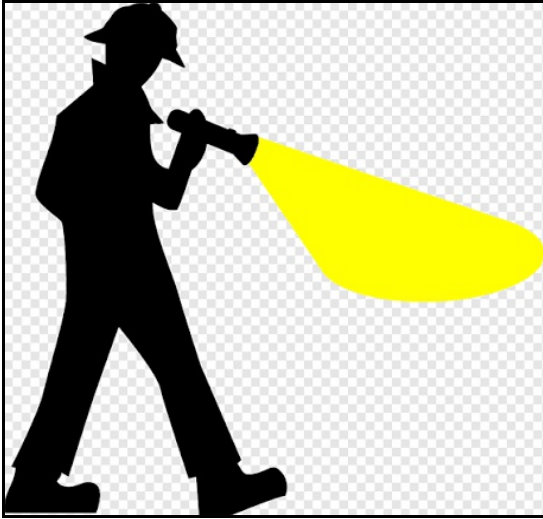


Man Search



In the past several decades an interesting change has occurred in American industry. There is now a focus on people themselves as being the most valuable production resource; not capital; not infrastructure --but, people. When people are depreciated, neglected, or denigrated, productivity decreases. Many companies have learned that increasing a worker's confidence and reducing worker anxiety pays big dividends to the stockholders.

Successful companies are becoming increasingly involved in literacy programs, day care for children, and health care for workers and worker families. The change is apparent in the re-designation of the *personnel management department*, to the *human relations department*, to the present designation of *human resource department*. People are no longer seen as something to manage and manipulate, or something to placate; they are now seen, by many companies, as the major resource.

There is an old question that goes like this, "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it fall, is there any sound?" The technical answer is no, because in order for sound to exist there must be a receiver. Without a receiver, sound is meaningless. Likewise, what is creation, without man to contemplate it? What is God without people to communicate with?

In Genesis 1:25, after God completed the creation, he saw "that it was good." But there was something missing, "There was no man to till the ground" (Genesis 2:5). There was no man to return God's love. From the very beginning, God was looking for a man. God made man "in his own image." Man is the one creature that can contemplate metaphysical questions, ponder about the universe, and appreciate God. Man is the one creature "created in the image of God."

Soon after God made that man, he sinned against God then hid from God in the garden. God, once again, went looking for a man. "Where are you Adam" (Genesis 3:9)? The man God made had no time for God. God has, throughout the centuries, been looking for men, innocent men, to return his love, do his work, enjoy his creation, till his ground, and teach and lead his children.

Time went on... In Psalm 14:2 & 3, God looked down from heaven for the man that he made. When he looked, he was disappointed. God made an innocent man; when he came back to find him, he wasn't there.

In Judges chapters 6 and 7, Israel was besieged by the Midianites and the Amalekites. Who would defend Israel? God once again, looked for a man. He found a man named Gideon. The way in which Gideon gathered his army is interesting.

God said to Gideon, "find some men to do my work." Gideon put out a call for people to do God's work; when

God returned, Gideon said, "I found 32,000 men." However, God's purpose is always to shake out the chaff and hold on to the wheat. So, the Lord said, "The troops with you are too many for me ...Israel would only take credit away from me, saying, 'our own hand has delivered us.' –See what can be done when you get a gang together... Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops. 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him go home.' Thus Gideon sifted them out; 22,000 went home, and 10,000 remained" (Judges 7:2,3).

"Who is fearful and afraid?" Life is always asking that question. A lot of people quit because they are afraid; never-the-less, 10,000 stuck with it. Once again God said, "The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will "sift them out" there" (Judges 7:4). As you remember the story, 9,700 got down and lapped the water like a dog, while 300 knelt down bringing the water to their mouth with one cupped hand, thus remaining alert to what was around them. Nine thousand, seven hundred sitting ducks for the enemy did not pass the test. Only 300 knew how to pay attention. If we are to be of good service for God, we need more than enthusiasm, we must have good judgment & caution as well. We need to "watch and pray."

In the O.T. there are some strange military tactics. For example, Ex. is the story of people escaping slavery by crossing to the far side of the Red Sea and then living for 40 years in the desert. In the book of Joshua, the people marched around a city once every day for six days, then on the seventh day they marched around it seven times, the priests blew trumpets and the people shouted. This is unconventional warfare.

Here, in the book of Judges, 300 men are asked to go to battle using only pitchers with lamps inside and trumpets. What could all of this really mean? It should be clear that each of these unconventional strategies is a picture of how God wants to go about redeeming his people.

It is rudimentary to understand that "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). The church has lost its way many times in history when it has forgotten that its battle is not against people, but against evil, in behalf of people. We can hardly expect to win them by calling them names.

When Zerubbabel went to restore the temple, God was, once again, looking for men who were willing to use spiritual means alone. The Lord said, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, said the Lord of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). There is the spirit that heals the human heart and builds the temple. When the human spirit embraces God's Spirit, it is empowered with humility. Humility is a powerful force that allows people to connect with other people without intimidating or overpowering them.

