

The Gift of Apostle (2)

A gifted story: Mary's circle of friends had been a great source of enjoyment until they began experimenting with drugs. She knew that she did not want to become involved with drugs, but her friends told her she had to take one of the substances or no longer be a part of the group. Mary refused, and instead she stood up and proclaimed her faith in front of her friends. She lost many of her friends and went through a very lonely period after that, but in her heart she felt sorry for her friends and knew her intent was to try and help them. Mary possesses the gift of apostle-- she can see what others cannot see and she is able to take a stand in the midst of an adverse situation.

Biblical references:

1 Cor. 12:28— *In the church God has put all in place: **in the first place apostles**, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues.*

Romans 1:14- 16— *For I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant. So then, I am eager to preach the Good News to you who live in Rome.*

See also Acts 20:17-21— *(Paul's description of how he conducted himself in Ephesus and his plans to be obedient to God and go to Jerusalem).*

Acts 14: 21-23— *(The activities of Paul and Barnabas in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and Pisidia).*

Definition and comment:

The gift of Apostle: the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ which enables them to assume and exercise helpful leadership over a number of churches in spiritual matters which is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches. It is also regarded as a gift that gives the believer the courage and the urgency to express faith in settings where the Gospel is rarely heard. Apostles have a special calling— they are selected by Christ and sent out with a unique commission and divine credentials to act and speak authoritatively on his behalf. These people are called to lead, inspire and develop the Churches of God by the proclamation and the teaching of true doctrine.

Although some believe that this gift was given only to the original 12 men who had been with the Lord from the time of John's baptism until his ascension, there is wide acceptance that Paul too was considered an "apostle." It is interesting to note that Paul refers to himself as an apostle that was "abnormally born" (1 Cor. 15:7-8). However he may have felt about the receipt of this spiritual gift, he clearly accepted it, and his ministry was characterized as one of church building. In many ways Paul was the first practical theologian, the one who began to lay down rules for church members to follow. The fact that God chose Paul for this task is all the evidence we need that the gift of apostleship did not die with the original 12 apostles.

Many others were called “apostles” in the New testament: James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19); Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25); Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1, 2:6); Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7). A number of other references are made to the “other brothers” who are clearly acting as apostles in various passages in both letters to the Corinthians.

A person given the gift of apostle will feel an urgency to be a builder of churches for Christ and will most likely be drawn to the ordained ministry, but the building of churches is not the exclusive domain of ordained clergy. Anyone exercising this gift will be involved in starting and strengthening churches or in reaching out to those who may have little other access to the Gospel.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

Do you have a sense that Christ has called you to build up his church?
Is there within you an urgency to take the Gospel to settings where it is rarely heard?
Are you compelled to find new ways of communicating God’s love to people that have not been reached by traditional means?
Do you feel that God is sending you out on a mission to reach a people in need of hearing the Gospel?

Areas for study and personal growth:

The roots of the word “apostle” reveal the full meaning of this gift: “stello” means “to send” and “apo” means “off from;” thus an apostle is sent off someplace to speak for Christ. A good place to begin understanding how this gift might be applied in your life might be to contemplate just where God might be urging you to go— in the language of the Shepherd, what sheep to feed. Prayer will be the chief means for this enlightenment. Any call into the ordained ministry will need to be met with consideration for theological training in a seminary or in a special instructional program (such as a lay ministry course or AIM curriculum).
Read and study about the structure of the church and learn about the dynamics within congregations to better understand what is involved in building and growing a healthy body of Christ.
Look for ways to improve your ability to express your faith. You will need to tell both the Gospel story as it is found in scripture and your own Gospel story, witnessing to Christ in your own life. Listen to audio and video accounts by other Gospel storytellers, not in an effort to copy their style, but to sense their passion and build courage watching their joy in delivering the message. Your own story, in your own style, delivered from the heart will become God’s vehicle from within to reach those he wants to touch.
Seek out and speak with others with the gift of apostleship, hear their sensitivities as to where the Gospel needs to be taken, and then learn more about the needs that surface so that you will be better prepared to address them.

General ways to use the gift of apostleship:

Within the church: deliver Temple Talks, testimonials, and sermons (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
Within the wider community: take the Gospel message to those who cannot come to church

—the sick, the lonely and those in prison

For reflection:

The gift of apostleship is really about being creative in taking the Gospel message where it would not be otherwise be heard. No one did this better than the Apostle Paul, and he is the one to look at to best understand how this gift should be employed. Paul found ways to reach everybody; highly educated, he spoke to people in their own tongue—he knew the best way to reach a person is at their own level. He also trusted greatly in the Lord in all he did, and he recognized his own weakness but was not afraid of it, because the message he was giving out was God’s message, and he knew God would work through him effectively because of his willing heart.

Indeed, one of the great ironies is that God chose Paul to build up his church. Paul, who had persecuted so many Christians, seemed an unlikely candidate for such an important task. But God loves to rise up the weak to his purposes. Christ chose basically illiterate fisherman to spread the good news, even a despised tax collector. These early apostles were not superhuman people, but ordinary people whom God chose to give supernatural gifts to equip them for his purposes. But what an honor to be thus chosen for such a remarkable and world-changing purpose. Today’s Christians with the gift of apostleship have a similar honor of working to change the world for Christ. Clearly it is a job that needs to be done.