

THE PIONEERING SPIRIT OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH



he Lord is real to us only as we place our faith in Him. The Christian life is a faith life. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. The Bible says that “*we must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” (Hebrews 11:6).

We need to recapture what could be termed the “pioneering spirit” that springs forth from the faith life. As we follow the history of the people of God, we find them being led by Moses toward the Promised Land. After the wilderness wanderings and the death of Moses, Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan and into Canaan. Battles were fought and victories were won, but the task was not complete. The children of God were to drive out the enemy, but this is something that they did not do.

In the second chapter of the book of Judges, God tells us that after the death of Joshua, there rose up a generation which did not know the Lord or the mighty works which God had done. Again

and again, the Bible says that the children of Israel did not drive out the enemy. In Judges 1:21 we read, "Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites." Verse twenty-seven of the same chapter says, "Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean."

Verse twenty-nine says, "Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer." Verse thirty says, "Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron." Verse thirty-one

says, "Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho." Verse thirty-three says, "Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh."



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The faith required to trust God for the complete victory is also the faith that would have made God real to His people. Their refusal to trust God for the victory and their choice to live without faith brought them to the place where God says of their generation, they "knew not the LORD" (Judges 2:10).

Men with a pioneering spirit came before them, but their generation was willing to simply rest on those who had gone before. Though this rest was enjoyable and their complacency less of a burden, the absence of faith caused them to lose touch with God. They went by the same name as their forefathers, they lived in the same land as their forefathers, but they did not know firsthand the God of their forefathers.

There have been pioneers who had that "pioneering spirit." They were committed to follow Christ, just as surely as Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. The pioneers did not know the end of their earthly endeavor. They had enough light only to take the next step of faith. As they trusted God to meet their

needs, their needs seemed insurmountable, but God came through; for without God, it would have been impossible.

They could do more than talk about their impossibility; they felt the impossibility. They faced the impossibility. They dealt with the impossibility and cast themselves entirely on the mercy of God. Not only did the Lord provide, He became real to them as they trusted Him to meet their need.

In so many places today, there are people who use the same names, who serve in the same locations others have served, but they only inhabit the land and the buildings that were conquered and built by those with a "pioneering spirit" in God. Today's inhabitants can tell stories of how things were built and victories were won, but they repeat these stories as someone repeating a historical account.



For those who had the pioneering spirit and trusted God for the facilities, the facilities were never the goal, only a means to the goal.

In some places there are large facilities and large numbers of people to lead, but the pioneers who once used those facilities knew firsthand that God provided them. The pioneers who led those large numbers of people before led a people who knew that their leader had personally trusted God for wisdom and direction because there was no other way to get wisdom and direction.

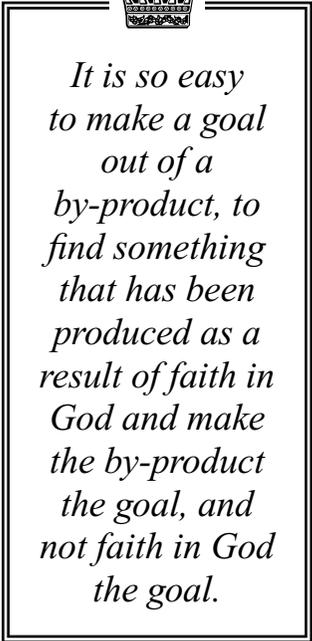
College students sit in buildings and use facilities that were provided by the faith and sacrifices of others. They will never have an appreciation for those facilities like the people that had to trust God to provide them. For those who had the pioneering spirit and trusted God for the facilities, the facilities were never the goal, only a means to the goal. Their goal was God. They followed God and needed physical facilities to conduct the ministries that God had

given them. But the generation following faces the temptation of making the care and maintenance of the buildings the goal, because somehow they cannot understand the faith that was exercised in trusting God for the provision. Growing, pioneering ministries so often degenerate into ministries of maintaining.

Young students sit in the classrooms of Christian schools at desks they had no part in purchasing, in buildings they had no part

in building, using facilities they had no part in providing. How can we expect them to have appreciation for what was not firsthand to them?

The pioneer never feels toward the physical facilities the way those who come after the pioneers feel toward the physical facilities. It is the spirit of adventure, following God, the faith life that is most meaningful to the pioneer. We must lift up our eyes and look on the fields. They are white unto harvest. Unless we recapture this pioneering spirit and move from the death of a maintenance ministry, someone will say of us, *“There arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done”* (Judges 2:10).



