

12. Learning to Help People Put Their Plan of Action into Action

In our last topic, we talked about helping people develop a plan of action for their lives. It is one thing to develop a plan of action. However, for that plan of action to be effective, a person has to learn how to put their plan of action into action. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Many Christians try to serve the Lord in their own strength. We can be very busy when we try to serve in our own strength. However, we accomplish nothing when we are doing it in our own strength. The night before His crucifixion, Christ told the disciples, in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” From this verse, we might ask the question, does Christ want us to be busy Christians or fruitful Christians? When we get to heaven, Christ will never ask us how busy we were. However, He will ask about our fruitfulness. Therefore, we need to help developing leaders learn to put their plan of action into action in the strength Christ provides rather than their own strength.

In Acts 1:4-5, 8, we read, “And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ *He said*, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. ...⁸But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” In these verses, Christ told the disciples that they would not be effective unless they learned to serve Him in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of their own strength. That is the key to helping a developing leader put a plan of action into action.

In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is mentioned once. Then, in chapter 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times. Look at the contrast between the end of chapters 7 and 8. The last twelve verses of Romans 7 use the words, “I”, “me”, “my” and “myself” thirty-seven times (this is the passage on “I” trouble and not the kind that requires glasses). Verses 18 and 19 summarize the problem, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.” Then, verse 24 tells how we feel when we depend on our own strength, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

In contrast, Romans 8 ends in a very different way. Verses 35-39 tell us, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” As we learn to depend on the Holy Spirit for strength to serve the Lord, we see that we are more than conquerors through Christ. We also see that we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

One of the things that happened when we became Christians was that Christ set us free – Galatians 5:1, 13. Christ also emphasized this thought as He spoke to His disciples, in John 8:31-32 and 36. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’” The key is to understand what that freedom does for us.

True freedom gives us the power to make choices. Before we became Christians, we were slaves to sin, and so we sinned. The primary choices we made at that time were which sins to commit. We did not have the power to obey Christ, because we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). However, as Christians, we now have the power to make choices. Romans 6:13 and 16 tell us, “And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ...¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?”

We can share with developing leaders that we have now been set free. That freedom makes it possible for us to make choices, and then carry out those choices. A Christian can make the choice to present himself to sin (by depending on self-effort, instead of the strength that Christ provides). As we see here, when we present ourselves to sin, it leads to the death we mentioned earlier in Romans 7:24. However, a Christian can also make the choice to present himself to God (by yielding to God and acting in the strength Christ provides). These verses tell us that when we make the choice to yield to God, we have the power to obey and that leads to righteousness. In the process, we act like Christ, because we act in His strength.

A good illustration of this is found in Acts 4. Verse 13 tells us, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Peter and John were just as bold in front of the religious leaders as Christ was when he stood in front of these same religious leaders. Then, in verses 19-20, we see that they realized that they had the power to act in the strength of the Lord, “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’”

Acts 4:23-24 and 29-30 tell us what choice they made when they were released, “And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them. ...²⁹⁻³⁰Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’” The Lord shows how He answered when the disciples depended on the strength of the Lord instead of their own strength. Verse 31 says, “And when they had prayed,

the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

We also model for developing leaders our own dependence on the Lord. As we invite them to spend time with us in prayer, and see the Lord give us His strength to carry out His plan of action for our lives, the developing leaders will see that the Lord is working in our lives because we pray and depend on His strength. (They probably also see our lack of effectiveness when we depend on our own strength.) We also need to ask them to pray that we will be able to have the power to do what the Lord tells us to do. Paul illustrated this principle in Ephesians 6:18-20, where we read: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” At the same time, we also need to let them know that we are praying for them.

We also need to encourage developing leaders by reminding them of what happened to Peter when he depended on his own strength. Christ warned him, in Luke 22:31-33, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’ But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’” Then, we see the following actions on the part of Peter:

- ◆ He slept when Christ asked him to pray – Luke 22:45-46
- ◆ He tried to protect Christ in his own strength – Luke 22:50; John 18:10-11
- ◆ He followed Christ afar off – Luke 22:54
- ◆ He sat down among the enemies of Christ – Luke 22:55
- ◆ He denied Christ three times – Luke 22:57-61
- ◆ He went out and wept bitterly – Luke 22:62
- ◆ He decided his only option was to go back to fishing since he failed – John 21:1-3
- ◆ He was asked if he loved Christ more than the fish – John 21:15
- ◆ He was restored to effective ministry – John 21:15-17
- ◆ He listened the next time Christ told him his source of power – Acts 1:8, 14
- ◆ He was used greatly by Christ as He depended on Christ – Acts 2:1-41

The Lord gives us a great privilege as He sends us to help developing leaders develop a plan of action. It is also a great privilege to help them learn to depend on the power of Christ to put that plan of action into action. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to serve the Lord in the power of the Lord instead of their own strength.