

Church – Empowered and Effective

Last time we looked into the matter of God's vision for His church, of which we collectively are part. He has chosen us, His **church**, to be the vehicle through which the message of **transformation** will reach the lost in this world. Jesus has commissioned us, according to Matt 28:19-20, to ...*"Go ... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

It's very clear, until Jesus returns we the church are called to go ... make disciples. Disciples are more than just converts. In life a baby is born but does not just stop at being a brand new infant. The child grows, is fed, exercised and educated and brought to maturity. As a mature adult the person then goes on to be married and reproduce and the cycle repeats. So it is for the church. We grow then we go. We go out, share Christ, see people experience the "new birth" and then we encourage, teach, and help them develop their gifts and ministries, and release them to go ... make disciples ... and repeat the process.

We are an integral part of His plan to grow the Father a vast family of sons and daughters who are conformed to the image of His Son, who form the Body of whom Christ is the Head, and who are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We are His ambassadors with a mission to bring transformation to a lost and dying world. We're here as agents of change – to bring light and life to the lost.

Now today we need to commence our focus on the **what, why, who and how** of our mission as the church.

What:

If we listen to Jesus' words and take heed of them we certainly will have some idea of **what** we're here for and to do in terms of ministry to a needy world:

John 14:12 ... *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father."*

We may come back to this passage and its fuller context to discuss it in more detail later, but for now we're interested in what those works are which Jesus says we will do. His words in Luke 4 give us a good picture:

Luke 4:18-19 ... *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord."*

Quite clearly, we're here for others and their multifaceted needs. We can make a huge impact on our local communities and those further afield if we make the needs of these communities the priority for our existence – our ministries and activities.

In a while we will look at one important fact from the church at Antioch, as recorded in Acts 13. (In weeks to come we may look further at the life and ministry of that church, as it is a good example of an empowered and effective church. This week you may like to have a look in the book of Acts and

see what drove or motivated the early believers at Antioch. They certainly understood and lived out the Father's vision for His church). In fact, a really good book I can recommend is entitled "The Case for Antioch" by Jeff Iorg. I recommend you get it, read it, and pray and ask the Father to help you embrace the message.

Church, our focus must be external. We need to cultivate a **missionary mentality**. Having a **missionary mentality** is much more than giving some money to people out there serving the Lord in faraway countries, or to organisations doing good things for the Lord (which is something we do, and that's commendable). It's to be a **way of life** for us as a body of believers, where **we give of ourselves** to meet the needs of the lost in our communities and beyond.

An illustration may help: The scene is a chicken and pig collaborating to produce a breakfast for the farmer. The chicken offers a donation, the pig makes the ultimate sacrifice. The chicken gives "some of me" while the pig gives "all of me". A missionary mentality holds nothing back, it is selfless giving of our all to see others come to Christ, to see people healed, delivered, set free from bondages, and to be disciplined. God gave His very best so that we could be saved and restored to Him, so the challenge facing us is – what will be our response to Him and His vision for the lost?

Jesus said in Matt 22:37-39 ... *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"*

To love your neighbour is not just a statement we make, "oh I love my neighbours", it's putting hands, and legs to love – it's **love in action** towards our neighbours – it's practical demonstration of Christ's love towards our neighbours in a contextually appropriate manner. It's meeting them at the point of their need – daily or as often as the occasion calls for. It's our daily actions of love, undergirded by prayer, for our neighbours that will win them to Christ and make disciples of them.

Remember also from the passage in Luke 11:25-37 Jesus' definition of "neighbour" in the parable of the "Good Samaritan" – it's the person who you would normally avoid at all costs, the one you don't like, the "difficult" person.

In doing that, in loving our neighbour, we are really fulfilling the first commandment, to love God. Also, in this respect we do well to take note of God's word to us in 1 John 2:3-4 ... *"By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*

So, to be as the Father designed us to be, an externally focused church, we need to embrace and develop a **missionary mentality** and live it out as a **way of life**. It's the **way of the cross**.

Why:

Well, Paul gives us a very clear answer to this question:

2 Cor 5:15,17-20 ... *"He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf ... Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ*

*and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were making an appeal through us” ...*

Eph 2:10 ... *“For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that **we would walk in them**.”*

Who

To be effective we need to know **who** we are dealing with, who our “neighbour” is, and what their needs are, and **how** best to minister to their needs, and in doing so to share the love of Christ with them.

In construction, when you’re building something, everything has to be measured and checked against the master plan. I love to do carpentry, to make things, it’s one of my hobbies. There’s an old saying we are wise to adhere to if we don’t want lots of rework and waste of materials, and that is, “Measure twice, cut once!” So **measurement matters**.

It’s no different for the church. If we are to obey Gods’ command to “love our neighbour”, to go out and bring the message of transformation to the world around us, we first need to “**measure**” our community or those we want to reach whether they’re near or far away. If we want to make an impact in our community we need to know who makes up our community, and what their needs are, and how and when to minister to them.

