

Leadership Letter #4 – September 16, 2006

To my dear Nigerian pastor friends:

Greetings again to you. This is the fourth "Leadership Letter." Have you received all of them? (If not, email me and let me know which ones you are missing!) It has been encouraging to hear from many of you and to see how God is using these letters to encourage you in your faith and ministry. I'm also encouraged to hear about your commitment to our upcoming church planters conference. Thank you for your prayers and efforts to make that conference successful.

The Church in Nigeria

When Jordan Stinziano (teaching pastor at Summit Church here in Florida) and I came to Nigeria last December, one of our first observations was about the state of the church in Nigeria. We were both amazed at how many churches there were (a lot more than we expected!) and also what types of churches there were. To put it bluntly, the church in Nigeria is a church of "extremes." There are a few that are healthy ... but there were many that were not. Some extreme churches emphasize the "prosperity gospel," while others are all caught up in demons and spiritual warfare. There seemed to be very little Bible teaching ... and a lot of emotional excess. None of these extremes are helpful. They take the focus off of Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Him. A Biblical church is a Word-centered church where the Scriptures give us the content for our teaching. That's one reason we are so excited about Living Spring Ministries ... the leadership has a true commitment to teaching the Word of God in a biblical and balanced way.

This week I want to present to you a few thoughts about the importance of the Word of God in our lives and ministries. The Bible is our sole authority in life, practice and ministry.

The Primacy of the Word of God

Who are you going to listen to? Will you listen to the teachings of men, or will you listen to the Word of God?

In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Paul writes to his young protégé and says:

¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

When you are first studying a passage of the Bible, you must look for the big picture, the essential meaning of what is being said. And here the message is very simple: (1) God's Word can equip us for life! It gives us the necessary wisdom that leads to salvation. (2) God's Word can also equip us for ministry! Paul tells Timothy that the Word of God equips us for every good work.

I have deep concerns about the preaching in our churches, both in America and throughout the world. We don't need pop psychology. We don't need "positive thinking." We don't need liberal churches that proclaim a humanistic message devoid of the power of the gospel. We need Biblical truth taught clearly, accurately and relevantly.

Now let's dive a little deeper into this passage and understand some of the particulars. First, Paul says "all" Scripture is inspired by God. That tells me that all of the Bible is good for us. You need to be systematically teaching your people God's Word. Though I believe that there are times when topical sermons and series are appropriate, we ought to have a plan to teach our people the whole counsel of God. The primary form of effective Bible teaching is expositional – taking one passage of Scripture and teaching it verse by verse in its immediate context and meaning. Learn to teach through books of the Bible. Help your people to see verses in their context ... that's how you accurately determine their meaning.

Next, please note the word "*inspired*." It literally means "God-breathed." The very words of the Bible come from the heart and mind of God. Though written by human authors, the Bible is clearly God's truth delivered to us. It is without error in all that it teaches and affirms.

Finally, Paul tells us that Scripture is "*profitable*." It's beneficial. It's what we need. And he lists four areas in which it is profitable: for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. Teaching gives us "content." It instructs us what to believe. Reproof tells us where we have gone wrong in our understanding and/or behavior. Correction puts us back on the right path. And training helps us apply the truth to our lives so that it will result in real life change.

Can I leave you with three thoughts about effective Bible study and teaching? **First, expend the effort – it's worth it.** 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "*Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*" Put in the hard work that it takes to study and prepare to teach the Bible to people.

Second, be open to God. He is ready to meet you. Listen to these words from two Old Testament books:

Proverbs 8:34-35 *Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD.*

Jeremiah 29:11-14 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD..."*

Finally, be willing to change. When you hear the word of God, act on it. Be doers of the Word, not merely hearers. Change will happen when we trust the Holy Spirit to empower us and bring change from within. Paul put it this way:

Romans 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to*

the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God is in the business of changing lives. He wants to progressively conform our character into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Life transformation will take place when pastors faithfully teach the Word of God, because it is the Spirit of God who takes the Word of God and then uses it to transform the life of the child of God.

Please take the time to study through the material I've just presented. You may even want to pass it on to your church ... it makes a great sermon message!

Getting to Know Arjuna Chiguluri

We're going to have some great Bible teaching at our upcoming conference for church planters and pastors. One of those Bible teachers will be Arjuna Chiguluri. Arjuna is coming from Vizag, India, to be one of our plenary speakers as well as leading a four-part workshop series for pastors. Arjuna gives leadership to Vision Nationals, a church planting ministry that began in 1991. They began planting churches in tribal areas of India. God blessed that particular ministry leading them to enter full time church planting and training programs, including the development of a Bible College to train future church planters.

Since then, they have planted hundreds of churches throughout India and influenced many, many more. Arjuna and Vision Nationals hosted an International Church Planting Summit last February. Ken Eze, Nolen Rollins and I were among the speakers there. What a great time as we trained 153 church planters and leaders in a four day conference similar to the one we will have in Jos in November. Since that conference, Arjuna tells us that eighty churches have been planted throughout India. That's 80 church plants since last February!

I am so excited that you will get to hear from Arjuna. He is a superb Bible teacher. He is also a seasoned pastor and leader. The church planting movement in India is several years ahead of the one in Nigeria ... so he will be able to give you much wisdom about what the necessary next steps are for your success. He has been a mentor to Ken over the years ... and I know you will benefit from his presentations. Because of all that, we have asked Arjuna to be our very first keynote speaker at our church planting conference. He will be speaking the first evening on "Planting Churches to Reach a Country for Christ."

Another Bible Study to Help You

It's encouraging to me to see how God uses the church and the preaching of the gospel to change lives. I've attached another Bible study, this one entitled "Pictures of Power." It's taken from Acts 3-4. The objective of this study is to encourage us to see the power of God at work as the gospel advances. I hope it is an encouragement to you. I also pray that it will motivate you to trust God in greater and greater ways through your ministry.

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