportunity to share Christ with individuals and see them come to Christ. We have no idea what God could do with just ONE of those precious souls, committed totally to Him!!

Sometimes it seems like evangelical Christians are preoccupied with what has been called “nickels and noses”, or measuring success by how much the offering was and how many people came forward. While those standards can not be totally discounted while evaluating the ministry of a local church or a mission project, sometimes it is that one soul who accepts Christ who will go on to make a huge impact for the Kingdom!

Lydia was Paul's first “convert” in Macedonia. She opened up her home to an embryonic church, and was responsible for many others in Philippi accepting Christ. Her conversion could have seemed like a “slow start” for Paul, Silas and Timothy, but God used her in a mighty way to help nourish a fledgling church. Don't discount the one or two who make a decision for Christ...they could be a chosen vessel to accomplish great things for the Kingdom of God.

THOUGHT: “The luscious fruit of a beautiful apple tree began with one small seed.”
(Anon)

As Unto the Lord

“Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men...” (Col. 3:23 Holman Bible)

In 2004, Christian big band Denver and the Mile High Orchestra performed at the summer Olympics in Greece. 5,000 people from dozens of countries went absolutely wild! Why? Was it the hot charts they played? The music was great, but that is not the reason. Was it the cool looking outfits? No...The loud sound system? Not really! The reason the crowd went nuts could be wrapped up in one word...“Enthusiasm!” Denver and his Band put 100% of themselves into every note, every word, and their enthusiasm stole the show!!

At this point in the project you may be getting tired. The newness of a different culture may be wearing thin. People may start to get on your nerves. The different language may be frustrating now. Those new aromas which were “interesting” several days ago may be less than enticing at this point. Perhaps it is more difficult to get enthusiastic about another performance or ministry opportunity. Let me challenge you to remember your PURPOSE and your FOCUS on this project. God will use you, and will give you strength, but you need to continue to put yourself into your ministry with enthusiasm.

A well known agnostic philosopher went to hear a great British preacher. At the conclusion of the sermon, the philosopher was asked if he believed the message. With a glance toward the preacher he replied, “No, but **he** does!”

That will make an incredible difference in the impact you have this week. Whatever you do in the name of Christ this week, do it with ALL your might! God will use your enthusiasm to touch a lost heart!

THOUGHT: “Excellence is the point where PASSION meets PRECISION.” (Derrick Johnson)

Going the Extra Mile

“Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two....therefore you are to be mature, as your Heavenly Father is mature...” (Matthew 5: 41, 48)

In Jesus' day a Roman soldier could require that a Jewish boy accompany him for a mile to carry his heavy bags. In discussing loving ones' enemies, Jesus said, "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two..." WHY would Jesus suggest going above and beyond what was required, especially when one was being FORCED to carry a soldier's belongings? It has to do with TESTIMONY.

What would a soldier think, if after the required mile he commanded, "OK, drop the bags and get out of here!" only to have the Jewish lad respond "I'll be glad to help you for another mile if you like, Sir!" What would that say about the character, family and upbringing of the boy?

Singer Dave Boyer, after he accepted the Lord and went from singing in clubs to singing in churches, recounts the times he would arrive at a church early to rehearse with his accompanist, only to have the accompanist show up to late to rehearse for the service. He said on more than one occasion, "When I was singing for the world we would practice 4 hours a day and every weekend to make sure it was right, but now that I am singing for the King of Kings, I can't even get a piano player to show up 30 minutes early to rehearse!"

In Galatians 4:9, Paul puts it this way "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." Just what will we reap?-Ministry done with excellence - a reputation for perseverance. And one day a commendation from the Savior, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

THOUGHT: I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know...the only ones among you who will be really happy....are those who will have sought and found how to serve." Albert Schweitzer

Pressing On

I **press** toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 3:14)

When my grandfather passed away on January 8, 1962, my grandmother wrote this poem:

“Home at last, the life’s long journey ended!
The pilgrim’s feet now tread the golden shore.
And he beholds the face of Christ His Savior,
and is at home with Him forevermore.....
And so we travel on toward that glad morning
when we shall meet our loved one once again
Where there will never be another parting,
and with the Lord forever we shall reign!” (Marion Gerow)

A missionary returned to the U.S. from many years of faithful service in Africa. On the same ship was a US dignitary of great fame. As the ship approached New York harbor, the statesman was welcomed with great fanfare, bands, speeches and celebration, but there was no one there to meet the missionary. As he settled into his humble and sparse room for the night, He began to pray, “Lord, why was there no one there to meet me when I came home?” It was then that He heard the Father gently say, “But my child, you aren’t home yet.”