So, the 300 soldiers went out, each with a clay pitcher; within the clay pitcher was a lamp. Paul said, "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). When God made man, he made him from the dust of the earth. Into that earthen vessel, God breathed the "breath of life," making us "in his own image." That is to say, the real message of light is within. I'm afraid we're more concerned with the "dust of the earth," (clay pitchers) than we are with the "breath of God" (light within).

We are quite enamored with the "earthen pitchers;" however, in this story, it is not until the earthen pitcher is smashed, that the light is revealed. God is still looking for men who are not so narcissistic that they cover up the light of God within. Without humility, the light of God cannot shine. There is a sense in which the pitcher

must be broken. It is only the work of God within us that has true power in the struggle. God is still looking for people who will be open and honest, and let the light shine out.

"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine; This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine; Let it shine; Let it shine; All the time." "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm going to let it shine." Perhaps this would better be the song of the big people, rather than the little people.

Over the centuries, God kept looking for a man ...an innocent man; the man that he made. God could not find one innocent man, until at last he turned to his own son, "The man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). The story finally comes to its conclusion. Man is found, as divinity comes down to become a man, in behalf of men. The *Christ of heaven* could not help us until he became the *Jesus of earth*. He came to "seek and to save" that man that was lost. He came to answer the question that echoes from the very dawn of creation, "Where are you Adam?"

When Christ Jesus was on the cross, there were some who said, "Why doesn't God save you?" Others replied, "He saved others, but himself he cannot save."

The only man God could not save was his son. At Gethsemane, God "made him to be sin for us, for he knew no sin." "That we might be made the goodness of God through him." That is why the Lord said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But there was no other innocent man to be found. Later, on the cross, Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" God could not show mercy on his own Son. There was no mercy *on* Calvary, but there is mercy *because of* Calvary. God had found a man, who would "seek and find" men.

Christ was sifted

Certainly the men of Gideon's day were *sifted* by God. However, no one was ever sifted like the man Christ Jesus "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death --even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). We think of our own reputation; Jesus made himself of no reputation. He took off a royal robe, to put on a robe of sin. Few people want to let the light shine if it means breaking the old clay pitcher. However, the old clay pitcher will break no matter what. That is not a problem if the inner light shines brighter and brighter. Paul said, "though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day."

Remember, Peter was sifted. Jesus said to Peter, "Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat." Do you know what sifting does? The grain is beaten with flails, or it is placed on a thrashing floor then stomped on. That is what sifting is, but in the process the chaff is broken loose from the wheat. The chaff blows away and nothing but good is left. That is what trials can do for us; they bring out the good that is inside. I never thought I wanted to live the life of the Apostle Paul; but, in the end, it was Paul who said, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." When a person can say that, there is very little chaff left. Sure! The pandemic was a trial --it broke some stuff. But, it did not put out the light. I knew we were already on our way out of the pandemic when I heard a 60-year-old black woman, mayor of Atlanta, Georgia say, "Not trading Mom for money." That woman is safe --you see, a pandemic can only get you **if you let it "put out your light" and**

take your heart. Use everything you've got to take care of people. All the people. If you don't take care of people –you're not taking care of the Gospel.

Christ was sent

Gideon was sent, but Gideon did not go alone; God went with Gideon. None of us need to go alone. However, when God sent Christ to do battle with evil, he sent him alone. God did not go with him; *he* died alone. "That through death, he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil." The job of Christ is to destroy the devil in us. When Jesus destroyed our ancient enemy, the one who separates us from God, he did it with our enemy's own sword, "and by death he destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil." Only the light within the pitcher (the light and truth of Christ in your heart) can defeat the "Father of lies." Let it shine. God never intended to overcome darkness with more darkness. The church is wrong in this idea!

Christ succeeded

"Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

What is it that God is looking for? People. It is so easy to get away from that. It is so easy to forget that God's warfare is unconventional. That it is done in humility. That it is accomplished with the inner light of God's Spirit. That God found men through *forgiveness*. "Father forgive them, they don't understand what they're doing." It is hard to understand that the cost may be the earthen vessel itself. Christ died on the cross, Paul died, others have died. We must put the real value on the *contents* rather than the *container* --the light, not the clay pitcher.

God did find an innocent man. Pilate said, "I find no fault with this just person." The governor said, "What evil has he done?" The soldier said, "Certainly, this was the Son of God."

People are important and they are central to God. The universe doesn't make a "tea-cup of sense" without people. It is a great thing to know that I am a man, and that God actually wants me and needs me, because I need him. My world makes little sense without God.

If the church will stay on target, it must remember first and foremost, that God's interest and concern is *people*. He started out in the very beginning calling, "Where are you Adam?" From that time forward he has sought men. The work of God in Christ is to seek men and restore their innocence. It is through Christ that God is able to find that innocent man that he made. Isn't it time for each of us to say, "I am here, God?"

In World War II an entire town in Northern France risked their lives to give sanctuary to 5,000 Jewish people. They did it because they knew Christ would have. In a documentary of that event, called *Weapons of the Spirit*, Bill Moyer asked an old Christian man to sum up Christianity in one line. The man replied, "Christ did that when he said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself.'" So then, let your light shine --so often the material hides the spiritual. Don't let your Christianity get much more complicated than that, or you will lose it.