

THE RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

SERIES: PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

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If you walk into your average Christian bookstore, you will find book after book extolling the virtues of one strategy or another to help your church grow. Many of them are substantive and good. They are very reflective of things that God is doing well in churches, and they are helpful. But there is another side to them. They are represented as the latest thing in church-building, such that if you just follow their ten easy steps, all of a sudden your church will experience fantastic growth.

There used to be a series called *Mastering Ministry*. It included topics like “Mastering Church Management,” “Mastering Effective Preaching,” and so on. It was prepared by a collection of very qualified authors, and I don’t want to suggest for a minute that they weren’t of value. They had many helpful ideas. But what I think things like this can do is feed the notion that we’ve got to strategize our way into successful ministry, that we can get up to a higher level of ministry by following the new plan, the new focus, the new catchy slogan, or whatever. I’ve wrestled with that many times. I would hear of the things a successful church was doing, and I would just want to grab that and start doing it here, to see if I could make my ministry grow.

But underneath all that is something that is much more important for us to consider: how God has equipped and prepared us to be his servants.

Imagine being one of Jesus’ disciples, walking the path that we’ve traced in this series, as Jesus taught them in the last hours before he would go to the cross. They came into that upper room at the beginning of the evening full of excitement, more and more confident that he was the Messiah and that he was about to ascend to the throne of his kingdom. They were even jockeying for positions of importance. Jesus systematically undermined that confidence and ambition through his own personal example of servanthood to them and by his predictions of their failure. He brought them to a point where they were completely vulnerable and confused. They didn’t know what was going to transpire. This little band of men was one minute high and the next low, one minute trusting God and the next minute pushing their own agendas.

We have seen Jesus carefully building for them a body of knowledge that would prepare them for the next step after he went to the cross, rose from the dead, and returned to the Father. This vulnerable, motley crew of men who had been following Jesus was going to be handed the leadership of the kingdom of God. Jesus began laying a foundation for that ministry: Their security was in who he was and in their relationship with him, in understanding that he would be present with them forevermore as the Holy Spirit, who made the presence of Christ real, came into their lives and into the body of Christ. God was going to continue to work in their lives to transform them into men having the character of Christ. He was going to build among them a community of love that would speak volumes about his grace and love to the world. When they demonstrated God’s love to the world, they were going to face all kinds of opposition, but God’s word was going to go out and people were going to believe.

In the passage we’ll study in this message, Jesus now turns to the issue of what resources are available to them. How will they be able to be the people of God in the world and live out what God has called them to do? The wonderful words that Jesus is about to give the disciples ring down to us, and I hope they will give us confidence to serve and honor him day by day in our own lives. As Jesus comes down to the end of this segment of his teaching, he returns to the theme of the Helper they will be given. In chapter 14 he introduced the Helper who would come, the Holy Spirit, and taught how he would make Jesus real to them after he physically left, so that he would always be with them wherever they went. Now Jesus teaches about the Helper with a different emphasis. His teaching here has to do with how they are going to serve in his kingdom. Let’s read John 16:5-15:

“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not

believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.”

We are always hoping for some edge in the Christian life, but we need to return to the truth that Jesus gives his disciples, who are shaken, wondering how they are going to minister. Jesus now speaks into that void in their life.

We are part of something greater than ourselves

Notice how he begins in verses 5-6: “But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” We are far into this teaching now, and Jesus keeps returning to this theme of his going to the Father. He says, “No one is asking me any questions about the fact that I am going to the Father.” They haven’t gotten it yet because they cannot get their eyes off of the immediate situation. They are locked into their own sense of loss over Jesus’ leaving them, so distracted by their own needs that they can’t even begin to discern the larger picture of what God is doing.

I would suggest that this is something all of us humans are prone to. God is at work in us and through us and around us. He wants to prune us as we talked about in chapter 15 (see Discovery Paper 4735). He is trying to form us into the image of Christ and build us up into the kind of people who can effectively serve him. Sometimes his work is larger than we can see and we are just a small cog in it. But how many times our vision of the larger issues of God’s work is limited because we are so focused on our own needs!

The disciples can’t get beyond that at this point. It’s going to take the dramatic events that are about to unfold--the trial and execution of Jesus, their own personal failures, the glorious resurrection, the post-resurrection encounters they will have with Jesus, and finally the outpouring of God’s Spirit on the day of Pentecost--before they start to get beyond themselves to trusting God and serving him, because the kingdom of God is greater than they are.

So as a preface to the teaching that follows, Jesus points out that we are never going to be able to truly hear the voice of God or even trust the promises God gives us if we are locked into a myopic focus on ourselves. Until we see ourselves as children of God whom he dearly loves but part of something much greater than ourselves, I’m afraid that our vision of what God wants to do will be seriously impaired.

Now Jesus launches into his teaching on how the disciples are to move on in ministry. This passage is divided into two halves. He talks first about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world, and then he talks about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers.

The Spirit convicts the world

Interestingly enough, Jesus talks about this Helper or Comforter as coming to the believers even in reference to his ministry to the world. What is important about that? While this passage doesn’t limit the work of God to what he does through his people, the church, it does emphasize that this is the primary way God wants to minister to the world at large.

