

## **|| Series: Engaging the gifts of the Spirit**

Topic: Apostolic Community (Acts 1:9 - 2:14; Nehemiah 2:1-10)

The intent of our current series “Engaging the Gifts of the Spirit” is to encourage a releasing of the **apostolic nature the Holy Spirit**, which is inherent in the life of every born again believer.

A few weeks ago I spoke on the change that occurred in the lives of the disciples after they had received the Holy Spirit and how they **ventured out** into the streets, homes and community squares [sermon: *Venturing Out* Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August].

The **Book of Acts** dramatically highlights the effect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had on them. What they had encountered in the **Upper Room** was outworked powerfully in the **market places**. Of the forty (40) recorded miracles in the Book of Acts, thirty nine (39) of them happened **outside of the walls** of the church meeting.

I believe, as like then, **we are living in a time** where the **power of Christ** needs to be seen in the market place. Engaging the gifts of the Spirit is something we need to encourage and **practice** together here in our church meetings. This is a safe place to do that. But it needs to then be taken **from** the Upper Room and **into** the community.

The birth of the **New Testament church** was **earmarked as an apostolic community**. People were compelled to take the **power of Christ** into their workplaces, homes, families and communities. It changed the known world. Their greatest message was the power of their own testimony of encounter with Jesus.

**|| In the economy of God there are times and seasons.**

*Ecclesiastes 3:1* says there is a **time for everything**.

*Hebrews 6:12* says that by faith and endurance **we inherit** the promises of God.

*Jesus* said very little for 30 years and then he **launched** his ministry.

*David* was **anointed to be King** when he was about 17 years of age and he didn't **rise to the throne** for another 12 years.

When **David was King of Israel**, he gathered his army which included the **sons of Issachar**, men who were known to **understand the times** and knew **what** Israel should do (ref: 1 Chronicles 12:32).

In the **economy of God** there are **times and seasons**. What Kingdom season are we in right now? What are **today's "sons of Issachar"** seeing and saying? I believe we are in the midst of the **reinvigoration** of the church as an **apostolic community** who recognise that the world is not coming to them but the people of God are being **sent out** into the market place. What we experience in this **Upper Room** needs to be **transported** into the board room, the class room, the lunch room, and the lounge room.

The example from **The Book of Acts** of an energised apostolic community:

In Acts 1:9 **Jesus** finally leaves his disciples after giving his final instructions. The disciples head back to Jerusalem and lodge in the upstairs room. Acts 1:14 has a very important clue as to the foundation of the **apostolic anointing** that would soon come. || It says: “*They all joined together **constantly in prayer***”. Ten (10) days later (yes they prayed for ten days!) the outpouring of the **Holy Spirit** comes with tremendous power (ref Acts 2: 1-4) launching them into an **apostolic age**.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was the **heavenly signal** for them **to move** from the upstairs room into the streets where He would give them a power from heaven that would ensure the **entire society** would be impacted by their message (ref: Acts 2: 14). I want you to see this progression:

- || The agony of **prayer and waiting for ten days** introduced them to an **unexpected heavenly encounter** with **unbelievable manifestations** which concluded with the **unplanned outcome** of being launched out as an **apostolic community**.

In the **economy of God** there are **times and seasons**.

**Nehemiah** is the cup-bearer of a **pagan King**. He is living in difficult times. Born in exile from Jewish ancestors who had been displaced from their homeland and are now **refugees** and nomads. The King allows the **Jewish remnant** to return to their broken city but the reports coming back don't paint a pretty picture. It's a desperate state of affairs. The **bible** recounts:

*“In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”*  
(Nehemiah 1:1-4 NIV)

Nehemiah hears of the **devastation** of the city and the **distress** of the people. It drives him to **tears** and his response was to fall into the **agony of prayer**.

If we are ever to catch hold of being an **apostolic community** it starts right there – the **plight** of those around us, the **state** of the nation which we love, the **cruelty** metered out to others through **injustice**, should drive us to the **agony of prayer**.

