

Released for Ministry—the Proceeding Word

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Introduction

As we begin to grow up a little in the Lord we have to be taught how to wait on God and on His timing. Some of the reason for this involves the process of dying to self, putting to death the deeds of the flesh. This takes time. It is usually years before we have have learned to rest in the Lord becoming obedient to His will. During this time, we have heard so many messages about “waiting on God” that we become passive toward any form of action on our part. We are waiting for God to “do something”. However, this is only appropriate while we are dying to self.

As we come into functional citizenship in the Kingdom of God, we have a partnership role to play with the Lord, which involves us laying aside our passivity and becoming actively involved in moving into our destiny. Our calling involves works that were prepared for us from the foundation of the world¹. These works have been waiting on us; but, we have to be prepared beforehand in order to fulfill them. God spends more time preparing the *worker* than He did in preparing the *work*. Our preparation for purpose is completed when the Lord gives us “a proceeding word” that moves us into accomplishing the work prepared for us.

Our maturing process in the Lord is presented in the Scriptures by John as a three stage process: children, young men, and fathers.² In each of these stages there are specific things that we have to learn in order to grow up and fulfill our calling in God.

The first two verses of Hebrews chapter six gives us six elementary principles of Christ; six foundation stones which we lay in our lives and then continue on to maturity. But the key to doing this is in the third verse.

1 Ephesians 2:10

2 I John 2:12-13

Hebrews 6:3 NASB

(3) And this we will do, if God permits.

We forget that our maturing process is directed and controlled by God. We supply the motivation, the willingness to go on, but He supplies the revelation that changes our character. If there are big holes in our foundation, He does not permit us to move on. Our Heavenly Father does not allow anyone into His Business that He doesn't think is ready; that is, anyone that doesn't have a father's heart and a renewed mind.

We are being prepared to participate in the purposes of God—the fulfilling of His plans and promises. When we have been prepared in some areas, the Lord will give us a *proceeding word* that will bring us into a place of practicing that which we have been prepared to do.

A proceeding word is only received when God permits us to go on beyond the foundation, the elementary principles of Christ. A proceeding word takes us into our destiny, our calling. It also takes us into tribulation, trials, opposition, enemy resistance and frustration. We must have been prepared beforehand to handle these things or we will have a tendency to become discouraged and let our calling fall away. This is dangerous territory, which is why the next few verses of Hebrews six warn us about the seriousness of it.

Hebrews 6:4-6 NASB

- (4) For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,
- (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,
- (6) and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

If a person who has matured in the areas listed falls away (this is a willful turning away from the Lord) it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.³ This is why God doesn't necessarily permit people to go on into the deeper things of God. It is dangerous to the immature and the unprepared.

Proceeding Word Defined

A proceeding word is a particular type of “rhema” word, that is, a “quickened”, fresh spoken word from the Holy Spirit. We receive “rhema” words as the Lord brings revelation of the meaning and application of the written, recorded word to us and our circumstances. As we grow up in the Lord, we receive many “rhema” words from the Holy Spirit applying the Lord's teaching to our lives—making the word flesh in us as it was in Jesus.

However, there comes a day when we begin to come into the responsibilities of sonship. We have grown up in the family of believers but it is now time to “get a job”, to be “employed” in the Kingdom of God, to become a productive Kingdom citizen, to begin to fulfill our calling by doing the works prepared for us from the foundation of the world. This is when the Holy Spirit brings to us a

3 II Timothy 2:25 speaks of God granting repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. We have a false idea that we can repent at any time; however, that is not the case. God is sovereign and grants repentance according to His foreknowledge. Hebrews 12:17 tells of Esau seeking repentance with tears but God did not grant it. We should fear lest our easy grace mentality cause us to lose the inheritance.

proceeding word that takes us into our work in the Kingdom.

There are three primary characteristics of a proceeding word:

1. it is *always* deposited in us before it is confirmed by others;
2. it is *always* directional in its scope and nature;
3. it is *always* dependent upon the power of the Lord for it to be done.

The result is that it *always* moves you toward the fulfillment of your destiny in the Lord.

A proceeding word comes as our preparation process reaches a point where we can be trusted by God to be obedient to His word and walk in the power of the Spirit. Our character has made progress toward becoming more like Jesus and we are able to be used by the Lord without becoming lifted up in pride.

The Example of Moses

The Scriptures make it clear that Moses had within him a sense of His purpose and calling—that he was to be a deliverer of the people of God from the oppression of Egypt. Remember, Moses was not a heathen. He was one of the people of God even though he had been raised in Pharaoh's court.