The “measuring” is not just confined to the gathering of facts about our communities (which is very important), it also very much includes a “measuring in the Spirit”, listening to the Holy Spirit as He makes you aware of needs and where, when and how He wants to minister into those needs.

The “measuring” is to be done on both sides, measuring to know our communities makeup and needs on the one hand, then to “measure” ourselves, the church, on the other hand to see whether we have what it takes to meet the needs in our communities. Are we an empowered and effective church?

We will fail to have impact if we just see the community around us an anonymous mass that somehow we need to speak to about Jesus. We will also fail if we go out in our own strength without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said:

John 15:5, 7-8 ... *“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing ... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”*

We “measure” and understand who makes up the community, find out their needs, their likes and dislikes, something of their backgrounds and characteristics, their bondages, so that we can minister to them and their needs in **contextually appropriate** ways. For instance: elderly folks who are immobile or house bound need help with shopping and other errands, or being taken places they need to go; They may just need a “friend” to be with them instead of facing hours of loneliness; young families would benefit from programs aimed to occupy their children in healthy activities, or with

“baby-sitting”; especially in this day and age, kids need Christian role models in whatever they’re doing; the homeless and hungry need shelter and food; the oppressed or possessed will need deliverance; the sick need healing; then there’s garden clubs, birding clubs, folks who like to ride, and the list goes on. What I am saying is we first need to “measure” our community and then bring the message of transformation to them in a **contextually appropriate manner, in the power of the Holy Spirit**.

Are we living up to that? To a certain degree we are, but really how effective are we? But do we as a local body of believers share our heavenly Father’s **passion** to reach the lost? Is His vision our vision? Are we an empowered transforming force in our communities? If not, we’re missing the mark.

I look at the world around us and see how it appears that the gathering of believers, the church at large, seems to be dwindling and I feel the sadness of the Father’s heart. God has promised that He will cause all peoples to bow and acknowledge Him, but for that to happen we need to co-operate with Him as his empowered and faithful ambassadors, and share the love of Christ effectively.

So it’s really a no brainer, we as a local church need to **pray, plan and proceed** in line with our Masters commission. **Mobilise ... measure ... and minister** in a **contextually appropriate manner** in the **power of the Holy Spirit**.

How:

This calls for answers as to **how** we are to be a mobilised, empowered, and effective church; a force to be reckoned with out in the world around us. Now a look at the early church as recorded in the Book of Acts will give us a good idea of what this looks like. I encourage you to spend time meditating in Acts.

Now the answer to this “how” question may not be discussed in one short session and may be the topic of discussion for a while. But let’s make a start.

So, let’s look into the Word and see if we can find answers to the **how**.

We’ll start with a very important example from the church in Antioch.

Acts 13:1-3 ... *“Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, **when they had fasted and prayed** and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”*

The church in Antioch were **ministering to the Lord** through fasting, prayer, and worship. As they engaged in worship ministering to the Lord the Holy Spirit responded with an instruction to “set apart” Barnabus and Saul (later known as Paul) and through the laying on of hands they were “set apart” meaning they were Holy Spirit empowered and sent off on the first of a series of major earth-shaking missionary journeys. Journeys which resulted in the gospel reaching into Asia and Europe in a demonstration of The Spirit and power. Powerful ministry which saw many saved, healed, delivered, and discipled.

The real point we need to take note of here is that **Worship precedes empowered evangelism**. The empowering to evangelise in a demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power comes only **after**, and **results from**, ministering unto the Lord. Worship of God, a lifestyle of worship and waiting on God, is the only pathway to empowerment for the task He has set before us to effectively reach the lost.

Isa 40:31 ... *"those who wait on the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."*

The foundational pathway to evangelism is the cultivation of a people who will worship God. It's in the place and life of worship that we are transformed by God. As worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth, the more we behold of who He is and His glory and Majesty the more He transforms us, conforms us to the image of His Son, He prepares us, and He empowers us for His ministry through us in a demonstration of power and authority.

God's purpose and plan is to bless the world around us through us, His people, a body of worshippers, who give witness to His glory. Those through whom His manifest presence and power brings life changing experiences to the needy.

Isa 59:21 - 60:1-3 ... *"As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the Lord, "from now and forever. Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

1 Peter 2:9 ... *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."*

Our lifestyle of worship and ministry unto the Lord is a prerequisite for God's glory and power to manifest in the midst of the onslaught of opposition and assaults from the enemy. Just look at the life of worship and ministry to God that Daniel and his friends exhibited, and the results. (See Daniel Ch 6) Not only was Daniel not touched by the lions when he was cast into the lion's den for openly worshipping God in defiance to the king's decree, but the end result was that king Darius decreed that in his kingdom people were to honour God because through Daniel's trust and worship of God he, Darius, had come to know and understand that Daniel's God was indeed the living God.

In Daniel Ch 3 we read of the miraculous intervention of God on behalf of the three worshippers thrown into the fiery furnace. They were unharmed, and this demonstration of God's power brought a transformation to the king and nation.

