

June 28, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: STOP AND GO, Acts 16:6-10 (Reflections on the Kenya-Uganda Mission Trip)

"Don't worry about preparing, God has already prepared you. Come for an adventure." Those were the words Larry Kitchel, founder and director of Christian Mission Aid, shared with me and our team, inviting us to come to East Africa, see and be a part of the work God is doing.

Most people on our team, however, don't operate that way. We prepare. We have our plans, sometimes very careful, logical plans . . . at least to our way of thinking.

But . . . I went to Africa with my Bible and some references in one sermon I took, but didn't use. You'll have to ask the team about whether or not they believe God used those words. Sunday, May 31 I shared at the deaf church that it is **not so important to have ears that physically hear, but hearts that hear . . . and share the good news of Jesus with those who need to hear and know about Him.** Sunday, June 7 at the early service at the Anglican Church with all the students I shared that **God calls us, like He did Moses, to a life of purity, even though the opportunity to live for the temporary pleasures of sin are all around us.** Later that morning and through the noon hour at the Orisai church I shared for 1 ½ hours about **the blessing**, which was in response to what I believe God directed me to say about 2 a.m. Monday, January 19. Sunday, June 14, under a tree in Maasailand with the hills as a backdrop I shared from the Bible about the **trees that God made**, the two trees in the center of the Garden of Eden, the importance of trees as a place, as a witness, as an illustration of growth when we walk closely with the Lord . . . and then about **the tree on which Jesus died, becoming a curse for us so that we might be forgiven of our sins and receive the gift of life God offers.**

There were other sharing times: the 3-day leadership conference at Orisai, the impromptu meetings with widows, a pastors' training, the service at the prison. I would jot down a few thoughts, look up a passage of scripture or two . . . and go.

I experienced God's joy, trusting Larry's counsel that God had already prepared me for what He wanted me to share. And maybe that is just the point. **We take IN so much in S.S., Bible studies, small groups and our own personal devotions that we need to GIVE OUT or we become a saturated sponge that can't take any more in because we aren't giving anything out.** *But you speak all the time.* Not like this, I don't. So what has this trip done for me? One thing is that it has shown me **I don't need to get so uptight about having all my homiletical ducks in order before I open my mouth.** That does not mean I should not study or prepare. Quite the opposite. **If I don't have the word of God within, I won't be sharing it when I open my mouth.** I need to

trust God more and trust more what He's already doing in my life (past and present).

The point is that **I need to listen**. For each of the nine of us the experience in Africa is somewhat different. Outside of Dean and Doris visiting Egypt a number of years ago, I was the only one who had ever stepped foot on the continent. It was a new experience for all of us . . . new food, new customs, new peoples, new languages. It was being sure to take malaria medication each day, pulling the mosquito netting over the bed, using a squat toilet, realizing that though we were quite safe we also could not dress or act in the same way we think is acceptable in Jamestown, using only bottled water . . . even when brushing teeth, riding on roads that make our potholes look wonderful, seeing the stark contrast between those who have and those who do not, realizing that most people in the rural areas know only a reed mat on a dirt floor in a mud-walled hut with a thatched roof.

We discovered that **so many of us** (and I include us believers in Christ) **let things determine our happiness or lack thereof. Our time, attention and money are enslaved by things**. When one doesn't have things, one doesn't need to worry about them. Instead, one lives, as Jesus commands, giving praise to our Heavenly Father, calling for the coming of His kingdom, asking for daily bread, for forgiveness as we forgive, for deliverance from temptation and the Evil One. Is stuff bad? No. But Paul reminds Timothy that the love of it is the root of all evil. Jesus says we can't serve stuff and God at the same time.

We visited with many people with a terminal disease, who had joy in their hearts. It is entirely possible that one of the widows we visited has died since we met her . . . but she and the others didn't often ask for themselves. They shared about the peace they have from God . . . and requests that many of us also have . . . for the welfare of their children.

I don't want to give you the wrong impression of Africa. It is a land of immense beauty. It is a land of stark contrasts, between those who have an abundance and those who don't know where they will get food for tomorrow, between women who work hard . . . and men who are often AWOL, between those who follow their traditions and those who follow Jesus Christ, between those who sing because of drunkenness and those who sing because of the joy of the Spirit. **Africa is not an idyllic place**. There is pain, abuse, poverty and disease. There are also those who share Jesus . . . and out of the overflow of what Jesus gives, He brings success to their reaching out to other needs as well.

Would I go back? Yes. Do more need to hear about Jesus? Yes. Do they need Bibles? Yes. Could we help in other financial ways? Yes. Do they need more teaching and training of leaders? Yes, especially in the unglamorous areas, the forgotten areas, the rural areas. **Maybe it's not so dissimilar to our own community and region**.

A brief account from Paul's second missionary journey is instructive. Paul is traveling with Silas to the churches he and Barnabas planted on their first missionary journey. Timothy has just joined them. Then come these words when a lot happens, but not much is written.

