

## HINTS FOR WORKER-TRAINING

from

THE BOOK OF ACTS

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In contrast to the Pastoral Epistles where Paul gives directives for the establishment of a young church, the book of Acts tells us how the Holy Spirit brought the message of the living Christ from Jerusalem as far as Rome. I feel that the book offers an example of how the Church lives and grows.

This living, growing, conquering activity of the Church has many facets. One of them is the selecting, training, and use of servants of the Word. Thus although Luke's purpose obviously is not to show how to establish a native ministry, we can nevertheless gain some important insights into this phase of our work from the book of Acts. In this paper we shall center our attention upon several areas of the book which seem particularly fruitful for this purpose.

A Replacement for Judas

The early chapters of Acts take us back to some of the basics involved in the selecting and training of servants of the Word. When the Church was selecting a replacement for Judas, Peter not only states the qualifications, (He must be an eye-witness of the things Jesus did.) but Peter also spells out the purpose for which the man is to be selected. He does so in these words, "He should become a witness with us of His resurrection." We seminary instructors are called to equip men not just to teach religion to others, but to testify to a Savior, the Savior, Jesus, Who rose from the dead and is alive and with us now. Peter's words show us secondly that we are to think of these seminary students not just as future pastors, but as men who shall together with us bring this testimony. These truths are obvious, but I think that we need to work at keeping them before our mind's eye constantly, for they shall determine not only the type of training we give these men, but they shall also determine our personal relationship to them.

I do not believe that this matter of witnessing together changes when a national church body becomes indigenous. It might appear as if our goal should be to train men to witness, "In place of us," rather than, "With us." Essentially I don't believe that this is true. Even if, or when we leave our respective mission fields, we continue to witness together with these national pastors to the resurrected Savior. Distance can not destroy that relationship. We cease to witness together, only if we cease to witness all together, only if someone defects, or when the Lord calls us out of the work of the ministry. This relationship of witnessing together can not be destroyed by distance or cultural differences, but I believe it can be damaged if we fail to respect and appreciate it.

#### The Seven Deacons

When the twelve asked the congregation at Jerusalem to select seven deacons, the apostles stated succinctly what they considered the essentials of the ministry to be. "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Do you and I who are training others, make prayer such an important part of our ministry? Are we teaching our students to give prayer the same importance in their work as the Apostles did in theirs? These words also serve to remind us that the Holy Spirit works only through the means of grace. It is only through these means that the Church lives, grows, and conquers. Through these means only, the essential work is done. There are many other things that apparently must be done in the work of a seminary instructor or pastor, but we must by example and by word teach our students to always give first priority to prayer and the ministry of the word, as the Apostles did.

#### The Conversion of Paul

The conversion of Paul gives us a sharp picture of how God makes a man into a witness to the resurrected, living Savior. You might say that not everyone can be a Paul, but it is equally true that essentially everyone of us and

everyone of our students must be a Paul. Everyone must be a man who has met, and lives with Jesus personally. Everyone must recognize Jesus as his absolute Lord. Everyone must live daily, constantly by this grace of God in Jesus alone. Everyone must be willing to let himself be a vessel which the Lord uses according to His will, willing to go where the Lord wants him to go, do what the Lord wants him to do, suffer what the Lord wants him to suffer. We fail daily in regard to these essential qualities of a witness. Nevertheless the Lord in His incomprehensible grace continues to forgive, and somehow continues to use us in this ministry.

The conversion of Paul shows us that only God can make a man into a witness to Jesus. All of the essentials that we have mentioned are things that we as humans can not give to our students. Do we perhaps begin to understand more clearly why the Apostles placed such importance upon prayer?

#### SUMMARIES OF SERMONS

The book of Acts provides us with summaries of a number of sermons. Peter's sermon in the home of Cornelius strikes me as classic. In the main body of his sermon Peter progresses from Jesus the Person, to His resurrection, the Judgment, and finally to forgiveness of sins through Him. What a pattern to follow! Certainly we should study this and other sermons in Acts so as to learn how to bring the Word to others. Paul's sermon at Athens gives us an example of his approach to the completely uninitiated. This is one that we on the mission fields should scrutinize meticulously. I strongly believe that such sermon summaries, think of it, inspired sermon summaries, should be given special attention either in our homiletics or exegesis courses.

#### The Death of the Apostle James

The death of the Apostle James at the hands of Herod Agrippa I is a most upsetting thing. He was one of the twelve, one of the inner circle of three apostles. Think of how much James could have done for the Church, but the Lord

permitted him to be taken out of the work very early and that at the hands of a proud unbeliever. How could the Lord allow such a thing to happen? I don't think we can ever understand His wisdom in this life, but the Holy Spirit can teach us to respect that wisdom which is so much higher than ours.

