

DAY SIX

Thus says the Lord to you: "Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's... This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still and see the victory of the Lord..."

2 Chronicles 20:15, 17

Come on, Lord, get serious: Surrounded by enemies, threatened with destruction and you want us to stand still. Let's be honest, there is something about this story that just doesn't feel comfortable. Many of us would really prefer to "take the bull by the horns." More often than not we are encouraged to be a people of action. Yet this story from 2 Chronicles stands as a powerful reminder that there are occasions when the best thing we can do is stand still and wait upon God.

Over the course of the next month there will be considerable action in and around the church. Many will be feverishly working to accomplish all of the tasks for this stewardship campaign. And in the midst of all of your hard work there will actually be those who will complain about the campaign, about the process, about the project itself and who knows what else. You may be tempted, at times, to leap into battle, to answer all of the complaints, to convert the unconverted.

Remember, this is ultimately God's project, God's campaign, and God's battle. No matter what we do or how we do it, there will be opposition. We will do everything we can to answer questions and deal with criticism, but in the end it is God who will make us successful. In the midst of all the business and activities of the next few months, remember to take the time to stand still.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do I respond to criticism and complaints?
2. Do I feel a pressing need to make everything right?
3. What might be some ways that I can stand still and trust God?

PRAYER

Teach me, Oh Lord, to stand still and wait for You. Help me to pause and remember that ultimately our success is in Your hands. Teach me to trust, Amen.

DAY SEVEN

Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.

Ephesians 3:20

How many times do we limit God? How often do we fail to recognize the wonderful power that God gives us through Jesus Christ. Look again at the words used by Paul, “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.” Often we find ourselves saying “yes, but...” There are always reasons why something can’t happen. We’re too small; we could never do that. We’re too poor; we could never afford that.

During the course of a stewardship campaign, churches often do more than they ever imagined. Individuals, by God’s grace, end up being able to give more and do more than they had ever dared dream. Her name was Sally. She was devoted to her church, to their project and to their campaign. There was only one problem; her husband. He controlled the finances, never attended church and seemed not to care at all about the church’s need. Sally worried and worried about her pledge, convinced she would be forced to give a token pledge at best. Sally was encouraged to pray. Finally, the night arrived when the leadership would fill out their pledges. Lo and behold, Sally’s husband came with her. As the time arrived to fill out the cards and return them, Sally and her husband were the last ones to turn in their card. As they came forward Sally was smiling from ear to ear even as tears coursed down her cheek. Her husband had filled out the card and had placed an amount higher than even Sally had dared hope or pray for. Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are there ways in which I am limiting God’s impact in my life?
2. Are there ways in which we are limiting God’s impact in our church?
3. Am I limiting God as I consider my gift?

PRAYER

Abundant God, forgive me for the times that my lack of faith has limited what You can do. Help me to believe that together we can truly accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine. Help me to dream with faith and trust. In the name of Christ, Amen.

DAY EIGHT

I pray that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through His spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Ephesians 3:16-17

Evelyn Underhill in *The Spiritual Life* puts it this way: “For a spiritual life is simply a life in which all we do comes from the center, where we are anchored in God...”

Consider the power and awe inspired by watching the mighty Mississippi River. The sound and flow of the river fills us with a sense of peace and joy. Amidst the peace and joy, however, exists a powerful current that must be taken seriously. Imagine being on the river and losing an oar -- and then having an engine that won't start! Looking around, you discover you are without an anchor -- drifting rapidly downstream with the current.

In Ephesians 3, Paul speaks of being rooted and grounded; Evelyn Underhill speaks of being anchored in God. True stewardship begins with the realization that we are called to live our lives being rooted, grounded and anchored in the love of God. How many of us spend most of our lives being swept away by the currents of life, the demands of our jobs, family, education and even church responsibilities? We search in vain for a rope and anchor. We think if only: if only I could make more money, if only I could save more money, if only we had a bigger home, a better car or a faster computer. And still we find ourselves swept downstream. True stewardship begins with a life that is rooted, grounded and anchored in God's love.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do I have an anchor in my life?
2. Do I find myself being swept away by the demands of society and culture?
3. What are some practical ways I can begin to be grounded, rooted and anchored in Christ?

