

24/7/365 FOLLOWING AFTER GOD – MISSION & MINISTRY

Continuing in this theme, one of the things I've discovered that keeps me in communion with God is recognizing and embracing my place in His plan. Consider once more **Isaiah 58:13-14** as the LORD addresses His people. ¹³ **"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on My holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,** ¹⁴ **then you will find your joy in the LORD..."**

Focus on that section about **"not going our own way"** or **"doing as we please"** or **"speaking idle words."** I have a hard enough time with that for a few hours on the Lord's Day, so the idea of doing it all the time is mind-boggling. Our agendas and purposes naturally take priority over His, but as His people, they shouldn't - and they don't have to. **We avoid going our own way by following His way.** We can even keep from idle chit-chat if the words we speak are in harmony with His word. And notice that we are promised that in so doing we will find our joy IN the Lord. That's because we will be in constant communion with Him.

Listen to **1st Peter 4:10-11**: **"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."**

When we move in the mission and ministry of God, we find a profound sense of God ever-present presence. Why? We are moved into a position of co-working with God. Think on that a moment. Haven't you found that you can get really close with those you work with? Part of the reason for that is that you are forced to spend a lot of time with them. And when you learn to work together for a common purpose, you naturally form a bond.

Similarly, cooperating with God keeps us connected. I know some of you have experienced this in one fashion or another. When you are operating in the gifts God gives you, you are keenly aware of His Spirit motivating and empowering you. And notice Peter's emphasis on using these gifts to serve others.

Recently while visiting another church, I was asked if I *"enjoyed the chance to just attend church without having to do anything."* The person who asked seemed at first surprised by my response. I said, *"Not particularly."* I continued, *"Don't misunderstand, I appreciated the time of worship and the pastor had a good message – but, I feel most fulfilled when I fulfill my calling to teach."* **There's a difference between enjoying a service, and finding joy in the Lord through service.** Now, I know as well as the next guy that *"the church is a team,"* and it's not all about me. There are others who can do what I do, as well if not better - and there comes a time for me to let others *"have a turn."*

But before long, I start to feel a bit like a player sitting on the bench through the whole season. I came to participate and I'm itching for the chance to do so. "Send me in coach." Your calling may also be teaching. Or maybe you're called to lead in praise and worship or to sign for the deaf. If so, you may know what I mean You're fine to have a weekend off, but if it's really your calling, you're eager to serve.

Yet, though these gifts may get the most attention, **mission and ministry can take on many forms** that are just as important to the work of the kingdom as those that take center stage. In fact, consider the impact of encouraging your neighbors by helping them when they need it; taking them a meal when they're sick or doing chores for them when they're unable. How about sharing your faith with family or friends? If it's truly a calling and you have a burning desire to tell people about Jesus, but neglect it – well, not only will that feeling not go away - it'll cause you spiritual indigestion.

Of course, being sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in your daily routines at work and play are also essential. The way we do our jobs and interact with people is as much our mission and ministry as anything. In **Colossians 4:5-6**, Paul says: "**Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**" And those words are in the very context of praying to God for "open doors" to share the gospel.

And what about just doing your part to help with community projects such as **our Giveaway** in whatever way you can? There are plenty of slots open waiting to be filled by you. If you can honestly tell me that when you've served others in need that you had no sense of God smiling upon you or coming closer, than I'd say something in your attitude was blurring your vision and clouding your heart.

Bottom line is when we're doing what God wants us to do, He comes alongside to help us get it done. And when we aren't, He takes a step back. My personal experience is that I never feel closer to God than when I'm moving in His will. And that will be true of you as well. Listen to **Psalm 32:8-11**: **I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.** **⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.** **¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him.** **¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!**

Pretty straight forward. I especially like the idea of Him watching over me. But what if we don't listen? What if we don't go in the way we should go? The song I've chosen for to close with today is "**He Leadeth Me**" - but don't misunderstand the 1st verse to suggest "whatever I do or wherever I be, it's still God's hand that leadeth me" if I have the attitude of that stubborn mule. True and everlasting joy is found following His way **24/7/365**.