

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Shifting Duty Assignments

by Dan Trygg

“When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. ⁴³ But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.’”

Luke 4:42-43

“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. ² 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.’ ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Acts 13:1-3

“I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.”

Acts 20:26-33

One of the few constants in life is change. Nothing ever stays the same. Circumstances change, times change, seasons change, opportunities come and go, and even God's assignments in our lives can change. Children grow up. Relationships either deepen and mature, or they begin to diminish. Time marches on, ...and time waits for no one. **Even if the things around us were static, we ourselves are in a process of change.** We move from childhood growth and learning to adolescence, then to adulthood. Hopefully, we discover our God-given skills and purpose for being here, and live a fruitful life for Him. In any case, we will move relentlessly through the process of aging, often with accompanying loss or adjustments in our senses or abilities, until we eventually pass from this life. As we go on in life, we begin to see that we reap what we have sown along the way. **In the midst of all the variables in life that are in flux, we often want to hold on to certain things or experiences because they have been important or valuable for us.** That is *natural*, but it is virtually *impossible* to keep things the same in any area of our lives. We may be nostalgic over things that had been good times in our lives, but have retreated into the past and are unrecoverable. Sometimes the transitoriness of life can give us hope. We know that “this, too, shall pass”, and we can endure particularly difficult periods in our lives because we realize that they are only temporary. At other times, however, the changes in life can leave us feeling sad, when undesirable, or unexpected, events come into our lives.

One of the areas of change we will all have to deal with in life has to do with the people coming in and out of our lives. We have three examples of this in the scripture selections above.

In the first scenario, Jesus had healed and ministered to a whole crowd of people until late into the night. In the morning, He left the city to find a quiet place to pray and seek His Father. When the townspeople gathered at the house, thinking that He would continue ministering to them, they could not find Him. Upon searching, the apostles came upon Him in prayer, and told Him that the people were looking for Him to return. To their surprise, He refused. **In prayer, He had received clear direction from the Father that He was to preach the gospel in other places.** So, to the disappointment of the crowd, Jesus and His apostles left. Do you think everyone agreed with Jesus' decision? Did it make sense to them? What about all those people who wanted Him to pray *for them*? Couldn't He have stayed one or two days more? *Apparently not*, in Jesus' mind. **It was of the utmost importance to stay in step with God's leading**, no matter if that were inconvenient, unpopular, or even made much sense to the natural mind.

In the second example, Saul and Barnabus were in the church at Antioch of Syria. Saul had been there for over a year, teaching the new believers, and Barnabus had been there some time before that. Antioch was the first church that was comprised of *both* Jews and Gentiles. These men were well-known, recognized leaders in this fellowship. After more than a year working with these people, you can be sure that they were intimately connected with numerous families and friends within the church. One day, they joined three other church spiritual leaders, “prophets and teachers”, to seek God in prayer and worship. **The Holy Spirit indicated to the group that they were to “set apart for Me Barnabus and Saul for the work to which I have called them”.** How did the Holy Spirit communicate with them? It is not clear. Because prophets are mentioned, it would seem to suggest that they were given some revelation from the Spirit about this. In any case, they took seriously the revelation that they received, and they further sought the Lord with prayer and fasting.

Being convinced of the leading of the Lord, they laid hands on them and sent them away. Note that what was important was *the Lord's direction*. There was no church vote, no extended planning or preparations. What mattered was obeying God. **Whatever teaching responsibilities they had been doing in the church abruptly came to an end.** (*Others* would have to step in to pick up these responsibilities. Barnabus was a Levite, one dedicated to the study of the Scriptures from birth, and Saul was a Pharisee, also deeply dedicated and well-trained in the Scriptures. Do you think anyone could easily fill *their* shoes? Probably not. But there *were* other people gifted as “teachers” in the group. It was time for them to step up and develop their gifts.) Barnabus and Saul said, “Good bye,” to the friends and disciples they had made, and headed off to the island of Cyprus. **Can you imagine being someone at the Antioch church who had not been at that prayer meeting? Suddenly you hear that two of your favorite leaders were leaving! It was not planned for. There was no real warning.** The Holy Spirit just *called* them to go, ...and they *did*! **There was probably some emotion and confusion over this.** There was probably some excitement for what God was going to do, ...and possibly some apprehension for their safety, ...as well as feelings of loss and sadness that they were leaving.