PRAYER

Oh Lord, I confess that I often find myself being swept along by the currents of life. I put my faith and hope in power, people, and possessions. Forgive me. Help me to turn to You during this campaign that my life would be rooted, grounded and anchored in You and Your wonderful love. In the name of Christ, Amen.

DAY NINE

For God so loved the world that He gave...

John 3:16

The candles cast a beautiful glow about the sanctuary; the choir raised their voices in a magnificent song of praise to honor the birth of the Savior. Yet, in the midst of such beauty and pageantry, tears slowly rolled down his cheeks. David had just returned from his third mission trip to Russia and all he could imagine was the children he had visited in the orphanages; children who would not hear the story of the babe lying in a manger, children who would receive no gifts, no candy, and no Christmas meal.

For God so loved the world that He gave...

The greatest gift the world has ever received was given for one reason and one reason alone -- love. It was a love so strong and powerful that He gave His only son. Our stewardship emphasis is not about bricks, buildings or budgets. Ultimately, we are about love; a love that desires to reach out and bring people into the family of God. A love so strong, so powerful that we want to give and give and give some more; not from obligation or guilt but from heartfelt desire that people would come to know the wonderful and saving love of God through Christ.

For God so loved the world that He gave...

We don't need to travel to rural Russia to find those in need. How many children and young people in your own community will not hear the Good News, will never grow up knowing the joy that comes from being a part of God's family? How many families in your own congregation desperately need to hear the good news of God's love in the midst of divorce, death, sickness or unemployment? How many elderly people need to know God still loves them? Think for a moment of co-workers, family members and friends who desperately need what the church has to offer -- love.

For God so loved the world that He gave...Will you?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do I give?
2. Does my gift adequately reflect God's love for me and others?
3. Who do I personally know who needs to know the love of God through Christ?

PRAYER

Loving and Giving God, thank You for loving the world so much that You gave up Your only son that I might live. Help me, Oh God, to give like You. Help me to give with a generous and loving heart. Open my eyes to a world that stands in desperate need of Your wondrous love in Christ. I pray in His name, Amen.

DAY TEN

For God so loved the world that He gave...

John 3:16

His name is Andre, Director of the orphanage in Kaigorodok, a small rural village approximately 600 miles northeast of Moscow. In 1996, Andre and his children were desperate with little hope of help for the barest of necessities, even food.

Through the generosity of God's people in the church, Andre was able to provide for the children's basic needs and see them through the cold Russian winter. The following year, members of the church that provided financial support visited Andre and his children -- finding them better fed, healthier, and happier. Andre was smiling from ear to ear. The children performed skits, sang songs and treated them to a wonderful feast: the reason, gratitude. Andre and the children were genuinely thankful and out of gratitude they wanted to, perhaps even had to, give.

After working in rural Tennessee with his youth group, a 16-year-old boy experienced this same type of response from an elderly woman for whom his group had been working. Even though she could afford very little, she had been deeply touched by the work that had been done for her and wanted to give something in return. The woman went to the dollar store and purchased socks for each of the kids. Normally the 16-year-old would have scoffed at such a gift, but he knew this gift was given with profound gratitude and was a real sacrifice.

For God so loved the world that He gave...

Generous and sacrificial giving begins with gratitude; gratitude for what God has done through the gift of His son Jesus Christ; gratitude for what God has done for us through the family of God we know as our church. For those who make incredible, truly sacrificial gifts, it is an expression of their deep gratitude for what God has done for them through their local church -- the family of God.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do I recognize the blessings that God has poured forth on my family and me?
2. How has God blessed me through the people in my local church?
3. Does my gift recognize the extent of God's blessings in my life; is it generous and sacrificial?
4. Is my gift grounded in gratitude?

PRAYER

Oh God, I have so much for which to be thankful. You have blessed me in ways that are too numerous to even count. Forgive me for not being always grateful. Forgive me for focusing on what I don't have instead of all You have given me. Fill my heart with gratitude and show me how I can give with generosity and sacrifice. In the name of Christ, Amen.