

SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

SERMON SERIES: POPULATION | PARTICIPATION | POWER | **PACE-SETTING** | PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVE | PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

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Pace-setting

#4. With additional perspectives, burdens, and gifts in our midst, what new ministry opportunities is the Covenant now better positioned to strengthen and initiate?

Acts 16:4-10, NIV

Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the ordinances for them to follow which had been determined by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, after being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; and passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading with him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately sought to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

When we planted LBN Houston in 2004, as we call it, or in its official name, the Good News Covenant Church, we began thinking about the importance of having a kingdom mentality. The Lord told us about tearing down the cultural and language barriers that might exist, and that he would give us the strategies and bring the people. We should just be vigilant about that. The diversity existing in our country invites us to be intentional in extending the kingdom of heaven and attending to its priorities.

What is the priority of the kingdom? Large and modern churches? Famous and powerful ministries?

The answer to those questions is NO. The priority of the kingdom is the people, the souls, the world. The whole Bible revolves around John 3:16. Love for the world was at the center of God's plan of redemption.

We had a first experience on our first arrival at Ashford Community Church. We were looking for a place to set up our new church. At that moment I understood how far the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was from understanding what the priorities of the kingdom were.

But we had received a direction and the Lord had called us to be inclusive in the kingdom. So we bought a translation system and people started coming in who didn't speak Spanish. We reached 17 people in our congregation who we had to translate simultaneously by hearing aid week after week.

Acts 16:6-10 shows us that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, the latter as a writer and eyewitness to the events, were prioritizing the kingdom of God, manifested in Jesus's command to go to the nations and make disciples.

OUR PRIORITY IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THEREFORE:

a. Let us change our perspectives. The Lord's command was, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

This mandate leads us to the assurance and the conviction that God is an inclusive God. Although it seems that at the beginning of the church the converted Jews only wanted the preaching of the gospel for their own, God changes the perspective of the apostles. First, Peter through the vision of the food-laden canvas descending from heaven, and then the apostle Paul, calling him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

b. Let us seek opportunities to preach the Word of God. We can ask this about Paul: did he have good intentions? Yes. Was he preaching the gospel? Yes. However, the Holy Spirit exposes him to another culture and sends him to a place unknown to him. It sends it across the Aegean Sea and into



Macedonia; that sea could represent our own barriers, which we ourselves set ourselves as the limits of our calling. Many times we seek to do the work according to our understanding and paradigm, and we say to ourselves, “I was called to my people.” In my Argentine culture we have a popular saying that is expressed like this: “*Zapatero a tu Zapato*,” or “Shoemaker, stay in your own shoe.” The Lord commands us to be empathetic and put ourselves in the shoes of the other.

c. Let us listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and the voice of others. In verse 9, the Lord shows his direction to Paul to go to Macedonia. Paul was looking for the geographical direction of where to go, and the Lord speaks to him and shows him Macedonia. We must recognize the opportunities and thus extend ourselves to a new ministerial context. The apostle Paul, through the voice of the Holy Spirit, accepted all the opportunities for ministry that were presented to him. Instead of preaching in the synagogue, he preached and prayed in the house of Lydia; and even used his imprisonment as an opportunity to preach to the jailer and reach out to the entire family until they were baptized.

d. Let's set the pace. Let's take the initiative for inclusion, because that's how God wants us to do it. What do we mean by setting the pace? It is to trigger the initiative of the kingdom; it is to begin to do something new by understanding that God calls us to achieve diversity and different ethnicities. God has not called us only to one race or sector. We must be inclusive in the way we work. Set a new precedent in your ministry, in your church, in your life, and open yourself up to the possibilities and opportunities for a new ministerial context. Let's set the pace!

When the pandemic began, the Lord spoke to me and said, “It's time to hear two voices—my voice and the voice of others—so it will be easier to understand the course.” So LBN Houston became the most missionary church we've ever had. We started the food bank, the people we serve are 70

percent Asian, 20 percent Latino, and 10 percent English speakers. We extended our missionary reach to Bolivia where we adopted a missionary family in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. With the arrival of hurricanes in Central America last year, we sent two containers—one to Honduras and one to Nicaragua. We serve children's canteens in Honduras where about 1,200 children are fed every week. We sent ministerial support and Covid relief to Pastor Obama in Equatorial Guinea and to the Escopez pastors in Argentina.

e. Let's take kingdom initiatives. Houston at this time has become the most diverse city in the United States. There are more than 300 ethnic groups in our city alone and more than 200 languages and dialects spoken. Today in Houston there is no racial majority and one in four people is born abroad. It is believed that in 40 years that will be the reality of the United States of America. While the Covenant is in a unique position to move forward in ethnic ministry and diversity, we must remember that, ultimately, we are not going to move forward either structurally or mechanically. It is only when we relate to each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, spiritually fervent in our desires, and continually dependent on the Holy Spirit—only in this way can we be formed as a family of God, which has a living hope. We can emerge for a better future when we truly commit to a life and service together in Christ.

Let me conclude this message by telling you a story of Kingdom City. In 2015 I decided to return, in the direction of the Holy Spirit, to the same door that had been closed to me at the time 12 years ago. We were about to receive an NCP loan for the purchase of our building, but it was not enough to achieve our heart's dream. The Holy Spirit made me restless to knock on the door of Ashford Community Church again. There we invested our resources, and even went as a bridge of blessing for the church that received us in the building, and we managed to finish the temple that was 60 percent unbuilt, thus bringing the resources that ACC needed to flourish again.

Today we are a multicultural congregation within an international community of churches that pursue the



unity and presence of God above all else. Other churches that preach in different languages interact with LBN Houston: Portuguese, English, Swahili, Hebrew, Telugu (Indian dialect), and French.

We attest that it is possible through the flag of the kingdom to work together to reach the world. I believe with all my heart that there are no protagonists in the kingdom of heaven, but a body, a corporate ministry that, through unity, will make Jesus known as the Lord, as John 17:20-23 says:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”