

Being Intentional

Acts 1:3-9 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

An intentional interim ministry is about identifying particular needs, developing specific plans to meet the needs, using the right resources, and purposefully moving to a healthy place for continued and future ministry. It is not about quick fixes or reaching a point of exclaiming "we've arrived". It prepares us for a profitable journey that will continue for as long as the travelers remain focused on the destination.

We have begun this journey, and with the help of many we are identifying the needs of First Baptist and developing the strategy we will use in the months ahead. An early part of this will be to select a Transition Team that will work very closely with me to begin addressing our needs and walking us through the tasks that are ahead. All along the way the congregation will be key to how all of this comes together and plays out. The February newsletter will detail the Team selection process.

On occasion you will be involved in Sunday or Wednesday evening gatherings where we share, learn, and support one another through this adventure. Many of you will be invited to serve in a very personal way to help our church experience life as the bride of Christ. Many of these tasks will not be as elected committee members but as volunteer team partners who help us move along the path. There is no room for self-service and domination. Each servant should be eager to help discover God's peace and purpose for First Baptist Church.

I will challenge you to be committed to attend our gatherings, take notes and learn from what we share, be an encourager to those around you, be an active steward of your time and money, and allow Jesus Christ to live through you every day wherever you are. These are the bare essentials that must be present for us to be as God intends in DeLand. Anything short of this is a recipe for spiritual mediocrity and stagnation and a choice to be salt that has lost its savor or light placed under a basket. We will have no godly effect on our community.

Jesus' entire ministry was about intentionality, but this morning I want us to examine the call to the newly born Christian church of Acts chapter 1. The church of God was born with a very specific purpose in mind.

Following His resurrection, and over a period of forty days, He appeared to hundreds of men and women with many convincing proofs that He was alive, had a physical body, and was commissioning His followers to an adventure that would not only change their lives but turn the world upside down as they too spoke to tens of thousands of people about the Kingdom of God. In a sense we can say that this is the greatest intentional interim ministry ever realized, because it continues until He comes again.

“Convincing proofs that He was alive”. I wonder what that was like? He spoke to them, they saw Him, He listened to their questions, worries, and comments. His feet kicked up dust and left footprints as He walked beside them. He drank water and ate fish. He certainly laughed. He told them things no one else could have known, recounted prophecy and the detailed events of recent weeks, and on certain occasions invited His doubting listeners to feel the scarred holes in His hands and feet and even thrust a hand into His wounded side. Convincing? I would say so!

On one occasion, at a church-wide dinner, Jesus commanded His followers to remain in Jerusalem to await God’s promised gift of the Holy Spirit. With little difficulty we see a Transition Team coming together. These men and women, selected by the Lord, are to be the point people who do some of the heavy lifting as the church is established and begins to minister in ways and places never before seen.

This team has a number of valuable qualifications. The members are willingly available to God. They make a conscious choice to sacrifice self and possessions to the Lord, and are extremely committed to do whatever it takes to be a spiritual army that genuinely honors God. They are regular participants in the coming together of the brethren, they adhere to the teachings of the Lord, they examine the Scripture carefully, and watch out for the needs of one another. They are family.

These folks are not afraid of an adventure into uncharted waters and have an attitude that it is not so important what lies around the next bend in an unpredictable river, because they are led by One who is far above the surface and sees every rock, rapid, and riverfall that lies ahead. It’s not about them keeping their hands on the controls but about them being held in the Hand that controls.

This Team is not perfect, they do not possess all knowledge, and there will be some uncertain and scary times ahead, but they do make themselves available to God. From time to time they even run ahead of God or express themselves as the true humans they are. Several blurted out, as they were trying to get their minds around this interim time, “*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*” They were looking through the glass darkly and were envisioning the near future to be one of complete victory and heavenly rule. Jesus was quick to remind them that they were jumping the gun, and in truth, it was not for them to know the details of the Father’s work. Take a step at a time, allow God to develop our character and equip us for the journey, and He will accomplish what is necessary by His own authority and power. It is not about us. It is about Him.

Thank God there was no further questioning or wrangling over those things yet unseen. Quiet

filled the place where the Christ-followers gathered and they prepared themselves to hear the most important words Christ spoke to them. *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

This was His intention for the church He established on earth. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you the power and strength needed to do what God has commanded. You are to be witnesses. You are to speak truthfully of what you have seen and heard. To those unfamiliar with the message of Christ you are to be salt and light, a bright beacon set on a high place that draws attention to the Lord and His protection and care.

Witnesses in DeLand to the lost in need of a Savior. Witnesses to thousands of students asking hard questions about life who live and breathe just on the other side of these walls. Witnesses to other thousands of elderly folks who are lonely, afraid, anxious, and unprepared for the day when they will die. Witnesses to those in prison, those without a father, and those without income or homes. Witnesses to those eaten up with addictions that are ripping their lives and families apart. Witnesses to your brothers and sisters in Christ who are spiritual babies not yet accustomed to personal time with God through His word, prayer, tithing, and humble service to others.

Ours is an intentional interim ministry not unlike that outlined in Acts 1. Who of you is willing to join us? Roll up your sleeves, get on your knees, and reach deep into your pockets and heart to say, “I am willing to do whatever it takes to be an obedient witness in my Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. May God be honored and my church built up to the glory of Jesus Christ.”