Read Acts 16:6-10. We discover that Paul has a plan. He has strategized to visit the major cities of the province of Asia, but he is prevented from doing so. It is **not that Paul has a bad plan.** He desires to *preach the word*, but is prevented by the Spirit from doing so in Asia. Some time later when he tries to head north and east to Bithynia, *the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to enter.* **The time is not right.** So he passes through the region, not stopping to preach. While in Troas he has a vision at night of a man from Macedonia calling for him to *"come and help us."* Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke (who has recently joined the group, hence the change from *he* and *they* to *we*) determine that **God wants them to go to Macedonia** and *preach the good news to them.*

The little group sails past the island of Samothrace to Neapolis, spends time in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, then goes down the coast to Corinth and Athens before heading back to Jerusalem. The churches of Macedonia, primarily the one at Philippi, become important to Paul in providing for those experiencing famine back in Judea. Paul mentions their generosity in the letters we know as 1 and 2 Corinthians. We, too, experienced similar generosity from people who had very little: from the deaf people at the Keno church and Pastor Joseph, from Pastor Charles and the leaders of his school, from the small congregation of the Orisai Grace Community Church, from other people at Orisai and later in Maasailand. **The most generous people were often those with the least.**

Despite all those lessons I want us to focus on one particular area. Paul discerned God's direction . . . and the others with him confirmed those words.

- Train yourself (be sensitive) to hear God.

How do we do that? Last fall we went through the *Experiencing God* study together. I encourage you to review the material this week. We hear God when we look for where He is working, when we seek Him through His word and prayer, when we obey what we clearly know to do (or not do) from His word, when we seek the confirmation of others. Paul does each of these things.

Think about it. Paul, the most famous missionary ever, is given direction to visit the churches he and Barnabas founded on their first journey, encourage these believers in their faith and deliver the instructions regarding how Gentile believers interact with the law as decided by the Jerusalem council. Then he strategizes to go into the heart of Asia to deliver the gospel. But God has other plans. Paul will indeed travel to these areas, but it won't be until his third trip, when he will spend

considerable time in the region. **Good plan, but not God's timing.** I think our church experienced that a few years ago regarding the new building. It wasn't God's timing then, but now . . . I'll talk more about that in a couple weeks.

Notice what the Bible says. When the Holy Spirit says "No" to one region, Paul passes through it and decides to go to another region. Again, the Holy Spirit, referenced as *the Spirit of Jesus*, again prevents them. We don't know how this happens, but Paul and the others are convinced that God says "No".

Are you sensitive to hear God's word . . . when He says "No", but also when He directs in other ways?

- Train yourself (be willing) to obey God.

Paul's sensitivity, and that of his companions, isn't limited to hearing when God says "No," it also includes when God says, "Go." Read vs. 9-10. All are convinced that this is God's direction. When we were seeking God's direction on going to Uganda, God woke me about 2 a.m. Monday, January 19 with the direction: "*Share the blessing.*" **God's words weren't detailed, but I knew what He meant.**

When I shared God's direction, the Elders encouraged me to make more inquiries with Larry at CMA. It took awhile, but we finally got moving, God directed people to apply, the Elders sought discernment as to how to come to the number CMA requested, you supported us with finances, we made plans . . . and then you upheld us in prayer. **God was glorified . . . and we were able to be a witness and a small part of His work in East Africa. THANK YOU for being part of obeying God with us!**

Last week I shared that one of the visible signs of God's blessings was the downpour of rain when we arrived at our hotel in Kumi late Saturday evening, June 6. The next morning when we heard from the people at the Orisai church before I began preaching, they shared how God had blessed them . . . with a church building, a bore hole (well) for water, the coming together of this special conference, including people from Kenya and the U.S. They were anticipating something special because they were seeing God's hand at work. When I started preaching, it was to about 300 people. That was after at least 200 children went outside with most of our team for S.S. The people kept coming. Here's the point. When they were talking about God's blessing, I then shared about the rain shower the previous night when we arrived. They all began clapping. They understood what that meant. I began my comments by saying that they spoke of how God was blessing, including the signs of it even by the rain shower the previous evening. **I was there to tell them a story of that blessing . . . and why God was blessing them, prompted by His word to me January 19.**

Are you willing to obey God? It doesn't have to be to go to Africa and share a message. The person may sit across from you in the same room. God's direction may be to humble yourself to go to a person and ask forgiveness. The Holy Spirit may be convicting you of a past wrong and asking you to make things right. Obeying God may be to do something you clearly are being directed to do from God's word, from God's people. If the call is from God, it will stretch you to depend on His provision and not your own. Obedience will reveal His hand of blessing and bring His joy.

On the bottom of your listening guide are a few words from 1 Timothy 4. The fact is that most of us learn to hear, learn to obey. **God's training us to follow and trust Him must be learned.** Listen to God's word. *Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.* 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Conclusion. What do you value? Are you listening? Are you obeying? Don't look for the big things. **Be obedient in the little things.** God often uses those for the most impact and to bring glory to Himself. Be sensitive to hear God. Be willing to obey God, whether it is "No" or "Go."