

Have you wondered what makes one person open to God (to receive all that God has for them)... and the next person remains very closed? ... What makes Sally receptive... attentive... responsive to God's voice and presence... while Thomas (right next to her) is bored... apathetic... oblivious...? ... (I am not asking why one person gets saved and the other doesn't.) I am asking: "why does one believer seem to receive so much MORE from God"...?

We might find some clues from the life of John the Baptist... and those who responded to his message. (And... here is something interesting to consider.) The least likely people (those you might not expect) were the most God-hungry... and most God-attentive. ... (And)... the seemingly best-positioned people... were the most God-averse and thickheaded to God's message. It was the down-and-outers... (the bad and the nasty)... who were pounding the trail into the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ... The prim and the proper... the good and the decent... the pious and the religious... just stood on the banks and clucked their tongues. *"I am already clean. I am a son of Abraham!"*

Today we don't have John running around in his camel hair... eating his funny diet of bugs... and shouting caustic remarks at Bible scholars... calling them a brood of vipers. ... But what made people respond to this strange man's message from God? ... What was the essence of John's ministry? ... It was "repentance". He called for repentance.

What was that? ... Repentance is the humility to see that what you have made of your life so far... is **not** what God wanted you to make of it. You

have to admit this. ... (Let me repeat that...) Repentance is the humility to see that what you have made of your life so far... is **not** what God wanted you to make of it. ... (LISTEN!) Repentance means you come to a full stop... turn around... and go full speed in a new direction. This time... its not of your own choosing. ... This time its not for your own ends. ... This time its not by your own strength. ... This time its not out of your own weakness. ... This time its not for your own glory. ... This time its on **God's** terms. - That's repentance.

Now let me go back to the original question that I asked at the beginning. What makes one person open to God (to receive all that God has for them)... while the next person remains very closed? Overall... I believe it has to do with expectancy. One lives with expectancy. (You see) Expectancy is the **root** of repentance.

(Now... I am going to wax very philosophical with you... stay with me... because this is *also* very practical!) The root of repentance... is a renewal of hope and anticipation. ... It is a spark in the soul that makes you dare to believe that good can come from bad... that light can overcome darkness... that life can resurrect out of death.

It's the small but tenacious belief that in spite of all that has happened in your life (and all that has **not** happened in your life)... what **is** going to happen in your life... will redeem it all. That's expectancy.

Thousands streamed to be baptized by John (even though his was a tough message.) ... *Brood of vipers! Turn or burn!* ... But his was not (in spite of all that)... a message of hopelessness. ... It brimmed with hope. ... His

words promised new life. ... He portrayed a God who longed to forgive and to restore. ... He proclaimed that a way was open to the life you always wanted. John gave them good news... so they repented.

Thank God that there are many repenting Christians (today) who want to honor God with their lives. They understand their purpose and reason for living. They want their light to shine for Christ. (Hopefully) this is your desire. You will find (however) that if you endeavor to make your life count for Christ... you will find that the desire to glorify the Lord - and the “**doing**” ... are two different matters. ... The first tends to be easy... but the second (the “doing” part) can be difficult at times.

So how do we remain persistent (after repenting) ...in fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives? That is the question... in which we will seek an answer... from our text today. ... Here is the short answer: **Continue to live in expectancy**. Feed it! (So we are going to talk about feeding our expectancy.) ... [P A U S E] ...

The first verse of our passage today concerns itself with the eagerness and expectation for the Messiah that John inspired.

Luke 3:15

It has been 400 years since a prophet ministered in the nation of Israel. When John the Baptist came onto the scene... the silence from God was broken. Many believed that the time for the arrival of the Messiah was at hand.

The excitement and confusion of the crowds in light of John’s powerful preaching is completely understandable. Messianic fervor was at an all-

time high. The rank-and-file Jewish citizen desperately wanted godly leadership but could find it neither on the throne nor in the temple. Every visible leader (it seemed) had sold out to Rome. So... when a renowned prophet with John's strong pedigree emerged with God's message on his lips (and without a hint of corruption)... people naturally began to speculate: *Could this be the Messiah?*

Their expectant waiting went beyond the times to the person who was prominent and provided answers—could he be the one? They sincerely hoped so—the sooner the better! Yet they were uncertain, for John had made no moves in that direction.

If they had recalled Scripture... they would have known that John did not qualify. ... The Messiah was to be a descendant of David (not of Levi.) ... John descended from **Aaron**. (His Father... Zacharias... was a priest. ... a descendant of Levi.)

