

This Is a Sure Sign You're Missing God

"Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).

I have recently been reminded that every so often, Christian leaders and pastors have a very sobering choice to make. It seems for me that about every three to five years, I am faced with this decision. This choice is one that determines our level of effectiveness, the growth of our faith, our level of obedience and ultimately our level of satisfaction in this life.

Through the cycles of life, leadership and ministry, every one of us has to choose, on a regular basis, between stepping out further on the difficult path of faith or settling down on the well-worn seat of mediocrity.

At some point, we are all familiar with both decisions. Somewhere in the genesis of our ministry or at the beginning of a new assignment, we have felt our passion and excitement merge with the necessary energy to be bold and courageous. We find the strength to pray and believe that God will do something bigger than our own abilities. At other times, following difficulty, failure or disappointment, we suffer from lack of vision and decide to back off, let up and settle down.

Lest the distinction between these two decisions be misunderstood, let me make clear I am not talking about becoming a sleepless workaholic, one who ignores, for the sake of work, the greatest priorities in life. Every leader must first rest, spend time in the Word, pray and lovingly serve their family. What I am talking about is not exclusively an

action; it actually has more to do with vision than it does with cluttering our calendars. It's more about faith than function. For some of us, stepping out may first mean stepping "back" and realigning our priorities around those found in Scripture.

One may take the comfortable road of settling down and end up with more "to do" than if had they "stepped out" in bold faith for God. We limit God when we only see the tasks of life that we perform as His plan. The work of God is not so much about what I can do as it is believing and trusting Him for the supernatural work only He can perform. This is experienced through faithful commitment to the Word of God and prayer. One is settling down by merely marking off a list, being comfortable with weekly accomplishments. Year after year going through the motions of ministry without ever really risking anything for God's kingdom. This road is paved with safety, comfort, passivity, predictability and only performing the maintenance tasks of life and ministry. The other is hearing God's voice through His Word and prayer and stepping out into an uncomfortable, risky, aggressive, spontaneous, sometimes controversial yet transformational path. This path is marked by a sincere belief that God wants to do something powerful in this world for the sake of the gospel and His glory.

The allurement of settling down has caused many to fall short of the best God has for them. The ministry becomes a casual routine distracted by a myriad of good, safe, predictable things. The excitement is more about a fulfilling hobby or a relaxing pleasure than the unseen, unfulfilled work of God in their life and ministry. Prayer is scarce, spiritual burdens are light, and sermons are little more than a last-minute, inspired download.

I am reminded of Moses, whose life started with such great promise. However, somewhere in the middle of his life, after failure and disappointment, he found himself settling down into the safe, comfortable, and obscure ministry of "keeping

sheep" in anonymity (see Ex. 3:1). His youthful zeal was gone as he labored day after day chasing his father-in-law's flock. In hindsight, we see the providential hand of God in Moses' life on the back side of the desert. Yet he had decided that this was where he would spend the remainder of his days. When God spoke miraculously to him through a burning bush, Moses received the call with fear and doubt. He no longer believed God was capable of engaging him in a mighty work. And yet we know that the plan of God for Moses was the transformational work of leading the people out of bondage.

At the heart of this for me is the question, "What am I willing to believe God for today in my life, my family and His kingdom in this world?" I have been blessed to watch God do some really great things in the churches I have pastored. And yet it seems with each new blessing and experience of God's grace comes the temptation to "settle down." Isn't this enough? Can't we just be content, Lord? Must we step out again? What about my comfort? What if we fail? These questions and a thousand more are the arrows of the enemy to stifle our faith and chase us to a place of comfortable repose.

After years of ministry and preaching, after a decade or two of shepherding "our father's flock," how easy it is to "hide" in those safe places. How common it is to be afraid to believe again for something transformational for the sake of the gospel. Like Moses, we question our own ability and even the potential of God through us. Let us be reminded that God has given each of us a "burning bush." The Word of God burns with truth and grace, and the communication we have with God each day at that bush will once again set us on fire to do a mighty work for God in this world.

By grace, let's resist the temptation to take the easier way. Let's commit ourselves to the most important things. Let's believe again for the impossible, dream again for our church and its gospel impact in our community. Be burdened for the person it seems is the most lost. Expect God to move in our

churches this weekend, anticipate the transformation that accompanies the work of the Holy Spirit. Be it bold or subtle, let's make today about stepping out, not settling down.

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."
-William Carey

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