

Leadership Letter 16

(Note: this is the 16th in a series of "Leadership Letters" that have been written in the last few months. You can read previous letters at our web-site. Go to www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org and look under the "encouragement" section.)

Addressing our Fears

Here's a great quote I found the other day: *The man who insists upon seeing with perfect clarity before he decides, never decides!*

Has God called you to plant a church for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom? Congratulations! You are not alone. God is calling many leaders around the world to leave the comfort and convenience of their present ministries and to step out in faith to build a new work that will be missional and effective in reaching people with the gospel.

Along with that calling often-time come fears – *fears about finances* (How will we survive? Will we have enough income?), *fears about failure* (What if this new work does not make it? What will happen if we fail?), and *fears about the future* (How will my family adjust? Who will come with us to plant the church?). I recently asked Ken Eze, the director of Living Spring Christian Ministry in Nigeria, what issues I should address in upcoming Leadership Letters that would meet the needs of pastors and church planters in Nigeria. Without hesitation he said, "*You've got to write about the fear of finances. It's not only the lack of funding – but the fears connected with funding a new church plant – that keep so many people from starting churches today.*" So that's where we're going today.

(Parenthetically, I know there are those receiving these Leadership Letters who are not called to be church planters. Some of you are pastors, business leaders and friends of our ministry. The material that follows is targeted to you as well, because God calls all of us to live by faith as we face our fears. So read on ... with application!)

My Good Friend, Father Abraham

I started reading through the Bible again this year. That puts me in Genesis 12-14 on this fifth day of January. The previous chapters have seen God dealing with the rebelliousness of mankind for generations. God now begins to unfold His great plan of redemption – a plan beginning with one man, Abram. God calls Abram to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and travel to a distant, but unspecified, new land. Responding in faith, Abram obeys with nothing to cling to but the promises of God. The journey is not without its moments of danger and decisions, as seen in the life of Lot. But through it all, Abram dares to believe God for the impossible, in spite of his childless condition.

Can you relate as a church planter? I know several church planters who have moved to our area (Ft. Myers, FL) and still have not sold their former homes. Having two mortgages is no fun. I know others who are trying to raise financial support for their new ministries, but are still languishing at 15-25% of their support needs being met.

Others have had promises made to them ... but then those promises have been reneged upon.

What do you do?

Abram obeyed the voice of God, pulling up stakes in Ur, and heading for a new home more than a thousand miles away. Hebrews 11:8 explains why this was no ordinary move. "*Abraham ... obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*" The command of God was clear, but the destination was not! That's faith – the kind that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6) and the kind God wants you to exercise today as you face situations in which His will may be clear ... but the way He wants you to accomplish it is not. Abraham found that you don't always need to know where you're going, provided you know whom you're following.

So What Do I Do?

It is always wise to exercise prudence. Sometimes we make rash decisions, thinking that God is in the decision, when what it really was is indigestion from too many tacos the night before.

But there are times when "*you know that you know*" that God has called you to do something. His voice was clear. His calling certain. And you must obey. To do otherwise would be sin. May I suggest that not everyone will support you in that decision. There will be nay-sayers who will feed your fears. "*How will you support your family?*" "*Why are you doing this when you have such a fruitful ministry here?*" "*Can't you wait?*" As I said, if you are certain that God has called you, you must obey. (I'll deal with learning to hear God's voice in a subsequent Leadership Letter.)

1. Obey Immediately!

Henry Blackaby, author of the great book *Experiencing God*, was speaking at one of our area events two years ago. After the evening was over, a large number of people lined up to speak with Dr. Blackaby. One of those was an area pastor who was sensing God's call to plant a new church in a completely different area of the country. He shared his situation with Dr. Blackaby, who asked if he was certain that God was calling him to do it. He responded, "*Yes, but I don't know what to do.*" He was caught in the dilemma of leaving the familiar. Dr. Blackaby looked at the man, and with a loud voice that could be heard throughout the banquet room, said, "*Obey immediately!*"

I've thought about that conversation many times since then. Whenever I am facing a decision about God's will, I'll make a "T" chart on a piece of paper. I list all the fears that I am currently facing on one side of the page ... all the "what if's" that can cause me to be double-minded. On the other side of the page, I simply list God's clear call ... and the decision is simple. Obey immediately!

2. Don't Doubt in the Dark What God Shows You in the Light

It is human nature to doubt. Especially when the lights go out and the times of questioning loom large. But if you have been walking with God and He has clearly communicated His will to you, don't doubt in the dark times what He has shown you

in the times of walking closely with Him. God doesn't always give us answers – but He does give us Himself ... and that is sufficient in the dark times.

In times of divine silence, it is very natural for you to question God. It was the German theologian Helmut Thilicke who said, "*American Christians have a very inadequate view of suffering.*" In your times of darkness and suffering, you are meant to learn what it means to draw near to God in faith.

3. We Face Our Problems by "Faithing" Our Problems

Say that phrase out loud and it sounds like a lisp. But it really is good theology. When you encounter challenges and problems, meet them with faith. Habakkuk 2:4 says that the righteous man shall live by faith. By the way, that verse is so important that it is repeated 3 times in the New Testament. Do you know where they are? Hint: in each case the author was the Apostle Paul. Check out Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

Don't move ahead of God. Rest and wait on Him. We are seldom more effective in our lives than when we make a determined effort to stop and rest in God. In every significant decision in my life, I have been forced by God to wait - the answer did not come in *my* time. I had to get alone, I had to wait for Him to clear the fog.

But remember, God's timing is perfect. He has never been one milli-second late. Faith will flourish in the midst of trials. That's where God calls us to be different people — trusting Him even in the darkest hours.

4. Faith is Not a Feeling

Jesus Christ was supremely interested in producing faith in the lives of the disciples. Over and over, He called them "*O men of little faith.*" He asked, "*When the Son of Man comes back, will He find faith on the earth?*"

In Mark 4, Jesus had just finished lecturing all day long about the importance of faith. He put the disciples in a boat and sent them to the other side of the lake. In the middle of the trip, a strong storm started flooding the boat and causing it to sink. The disciples woke up Jesus, who was sleeping down below. They begged Him to do something, admonishing Him with the words, "*Don't you even care that we are perishing?*" Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves (no problem there) but then He turned to the disciples and admonished them by saying, "*How is it that YOU (strong emphasis in the original Greek language) have no faith?*" The implication was they should have learned something that day. But when put to the test, they failed.

Learn to grow in faith. Faith is not a feeling. It's taking God at His Word. It's obedience to His known will.

Hebrews 11:8-19 records the life of Abraham from a New Testament perspective. Read each word slowly. Listen carefully to how the author to the Hebrews summarized Abraham's life:

⁸ *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land,*

dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Read that last verse again. Except this time, forget that you know about the resurrection of Jesus. Put yourself in Abraham's shoes. He'd never heard about "resurrection." But he still believed God could do it ... because he knew his God could do anything. *He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.*

Do you have a similar concept of God? Is He calling you to step out and plant a church? Is He calling you to believe Him for something great? Be a faith-filled man just like Abraham ... because our God can do anything!