

**“WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BE?” – PART I**  
**By Rom A. Pegram (6/19/16)**

Have you ever prayed for something so hard in your life, waiting for the answer to come; then it finally comes and you have no idea what to do then? So often, in the Church, we talk about prayer in general. We talk about the fact that prayer is something we should do. We even talk about methods of prayer. But, rarely—if ever, have I heard a sermon or a teaching on what we’re supposed to do when God *answers* prayer!

In our scripture lesson for today, there was a gathering of church leadership—preachers and teachers, to be exact. They were gathered together in the city of Antioch (northern Syria, near Turkey) and they were about the Lord’s business. This scripture talks about fasting which, biblically, always goes with prayer. So, at least one of the ways they were serving the Lord was through prayer. And, guess what happened while they were praying? **GOD DECIDED TO ANSWER THEM!** Isn’t that something?

They had two men who’d been head pastors at their church who, I believe, God had already called to a special ministry. And now the whole ministry team was gathered together and they were praying about it. And God let them know where he stood on this issue. **GOD DECIDED THAT THIS WAS THE DAY FOR ANSWERED PRAYER!**

Have you ever had a day like that before? Has God, in the midst of *your* prayer life ever entered in, spoke to you clearly, and then you were left with God’s answer to deal with? I hope and pray the answer is **YES!** It certainly was for the ministry team in Antioch in our scripture today. Let’s listen closely as we hear of their experience ... and, most of all, as we hear of their example on ‘how to react’ when God decides to answer prayer...

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called “the black man”), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. <sup>2</sup> One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. – Acts 13:1-3 (NLT)

Did you hear, in V. 3, how they reacted to hearing God’s answer to prayer? I want to take you through this scripture today, then share with you a story about how this unfolded in *my* life just a few short years ago. But, how did these folks react? ***When they heard the voice of God (in their hearts)—the Holy Spirit spoke to them, what did these believers do?***

**They fasted and prayed ... even about what they’d heard... So after more fasting and prayer** [italics mine], the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. – Acts 13:3 (NLT) Again, this is what was happening after they’d heard from God—answers to their prayers...

This reminds me of when the disciples tried their best to heal a boy suffering from an evil spirit (Mark 9), but Jesus ended up doing it himself. Later on, when they were alone, they asked Jesus why they couldn't do this—heal the boy—but he could. 'His response? This kind of work requires 'prayer and fasting'—nothing else...

When we hear the voice of God, in our lives, it generally comes out of a time of very intentional and focused prayer, like the kind combined with fasting—*an intentional letting go of whatever usually distracts us from God*. Then, it requires more fasting and prayer to be sure exactly what God's direction is in any given case. *So, they fasted & prayed, then...*

**They took ownership of the vision (answer to prayer) God gave them...** So after more fasting and prayer, *the men laid their hands on them* [italics mine] and sent them on their way. – Acts 13:3 (NLT) The placing on of hands is a sign of 'welcoming'; so they welcomed—placed their hands on—the vision God gave them for their ministry—that Barnabas and Saul would now take the Gospel to the world...

How do you welcome someone to your home whom you've intentionally invited there? Do you look to see who's there, then go about your business as if they weren't? Do you invite them in, but then turn your back on them in a very uninviting way? *I hope not...* So, how do you greet others when they come into your home?

Yes, you—at the very least—shake their hand or pat them gently on the back. If you're a hugging family, you pass out hugs, don't you? In the same way, we need to 'welcome' answers to prayer just as this ministry team from Antioch did. We need to claim it. We need to welcome it. We need to place our hands on it! *Then...*

**They put what God had asked them to do into ACTION ... by faith.** So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them *and sent them on their way* [italics mine]. – Acts 13:1-3 (NLT) Can you almost hear the excuses now, can't you (which is one way of responding to God's answer to prayer)? "But, Lord, we have never sponsored out of our church like this before!" That could have been their response, but it wasn't! The point is that *you cannot hear the voice of God and do nothing about it!* The voice of God in your life *demand*s action!

Now, I want you to remember what we've learned about 'what to do with answered prayer', so I'm going to tell you how the truth of this scripture unfolded in my life just a few short years ago...

Several years ago, I was appointed as the pastor of the Markesan United Methodist Church. And since the day Jane and I arrived there, we'd been praying for God's will for that church. In particular, we'd been praying for God's direction for this church—God's vision for this church, if you will. I'm the type of person who operates better with a plan—a blueprint, if you will. So, we'd been asking God for at least an outline of a vision that could be used to guide the ministry of this church...

During the early months at Markesan, several members of the leadership of this church, along with our retreat leader—Dennis Nitschke—met at Byron Center and I was able to share with them as much as God had shared with me at that time. Basically, one of the major changes that needed to take place was to move from a focus on *membership* in this church, to a focus on *discipleship*—what Jesus called us to be about. That was as much as God had given me at that point. But, I kept praying ... and *others did, too*.