Now in the Spirit’s relationship to the world, working in and through the followers of Jesus, he is going to convict the world. The word “convict” is a legal term that means to expose guilt. This word is used here specifically in relationship to the world, not to believers. In fact, there is no example in Scripture of the use of this word “convict” with reference to believers. Sometimes we say, “The Holy Spirit convicted me of such-and-such,” and what we mean by that is that God is growing us up, revealing to us an area of our life that needs to be worked on. We’ve talked about how God lifts us up out of the dirt of our own sin and selfishness and prepares us for ever-deepening connection with Christ himself (see Discovery Paper 4735). That is a real and vital part of God’s work in our life. But the word “convict” doesn’t apply to us, because Christ took our guilt on the cross. Conviction is the Holy Spirit’s

ministering the truth of the gospel to a world that needs to hear it. He exposes the need and guilt of the world before God in three specific areas: sin, righteousness, and judgment. Let's take a moment to look at those three.

Notice that the word "sin" is singular, not plural. This is very important. Jesus' reference to sin in the singular conveys the idea that man is innately sinful. We have been guilty before God and separated from him because sin has been part and parcel of our very nature ever since the fall. This sinful nature produces acts of sinfulness for which we are responsible. But here what Jesus is saying is that the Holy Spirit must expose to the world, or convince the world, that there *is* such a thing as sin.

The reason he says the world needs to be convicted of sin is that "they do not believe in Me." Part of what unbelief does is deny sinfulness. A billion-dollar counseling and self-help industry in this country is trying to erase any sense of guilt about anything, or of such a thing as a sinful nature out of which sins flow. The silly thing is that it flies in the face of all the evidence around us! We live in a world that is crippled by the sinful acts of people.

How does the Holy Spirit expose sin to the world as he lives in us? It is partly through our proclamation of the gospel. In our teaching of the truth, and in the way we talk about our own experience with God, we testify to the reality of sin. Then the Holy Spirit can take that word and use it to convict the world about sinfulness. But it is also partly through our demonstration of forgiveness. By our explanation of our relationship with God and by the way we live, we acknowledge our need of a Savior; and as the body of Christ we proclaim ourselves the company of the forgiven. We are the ones who say loud and clear, "There *is* such a thing as sin. I am guilty of it. I need a Savior so that I may be forgiven by God, and I believe in Jesus as that Savior." So as the body of Christ, both in life and word we become proclaimers to the world that sin is real, that it has consequences, and that in Christ God has graciously dealt with that.

Second, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness. If convicting the world of sin is convincing it of something it does have, convicting the world of righteousness is convincing it of something it doesn't have. Righteousness means right standing before God. It is synonymous with but not exactly the same idea as holiness.

The reason Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness is that "I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me." What I think he means is this: Jesus' very presence in the world was a lightning rod, if you will, drawing attention to what righteousness was all about. He lived righteously, and his very life and teaching constantly exposed the righteousness of even the religious rulers, the Pharisees and Sadducees, as a sham. Over and against the false righteousness of that religious system, and of all religious systems, his life and teaching pointed to a true righteousness that was rooted in a right relationship with God. Jesus having now departed, his testament of righteousness is no longer limited to himself. The Holy Spirit, present in his church, has opportunities to proclaim righteousness throughout the whole world. That is a huge thing! As we live and proclaim God's truth, we become testimonies of real righteousness. We aren't perfect as Jesus was, but we have a concern for and growth toward righteousness as God's work continues to build us up and draw us closer to himself. God's gracious building of his life in us is a testimony against the inadequacy and impotence of religious systems that would have us follow a few rules and be conformed to a certain culture. This righteousness comes from our identity with Christ and his righteousness, from our acceptance by him, and from the Holy Spirit's continuing to transform us.

Unfortunately, many times the church has been its own worst enemy in proclaiming the righteousness of God. Rather than living righteously according to the pattern that Jesus has described in this very teaching--loving one another completely and sacrificially, serving completely in the power of the Holy Spirit--we have taken Christian truths and behavior and codified them into legalistic systems. In this way we have fallen right into the trap of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. What the Holy Spirit wants to call us back to is humble transformation and love for one another as opposed to conformity, so that as the body of Christ we can rightly proclaim righteousness.

This demands that we not limit the concept of righteousness to a few causes that fit our whims. For instance, let's take a national social issue that is before us. Ginger and I received phone calls last week from two separate organizations. One was a lobby soliciting donations to support efforts to change California law to make abortion available on demand, independently of national law. The other was a Christian organization asking for donations to support the opposing side of that debate. Now, we as an evangelical church have spoken rather strongly about issues like abortion, and it is appropriate for us to humbly and prayerfully decide what is the righteous way to address that

subject. On the other hand, I haven't ever once been called by any Christian organization about the issue of corporate corruption that has been before us. We tend to limit our understanding of righteousness to a narrow band of issues. Jesus opens it up and says, "Live in relationship with me and live holy lives, loving one another, loving the world, and by that I will demonstrate righteousness to the world."