Acts 7:22-25 NASB

(22) "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

(23) "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

(24) "And when he saw one *of them* being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.

(25) "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

Moses' real problems started when he tried to enter into his destiny by his natural understanding and the arm of the flesh. He acted on what had been deposited in his heart by God; but his actions arose from his natural strength and not by the direction and power of God. He also supposed that others of the people of God would understand his calling and destiny. Of course, they didn't understand. You cannot fulfill your God given destiny through the flesh.

When Moses attempted to fulfill his calling without a proceeding word from God, it created a set of circumstances that forced Moses to flee. He then entered into a forty year preparation time herding sheep on the backside of the desert. (Notice that his Egyptian education, the finest that the world had to offer, did not prepare him to enter into his calling.)

Moses, in the timing of God, received his proceeding word at the burning bush. (Note: the NASB puts quotes from the Old Testament in all caps in the New Testament.)

Acts 7:30-35 NASB

(30) "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE

WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH.

(31) "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look *more* closely, there came the voice of the Lord:

(32) 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look.

(33) "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.

(34) 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.'

(35) "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

Moses was going about his normal daily routine when he saw a bush that was on fire, but did not burn up, so he turned aside to see what was happening, which set the stage for God to speak to him and give him a proceeding word.

God works with us the same way. When we are prepared properly, He will interrupt our routine with something that draws our attention and then He will speak our proceeding word to us and we will enter into our destiny.

After receiving the proceeding word, Moses got his affairs in order with Jethro, his father-in-law and began the journey to Egypt in obedience to God. On the way, the Lord stopped him.

Exodus 4:24 NASB

(24) Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.

This Scripture says that the Lord sought to kill Moses. (Of course, He didn't try very hard or Moses would have been dead!) Now, this is a serious thing since Moses was only moving forward in obedience according to the proceeding word that God had given him. What had happened?

Even though Moses had been personally prepared for his calling, he had not fully prepared his family. He had not been fully obedient to the commands of God as they relate to his son.

Exodus 4:25-26 NASB

(25) Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me."

(26) So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are* a bridegroom of blood"--because of the circumcision.

A proceeding word does not excuse us from the requirements of the covenant of God: circumcision of the flesh for Moses' son and circumcision of the heart for us. The Lord will not allow us to complete our destiny even after He gives us a proceeding word if we are neglecting the prerequisites of the covenant.

Once a proceeding word is in place, it is in place until it is accomplished. We can see this also in Moses' mission. After leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses begins to take them toward the promised land by the standard caravan route. However God stops him and tells him to turn back and take them in a different direction in order to set up Pharaoh and his army for destruction.

Exodus 14:1-4 NASB

- (1) Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
- (2) "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.
- (3) "For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.'
- (4) "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so.

So, the children of Israel are positioned by the Lord with the Red Sea in front, the wilderness behind and Pharaoh and his army coming at them. The people were afraid and cried out to Moses and blamed him for their predicament. However, it is the Lord's response to Moses that is of particular interest to us.

Exodus 14:15-16 NASB

- (15) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.
- (16) "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.

The proceeding word that Moses had received involved the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt but it also involved them entering the land that God had promised them. Just because they were now in what appeared to be dire circumstances did not mean that God had changed His word. There was no "plan B". It did not matter that there was a sea between them and the fulfillment of the proceeding word.

God chided Moses for crying out to Him. It appears that Moses should have realized that the sea did not matter only that they proceed with what God had said. It is the same with us. Once we have taken action according to the proceeding word, nothing will prevent the complete accomplishment of all that is contained in that word. In all circumstances, God will orchestrate events to accomplish His purpose and to bring glory to His name. We have to exercise faith and the authority that is inherent in the proceeding word and not be distracted when we hear the thundering hoof beats of the world's army.

The Example of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah asking about Jerusalem and about the people that had survived captivity. Obviously, this was a concern in his heart and the answer he heard struck him to the quick.

Nehemiah 1:3-4 NASB

- (3) They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity

are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

(4) When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

The Scriptures record the beseeching prayers of Nehemiah as he sought the Lord. The prayers arose from the burden of his heart and became reminders to the Lord of His plan and purpose. Nehemiah asked the Lord to prepare the way of fulfillment of His promises to His people. Nehemiah held this to himself as he went about his normal daily routine.

Nehemiah 2:1-2 NASB

(1) And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine *was* before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

(2) So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick?" This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid.