Several months later, I fell ill with a nasty flu bug. I was to the point of being flat on my back in bed or on the couch. I'd gone to the doctor on Tuesday that week and let him know I had to get better because I had to preach on Sunday. He let me know that if I wasn't at least 50% better by Saturday, I was to stay home for the weekend ... and *not* preach. *Ugh!*

In the following days, my flu seemed as if I was getting worse. I knew it would be some days before I was back in action again. But, sitting around drives me crazy so I usually do a lot of praying and a lot of reading when I'm sick. On Thursday of that week, during a prayer time, I felt 'the nudge of God' to read a particular book. I knew that it was on my bookshelf at the church. So, I asked Jane if she'd please go pick it up for me so I could read it on Friday. I was obedient. I read George Barna's book called "The Power of Vision" on Friday that week, finishing up the last chapter on Saturday morning.

Jane asked me on Saturday morning—like all nervous preacher's wives—if I wasn't feeling better and well enough to preach on Sunday. I told her 'no,' to call Phil Burt (retired pastor in Beaver Dam) and let him know that he was 'on' for Sunday. I let her know that I was not 50% better yet, and—even more—God was calling me to take that particular Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, as a time of fasting and prayer for Him. *I knew that that's what I had to do that particular Sunday.*

Well, Sunday morning came ... and so did a snowstorm. I got word, lying at home ill, that the substitute preacher couldn't make it into Markesan because the roads were too bad. Now, most pastors would have been a bit panic-stricken about that time ... but, that particular Sunday, I had a peace about the whole situation that *I absolutely could not explain* ... outside of it being 'a God thing.'

Listen to what happened. This was the first Sunday of a new line-up of our praise band. Cindi Umstadt had joined the group and was with them for the first time. Marie—one of our main lay leaders at the time, having received the word from Phil Burt that he wasn't coming up to Markesan because of the roads, knew she and the group would have to lead the whole worship time. And that they did. Marie shared about the Prayer of Jabez text—probably a little more than she'd originally planned—and asked if anyone wanted to share a personal experience concerning that. Well, Cindi ended up sharing a message about 'getting lost' that was really a message about God leading her. It all worked out ... for the early service (contemporary). However, there was still one more service (traditional) to go...

Well, poor Russ Hirschy was doing the 'mad scramble' that Sunday morning. Suddenly, there was no preacher for the 10:30 AM service! Russ knew what scripture I was going to preach on and he had—just by Coincidence—read a copy of the Prayer of Jabez book (Bruce Wilkinson) a few days earlier. In about an hour, Russ pulled together the morning message for the 10:30 AM service. So, it all worked out at the late service.

I felt that morning that, during my time of prayer and fasting, I was supposed to just pray for the worship services and for those who were leading. That's what I did. I had a peace about it, like you wouldn't believe!

At noon that Sunday, February 10, I sensed God calling me to take my Bible, the book I'd just read, and a notepad to the dining room table for some time with him. So that's what I did. (Jane had gone into work about 10:00 AM, so the house was perfectly quiet.) And I began to pray. I began to open up God's word and study every scripture I could find that had to do with vision. I wanted to know God's vision for this congregation. "God, what do you want us to be about?" That was the overwhelming question of the day. And, like another pastor I know who went to a place and told God that he was not leaving until he had God's vision for his church, I let God know that I wasn't going to leave that dining room until I'd heard from him. I prayed ... and I prayed ... and I prayed. And I wrote down what God spoke to my heart on that day...

It was as if about an hour had passed when I suddenly heard the front door opening and it was Jane arriving home from work. It was 6:45 PM. I remember looking up from the dining room table and saying, "Honey, come in here. You won't believe what's happened today." She came into the dining room and I told her about my afternoon and how God had been faithful to answer my prayers. I showed her exactly what God had shown me during that time—God's vision for that congregation. At that time, I had never experienced such great joy in my life as I did on that very snowy Sunday afternoon in February! God had answered my prayers ... but, now, what was I to do with it?

I learned from both George Barna ... and from God's word ... what we needed to do:

- We, as God's people, ***needed to fast & pray about what'd been given to us*** on that snowy February Sunday afternoon ... and I joined leaders & prayer warriors of the Markesan UMC to do just that...
- We needed to ***take ownership of the vision*** (answer to prayer) God gave us ... and that's what that church did, allowing God's vision to guide every single area of our ministry from that point on...
- We, as God's people, ***needed to put what God had asked us to be about into ACTION*** ... by faith.

So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. – Acts 13:1-3 (NLT)

This is exactly what the Early Church learned to do, as God led them—answering their prayers, giving them direction, casting before them His vision for their lives together...

So, here're some questions for us, this morning: *Who is God calling us to be?* And, *what are we going to do with God's vision for us once we know?* My prayer today is this—that we'll follow the example of the Early Church, fasting & praying together, welcoming God's vision into the life of our church, and then being about God's business as we follow God's blueprint in making disciples for Jesus... Next week, I'm going to finish this message and share with you what God's laid on my heart during these first few months at Trinity...