The attitude of eagerness for the coming of the Messiah and their expectation or hope for his arrival helped to get God's people back on track. It caused these folks to become "God conscious" people. Their expectation for His arrival caused them to spiritually prepare for His coming. It is in these folks we find principle number one on how to be persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for your life.

**** Principle 1: Direct your energy in preparing for the coming of the Lord***

During his 1960 presidential campaign... John F. Kennedy often closed his speeches with the story of Colonel Davenport (the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives.) ... One day in 1789... the sky of

Hartford darkened ominously... and some of the representatives... glancing out the windows... feared the end of the world was at hand. ... Suppressing a panicked call for immediate adjournment... Davenport rose and said:

“The Day of Judgement is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”

Rather than fearing what is to come... we are to be faithful until Christ returns. ... Instead of fearing the dark... we're to be lights... as we watch and wait. ... Looking for the return of Jesus Christ will help you to behave and stay on track (spiritually speaking)... just as a child will behave or straighten up because he knows his father is coming home at any time. ... Anticipating Christ's return will motivate you to be prepared or ready for the Rapture. ... [P A U S E] ...

John provides for us the second principle on how to be persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for your life... in verses 16-18.

Luke 3:16

The Baptist sets the record straight. He uses his primary metaphor (baptism) as the means of doing so. He contrasts his water baptism with the Spirit baptism of Jesus. ... His practice of immersion with water is merely a type of the greater immersion in the Spirit that is coming. ... The emphasis is on his feeling of utter unworthiness for the messianic task.

*** Principle 2: Your view of yourself should be honest and humble.**

In comparison... he is nothing... not even fit for the lowliest task of all. In those days the rabbis had disciples who performed all sorts of menial tasks

for them - *except* the removing of their sandals. ... In the Middle East of John's time... sewers were unknown and the waste products of humans and animals filled the streets. ... It was unthinkable that anyone else would handle your sandals... after a day spent walking about in such conditions. But John says that the One who is coming... is so great that he (John) is unfit to perform even this lowly task for Him.

John had many reasons to be proud - yet he was humble. He had a miraculous birth... a prophesied destiny... a man called to personally fulfill great prophetic promises... a powerful preacher... and a man with a great following.

John was both *strict* and *humble*. That is an all-too-rare combination.

Looking at yourself through God's eyes will give you a proper view and perspective of yourself. ... You are not trash or worthless. ... No... if you know Christ as your Savior... you are a child of the King of kings! ... You are a child of the Lord. That is a pretty important position and carries an important responsibility of being an ambassador of Christ. But we are (also) servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. (There is a balance here.)

John felt he was not worthy to loosen the sandals of Jesus. Yet... there are many today who don't have this balance. They feel they are worthy of Heaven. Some people feel: "*I'm not so bad. I'm pretty good... I don't need to be a servant.*" ... Others say: "*I am just as good as the next guy...*" Or "*I'm better than others.*"

But having a Biblical view of yourself (that has proper balance) will help you to remain persistent in fulfilling God's purpose in your life. ... The person who has a proper view of himself will acknowledge that all that he is (and

has)... are by the grace of God. ... He knows he deserves Hell... but God's grace has redeemed him. The Lord is the source of his strength... success... and blessings.

John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, **for apart from me you can do nothing.***

John was extremely successful in his ministry. Crowds thronged to hear him preach. They asked him if he was the Messiah. Yet... his success and these enquiries did not go to his head. ... His ego did not get inflated.... His envy or jealousy for Jesus was not aroused. He knew that God's purpose for his life was to prepare the way for Jesus. ... He was just a voice crying in the wilderness. ... His desire was that Christ be lifted up... and He was lifted in the life of John the Baptist. Charles Spurgeon famously said: "*Be not proud of race, face, place, or grace.*"

A friend of Teddy Roosevelt (William Beebe) said, "Theodore Roosevelt and I used to play a little game together.... after dinner. We would step outside for a cigar. We would go out on the lawn (in silence) and search the skies until we found the faint spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus. Then one or the other of us would recite: "*That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one billion suns, each larger than our sun.*" ... Then Roosevelt would grin and say: "*Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed.*" ... Beebe declared that Roosevelt looked at himself from God's point of view and so should we.

We have seen two principles so far that will help you to be persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for our life.

* *Direct your energy in preparing for the coming of the Lord.*

* *Your view of yourself should be honest.*

* ***Principle 3: Be Determined to help others with God's truth.***

Luke 3:17-18

John kept his eye on his purpose in reaching his people with a message of repentance... and warning them of judgment to come. ... He was determined to help these people spiritually... with God's uncomfortable truth.