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David said, *“Is there not a cause?”* The mindset of most people in David’s day was given to maintaining a good army camp, repairing the tents, continuing to bring in supplies, providing medical care if needed for accidental things that took place around the campsite,

watching old soldiers die, talking about how bad things were and how good they used to be, occasionally dreaming of what could be, but never walking down into the valley to face Goliath.

It is because David had a pioneering faith that he realized there was a cause. The cause was not to slay the giant. The Bible plainly states the cause, *“That all the earth may know that there is a God”* (II Samuel 17:46).

There is a fruitful knowledge of Jesus Christ, and there is an unfruitful knowledge of Jesus Christ. The “unfruitful” knowledge is knowing about Jesus Christ. The “fruitful” knowledge is knowing Him. Do you know Him? If you do, it is because you have exercised faith in Him.

May God help us not to run from our obstacles. May God help us to endure the battle. The Lord did not tell Moses that He would kill Pharaoh. He told Moses, *“I will go with you to face him.”* It is in trusting God to help us face our pharaohs that God becomes real to us.

When Elijah stood before King Ahab, he did not say, *“I am standing before King Ahab.”* He said, *“I am standing in the presence of God before King Ahab.”* Trusting God to enable him to deal with Ahab made God real to Elijah.

May the Lord thrust us into the battle, into the thick of the fight. By whatever means necessary, may we find ourselves facing what many believe to be impossible, but those who have a pioneering spirit will know that all things are possible with God.

You may choose to maintain. You may choose to avoid the conflict. You may choose not to launch out into the deep. You may stay in shallow water, or you may choose a road where you expect little resistance; but remember if you do, you will not know God.

Our Lord has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. We are to win the lost to Christ and establish

New Testament churches. This work will not be accomplished by means of education and training; it will only be accomplished by people with pioneering spirit, people who believe God for what must be done.

The Bible says in Acts 1:1-8,

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Our Lord commanded us to go “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Every town, every village, every city, and every community needs a New Testament church. Those of us who know the Lord as our Savior and are part of a Bible-preaching New Testament church should be fully aware that the greatest thing happening in our town

is what takes place in and through the local church that is obedient to His command. This is the work of God.

God made us for eternity, not just for time. People get many things they need for time in other places; but they can get what they need for eternity in a New Testament church.

There are certain things we should all understand about the New Testament church. The church started with Christ and His disciples and was empowered at Pentecost. The Lord Jesus gave ordinances to the church. These are the things He ordered that we do—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are not ministerial ordinances; they are local church ordinances. These things are done under the authority the Lord gave the local New Testament church.

Christ also gave us doctrine, our beliefs and teachings. The sole authority for our faith and practice is the Word of God. We are not creedal people. We do not have creeds that we read and go through repetitiously. We are people of the Book. The Bible, the Word of God, is our sole authority.

Baptists are not Protestants. We are not Catholics. We are not Jews. We love all people, but we are Baptists. When tracing the beginning of our doctrine and principles, we do not find a Martin Luther or a John Calvin or a John Wesley. We find none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus gave His disciples a body of doctrine, and because we have an infallible Book that is preserved forever, we can hold the Word of God in our hands and hide it in our hearts. The same body of doctrine the Lord gave His disciples has been handed down through the centuries and delivered to us. It is our solemn responsibility to give it to the next generation.

I am grateful for everyone who is truly a Christian, and I am grateful for the opportunity to tell those who are not saved how to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. I certainly do not have the idea that the only people who will be in heaven are Baptists. The people who will be in heaven are those who have been washed in

the blood of the Lamb and the precious little ones who have died in the safe care and keeping of Christ before they came to the time of accountability. This is in God's hands.

As Christians, we should have a spiritual understanding of the local church. It is the work of churches to start churches. The church I have the privilege of pastoring was started by another church. It is not the work of mission agencies to start churches. It is not the work of Christian colleges to start churches. Starting churches is the work God gave to churches.

The bride of Christ, the church, can give birth. Mission agencies and mission boards can start more mission agencies and mission boards, but it is not their responsibility to start churches. It is the responsibility of churches to start churches.

The simplest definition of a local church is "a group of baptized believers who have voluntarily joined themselves together to carry out the Great Commission." Because it is the responsibility of churches to start churches in the cities, the communities, and the towns where churches are needed, this must be done by other Bible-believing, Bible-preaching churches.

