

"The Ways of GOD In Relationship To Ministry"

(A Publication Of "The Inner-city Church Planting Mission")

As we study the Scriptures and get involved in ministry, we eventually discover that the profound principle of Isaiah 55:8-9 is very true. It is here that the LORD proclaims . . .

" . . . MY thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways MY ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are MY ways higher than your ways, and MY thoughts than your thoughts."

So many of GOD's "*thoughts*" and "*ways*" are "*higher*" than ours. Many times they are so much "*higher*", they seem very contradictory to ours. There is a simple explanation for this. GOD is GOD . . . we are but men. GOD is holy, just, and infinitely wise . . . we are basically evil and foolish.

But this is one very important reason why GOD has given us HIS WORD, (see Timothy 3:16-17), that we might be able to study and learn HIS "*thoughts*" and "*ways*" (in this case in relationship to the ministry), even though they may seem contradictory to our "*thoughts*" and "*ways*".

This is the purpose of this study. To look at five specific "*ways*" of GOD in relationship to ministry. To study and learn these "*ways*", because though they may seem so contradictory to our "*ways*", we can understand what GOD is doing, and why HE is working in this particular "*way*".

This study is so important, because if we fail to learn these five "*ways*" of GOD in relationship to ministry, we will easily become discouraged, disillusioned, and even defeated in our ministry for HIM.

I. The Way of GOD In Bringing Us Down The Strait And Narrow Path

"Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at, because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:13-14

Although this passage is primarily referring to the doors and paths that lead to eternal "*life*" (heaven), and eternal "*destruction*" (hell), they can apply in a secondary sense to the way of GOD in relationship to ministry.

"narrow" = to groan, to be in anguish, to be in distress

"strait" = (same Greek word as "*narrow*" in the original)

Very often in the CHRISTian ministry we are tempted to, and indeed, take the "*wide . . . and broad*" path in serving the LORD. We will take the fastest and easiest path, the path of least resistance and pain in seeking to do our service for HIM.

Many times this is not GOD's way. Instead, HE wishes to take us down the "strait . . . and narrow" path. The path of discipline and hard work. The path filled with "groaning, anguish, and distress"!

Just two ways this is illustrated within CHRISTianity today is in the area of finances and church growth.

A. Finances

GOD's way of providing finances for HIS people has always been for them to take the "strait . . . and narrow" path of prayer and crying out to HIM for their needs.

"Call unto ME (the LORD says), and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Jeremiah 33:3

"But my GOD shall supply all your need according to HIS riches in glory by CHRIST JESUS." Philippians 4:19

Instead, most churches and ministries have adopted the way of the world, the fast and easy way of going to man for financial help . . . either by begging others for funds, or borrowing from some worldly institution like a bank.

"Thus saith the LORD, cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD." Jeremiah 17:5

". . . the borrower is servant to the lender." Proverbs 22:7b

"Owe no man anything . . ." Romans 13:8a

B. Church Growth

GOD's way of building HIS Church has always been through the "difficult" and patient means of sowing and watering HIS WORD.

"For after that in the wisdom of GOD the world by wisdom knew not GOD, it pleased GOD by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I Corinthians 1:21

Ultimately, it is CHRIST's responsibility to build HIS Church. The very first time the Church is mentioned in Scripture, JESUS said . . .

" . . . I will build MY church . . ." Matthew 16:18b

Instead, we have taken it upon ourselves to build the Church, and we have again adopted the way of the world. The fast, easy, and humanistic way of using any method we can to get people to attend our churches. Whether it be beautiful buildings, slick programs, "CHRISTian" rock music, or other forms of "CHRISTian" entertainment.

The Scriptures warn us about how our Churches and ministries are to be built, and what their final state will be accordingly (see I Corinthians 3:9-15).

As one reads and studies the lives of the great men of GOD (both Biblical and more contemporary), men who accomplished great things for HIM, one discovers that the LORD took them down this "strait . . . and narrow" path as well. Men such as the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, Stephen, Silas, George Muller, Hudson Taylor, George Whitefield, John Wesley, John Huss, Wathcman Nee, etc.

II. The Way Of GOD In Teaching Us Through Trials

This way is closely akin to point I. But whereas point I dealt more with the "What" of difficulty in CHRISTian ministry, this point deals with the "Why".

Certainly this "way" of GOD is contrary to our "way". For it is basic human nature to want to avoid trials and sufferings as much as possible. But it is abundantly clear from Scripture that this is the only "way" that GOD is able to teach us many of the lessons we must learn in relationship to having a successful ministry.

CHRIST is our Example in every area of life, so too in the area of ministry. When speaking of HIM, it is Scripture that exclaims . . .

"Though HE were a SON, yet learned HE obedience by the things which HE suffered." Hebrews 5:8

If the very GOD HIMSELF, incarnate in human flesh, had to learn obedience through suffering, how much more must we!

