weekend

resource guide

for the week of 11 February

*… you also joining in helping us through your prayers… For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. (2 Corinthians 1.11; 10.4)*

I do not know a single Christian man, who takes his faith seriously, who does not want his whole life to count for Christ. Each of us wants to be used by God to influence people and impact our world. We want to participate in the eternal legacy of Jesus Christ. We, who have been magnetized and empowered by His love, naturally want to magnetize and empower others. Let me suggest one method that is tried and true- it has changed individuals, transformed whole families, demolished walls of racism and ethnic strife, and it has even toppled civilizations. I shall call it the "subterranean" method- you know it more simply as prayer.

There is a fascinating verse in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians where he invites their prayerful support for his evangelistic work. In 2 Corinthians 1.11 he literally says: "You also helping together underneath in prayer." What could such a phrase mean to Paul? I believe that he is thinking of the fortresses that were such common structures in the ancient world. Evangelism involves storming strongholds like that in people's lives. But a frontal assault is often useless. What is needed is a tunnel. This will require hard work, sustained work, and team work. Such work is unseen and unsung. But it is crucial if the fortress is to be taken. Prayer is like that. It assails the inner recesses of a man's will in a way that all our talking cannot.

J. I. Packer writes: "However clear and cogent we may be in our presentation of the gospel, we have no hope of convincing and converting anyone. Can you or I by earnest talking break the power of Satan over a man's life? No! Can you or I give life to the spiritually dead? No! Can we hope to convince sinners of the truth of the gospel by patent explanation? No! Can we hope to move men to believe the gospel by any words of entreaty that we may utter? No! Our approach to evangelism is not realistic until we have faced this shattering fact, and let it make its proper impact upon us."

Now let me confess to you at once that all of this is counter-intuitive for me. By temperament I would much rather storm walls than tunnel away in prayer. But time and experience continue to confront me with the reality that it is the tunneling which counts and prevails.

Foolish is the Christian- and I have been the fool- who does not remember that reality exceeds the yardstick of the scientist. There are natural laws for the realities of nature and there are spiritual laws which are natural to the realities of the Kingdom of God. In the natural realms gravity can exert a force which causes things to fall. In spiritual realms prayer can exert a force that, while unseen in the natural, has the capacity to cause "things" to fall.

The fall of Jericho (Joshua 6) testifies to the power of God's ways. God instructed the Israelites to march around Jericho for six days in a huge worship procession. Then on the seventh day they marched again, gave a shout unto the Lord, and the city walls collapsed. Israel's victory was not the fruit of their prodigious vocal strength! Victory came because something "subterranean" was happening in the spiritual realm that would breach the structural integrity of the walls in the natural realm.

The movement of God always begins in "spiritual places." The call to Abraham, the Exodus, the selection of David, the prophets' vision, the coming of Jesus, the day of Pentecost- from where did these come? From the realms of nature or the realm of the Spirit? Prayer is the one tool that God has given us to impact the fallen spiritual realm which buttresses the bastions of evil, sin, and brokenness in and around us.

So, if you feel like you are banging your head against a wall that will not budge perhaps its time to start tunneling…

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better…

Diversity is a huge concern in our world today. Can you remember your first personal experience with a “person of a different hue (color)” from you? Was a positive or negative experience for you? Why?

Acts 6.1-7: division… diversity… and distinction…

*Acts 6:1   Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.*

*Acts 6:7   The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

**NOTE:** Jerusalem was both a deeply traditional culture and a cosmopolitan mixture of Jews from all over the world. Native-born Palestinian Jews, who spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue, would feel they had more in common with one another than with the Greek-speaking folk who had come from the wider world. The “Hebrews” mentioned in verse 1 referred to the early Christians from this first group. The “Hellenists” or “Hellenistic Jews” were Christians from the second group who had returned to Jerusalem after years or perhaps generations away.

What? (does the Bible say)

What dispute arose amongst believers in Jerusalem?

How did the Twelve respond to this dispute?

How does this response demonstrate sensitivity to these needs, and their commitment to God's primary direction to them?

What qualities did the apostles require in the chosen seven?

What is a proselyte and why is his appointment significant?

Why is it significant that many priests of the Jewish Temple became believers in Christ?

How does the young church apparently benefit from the solution which God gave the apostles?

Now what? (should/will I think based on what this passage says)

It's risky to decide that because something is done in Acts, we should do it today. However, does 6:1-7 have any lessons relevant to us? Is the appointment of these 7 men a model for us? How, or why not?

What does laying on of hands signify today?

The seven men chosen (later called “deacons,” meaning servants) were “well spoken of and filled with the Spirit and wisdom” (v. 3). In addition, Stephen was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (v. 5). Those qualities sound more “spiritual” than practical. Why are those qualities needed in ministering to people of varied backgrounds where there is tension and jealousy?

Why do you think the apostles chose only “foreign born” to be the leaders? Would not unity amidst diversity been better served by having a “mixed group”? Why or why not?

So what? (difference will this passage make in how I live)

Memory test: What ideas or questions did Pastor Vince’s message on Acts 6 provoke for you?

How does this response to need compare and contrast to your own experience of Christian community?

What differences have you appreciated about Christians from a background very different from yours, and why do you appreciate them?

Where are the dividing lines of tension and jealousy among Christians in our own community that you have experienced and/or observed?

Taking Acts 6:1–6 as your example, what are some possible ways to bridge divisions in our own fellowship?

As you observe the work of the Holy Spirit throughout this passage, what actions do you think you and/or your group should take to insure His ministry in your LifeGroup and the larger community of Faith?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for…)

Praying for my group…