At the same time I feel that this upsetting incident can serve to bring our thinking in regard to the individual servant of the Word into focus. It certainly stamps out the thought that the Lord can't build His Church without me or without these students whom I am teaching. When we recruit students for the ministry, we tend to emphasize the need. The Lord Himself tells us that there is a need for laborers in the harvest, but it does not follow that the individual can be certain that the Lord shall use him for a long time in the ministry. You or I or anyone of our students might be another James, whom the Lord in His wisdom takes out of the work at an early date. One thinks of the recent death of Professor Lutz, which to our thinking certainly was untimely.

When one of us or one of our students appears about to be taken out of the work either through death or through physical or mental collapse, it is then that we pray or rather plead, "Lord spare me and use me in Your service," or "Lord spare him and use him in Your service." Such prayer, I believe, expresses the only attitude toward our own ministry which agrees with the facts.

I believe that the death of James can serve to give us such a sober, realistic attitude toward ourselves and others in the work. Then we and our students shall not think that we are doing the Lord a favor by serving, nor shall we become plodding work-horses, but rather we shall be ever so grateful to our Lord for each new day that He permits us to serve.

I think it is significant that shortly after reporting the death of James, Luke writes, "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied." This untimely death could not stop the spread of the Word.

#### Timothy

Timothy is a classic example of a man whom Paul selected and trained for the ministry. Paul chose Timothy on his second missionary journey through Asia

Minor. Apparently Paul had converted Timothy on the first journey. When Paul came to Lystra again several years later, he was able to see the progress this young man had made in the faith. Luke tells us too that Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium.

The kind of training that Timothy received is of special importance to us, I believe. I don't think any formal training or teaching is mentioned, although I feel sure that Paul did this from time to time as circumstances permitted. Timothy traveled with Paul, lived with Paul. Timothy not only heard Paul's message again and again, he also observed Paul's preparation for his work, Paul's prayer life, Paul's reaction to success or failure, Paul's way of coping with problems - all excellent training which is outside the classroom.

Do we give our men enough of this kind of training? Are we perhaps too much afraid to let them get close to us and share in our personal spiritual life? I realize that in Mequon this is quite impossible to do in any measure. The State-side vicar program, however, provides opportunity for this sort of sharing of personal life, work, experiences with the pastor in charge. On the mission field we seminary instructors are able to do this sort of thing ourselves, if we are willing. If we shield our lives and work from our students too much, we rob ourselves of great joy and satisfaction in working companionship, the giving or sharing of personal approaches to spiritual problems, observing, feeling the young man grow spiritually.

As Timothy learns from Paul, as he gains experience with Paul, as he matures, we see Paul giving him more and more responsibility until finally as Paul writes his second letter to him, we find Timothy apparently in charge of the church or churches in the large metropolitan center of Ephesus.

#### The Mission Seminary at Ephesus

The little mission seminary at Ephesus that Luke describes for us in chapter eighteen had one student, Apollos, and two teachers, one of them a

woman. When God provided the student, Aquila and Priscilla began the seminary program. They found Apollos preaching a truncated Gospel, so they took him in and explained the way of God to him more accurately. That was their curriculum - explaining the way of God more accurately. The Holy Spirit worked in this man's heart giving him the desire to go to Achaia. By this time he must have been well enough prepared for the work, for his fellow-believers not only encouraged him but also recommended him to the believers in Greece. The Holy Spirit also blessed Apollos' work for Luke tells us that he helped greatly those who had believed through grace. Apollos method? It was the only method. Luke says that Apollos taught Jesus from the Scriptures.

I feel that all the essentials of any seminary program are present in this little episode. Because it was a mission field, because it was very small, this little seminary could be, it had to be flexible, flexible enough even to have a woman instructor. I believe that our seminary programs should be as flexible as possible so as to meet the needs of the individual situation, but we dare not omit any of the essentials that we have in this example, such as careful selection of students and faculty, thorough training in God's word, recommendation of the candidate to the church upon graduation. The scope of our flexibility must remain within God's word and the spirit of the Gospel.

#### Paul's Farewell to the Elders at Miletus

If you stop to ponder Paul's farewell to the elders at Miletus for a while, it becomes hard to imagine that anyone of us could, or possibly should actually talk about himself the way that Paul does here. Paul speaks of his exemplary way of life among them, of how he served the Lord in all humility, preaching the full Gospel. He tells of how he coveted no man's silver or gold or clothes and of how with his own hands he earned his daily bread. How can he talk about himself in such a way? One feels a bit uncomfortable just suggesting that we should perhaps speak in a similar way at times.

