

The Four Daughters of Philip

Acts 21:9 says, “Now this man (Philip) had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.” This is a verse that we might fly right by. We might miss its importance. Here we are told all we know about Philip’s daughters. This verse is so matter of fact. They were prophets. It seems that in the early church it was normal to have people in the community who moved in the gift of prophecy. This means they heard from the Lord and shared His encouragement, direction or warning with the body of Christ. The gift of prophecy is a wonderful gift that reveals the love of the Father for His people. Paul describes this gift along with other spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12-14. He sums up his teaching on all the spiritual gifts by saying, “Desire earnestly to prophesy...” I Corinthians 14:39. He also says in I Thessalonians 5:19-21, “Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully and hold fast to that which is good.”

The gift of prophecy has great value. I believe this gift did not expire when the Bible was completed but is still viable today. We may not all excel in this gift like the Old Testament prophets, but we can all hear from the Lord. He generously gives His direction and leading to us when we seek Him. Left to ourselves, the best we can do is reason things out. But when we look to the Lord, He will give His instruction, the revelation of His will and plan.

I have learned that our spiritual ears can be tuned to His voice and our spiritual eyes sharpened to see where God is leading. One of the ways we can do this is by taking part in a simple prayer exercise. In this exercise one meditates upon a few verses of Scripture, asking a couple of questions and listening to hear

what God speaks into one's heart. This prayer exercise, sometimes called *Lectio Divina* or divine reading in Latin, has been practiced by believers for over a thousand years.

Recently when reading the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxas I was interested to see how much this kind of prayer and meditation influenced the direction of Bonhoeffer's life. He was first introduced to this prayer exercise as a child by Kathe van Horn his governess from infancy. She was raised in the community of Herrnhut, a Christian community founded in the 18th Century by Count Zinzendorf. Each day members of the community received and meditated upon one verse from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.* Bonhoeffer cultivated this spiritual discipline his entire life.

In the mid 1930's Bonhoeffer had the privilege of leading a seminary filled with young men many of whom would eventually be drafted and fight for the German army in World War II. He felt the best way to prepare these men for their future was to ensure they could hear from the Lord for themselves. "He longed to see a church that had an intimate connection with Christ and was dedicated to hearing God's voice and obeying God's commands, come what may, including the shedding of blood. But how could one hear the voice of God, much less obey God, when prayer and meditating on the Scriptures were not even being taught in German seminaries?" ** Bonhoeffer made daily meditation upon the Scriptures an integral part of seminary for all his students.

Later in 1939 Bonhoeffer was in the United States. He could have made the case that God had arranged to get him out of Nazi Germany and remained safe from the horrors of the war.

However, through his daily meditation he felt the Lord's clear direction to return to Germany. This decision did not make sense to his friends, yet Bonhoeffer had great peace as he followed the leading the Lord had made clear to him as he meditated on the Scriptures.

The best way to practice this prayer exercise is to do it.

* The community of believers at Herrnhut in Saxony, Germany thrived for over 200 years founding the Moravian church which to this day produces a booklet of daily Scriptures for meditation.

** Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy by Eric Metaxas,
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