He distinguished Christ's baptism being with fire... which refers to the purifying work of judgment that Messiah will accomplish. John baptized with water. Jesus has been baptizing with the Holy Spirit for over nineteen hundred years now. He shall also baptize with fire at His second coming. Fire speaks of judgment. And then John continued to warn of that judgment.

John explains the baptism of Spirit and fire through the picture of sifting grain at harvest time. The winnowing fork was a wooden forklike shovel used to lift the grain in the air... so that the wind or a winnowing fan could separate the wheat from the chaff.

The heavier, usable grain would fall directly down onto the threshing floor... while the lighter... **useless** chaff would be blown away. ... Jesus is ready to divide among people. ... Just as wheat is saved for the storehouse... so

those who draw near to Jesus will be spared. ... But also just as the chaff is tossed to the wind... gathered... and burned... so will be the fate of those who refuse Him. ... Jesus separates between people... and the winnowing fork is in his hand already. His purging brings decisive judgment.

John the Baptist loved these people enough to tell them the truth about what was to come. He was concerned about others. He warned that the Lord would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The ultimate fulfilment of John's prophecy will take place when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. He will cleanse the earth with fire. It is Christ who both *purifies* the righteous and will *purge* the earth one day of its dross... the wicked.

2 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Do we love others enough to tell them the truth about what is to come?
Pray that you would have such a bold love for others. ... [P A U S E] ...

If you want to be persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for your life then put these principles into practice.

* *Direct your energy in preparing for the coming of the Lord.*

* *Your view of yourself should be honest and humble.*

** Be determined to help others with God's truth.*

We now find here a fourth principle that will help you to be persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for your life.

**** Principle 4: Stand for what is right – even when you know it will cost you greatly.***

Luke 3:19-20

Rebuking a tyrannical Roman official (who could imprison and execute you) was extremely dangerous... yet... that is what John did. ... He was not deterred by threats or danger from powerful authorities. ... He stood for what was right no matter what the cost.

John criticized Herod Antipas... because he had married Herodias (the wife of his brother, Herod Philip.) ... Besides being his brother's wife... Herodias was also Herod Antipas' own niece. ... Antipas became infatuated with Herodias when he visited his brother's home. ... The two illicit lovers agreed to separate from their present marriage partners. ... Antipas and Herodias married each other.

When John the Baptist heard about this... he rebuked Herod Antipas. He did this repeatedly because Herod was committing both adultery and incest. ... John publicly protested these sins... as well as many other wrongs Antipas had done. ... He greatly angered both Herod Antipas and Herodias.

The first century Jewish historian (Josephus) wrote that the reason for the arrest was that Herod

'feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it in his power and inclination to raise a rebellion; for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise.' "

The Herods were renowned for their cruelty and evil. In fact... it was Herod the Great who ordered the murder of the babies in Bethlehem. The imprisonment of John the Baptist was only one evil act in a family filled with incest, deceit, and murder. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

If you want to remain persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for your life... then you need to know that persistence requires a strong resolve in our hearts to obey the Lord – no matter what the personal cost is.

Many believers are not persistent in fulfilling God's purpose for their life – because they are unwilling to consider the cost.

My sister (Mary) told me about a woman in her Sunday School class at Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California. ... Karen Watson was a Southern Baptist Missionary to Iraq. Prior to leaving for the Middle East Karen wrote a letter for their pastors to read – in the event that she were to die. ... The letter was dated March 7, 2003. ... Karen was killed... along with four other missionaries... on March 15, 2004.

Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger:

You should only be opening this letter in the event of my death.

When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a

place. I was called to him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward, his glory my reward.

One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work....I am writing this as if I am still working with my people group.

I thank you all so much for your prayers and support. Surely your reward in heaven will be great. Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well-being. Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine young pastors.

In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply, just preach the gospel....Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.

The Missionary Heart:

Cares more than some think is wise.

Risks more than some think is safe.

Dreams more than some think is practical.

Expects more than some think is possible.

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience....There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him. I love you two and my church family.

In his care, Salaam,

Karen

... **[P A U S E]** ...

Jesus is about to return – Folks! We need to be ready. We need to repent. We will only repent if we live in expectancy. Feed your expectancy.

- * *Direct your energy in preparing for the coming of the Lord.*
- * *Your view of yourself should be honest and humble.*
- * *Be determined to help others with God's truth.*
- * *Stand for what is right – even when you know it will cost you greatly.*