Following are some more Scriptures that explain why GOD will take us down this path of trials, and the rich spiritual lessons we will learn because of this . . .

"Blessed be GOD, even the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the FATHER of mercies, and the GOD of all comfort; WHO comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of GOD. For as the sufferings of CHRIST abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by CHRIST. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." II Corinthians 1:3-6

Notice the reason for our suffering here. So we will be better equipped to minister to others who will go through the same sufferings.

"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, lest I should be exalted above measure. And HE said unto me, MY grace is sufficient for thee: for MY strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of CHRIST may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for CHRIST's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

II Corinthians 12:7, 9-10

There are three reasons given to us here why we will be called on to suffer in the ministry:

- A. To humble us (v.7)
- B. To give us more of CHRIST's "strength" (v.9)
- C. To give us more of CHRIST's "power" (vv. 9b-10)

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of GOD is shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY GHOST which is given unto us." Romans 5:3-5

This Scripture tells us that there are five CHRIST-like virtues that will be produced in us as we suffer trials for HIM:

- A. "patience" (v.3) See also James 1:2-4
- B. "experience" (v.4a) This could be translated "character"
- C. "hope" (v.4b)
- D. no "ashamed"ness (v.5a) This could be translated "confidence"
- E. "the love of GOD" (v.5b)

And then that great truth in Romans 8:28-29, which really sums up so beautifully why GOD must take us down this path of trials . . . to make us more like HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST.

"And we know that all things (including trials, sufferings, and discouragement), work together for good to them who are the called according to HIS purpose. For whom HE did foreknow, HE also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of HIS SON, that HE might be the firstborn among many brethren."

III. The Way Of GOD In Bringing Us Through "Deaths Of A Vision"

This point we have adopted from The Institute of Basic Life Principles. It is a very important "way" of GOD if we are going to understand how HE works in relationship to ministry!

This concept could best be described by the following chart and Biblical illustrations:

A. Birth Of Vision

Each one of us have special purposes for being here. GOD wants to reveal them to us.

1. Abraham had a vision of being the father of a nation.

2. Joseph had a vision that he would be a leader and that many would bow down to him.

3. The disciples of CHRIST had a vision of establishing and being an important part of the kingdom of GOD.

4. A grain of wheat has a "vision" of reproducing itself and many more grains of wheat.

B. Death Of The Vision

The expectations GOD gives us are powerful motivations to continue during discouragement.

Sarah was barren and became too old to have children.

Joseph's brothers sold him to be a slave. He later was falsely accused and condemned to spend his years in prison.

JESUS was killed by the very ones HE came to save, and the disciples saw HIM buried in a tomb.

The grain dies in the ground.

C. Supernatural Fulfillment Of Original Vision

HE usually fulfills our expectations in ways we never would have thought.

GOD gave Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age who became the father of a great nation.

GOD allowed Joseph to interpret the dreams of the butler and baker and later the king, whereupon, he was made a ruler in the land.

GOD raised JESUS from the dead, and great miracles were performed by the disciples until the Gospel had spread through all the world.

A harvest springs up out of the very process of "death" in the ground.

GOD will allow this same cycle to occur in our lives and ministry as well, many times over. Sometimes HE will even bring us through a double or triple "death". That is, HE will give us a "vision" to do something for HIM, but then allow that "vision" to die twice, three times, or even more, before HE finally fulfills that original "vision" supernaturally.

When we begin to understand (GOD's) "ways", we see the great value in going through the Death of a Vision.

A. GOD's 'Building Program' During The Death Of A Vision

Since GOD is far more concerned with our becoming like JESUS CHRIST in character than HE is with our doing good works to further HIS Kingdom, HE needs this time of 'waiting' to accomplish character building.

The 'vision' provides the motivation not to become discouraged. This time of 'death' and character building prepares us for a greater ministry when HE does fulfill the vision.

Notice the qualities that are sure to be developed during this time:

1. Patience . . . in waiting GOD's time
2. Faith . . . in knowing what HE will do
3. Meekness . . . in yielding personal rights
4. Self-control . . . in not running ahead of GOD
5. An many, many others

B. Satan's 'Building Program' During The Death Of A Vision

Satan's purpose is to destroy GOD's work in our lives (and ministry), and also as much of the potential for achieving GOD's work as he can. To do this during this time he comes as an '*angel of light*' to deceive as many as possible, (see II Corinthians 11:14).

He prompts us to try in our own energy and wisdom to fulfill the original vision. He doesn't want us to learn GOD's qualities, and whenever we follow his leading, conflict results.

A classic example is Abraham trying to fulfill GOD's promise of a great nation by having a son by Hagar. Conflict has resulted ever since between their descendants. **The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, Basic Seminar Textbook**

IV. The Way Of GOD In Training Us In The "Deserts" Of Life

Before a man can really be used by GOD in the ministry, he must go through a very special and needed time of training. Not a time of formalized training in a Bible school or seminary (although those can be beneficial), but a time and place of training where GOD can teach only special lessons. Lessons of CHRIST-like character and virtue. Lessons that no Bible school or seminary textbook can teach you. Indeed, it is sad and tragic that many a Bible school and seminary graduate goes into the ministry with plenty of knowledge, but no CHRIST-like character and virtue. Because of this there is conflict and strife between the graduate and the people of his church, his ministry, or his fellow missionary.

