

Feeling lost in your ministry? Unable to do the things that you think you want to do or should be doing? Not equipped. Not qualified. Untrained. Not ready. You're not alone. All of us feel lost at some time or another. Should we have done it this way? Should we have done something else? Should we have waited a little longer? Should we never have done this in the first place?

There is no magic bullet, no panacea, no one-size-fits-all solution for those times that we feel this way. However, there is something we can do to try to minimize the number of times these situations occur. And that is by being prepared.

There are different types of preparation. There is individual preparation and there is corporate preparation. The first deals with what we need to do as individuals to be ready for the tasks we are trying to accomplish. The second has to do with the organization that you are a part of. This concept of preparation is not just for us here in the church. It is applicable to all our situations in our family, our jobs, our neighborhoods as well as our church. That said, this discussion will obviously be geared toward our work as part of the body of Christ, but there is no reason why you could not take these concepts and work them into other aspects of your life such as that big project at work or school.

So let's deal with individual preparation first. Preparation for a task from an individual standpoint consists of two aspects – an external aspect and an internal aspect. The external aspect deals with our disciplines and our ability to ready ourselves for the task at hand. The internal aspect consists of our thoughts and feelings. Without having control over our thoughts and feelings, it will be impossible for us to be prepared for the task ahead.

Corporate preparation is just as important. (IBM(?) commercial of business working on the web and they get so many orders they don't know how to deal with it.) There is no way that small company was going to be able to deal with all those orders. Unfortunately, they were all prepared individually, doing all the work required to make a small start up successful, probably spending nights working late. But they never thought about being prepared organizationally for the moment that their doors opened. The point here is that as a church, we need to be prepared as an organization – this means personal sacrifice at times when it is better for the whole than it is for us individually, where the goals of the organization, in this case the church, is more important than our own personal goals.

So with the understanding of what preparation means, let's turn to the Word of God to see how preparation worked in the lives of the men and women of the Bible and what God's word has to say to us about this. Proverbs 13:16 says **“Wise people think before they act; fools don't and even brag about it!”** (NLT). So God expects us to be wise and shows us how wise people prepare, by thinking about what they are going to do before doing it. The scary thing is that there are those who just do their thing without planning and preparation and they are proud of it. I have seen people who do something

without planning and then turn around and say that they are working in the power of the Holy Spirit so they don't need to prepare. I hate to tell those people that they would have been much more effective had they prepared – God's word tells us this. Many times, the way the Holy Spirit works is in the preparation period, the time of thinking things out. People and organizations that just do things expecting God to bless them while they have done nothing to prepare will find themselves adrift and without success.

This preparation, this thinking, is truly a discipline. In fact, I think our thoughts are the most important thing for us to discipline. Many times we know what we should be thinking but yet we allow ourselves to rationalize or justify a different thought. Until we have the ability to control our own thoughts, we will always struggle to control our behavior. This controlling of our thoughts is one of the main preparations needed whenever we attempt to do anything. [2 Corinthians 10:5](#) **“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”(NIV)**

As we can see, we need to be disciplined enough to control our thoughts as we prepare for our work, but we also see that we need to be obedient to Christ. In this obedience, we are looking at whether we are submitting our will to God or are we keeping our own will over God's. There are those who would say, “I don't want to be a robot for God. I am a human and want to have my own thoughts.” This is not saying you can't have your own thoughts. Just as a parent might say to a child, “Do this,” it is understood that the parent doesn't necessarily want the child to think like the parent, but that the parent, knowing what is best for the child, is telling the child the best way to do something, even though the child might not see it or understand it. If, like the child, we are obedient to God, we will find that we will be more successful, though it may often be in a different way than we originally imagined.

Now that we've prepared ourselves mentally, we also must prepare ourselves physically. Many times, God will prepare us through obstacles. We all know the saying, “Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it.” I love the example of patience. You might know you don't have a lot of patience. So you ask God for patience. Next thing you know, you are going through all these situations that require the patience of Job. Why? Because it is only through the practice of doing something can you get better at it. I'm not going to become a better basketball player by playing against a three year old. The only way for me to get better is by increasing the difficulty factor. God shows this through out his Bible.

We see Jesus in the desert, Joseph endured in Egypt, Moses and the Israelites in the desert, David in the wilderness, Peter in his time of darkness. In all of these situations, the people going through these things, brought them to another level. Jesus began his ministry only after the temptations in the desert. Joseph learned that what man meant for evil, God means for good (**Genesis 50:20** "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.)

What does this mean to us today? That sometimes when things aren't going well, when it looks like all our plans are down the drain, that it seems that no matter what we do, it appears that we will not be successful, we need to remember that this might simply be an obstacle that we need to get over or wait through.

Let's look at another way for us to be prepared. Mark 9:17-18, 25-29 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."; When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." In the KJV, this last verse says, "prayer and fasting". There is no evidence of Jesus praying and fasting at the time of this episode. So what does he mean? It means that he had already prayed and fasted before this even happened. Jesus was ready, prepared, for this beforehand. He had spent time in prayer, he had fasted. Then when the time came, he was ready.

We see Jesus preparing for his crucifixion with prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays and waits. Interestingly, he asks his disciples to do the same, but they weren't disciplined enough to do it. They let their bodies do what they naturally wanted to do, which is sleep. We can make our bodies do things that it doesn't want to do. Look at the Olympics and the athletes who can make their bodies lift more weight than should be humanly possible, run marathons that should kill the body. If we discipline ourselves we can do those things which we think are impossible. The question that needs to be asked is, if Peter had been disciplined and was able to prepare properly for what was about to happen through pray, would he have denied Jesus three times? The question that we need to ask is, if we are disciplined and prepare would we be able to handle those difficult times better than if we aren't?

As individuals, we need to control our thoughts. Don't rationalize when we know we're thinking incorrectly. Fix our thoughts, set them to where God would want them. Then we need to be obedient to God, doing those things that we know He is calling us to do, again, without rationalization, for we are controlling our thoughts. Then we need to discipline ourselves. There are many disciplines: study, fasting, celebrating, praying, submission, service. Finally, what are we being called to give up of ourselves to do for the larger body, in this case, the church? This is all about being prepared. Being prepared to do God's work for His kingdom. Are you prepared?