Dan 3:27-30 ... *"The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel*

*and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and **yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.** (Sounds like Rom 12:1) Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon."*

Rom 12:1 ... *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."*

And now, let's look at some examples from the book of Acts, where **worship precedes empowered evangelism**.

The story is recorded in Acts 3:1-10. Peter and John were on their way to pray. Worshippers on their way to minister unto the Lord in prayer and worship. And on their way the manifest presence of God splashed out of Peter and John and a lame man is healed. Verse 9-10 says, *"And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."* This is "measured" and "contextually appropriate" ministry in power. Peter and John would have walked that same route to the temple many time before (even Jesus would have gone this way many times) passing this man begging for alms – he had been placed there daily for years. Yet it was only on this very specific divinely appointed day that the man was healed, and for the very good reason that this was God's timing for the gospel to be presented in a demonstration of Spirit and power. Peter and John had their "Spirit measuring" ears turned on and they responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the man was supernaturally healed on this day.

Having gained the attention of the crowds through this supernatural healing, Peter and John went on to proclaim the gospel to the onlookers, and later, in the following chapter, we read in Verse 4, *"But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."* Then, because they had rattled the devils cage by this act of God they were persecuted. And after being threatened by the rulers, elders, scribes and Sadducees not to preach any more, Peter and John replied to them, Verse 19-21, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened: for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed."*

And then Peter and John and the believers encouraged one another and Verse 24 ... *"they lifted their voices to God with one accord."* In other words they immediately returned to giving thanks, praise and worship and to God. Then it goes on to say in Acts 4:31 ... *"And **when they had prayed**, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul ... And **with great power the apostles were giving testimony** to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **abundant grace was upon them all.**"*

It's so clear, isn't it! **Worship precedes ministry in the power of the Spirit. Worship precedes empowered evangelism.**

Now we move on to Philippi where Paul and Silas were on their way to the place of prayer. They were worshippers on their way to worship and minister to God.

Acts 16:16-18 ... *"It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment."*

The contextual need was deliverance. Paul, a true worshipper, an empowered believer, having "measured" the situation in the Spirit was then able to discern when and what to do, and as a result he cast out the evil spirit from the girl.

The owners of the girl were very unhappy at the loss of income they would suffer from this, and so they had Paul and Silas jailed. But as worshippers, who were sold out for God, they did what worshippers do, Paul and Silas thanked, praised and worshipped God in the midst of their "dark time". Worshippers focus on God not self, no matter what is happening to them. If we live a life of worship and publicly display our love and faith in God, then God will show up in power and perform the miraculous and as a result people will acknowledge God get saved.

Acts 16:25-34 ... *"But about midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them**; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and **everyone's chains were unfastened**. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And **they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house**. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."*

Worship precedes empowered evangelism. Worship invites the manifest presence and power of God to intervene and bring transformation.

Prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost the believers gathered daily to wait on God, and according to Acts 1:14 ... *"These all with one mind were **continually devoting themselves to prayer**."* Worshippers ministering unto God. Then on the day of Pentecost Acts 2:4, 6-8, 41 ... *"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" ... "And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and*

astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" ... "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." ... "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."

Talk about effective evangelism!

A few months ago I spoke from Acts 2:42-47 on the "Components of true worship."

Acts 2:42-47 ... *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."*

Let me remind you of the final summing up from that sermon:

Our entire life, the life of a true worshipper, is an altar before God. All that our "altar" consists of is part of what constitutes our worship – or the "worth" we place in God. The altar of a true worshipper is one which treasures and displays:

- A desire for good biblical teaching, which points us to a deeper and more intimate knowledge of God and His ways. Through His Word God reveals Himself to us and conforms us to His image, and
- A prayer life that leads to the formation of a pure heart that is aligned with the will and purposes of God. His desire is that we love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and
- A heart continually filled with praise and thanksgiving towards God; our loving heavenly Father, our Savior the Son, and our Helper the Holy Spirit. Praise and thanksgiving primarily for who He is – an awesome God. Ministering unto Him is a priority, and
- A generous heart. One which gives of its best in time, energy and substance to God and the work and extension of His kingdom. We are not to be "owned" by anything. Everything we have and are belong to Him, all he asks is we are good stewards of our lives and belongings, that we live for Him and for others, and finally
- A true understanding of the meaning of union and communion with God, and which extends to union and communion with our neighbour. If we first minister to God, He will empower us as we minister to others

These are the **main components** which **together** constitute true worship. So let us be worshippers in spirit and in truth, whose entire daily lives show how much we honour, value and show worth to God.

As we worship God let us do so with a heart of **expectancy**. Expect Him to show up and deliver the transformation in our lives, and in those we are trying to reach. For He alone can do that part. For **worship precedes empowered evangelism**.

Let us pray. Individually, quietly, pray a prayer of consecration – to be a worshipper. Let us do our part and God will do His part – release His power and do what only He can do.