We need to understand the ministry of the local church. Let us give our lives in service to God through the ministry of the local church. God's work in this world is the work of the New Testament church.

The Bible says in Acts 1:8 that we are to be witnesses unto Him "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

We must place the emphasis where God places the emphasis, "unto the uttermost part of the earth." There is no place to stop. There is no place where we arrive, then end. By the very nature of the New Testament church, it must continue to be a church with a pioneering spirit, always pressing beyond, "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

We live in a world of more than six billion people. We live in a country with nearly 300 million people and nearly 3,200 counties. Churches are to plant churches to reach these people with the gospel. What a glorious thing to be a part of a local assembly of baptized believers who hold the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice! What a privilege to be in a place where children can grow up hearing the Word of God!

We need pioneers. In the New Testament, we find people who pioneered a work for God. By the very fact that the world is against God and we are to go "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," we are going against the grain. It is a pioneering work we must do as we go against the grain of the world and preach the gospel, depending on God to enable us to do the work of winning the lost to Christ and establishing churches.

We can follow the Scriptures and develop a New Testament church pioneer team that can be duplicated into many teams and can be transported anywhere in the world to help people develop a team of pioneers that will go to "a region beyond." That team will train another team of pioneers to go to "a region beyond" and do it again. It is more than activity that we need; we must follow a biblical pattern.

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH HAD A SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD

Every one in a New Testament church should have a spiritual understanding of God's work in the world. There is a difference between Israel and the first century church. God is not finished with Israel, but He is working through the church.

The church age had a beginning and the church age will have an ending, as far as the work on earth is concerned. Christ is coming again to receive His bride. From the Bible we learn what the Lord has given His church to do at this time.

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH HAD A BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLE DOCTRINE

Not only should every one of us have an understanding of what God is doing in this world, we should study to attain a basic knowledge of Bible doctrine. I am not afraid of the truth. If you are a biblicist, if you hold to the Scripture and follow correct principles of interpreting Scripture, you will know the truth because the Holy Spirit will teach you the truth. All of us need a basic knowledge of Bible doctrine. From that we can continue to learn more and more of the Lord and His work.

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH HAD A HEART FOR WORLD EVANGELISM

All of us need a heart for world evangelism. There should not be one little group in the church that has a heart for world evangelism while everyone else watches the work being done.

We should study world geography as it applies to world evangelism. For example, if we hear something about Spain, we should be thinking, "Are they getting the gospel in Spain? Where are the New Testament churches in Spain? What cities are these churches in? Where are unevangelized areas?" This kind of thing should be on the

hearts of Christian people because we are God's children and God has given us His work to do in this world. His work is bringing the lost to Christ and establishing New Testament churches.

Let me introduce you to some New Testament church pioneers. Let us observe these individuals from Scripture and recognize what is particular to their lives. Pray that God will use you in some way as a New Testament church pioneer, bringing the lost to Christ and starting a New Testament church.

It may be a journey you make that takes a few weeks. It may take a few months. It may be a place where you go and spend the rest of your life.

Our Lord will be pleased when churches are actually functioning and doing what He gave us to do. A New Testament church will find that it is unnatural not to be planting churches. It is perfectly natural for a church, functioning the way God wants it to function, to be giving birth to church after church and teaching those churches from God's Word that it is their responsibility to birth other churches.

Remember that church planting is not the goal. It is a by-product of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. I recommend you read many of the helpful things written by A. B. Simpson. The Lord used him to do a mighty work. My ideas concerning this pioneering ministry were greatly influenced by his writings.

For those who are not preachers or evangelists or do not consider themselves to be missionaries, God wants to use them in a dynamic way to start New Testament churches.



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THE APOSTLE PAUL Providing Christian Literature

Let us begin with the apostle Paul. In II Timothy chapter four, we come to the end of Paul's life where he said in verses six and seven, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

He said in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He abandoned himself to God to be God's missionary pioneer. God used him as a human penman for so much of the New Testament.

Allow Paul to represent to us, not only the pioneering spirit, but what people need in print to help them understand God's Word and the things of God. Scripture is complete; we will not get any more of it. I am thinking of the printing of Bibles and Christian literature.