Let's try to analyze Paul's way of speaking about himself. I think it helps to think of several groups or types of people. First of all there are people who are proud, just plain proud. Then there are people who are proud of their humility. They are concerned about you noticing their humility. There is a third group which is actually humble. It is often impossible to distinguish them from the first group, the proud. The genuinely humble speak freely of themselves because they don't care whether you think they are humble or not. Absolute pride and absolute humility speak the same language. Such absolute humility, however, will not do for a Christian. Perhaps I don't care whether other people think I am proud or not, but I must care. Especially in regard to my students, I must care. If they think I am proud, I will be an offense to them.

Paul had a gift which I believe only the Holy Spirit can bestow. He was able to speak freely of his own good works without appearing to be proud. Through it all you know the man is genuinely humble. I do believe that you and I need to ask the Holy Spirit for this same gift, the gift of being able to speak of our own Christian lives freely without appearing proud. I think we need to be able to do that so that some of the things the Holy Spirit has accomplished in us may rub off on those whom we teach. If we are unable to speak of ourselves, a doorway to instruction, a doorway that Paul used quite frequently, remains closed to us.

#### How the Holy Spirit Works

In tracing the Gospel message as it reached from Jerusalem to Rome, the book of Acts also shows us how the Holy Spirit works. I feel that an outstanding characteristic of the Spirit's manner of work, is a certain divine freedom which He uses. He does the same thing in many different ways.

Take Paul and Apollos and Timothy as examples. Consider the very different ways in which the Holy Spirit brought each of them into the service of the Church. With Paul it was the spectacular confrontation on the way to Damascus. Aquila

and Priscilla took Apollos, the eloquent speaker, in hand and taught him to proclaim Jesus, the only Savior. A few years after converting Timothy, Paul came through Lystra again, took Timothy along, and in time he became one of the leaders of the Church. The Holy Spirit certainly worked in different ways to bring these men into the ministry.

Consider also the training of the same three. Paul learned to know the Old Testament in minute detail as a pharisee and at the feet of Gamaliel. Jesus and the Holy Spirit taught Paul to put the Old Testament into focus and realize that it all pointed to God's Son, Jesus, the Savior. Apollos got his training in that little two-teacher seminary in Ephesus. Timothy began by traveling with, and running errands for, Paul, the master missionary. He got his seminary training through travel and trouble. But again see how differently the Holy Spirit worked in the training of these three men.

We tend to strive for systematic organization and uniformity in the work of the Church and rightly so. Because the Church is in this world, we need system and uniformity to keep things orderly, but let us not lose sight of, and above all respect for, the divine freedom of the Holy Spirit. Let's not try to force Him to work in the same manner in every place and at every time.

We are working in different countries where conditions are very different. The attitudes of the nationals toward the Caucasian or the American and his religion are different. The daily life of the individual believer, the life of the Church are different. Dare we insist that the work be carried on in the same manner in these various countries? I believe that in these conferences we should strive, strive very hard to maintain, and deepen the unity of spirit among our far-flung seminaries, but I think that we should work not quite so hard for unified organization and identical outward forms. Let's not force such uniformity upon the Church. Let's leave room for this divine freedom of the Spirit. I think it was J. P. Koehler who said that the Gospel seeks new forms from time to time. I would like to add that the Holy Spirit may use



different forms at the same time.

Another fact that I feel the book of Acts brings home to us very strongly is this that the Holy Spirit is the one Who does the real work. He is the one Who does the real work in establishing a national ministry. He provides all the essentials. He prepares the hearts of the men, works in them the faith in the Savior, enables them to live for the Savior, gives their preaching success so that they may be able to win others. All of these things the Holy Spirit does. We can't do any of them. We can only thank Him that He has chosen to work in us, and through us, to continue to work in others.

That is the story of the Church's life, growth, conquest, be it from Jerusalem to Rome or from the U.S.A. to Lusaka. It is the same story, the wondrous story of the Holy Spirit's work from beginning to end. How can we ever thank Him enough for having chosen us to have a share in it!

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This paper didn't come close to exhausting all the insights for worker-training that we can get from the book of Acts. Are there any that I missed which you would like to point out at this time?
2. The sermon summaries in the book of Acts are part of God's inspired word. Does this mean that we must follow them according to content, form, homiletical principles, etc.?
3. The book of Acts shows that the Apostles leaned very heavily upon the Old Testament in their preaching and teaching. Does this tell us anything about the importance we should give to Old Testament studies? Should we perhaps introduce a Hebrew course at an early date?
4. Please compare the following as to importance, value, etc.
  - A. Training by means of classroom type teaching.
  - B. Training by letting our spiritual life, work, attitudes "rub off," on our students through close personal contact.

Finally, I wish to urge that we continue to use the Scriptures to seek from God not only the doctrine that we should teach, but also the methods we should follow as we strive to establish a national ministry in our respective fields.