



Christian Life Fellowship
Becoming fully devoted followers of Christ



Preparing to use Tools

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Introduction:

Many years ago I came to the discovery that God is always preparing us for what is ahead. He uses the things that He permits to access our lives, to teach us, to mature us, to develop us, to grow us, to encourage us and to use us. The process of preparation can be thrilling and enjoyable or it can be painful and difficult. At times the process is tedious; at times it is painfully slow. Other times the process is rapid and painless. Regardless, God is in charge of .this process.

Let me encourage you that whatever you are experiencing in your Christian walk right now is preparation for what God has in store for you. I believe that not only are we individually being prepared, but as the members of the body of Christ, as the church, we are being prepared for what is on the horizon. Certainly we are being prepared for His coming and the responsibility we will have as we rule and reign with Him.

When I look at the children of Israel, I see that God was at work preparing them. When they were in exile, God was preparing them to depend on Him and learn to seek after Him. The miraculous things God did to deliver them from Egypt and put them in a position to exit a place of slavery, demonstrated to them His ability to do anything and move all nature on their behalf. When God led them out of captivity, their faith and confidence were lacking. So God used the experience of the wilderness to further develop and prepare them for the experiences they would encounter when entering and conquering the promised-land. When they finally crossed into the promised-land, God prepared them to trust Him and to battle so they could inhabit the land God had in mind for them. They had to fight so they would win victories and take the land God had given them.

In reading the Book of Acts we see that God worked powerfully in the lives of the believers to prepare them for what was ahead. Persecution arose and God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the believers, to do the work of ministry and to deal with the persecution that came. They prayed, they loved, they were committed, they pressed into God and God used them in mighty ways.

God is preparing us. In His preparation there are victories over enemies who want to keep us in bondage. There are steps of faith, obedience and confidence that we have to experience to grow to the new place of service. There are places that we need to let Him work in our fellowship and in our individual lives so we can rise to accomplish the task which he has left us to do.

Last week I talked about the powerful tools God has given us to use in reaching our world for Him. This morning I want to talk about preparation. How many of us have ever picked up a tool and hurt ourselves or someone else in the process of using it?

Read the manual and commit yourself to becoming skillful in using the tools God has given. Prepare to daily use the authority of Jesus' name. Don't be frivolous with using His name, but prepare. Jesus said, "These signs shall follow believers. They shall speak with new tongues; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover, if they drink any deadly thing it will not harm them."

Prepare using the tool of prayer. Pray at home, pray with your family, pray with others at church, pray with people outside of church. The only way you will become skillful at using the tools is to practice them.

I think I remember the first time I used a hammer. Oh boy. I hit my thumb. The nail didn't go in straight. It got bent and overall it was a disaster. But without practice and preparation, again and again, I would not have somewhat perfected the skillful use of a hammer. Every time I would use the hammer I would continue to bend nails and hit my thumb. I can't pound like a pro but I can drive a nail and it ends up pretty straight. It takes some practice and the more you do it the better it goes. You can learn what to do and what not to do. The more skillful you become the less likely you are to hurt yourself or someone else.

Preparation requires discipline. Just like practicing the piano, or gymnastics, or shooting hoops, or using a computer. We have to work at it diligently, daily and keep at it so we become proficient. **Mark 16:17-18**
These signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them.

I. Prepared for works of service

Service by its very definition is something that involves contributing to others welfare. In order to serve, one has to observe those around and see the need and be willing to rise to meet the need. God wants to take us from being selfish, single minded folk to becoming servants who have been prepared to touch others, to encourage others, to see others through His eyes and respond to them with His heart.

In High Point on Wednesday night, we are talking about compassion. Being willing to see the need of someone else and being moved to do something about meeting that need. I don't think we can adequately serve without having a changed mind and heart. Most human beings, if they are honest, would admit that they are caught up in the things that only concern them; their health, their family, their career, their finances, their vacations, their knowledge. We can easily get caught in the trap of "it's all about me" But there is more to life and the universe than me, myself, and I. There are people all around us who struggle and hurt and it is our joy to be able to serve them. The best servants are the ones who have

been served well; ones who have experienced being in a position of need and having had someone meet that need.

Jesus said that those who want to be great among you need to serve. Serving prepares us for eternal ministry. We serve because of love. The love sees the need and extends itself to meet the need. We serve because of the example of who we follow. Prepare yourself to serve by doing what no one else may want to do. Remember Jesus' words, "In that you have done it to the least of these my brothers; you have done it to me."