Now we see the "unusual circumstance" that prepared Nehemiah to receive his proceeding word. Nehemiah had been careful not be sad before the King. When the King asked him why he was sad, it was not a normal question because, [1] Kings do not ask servants such questions and [2] there was no physical evidence to warrant the question. This caused Nehemiah to be afraid.

Either Nehemiah had offended his King by allowing him to see his depression or the hand of God was in the actions of the King. If the King was offended by his countenance then Nehemiah would lose his position or his life. If the King was not offended then it was a moment of destiny orchestrated by the Lord God. So, Nehemiah answered the King's question by explaining the burden of his heart to the King.

Nehemiah 2:4-5 NASB

(4) Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

(5) I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

After praying (probably non-verbally), Nehemiah made his request. Notice how at each point of the procedure, Nehemiah was careful to maintain close prayer contact with God.

Nehemiah 2:6-8 NASB

(6) Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.

(7) And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors *of the provinces* beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah,

(8) and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted *them* to me because

the good hand of my God *was* on me.

The King immediately grilled Nehemiah about how long would it take and when would he return. Nehemiah gave the King a definite time and then asked for safe passage through the surrounding provinces and for timber supplies to rebuild the gates of the wall. It was Nehemiah's prayer time with the Lord that had prepared him with answers. Had he been vague with the King he would not have received leave to do this.

We can see a difference in the way that Moses received his proceeding word and the way in which Nehemiah received his. God spoke to Moses directly with great detail about what he was to do and what God would do to accomplish His purpose. Nehemiah received his through his prayers and the circumstances that the Lord arranged to make a way for him to proceed to do what God had purposed for him to do.

There is no formula for receiving a proceeding word. Our God is sovereign and, not only can, but will do things differently with different people. God takes into account our different personalities and even the different type of work involved in order to fulfill His intention.

Nehemiah 2:11-12 NASB

(11) So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

(12) And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.

Notice that Nehemiah did not announce to everyone what he was doing nor about God calling him to do it. He kept his proceeding word to himself for a while while he reviewed the situation.

Nehemiah 2:15-16 NASB

(15) So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

(16) The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.

Without others knowing about it he went and looked at the gates and walls, inspecting them from the viewpoint of what had to be done.

Nehemiah 2:17-18 NASB

(17) Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."

(18) I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good *work*.

After Nehemiah understood the situation and how the things that God had put into his heart applied to the task of rebuilding the walls, he told the people about it and emphasized that God was favoring the project. This motivated them to participate and put their hand to the work too.

As you continue to read Nehemiah it becomes obvious that Nehemiah had a broad proceeding word

that involved others receiving proceeding words that fit into his. Various groups rose up and took responsibility for different aspects of the work that needed to be done as detailed in Chapter Three.

[Note: the other people did not join Nehemiah's vision of rebuilding the wall. They received their own part of the vision given by God that fit together with Nehemiah's proceeding word. This is important because today it seems as if leaders want to create a following by having the people buy into their vision rather than joining together with like-minded vision people to do the work of the Lord.]

The Example of Paul

Paul's walk with the Lord began when he was converted on the road to Damascus. The Lord sent him into the city and told him to wait and he would be told what to do. Then the Lord sent Ananias to him to show him how much he must suffer for the Lord's sake. Ananias laid hands on Paul, he received his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴

Paul began showing the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, which stirred them up to the point of trying to kill Paul. The disciples were wary of him because of his past reputation; but, Barnabas took him under his wing and vouched for him. Eventually, Paul ended up in Tarsus where he continued to grow in understanding concerning the Lord. Paul knew from what the Lord had Ananias tell him that he was a man of destiny—that he had purpose in the plan of God. However, it probably seemed to him that it was impossible to fulfill.

Then, God begins to move among the Greeks in Antioch and Jerusalem hears about it and send Barnabas to check it out. He sees the hand of God in what is happening and immediately goes to Tarsus to find Paul and the two of them return to Antioch to minister to the Greeks. They teach in the Church at Antioch for over a year.⁵ It was in Antioch that Paul received his proceeding word.

The time in Antioch was about eight years or so after Paul's conversion. During that time, Paul had been quite active except for the three years he spent in Arabia after he was converted. These eight years had prepared Paul to receive his proceeding word. This occurred in a gathering of the prophets and teachers in Antioch.

Acts 13:1-3 NASB

- (1) Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- (2) While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- (3) Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

The next verse begins, "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit,...", which shows that the action of the calling, separating, and sending of Barnabas and Paul was a work of the Holy Spirit.