One of the things we must have if we are going to start churches is printed material to put into the hands of families, children, and young people. No doubt, we should be able to get off a plane or out of a car anywhere in the world with nothing but the Word of God in our hands and be able to instruct people in what the Lord wants them to do. But all of us realize that gospel tracts, gospel literature, and the material we teach in our Bible-teaching Sunday School are all a vital part of helping us as we look to God and God's Word. Let us associate Paul with printed materials and those who have a pioneering spirit to get Bibles and Christ-centered literature into the hands of others.

PHILIP Following the Lord's Leading

We actually need many Philips. The Bible tells us a number of things about Philip, this deacon, missionary, and evangelist.

In Acts chapter eight, there had been a great revival. Philip had been right in the middle of it. The Bible says in verses twenty-six through thirty-one,

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

Observe the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and how Philip led him to the Lord, reading to him the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, pointing him to Christ. The point I wish to make with Philip is that he was a man who allowed God to lead him to the place of the Lord's choosing. No one, using his own wisdom or his own understanding, would have left a city of great revival and gone to one Ethiopian eunuch in the desert. Churches and areas of God's great blessing and influence are the very places from which people must go out to other areas of need. Our God leads His children.

Do you imagine the place of greatest need to be the place of greatest population without churches? The place of greatest need is the place of God's leading. Many people need to understand that we must seek God's face because there are out-of-the-way places, there are villages, towns, and cities all across America and around the

world that God will direct us to as we pray and seek His face. Begin to pray for the small towns across America without a church.

BARNABAS

Contributing to Special Needs

In Acts 4:36-37 the Bible says, *“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”* Barnabas was a layman, a businessman. He was a man of means. He sold a piece of land he had and gave the money to the work of God.

One of the tremendous needs in the work of God is the work of laymen and businessmen realizing that God wants to use them to plant churches. There are laymen and businessmen who could make contributions financially to God’s work because God has blessed them in a unique way.

There are also laymen and businessmen like Barnabas who can help start a church. They can reach other laymen and businessmen and teach them that they can serve in a New Testament church and help that church to start other churches.

EPAPHRAS

Praying Fervently

The Bible says in Colossians 4:12, *“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”*

There are many ways God can speak to us about praying. Here we find a profound statement, *“labouring fervently for you in prayers.”*

No New Testament church pioneer could do a greater work than prayer. Epaphras gave himself to prayer.

Remember that all the members of this team will have singular responsibilities but will all work together. They are people who have a spiritual understanding of God’s Word, have a basic knowledge of Bible doctrine, and have a heart for world evangelism.

LUKE

Providing Unique Skills

In Colossians 4:14 the Bible says, *“Luke, the beloved physician...”* Luke represents people with special skills. We have medical doctors in our church. We have many other people who have special skills. They are not preachers; they are not evangelists; they are not missionaries; they are Christians who love God and have special skills. They can be New Testament pioneers.

We have people who can build and people who can design. There are people who are architects. There are people who are engineers who have special skills. They must also be soul winners and go. We need New Testament church pioneers on this team who are like Luke, people who love God and have special skills.

The apostle Paul talked about only Luke being with him, standing by his side encouraging him. God has blessed many people in churches with special skills that could be used on a New Testament church pioneering team to start other churches.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Encouraging New Converts

In Acts 18 we find a couple, Aquila and Priscilla, tenderly working for the Lord. These are people who are given to the ministry of encouragement. In verses twenty-four through twenty-six, the Bible says,

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the

scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

This couple was greatly used of God. Of course, there are other references to them in the New Testament. The mighty preacher Apollos is thought by some to have been more eloquent than any other preacher in the New Testament. Here was a mighty man of God. Apollos needed someone with more maturity and understanding to take him aside and teach him the way of God more perfectly. This couple, Aquila and Priscilla, did just that.

Often I see husbands and wives taking a young preacher under their wing, nurturing him, helping him, and encouraging him. There are many Aquilas and Priscillas who could be mightily used of God to help people grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and know the way of God more perfectly.

TIMOTHY Developing Disciples

The Bible says in II Timothy 2:1-2, *“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”* Timothy represents for us the area of discipleship.

Paul called Timothy his son in the ministry. He wrote to him and said in II Timothy 3:15, *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation*

through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy had been brought along in the Word of God.

The apostle, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, gave Timothy this principle in II Timothy 2:2, *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”*

May the Lord give us a pioneering spirit like these first century Christians had. May we press on to the uttermost part of the earth in the power of His Holy Spirit.