As we “press on”, and there are obstacles, challenges, and thankless days and nights of service to the King, remember that you aren’t home yet! There will be a prize, a reward, for those who faithfully serve Him, but for now the prospect of hearing “Well done, my good and faithful servant” is enough.

THOUGHT: Earthly rewards pale in significance when compared to eternal rewards

In Season, out of Season

"...proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching." (II Tim. 4:2-Holman Bible)

When I was with a music group that toured with Country artist Roy Clark, I saw him be admitted to a hospital on three separate occasions from exhaustion. Why did Roy push himself so hard? He felt that he owed his fans the very best show possible, so he pushed himself to the limit every time he stepped on stage, even when he didn't feel good or was extremely tired from his exhausting schedule.

On one occasion we performed at a State Fair in Allentown, PA with the Fifth Dimension. Marilyn McCoo happened to be ill that night, but she started and completed the show with energy and grace, and when asked how she could perform when she felt so ill, she replied "People paid good money to come see us; I am not going to let a little sickness let them down!"

Sometimes we just don't feel like going on! We may be tired, distracted by circumstances, ill or depressed. We might feel like someone else should carry the ball this time, or we might just feel like missing the game altogether! The apostle Paul told young preacher Timothy, "Proclaim the message whether it is convenient or not, whether you feel like it or not, whether you want to or not, because people need to hear the message and it has been entrusted to you to share!"

There are times when we CAN'T go on, and when those times occur the most spiritual thing you can do is rest. But don't miss an opportunity because it is not convenient! You might miss an opportunity to see a tremendous blessing if you fail to persist even when you don't feel like it.

THOUGHT: "Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can." John Wesley

Driving on Empty

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”.
(Matthew 11:28)

There have been very few times in my life when I have exerted a maximum amount of energy, but one experience I recall vividly! We had taken a pop-up camper to Colorado on vacation, and a brother-in-law thought it would be a great idea for us to take a hike in the mountains. We started off just fine, but the first 1,000 feet were straight up!! 11 miles and over 5 hours later we emerged from the forest exhausted, thirsty, and soaking wet (from the thunder storm we had hiked through!!)

There are times in our spiritual walk when we are exhausted spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally. Sometimes it feels like we can't take another step. Occasionally it feels as though we have walked through a thunder storm miles from loved ones, and we are uncomfortable and homesick. God knows our condition!

Missionary Alfred Perna was ministering in a very poor part of Italy. When his duties were completed, he and his son began the 400 mile drive back to Rome, but realized that they only had enough money to buy 6 gallons of gas! They watched the gas gauge needle steadily drop until it almost reached empty, and then it froze. As they drove through Naples with the gas gauge registering almost empty they prayed and drove on. As they drove up to their apartment in Rome, the car sputtered and died, with the fuel tank empty.

God will do that for YOU!! When the emotional, physical fuel tank is almost empty, He will stretch your resources and help you make it all the way home! Keep your eyes on Him; the finish line is in sight!!

THOUGHT: “When you find He’s all you have, you’ll find He’s all you need.” (Gary Mathena)

The Finish Line

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith."
(II Tim. 4:7)

I have several friends who are marathon runners. That means that they run over 26 miles AT ONE TIME! I would struggle with 26 YARDS!! Many of these folks have told me that there are two things that keep them going mile after mile: the encouragement of family, friends and onlookers on the sidelines, and the goal of the finish line.

A flock of geese flies hundreds of miles in a triangular formation. While the lead goose sets the pace and fights the headwind, the geese behind the lead are constantly squawking their encouragement. After a while, the leader moves back in the pack, another leader takes over, and the following geese again encourage the leader. That is how our lives should function! If we are taking the lead, others should be encouraging us and giving us the emotional stamina we need to finish well. If we are following, we should be encouraging those ahead of us to do their best and to keep on!

The goal for the believer has several facets: there is the goal of doing our best for the Master, the goal of obedience, the goal of a servant attitude, the goal of running within the prescribed course, and the goal of the commendation of our Heavenly Father. When we get to the end of the race, we should be able to look back as the Apostle Paul, and say "I fought a worthy battle, I finished well, and I have shared my faith as God has allowed opportunities." God will judge our efforts not necessarily on how many souls were saved, or how many miles were traveled, but on how available we were to be used, and on how we took advantage of opportunities to be "salt" and "light" to a dying world.

THOUGHT: "Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you are alive, it isn't." (Richard Bach)