

WHERE'S YOUR TENT?

By Alfred Ells, M.C.

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting. — Exodus 33:7



All ministers naturally want their ministry to be a successful one. So what do you do when you pour your life into a ministry that seems to barely flourish or fall short of its potential? Perhaps periods of great growth and favor occurred in the past, but right now you feel like you have been wandering about in a dry desert. One minister once shared, “Yes, God has provided, even manna at times. But the ministry and I have never entered into the Promised Land of fulfillment, the place of highest calling and destiny.”

Perhaps the most crucial principle of ministry to remember is that first things must always come first. When things aren't working, we need to reexamine our first love (Christ) and our first calling (intimacy with Him). Doing so means rekindling the holy connection required for entering our promised land.

Both Moses and Joshua communed with God at the tent of meeting on a regular basis (Exodus 29:42-46). It was here that their first love spoke to them, and gave direction, strategy and orders. It was the sanctified place of intimacy and connection with the Lord. Their meeting with God was the first and foremost necessity for entering and conquering the Promised Land.

Regretfully, there have been times in my life that I have ignored this principle of “first things first” and suffered the consequences of my own human “wisdom” instead of benefiting from His. Many ministers and ministries are poised to enter their place of promise but are too preoccupied with daily demands to clearly know God's heart and, therefore, the needed strategy. The following are tips to consider in renewing your intimacy with the Lord so you can fulfill your destiny in Him.

GET RID OF DISTRACTIONS | EXODUS 33:7

One of the most important keys to connection with the Lord is to designate a meeting place. A quiet spot away from phones, family and friends is best. For example, Dick Eastman, who teaches worldwide schools of prayer, set up a tin shed adjacent to his house that he used for years as a meeting place with the Lord. A friend of mine goes regularly to pray and meditate at Canaan in the Desert, a local Sisters of Mary community, because it is secluded and free from interruptions.

WAIT UPON THE LORD | ECCLESIASTES 5:2

A time of meeting with God should not be managed by you but by Him. Do not go with an agenda. Let your words be few. Your responsibility during these times is to present yourself to the Lord and await His direction. Be still and allow the Lord to reveal his will. If you have not done this for a while, it will

take time to develop the focus to quiet your mind and wait upon the Lord. Trust Him; He will speak to you.

WHEN PROMPTED, FULLY SHARE YOUR HEART | PSALMS 51

Just as David shared the deepest despair, pain and hope of his life with the Lord, so are we to share our hearts with Him. This should be the place of greatest intimacy in your life. Do not just share your thoughts, but expose your feelings. Tell him of your deepest desires, dreams, hurts, fears and shortcomings. He will provide comfort, hope and healing in return.

LISTEN CAREFULLY AND WRITE IT DOWN | HABAKKUK 2:2

As intimacy develops, God will share His heart with you. He will reveal not only His love for you, but also His plans and purposes for your life and ministry. At times, He will give you very specific instructions. Keep a journal or notebook handy for what the Lord lays upon your heart. Don't worry about your grammar, spelling or what others may think. This is for you, not for publication.

DON'T SHARE EVERYTHING GOD REVEALS

Much of what the Lord may share is for you, not for your sermon on Sunday or for your wife and friends. Intimate conversation is just that: private thoughts and feelings between two parties. Once the conversation is made public, the intimacy is violated. Too often I have proclaimed what I should have pondered privately because I wanted people to know that I had heard from God.

SEPARATE YOUR STUDIES FROM YOUR MEDITATION

When you are studying for a sermon or lesson, you are seeking direction from the Lord for what to share with others for their benefit. When you wait upon the Lord, you are seeking a deeper level of intimacy for yourself. Mixing the two risks your closeness to God. If you foster your intimate relationship with Him first, your message will flow out of it.

MUSIC, MEDITATION AND THE BIBLE ARE VALUABLE TOOLS

Many people start their time of meeting with the Lord by reading the Word or entering into worship with music. If that helps, do it. Develop a ritual to begin your time with the Lord. It will help you quiet your mind. Your ultimate goal, however, is not just Bible study, but presenting yourself before the throne.

IT DOES NOT HAVE TO LAST FOR HOURS

Many people avoid the important practice of meeting with God because they wrongly assume it must be a lengthy session of an hour or more. Obviously, the more you meet with the Lord, the better. But intimacy can be developed by starting with something manageable and building on that foundation.

BUSYNESS IS A CURSE TO GODLINESS | LUKE 10:38-41

It is easy to become so busy in meeting the demands of ministry that you become like Martha instead of Mary. Martin Luther is quoted as saying that because he had an unusually busy day ahead, he would pray twice as long. The more intimate time you spend with the Lord, the more you will realize your

neediness and His sufficiency. His favor for accomplishing what really needs to be done on a daily basis begins with your humility before Him.

DON'T GIVE UP — IT IS A SPIRITUAL BATTLE | EPHESIANS 6:12

Satan will make it his business to challenge your intimacy with the Lord. You will be amazed at how he will try to divert you from time with Him. As Scripture declares, submit to God, resist the enemy and he will flee. Keep trying and it will work.