

Getting Inspired

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and openness to God's inspiration in discovering His will for our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 27:8, Acts 10:1-34, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 4:8

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Divine Guidance"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of seeking God's guidance through prayer and being open to His inspiration, using the examples of Cornelius and Peter. Both men were devoted to prayer, made time to be alone with God, and practiced His presence throughout the day. By committing to daily prayer and staying connected to God, they were able to receive divine inspiration and step out of their comfort zones to fulfill God's will, leading to miraculous outcomes in their lives and the lives of others.

Transcript

Have you ever thought to yourself, "I wish God would show me what he wants me to do!"? "I wish he'd make it clear!"

If you're young, it's, "I wish God would show me what I'm supposed to do with my life."

If you're an adult, out there in the thick of the rat race it's, "I wish God would show me how he wants me to handle job, family, kids, financial pressures. How can I be a disciple with all this on me?"

If you're retired, it's, "I've got some time now. I'm not tied down to a job. So what does God want me to do with it? Why doesn't he show me?"

He will, if you give him a chance.

We complain about God being distant, vague. How am I supposed to know what he wants me to do, if I don't even get a hint? While at the same time we don't give him a chance to give us a hint. We're so tangled up in distractions, we wouldn't recognize the hint if it came.

By contrast, here's Cornelius. Cornelius is an officer in the Roman Army. He's a Gentile, an outsider plunked down among all these Jews. And he can see that the Jews have something which he has never had. They have an awareness of God.

Cornelius is drawn to these devout people. He wants what they have: their faith; their love for God. So he gets to know them, as much as they'll let him. He asks questions. He learns. Cornelius doesn't say, "Gee, I wish God would show me what he wants me to do." He just plunges in and starts doing what he already knows God wants him to do.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God.

Acts 10:1-2

Cornelius fears God.

Cornelius is generous with his money, gives liberally to people in need; because he knows that giving alms is pleasing to God.

Cornelius prays constantly. He's a military professional, good at what he does. He has authority. But his heart is far beyond career, money, reputation, accumulating stuff! This man's heart is reaching out to God. So he prays. Not just at bed time. Not just at lunch time. All the time. Cornelius even observes certain hours of prayer like the Jews do. But in between he's still praying.

Then one day, out of the blue comes inspiration. God shows Cornelius what he wants him to do. It's going to change his life, and the lives of countless people around him.

About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror, and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:3-8

What Cornelius needs is light from God, God's very Spirit. And this gift is going to be given to him---not by an angel, but by a man. The problem is that the man who is supposed to help Cornelius is a Jew, who, like any self-respecting Jew, will have nothing to do with Gentiles. This Jewish man would never step inside a Gentile home. He would never, never, never sit down and eat at a Gentile table!

So this Jew, even though he happens to be Peter the apostle of Jesus, needs some inspiration to loosen him up. And lo and behold, Peter gets his inspiration at the same place Cornelius gets his: at prayer.

The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and wild birds. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them."

Acts 10:9-20

Peter's religion says, "Don't mix with Gentiles." But the Spirit of God says, "Jesus died for Gentiles. You've got some Gentiles at your gate looking for you. Go with them." So Peter breaks the rules of his religion and goes with these men to the house of Cornelius. A crowd of people is gathered to hear Peter's message. Peter preaches the Word. And the Gentiles have a Pentecost! The Holy Spirit falls on them before they're even baptized!

So here we have two men, a Jew and a Gentile. Both are inspired. Both are directed to do something they would never have dreamed of doing. And the outcome is God's glory in the lives of countless people, including us.

Notice the one thing these two men had in common. Notice what they were doing when inspiration came. Both Cornelius and Peter were at prayer. Cornelius was observing the ninth hour of prayer at 3:00 p.m. Why wasn't this man in his office at that time of day?

Peter was upon the housetop praying at noon. You mean this busy apostle didn't have more important things to do than pray? At noon? Nothing was more important to Peter than prayer! Prayer was the real work. Everything else was gravy.

So if you're saying to yourself, "Why doesn't God show me what he wants me to do?" God is saying to you, "Why don't you give me a chance to show you what I want you to do?" You'll get your inspiration when you make some room for it. Move prayer from that moldy old corner of your life up into the center. Get serious. Exercise some discipline. Then the light will come on.

There's no set formula or system. Cornelius found a way of praying constantly to God that worked for him. And Peter had a way of praying constantly to God that worked for him. But here are two things that both these men did, two things which we need to learn:

1. They made time to be alone with God. And not just five minutes---"Hi, Father, see you later." Time when they could think. Maybe read some scripture. Maybe lift up people by name before God's throne. Worship.
2. Give thanks.

They were both busy men. They had all kinds of pressures on their lives.

But they knew that they'd never get anything done the way it ought to be done unless they took time to connect, and get refreshed in God. So they were reachable. God could get through to them.

3. Because they had this oasis alone with God each day, they were then able to practice God's presence the rest of the day, in the midst of all their busyness. Under their breath, down in their heart, they found it possible to continue crying, "O Lord, help me! Thank you, Father!"

Prayer was their link with God. And while they were praying each was inspired to do something he never thought of doing. Cornelius, the Gentile officer, was inspired to send out and bring a Jewish man into his house. He could have said, "Wait a minute, Lord! No Jew is ever going to consent to come into my house! It's impossible!" But Cornelius yielded. He went along with the program.

And Peter, the Jew, even though he objected to the idea of breaking the rules of his religion, was now inspired to obey the Lord Jesus, who wasn't nearly as religious as Peter, and go ahead and break the rule, and go to the Gentile's house.

And if you are really up for letting God show you what he wants you to do, you'd better brace yourself. He's probably going to inspire you to do something you would never have thought of doing. The Spirit has a way of blasting us out of our comfortable rut.

Maybe the Spirit will be easy on you for a while. Like, "Don't just say 'Hi' to that person, ask them how they're doing, and hurry on. Have them over for dinner." Or, "Don't just lament about all the starving people in the world. Send some serious cash to World Vision, or Care, or the Red Cross." Or the Spirit might even needle you into going to visit that grouchy old neighbor you've been praying for.

"But Lord, I wouldn't know what to say. It would be awkward. I'm not much of a talker."

"Just go, and open your mouth, and I'll put words in it."

Of course, that's all tame stuff. The Lord might have something much more interesting in mind for you or me. If we're up for real inspiration, we'll get real inspiration. And the proof that we're ready to let the Lord inspire us is exactly what it was for Cornelius and Peter.

If you're willing to commit a serious slice of time each day to be alone with God, God will send inspiration. If you're ready to form the habit of practicing the presence of God wherever you are---resting, buying, selling, driving, chatting on the phone---the Lord will start sending inspiration.

Because with these two simple disciplines you make yourself available. And you will be guided. You will find yourself doing things you never thought you'd ever do. Words will come out of your mouth that you never imagined you'd ever speak.

You'll be saying to yourself, "All these years I've been dead.

Now I'm alive.

Here I am, Lord, send me."

And the next thing you know, you'll be having lunch with your Cornelius.

And only God knows what miracles will flow from that.

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