Prepare yourself to serve by keeping yourself pure. That may mean setting up some boundaries. That may mean having an accountability partner. That may mean turning off the TV, putting away that magazine, stop watching that video that takes God's name in vain or puts in your mind some images that are sexually arousing. **2 Tim. 2:21- If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for his purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.**

God is looking for purity in the lives of His followers. If there is something that is impure, in thought, deed, attitude, then confess it to God and apply the power of His word to cleanse you so you can reflect His purity and glory. When you look into a mirror, you expect to see a clear reflection of yourself. If there is dirt, or steam, or junk that interferes with the reflection of the mirror, what you see is skewed or inaccurate.

II. Prepared to witness

1 Peter 3:15- Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.

Can you explain to anyone the reason why you have a hope? Can you explain to anyone the way Christ came to be a part of your everyday life? You need to write out how it happened. You need to rehearse it, so when someone asks you to explain it, you can share it without thinking about it.

If someone broke into my house and vandalized it and stole things from it, you better believe I would practice telling the story so it would be accurate when I told it to the authorities and if necessary, to tell the story to the court to be able to relate what happened and how I found things.

Those of us who are followers of Jesus need to be able to tell the story of what our life was like before we started to follow Christ and how He has changed us. If you look for the opportunities, they will present themselves where you can share your faith with others. So often in conversations with my neighbors, I am able to drop a tidbit of faith and mention that God's Word says this or God does answer prayer. I am not pushy with it, but when it comes up, and it does come up, I seize the opportunity and use the tools of authority, prayer or God's Word.

Someone e-mailed me this week and asked for examples of how I use the tools I talked about last week. Here are a couple of examples. Just over a year ago, one of our neighbors was battling cancer. I felt strongly impressed to go to their home and ask if I could pray for them. They were gracious and welcomed my prayer. They had several months of treatment. Not too long ago, I was talking to the

spouse of this neighbor and the neighbor reported that they are now cancer free. This spouse attributed their health to good luck. I was quick to encourage this spouse that good luck had nothing to do with it. We had prayed and I told them without reservation, God heard and answered prayer. Has it made a difference? You bet it has. God was exalted and the opportunity was seized. How my neighbors respond is between them and God. I did what I could and I believe God is trying to get the attention of those neighbors.

Another neighbor over two years ago was talking to me one day and I could tell something was wrong. He told me that they might have to move because of downsizing at their company. I told them God had a plan for their life. He said, "I wish He would let me know what His plan is." I told him if he would seek God, God would show him His plan. I also told him I would pray that God's will would be done with his job. Not a couple weeks later this neighbor spoke to me with a huge smile and said he was not going to have to move. I reminded him I had prayed and I believe God heard and answered and His plan for him was being revealed.

Don't be shy about your faith. The culture today is looking for people who are convinced in their belief. I know we practice tolerance and it seems like we have to tolerate diversity of belief to be politically correct, but I would like to affirm with the Apostle Paul who wrote this in his letter to the **Romans 1:6- For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes - Jews first and also Gentiles.** How can we be ashamed of something so revolutionary and so life-altering? How can we hide it and keep it quiet? Prepare to witness. Practice on your family. Practice on a brother or sister in this fellowship. Practice telling your story to the Lord.

God has wonderful things in store for you and this fellowship. He is in the process of preparing us for what is just ahead, around the bend or over the crest of this hill. If we use the experiences God allows to come into our lives, we will be better prepared for the opportunities that He brings our way.

So what is God doing to help get you prepared? Is He stretching your faith? Is He allowing trials to work patience into your life? Has some illness been permitted so He can receive glory from healing, or

so you can relate to someone who is facing a similar trial? God has good things prepared for us. Let's allow Him to prepare us for service, for witness for

eternity and utilize the tools He has given us to accomplish the task.

Conclusion:

God wants to use you and me. In a time of preparation, all kinds of things happen. Some of them we initiate and some of them God initiates, but as we bend our hearts toward Him and seek His face, He will prepare us for service. Today we are beginning a season of fasting and prayer. This will take us up to the celebration of Pentecost. It will include the national day of prayer. This afternoon we have opportunity as believers to gather together at 4:00 to seek God together. Please join us in this sanctuary around these altars.