4 Acts 9:1-31

5 Acts 11:22-26

Paul already knew from what Ananias had told him a few days after his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus road that God had a purpose for him and that it would require him to suffer much. The implication of the words here in Acts is that Paul and Barnabas both had already received preparation in their hearts. The Holy Spirit speaking was a public acknowledgment and formalization of their calling.

Paul and Barnabas already had a proven ministry as a teacher and prophet respectively. Now, with this proceeding word they were to begin to fulfill a new apostolic ministry, which was their destiny in God. Again, like Moses and Nehemiah, Paul was going about his normal activities of daily living—his normal routine—when the Lord intervened with a proceeding word.

After receiving the proceeding word and moving into its fulfillment, it was the focus of the remainder of Paul's life and ministry. Because this type of word moves you into your destiny in God, it becomes the primary focus of all that you do after you are released into it.

Everything prior to receiving your proceeding word is preparation or training, even though there may be powerful ministry happening during the preparation time. Paul certainly was an effective teacher before he moved into the fullness of his calling as an apostle. We need to be careful not to substitute the work of the training time for our calling or destiny.

The Strategy of a Proceeding Word

Moses and Nehemiah both received detailed instructions, a strategy, to accomplish their proceeding words. Paul, however, apparently did not. He and Barnabas went out in faith under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is some of the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament ways of God's dealing with us.

Hebrews tells us that we have received a better covenant with better promises. Part of what makes it better is that Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit from the Father. We now have Him dwelling within us to teach, lead and direct us in the ways of the Lord. No one had the Holy Spirit under the old covenant the way that we have Him under the new. Therefore, we do not need to have a detailed strategy to accomplish what God has for us like Moses and Nehemiah. We simply need to be led by the Holy Spirit.

We see a good example of this leading with Paul and Barnabas. When they first went out nothing appeared to be happening. After being sent out from Antioch they went to Selucia, then to Cyprus, then to Salamis, and then after going through the whole island they went to Paphos. The only thing recorded about what occurred was at Paphos where the proconsul wanted to hear what Paul and Barnabas had to say. It was here that Elymas the magician (a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus) withstood Paul and received judgment.⁶ Then they left Paphos. John Mark returned to Jerusalem and Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia.

John Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas when they left Antioch. I am sure that it sounded like a good thing to do after the excitement of the Holy Spirit separating Paul and Barnabas and sending them out as apostles. I am sure that it was the talk of the whole Church in Antioch. So, John Mark went with them. However, after many months of traveling, the only thing the only thing they had to show for their ministry was some conversation with a proconsul in Paphos and a confrontation with a

6 Acts 13:4-12

false prophet. No wonder John Mark returned to Jerusalem. He was discouraged. Things were not going the way that he expected them to. This is what happens when you just go along or buy in to someone else's proceeding word without receiving one yourself.

Paul and Barnabas left Perga and continued to Pisidian Antioch, which is where we begin to get a record of God doing things. Paul spoke in the synagogue and stirred some interest. By the next Sabbath the entire city gathered to hear Paul. The Jews plotted against Paul but the Gentiles gladly received the word.

Acts 13:49 NASB

(49) And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

While all of this is covered in one chapter, there was a lot of time, travel, and effort put into the ministry by Paul and Barnabas that had not produced anything until Pisidian Antioch. This shows us that a proceeding word may not have immediate results, but may require perseverance on our part to be accomplished.

Resistance

While we haven't discussed it yet, every proceeding word produces strong resistance from the Enemy of our souls. The proceeding words from God are part of the Lord bringing His purposes to completion, which is something that the Devil hates.

Moses was resisted strongly by Pharaoh. Nehemiah was resisted by Sanballat and Tobiah. Paul is resisted by the Jews. I believe that it is impossible to fulfill a proceeding word that you have received without encountering resistance that is greater than any that you have previously known. Because of this, God will not give these types of words to anyone who has cracks in his foundation or a lack of character development. As Hebrews says He will not permit us to go on to maturity.⁷

So much of the current teaching to the people of God concentrates on prosperity and an easy life. This teaching does not have in it the power to bring you to maturity because it does not develop in you the perseverance required to fulfill your destiny. The Scriptures make it very clear what is required to complete us, make us mature.

James 1:2-4 NASB

- (2) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
- (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.
- (4) And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Trials, tribulation, the testing of our faith are things that are necessary to our experience. They are not things to be avoided because they are painful but, instead, should be embraced as tools of the Holy Spirit to bring us into perfection, lacking in nothing. Until we can do that, the Lord is not going to give us a proceeding word.

⁷ Hebrews 6:1-3