This is why GOD must take us to the "backside of the desert". To teach us these great CHRIST-like character qualities of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance (Galatians 5:22-23), and many times to "unlearn" and cleanse us from the things man has taught us!

The following chart illustrates this principle . . .

A. The Man Of GOD

1. Joseph

B. His "Desert Training" Experience

- sold as slave into Egypt (Genesis 37:27-36)
- falsely accused and put into prison (Genesis 39:1-20)

Thus he became the second in command of the greatest country on earth at that time.

2. Moses

- Keeps the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 3:1)

Though Moses had been instructed in the best schools of the greatest country in the world, there were certain virtues and leadership qualities he could only learn in "*the backside of the desert*". Thus he became the spiritual and moral leader of two and one half million people.

3. David

- Keeps the sheep of his family (Psalm 78:70-72)
- has assorted flights from Saul, and wanderings in the wilderness (I Samuel Chapters 19-31)

Though David was anointed King (his initial "vision" for ministry), as a young man (see I Samuel 16:13), it wasn't until years later that he actually took the throne. Thus he became Israel's greatest King.

4. John the Baptist

- Literally spent his early life in the deserts (Luke 1:80)

Though John was "*. . . filled with the HOLY SPIRIT, even from his mother's womb*" (Luke 1:15b), he did not begin his public ministry until years later. Thus he became the greatest man that ever lived (see Matthew 11:11).

5. Paul

- spends three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:17-18)

Though Paul had been chosen by GOD even in his mother's womb (see Galatians 1:15), was a very learned man in the Scriptures and Jewish religion (see Philippians 3:4-6), it wasn't until years after his conversion that he could begin his worldwide ministry. Thus he became one of the greatest missionaries and church leaders of all time.

6. JESUS

- lives the first thirty years of HIS life with HIS parents
- spends forty days of fasting in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-2)

Though JESUS was "qualified" to begin HIS public ministry at the age of twelve (see Luke 2:41-49), the Scriptures tell us that HE went back to Nazareth under HIS parents authority (see Luke 2:51). Thus HE ". . . *increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with GOD and man*" (see Luke 2:52), and had the most powerful ministry ever.

V. The Way Of GOD In Revealing HIS Will Through Finances

How does a ministry discern the will of GOD concerning decisions it must make in its day to day operations? According to the Scriptures, there are several vary effective means . . .

- A. The Scriptures themselves
- B. Prayer (which includes listening to GOD)
- C. The wise counsel of others (especially our authorities)
- D. Circumstances (closed and opened doors)
- E. Financial provision (or lack of it)

It is through the means of financial provision and discerning GOD's will that we will concentrate on here.

When a ministry truly determines to operate according to the Biblical principles of finance, that ministry then adopts a very powerful means to knowing GOD's "ways" and will. Following are three aspects of finance that a ministry can follow to help discern what GOD's will is concerning that ministry . . .

1. Never borrow.

" . . . the borrower is servant to the lender."
Proverbs 22:7b

"Owe no man anything . . ." Romans 13:8a

When a ministry determines to adopt this principle of never borrowing to finance the work, that ministry will never purchase any equipment or seek to expand in any way unless the cash is "in hand" to pay for it. Thus GOD's will be discerned.

2. Never make its needs known to anyone but GOD.

"Call unto ME (the LORD declares), and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Jeremiah 33:3

"But my GOD shall supply all your need according to HIS riches in glory by CHRIST JESUS." Philippians 4:19

The ministry that follows this principle will have help in knowing GOD's will concerning what direction to take because it will know the monies it is receiving have been sent by GOD, not man.

3. Never accept financial assistance from the unsaved.

The Apostle John, when once writing to a group of CHRISTian, exhorted them to help some travelling ministers . . .

"Because that for HIS Name's sake thy went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles (that is the unbelievers)." III John 7

How important this principle is! For the ministry that follows it will be greatly protected from three types of money that carry a curse from GOD upon them . . .

- a. wicked money (see Proverbs 10:2a; 15:6b)
- b. vain money (see Proverbs 13:11a; 21:6)
- c. hasty money (see Proverbs 20:21; 28:22)

Conclusion: In these dark and evil days of wickedness in the world . . . and days of compromise in the Church, may we as ministers of JESUS CHRIST be more determined than ever to be *"salt"* and *"light"* amidst this darkness and compromise (see Matthew 5:13-16), as we conduct our ministries according to the *"higher thoughts"* and *"ways"* of GOD!

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show HIMSELF strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward HIM."
II Chronicles 16:9a