In the third account, Paul had some significant history with the Ephesian church. He had stopped in there at the end of his second missionary journey, on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18f.). He spoke once at the synagogue in town, but, in spite of a positive reception, had travelled on to Judea. He left Priscilla and Aquila to follow up with those who were interested in hearing more. After taking care of his business in Jerusalem and Antioch, he travelled back by land to Ephesus (Acts 19). Once there, he went to the synagogue and boldly spoke out about Jesus for the next *three months*. When some of the Jews became resistant and began speaking evil of the Way, Paul took those who had decided to follow Jesus, and withdrew from the synagogue to start the first home church in Ephesus. He then began regularly teaching and discussing about the Way at the lecture hall of Tyrannus, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day. This went on for the next *two years*, and the Lord used it mightily, so that “all the ones dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (19:9,10). At the same time God was powerfully demonstrating the truth of the gospel by miracles, signs and wonders. The Greek expression here is very telling, though it is somewhat obscured by our English translations: “And God was doing *not ordinary miracles* through the hands of Paul...” In other words, there were the *ordinary miracles*, or acts of power, that were commonly seen among believers in most places, and then there were these *beyond-the-ordinary* miracles God was doing through Paul during this period of time. Through the preaching of the word, and these authenticating miracles, many chose to abandon their occult practices and come to Jesus. They even had a public bonfire to burn their scrolls of spells and incantations, many of which were very expensive. They estimated that the cost of those materials totaled over \$ 10,000, so we know that this was no small event. Wow! What a public statement! **Surely, this time in Paul's life had to be his “glory days”, the high point of his public ministry. Certainly for the Ephesian Christians this had to be an incredible, awesome time,...more than what they could have ever asked or imagined.** They were having a *radical* impact on their community. People had even stopped purchasing the idols and graven images that were so popular in those days! The preaching of the gospel was spreading everywhere. It was so exciting! **...And then God began to lead Paul in another direction.** We know from II Corinthians 8,9, that Paul had been making arrangements to gather a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. He had already set this in motion a year earlier, and now it was time to return to Greece to gather what had been collected, and journey, along with delegates from every church, to bring this offering to Jerusalem. It was on his return trip from there that he called the Ephesian elders to meet with him, and told them that **he knew he would not be returning. He said that he was “bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem” and that “the Holy Spirit testifies to me that bonds and afflictions await me” (19:22,23).** None of them knew that he would be spending the next *four years* imprisoned for his faith, ...nor that it would result in the writing of much of the NT, ...nor that he would testify before Caesar, ...nor that he would later be released to go to Spain to evangelize. All they knew was that he was suddenly telling them that he was not coming back. Can you imagine the impact of that news on them?

In each of these scenarios, **it was *the leading of God* that prompted the change in direction.** In each case, it apparently came out of the blue, and it seemed to go against what may have seemed to be “common sense”. In each case, the call came on the heels of a time of effective ministry. In each scenario, **God led the leaders *away* from the ministry setting they had been effective in.** Each time, **there were already disciples in place to follow up on the work, ...** Jesus' apostles eventually returned to minister in Galilee, ...or the elders, prophets and teachers of Antioch, ...or Timothy, who eventually settled at Ephesus, followed later by the apostle John. ***God took care of His people. God is going to shift around duty assignments as He sees fit.*** It is not about our comfort. It is about the growth of His kingdom. **When this happens, emotions *will be* stirred, but we need to *remember the wisdom of God*, and support what He is doing. We also need to *be faithful to our responsibilities* where we are.** We must keep meeting with our brothers and sisters. We are to build them up and help them grow. **Our job is to win people to the Lord, build them up, equip them to serve and encourage them to do God's will, as He leads – Win, build, send.**