Nehemiah hears this news in the **month of Kislev** (our November/December), almost four (4) months later in the **month of Nisan** (our April) his demeanour is so weighed down by the **burden** of the Jewish exiles that he is **noticed by the King** (ref: Nehemiah 2:2). During those 4-5 months since hearing the news he'd managed to **contain it, conceal it, even internalise it**. But he had reached a point where he could no longer keep it down and it was now **getting to him**.

**|| Q. What's getting to you?** Unless something starts getting to you then it'll only ever sit somewhere just above your eyebrows and irritate you from time to time. **For Nehemiah:** The plight of his people was so **overwhelming** that the King, who only ever wanted brightness and happiness evident in his presence, **saw** that something was getting to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah's **level of discomfort** could only be **eradicated** by doing something about the things that God was **stirring in his spirit**. And that burden was so heavy now that he could no longer hide it from the King.

He **didn't** just see a broken city, he **saw lost people** who were now living in great trouble and distress. We will **never** become an **apostolic community** if we don't have a heart for lost people **like God does**. That's what drove the **apostles** in Acts chapter 2 out into the streets. That's what caused **Nehemiah** to fall on his knees and engage the agony of prayer.

If we want to see **breakthrough** in our lives and the circumstances of our communities then we need to be laying down the **foundation** of personal, private and corporate prayer. **Apostolic people** are launched out to reach the lost by the **power of intentional seasons of prayer**.

Remember the disciples:

- The agony of **prayer and waiting for ten days** introduced them to something **unexpected...**

Because **Nehemiah** had been **praying** and seeking God in chapter 1, something **unexpected** happened in Chapter 2:2. **|| The King notices his face.** What's so remarkable about this is that the King is so self-absorbed that recognising anything in another person would have been incredible.

When we begin to pray, **unexpected** things begin to happen. You might call them **coincidences**. How many coincidences are happening in your life today? **John Wesley** once said: **"God does nothing but in answer to prayer."**

**|| Prayer opens the door for the unexpected.** But like the disciples, Nehemiah experienced the **unbelievable**! The King, having noticed Nehemiah's face asks: **"What is it you want?"** (Nehemiah 2:4)

For a servant in that setting to be asked that question by the King would be an unbelievable event. But for Nehemiah, **five (5) months of agonising prayer** had drilled a dream into his heart that he was now being asked – what do you want? **He knew exactly what he wanted.**

**|| Q. Do you know what you want?**

**William Wilberforce** knew what he wanted. To abolish slavery.

**William Booth** knew what he wanted. To reach the down-and-out of Britain's cities with the Gospel of Christ. The Salvation Army was the result.

**Billy Graham** knew what he wanted. To see people come to Christ.

**C T Stud** knew what he wanted. He quit an international cricket career to become a missionary to India, China and Africa. **His motto was:** "If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

**|| Apostolic people** recognise that **prayer** opens the door to the **unexpected** and the **unbelievable**.

Nehemiah's day was not finished yet. Not only did the **unexpected** happen and the **unbelievable** but now the **unplanned** was before him. **The King says:** "I'm going to sort it out for you. I will protect you, make the way for you, give you more than you ever thought you would be able to find."

I'm **not** trying to give you a **formulae** for success here. What I am trying to do is to help you see that God is wanting to **stir you to action**. To **engage the gifts of the Spirit** that are inherent in your **born again** life. We live in an **apostolic age**. The **Holy Spirit** is calling out His people as an **apostolic community**. An apostolic community has a **burden** for those who are lost, in trouble, and distressed.

**Nehemiah** knew it, the **disciples** understood it through:

- The agony of **prayer and waiting for days/months** introduced them to an **unexpected heavenly encounter** with **unbelievable manifestations** which concluded with the **unplanned outcome** of being launched out as an **apostolic community**.

**Closing thoughts:**

**What's getting to you?** Is there a God burden in your heart that drives you to the agony of prayer, so much so that it begins to become noticeable to others?

**Do you know what you want?** If some unexpected, unbelievable opening came for you to ask for what you wanted – would you know what to ask for? Would it be so small that it wouldn't really require such a moment to occur?

You were made for this time in history. Nehemiah had his day. The disciples theirs. The example they leave behind lingers and are available to guide our responses.

**|| Engaging the gifts of the Spirit** is an apostolic action conducted by an apostolic community who have a heart for lost people like God does.