Finally, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment, "because the ruler of this world has been judged." Jesus speaks of this judgment as having already been done, but it is actually going to happen the next day, when he goes to the cross to defeat Satan once and for all and judge him. His saying it has already happened simply means that it is such a sure thing that he can speak of it as done even beforehand. It's a very common device in the literature of the day.

Just as society denies the idea of sin, it gives the idea of judgment little credence. Judgment implies guilt, and if there is no guilt (sin), then there is no judgment. Furthermore, society often portrays the idea of judgment as capricious and unfair. People say, "How could a loving God judge someone?"

However, Jesus reminds us that sin is real and it has real consequences. Satan himself stands as the ultimate example of one who has rebelled against God. On the cross, God judges sin completely, and Satan is defeated through Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

As believers we testify to the world that this judgment is real. We know that we are deserving of God's righteous judgment, but we also know that Christ has taken our judgment on himself. Just as we proclaim that there are real consequences for sin, we also proclaim there is real freedom from judgment in Christ.

Now let's turn to the second half of this passage. In verse 12 Jesus shifts to the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers, the disciples and by extension us.

The Spirit discloses Jesus to his own

Jesus says, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth." Notice that he says, "All *the* truth." He is speaking of a specific body of truth. The Holy Spirit is not going to give them every bit of truth that exists in the universe, but he is going to give them *the* truth that they need to know. I believe this harkens back to John 14:6, where Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life...." The Holy Spirit will instruct believers in the fullness of who Christ is and all that is attendant to that: what it reveals about God, what it reveals about us as people, how we are to live as followers.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 13b, "For He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." In verse 14b he says, "He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you." In verse 15b, "He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you." Three times he uses the word "disclose." And what the Holy Spirit will disclose is the wonder of who Jesus is. There are many who argue, I think with some merit, that verse 13b is a specific prediction that the Holy Spirit will disclose to these particular apostolic disciples the truth that they will record as the New Testament. "What is to come" might even refer to the book of Revelation. The actual structure of the sentence is not quite so definitive; however, the minimum that is true here is that Jesus is promising them that the Holy Spirit will give them the full understanding of who Jesus is and the full understanding of God's work.

That also comes down to us as a promise. The way this applies to us is that the Holy Spirit takes the word of God, the truth that flowed from these very apostles, and makes it understandable to us. God has not left us alone. He has given us the beauty of his word, not as some informational "how-to" book, but as a revelation of the glory of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. And part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us is to open our eyes to that.

The result of all this, Jesus says, is that "He [the Holy Spirit] shall glorify Me." The end result of this process of following Christ is that Christ is glorified.

New-covenant ministry

So what Christ is saying to these followers of his is, “You are indeed about to be launched on this mission impossible, and the way it becomes a mission possible is the Holy Spirit, who is the only resource you need. He will take the word of God and teach you, and as he builds you into a community of faith, and the Spirit’s work is alive in you as individuals and in the corporate body, the world is going to see the glory of who I am.” This is good news! As I have said throughout this series, this teaching in the Upper Room Discourse is the essence of new-covenant living: abiding in Christ in a love relationship with him that leads to worship and adoration of him, which then translates into ministry to our world and to each other, which is energized and instructed and made possible by God’s very presence in our lives. We are not left to simply follow religious axioms, but we are set free by the indwelling Spirit of God to love and worship Jesus, and to love and serve one another in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have what it takes, not in and of ourselves, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I learned some important lessons in this regard during the first year of my Christian life. God in his wisdom, and his sense of humor, chose to throw me into all kinds of situations early on. Part of it was motivated by my reckless zeal and fearlessness about doing anything and everything for Christ in the early years of my Christian faith. In that first year, my best friend and I took off for the Panama Canal Zone (which was still a U.S. province at the time). We were ministering out of a church in what is now called Balboa. In the first week we served with the youth ministry. In the second week we went on a mission trip up into Bajo Boquete, a little mountain town near the Costa Rican border. And in the last week there was a youth outreach at the church in Balboa that they publicized all through the Canal Zone, even in the city of Panama. They were going to have some really good music. My best friend was a leading music along with some people in the church, and I was the visiting evangelist!

There were services Sunday night through Friday night, and a funny thing happened. I was all gung ho, but I realized about Tuesday that I didn’t know enough to talk for six nights in a row. I got to the end of Thursday night, and I didn’t know what I was going to talk about on Friday. I literally had nothing left to say. So I spent a lot of time by myself praying, and finally I had to tell God, “I have no idea where this is going. You’ve got to help me figure this out.” Now, I don’t recommend this homiletically, but I got up in the pulpit the next night still not knowing what I was going to say. I decided on the spur of the moment to start in Genesis, and I just started working quickly but systematically through the whole story of God’s unfolding drama. I could not tell you what I said, but when the time was over there was not a sound in the auditorium. There were young people who came to Christ that night. There were things that went on in me spiritually, too. And there is no explanation except this: God was true to his word. The Holy Spirit is active in his body, and if we are willing to trust him, the Holy Spirit is our adequacy. That is what it means to follow him as new-covenant spiritual leaders.

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Catalog No. 4738
John 16:5-15
10th Message
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September 8, 2002

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