

From the look on Mark's face I knew I was in trouble when he asked me to come into his office for a quick talk. Mark had recruited me from Wal-Mart to Target. I had been in position for about 10 months when I was promoted. I was back in his store for a visit. Mark said he had some advice to give me. Now, Mark and I had a great relationship and would hang out outside of work from time to time. He had 3 kids of various ages ranging from elementary to high school. Since we were in the store I thought it was going to be a talk about where I had transferred to, but it ended up being a lecture on what I was becoming. /

Carm was 7 months pregnant, and Mark had concerns about my understanding of what my new expectations of being a father were. "You think you are going to be this great Dad, but really all you are becoming is a glorified pack mule." He said stern faced. I laughed and said, "What are you talking about?" "Laugh all you want Lashley, but knowing what's coming is part of the battle. Nobody you know is going to want to talk to you anymore. In a sense, you will become invisible. They are going to bypass you and want to look at and hold your (1)

baby. They will talk to your wife about feedings, diaper changes, sleeping schedules and even though you are a part of all that you will be shoved aside,” he didn’t smile. “You will go to parks, concerts, social events, to see family and your wife will walk ahead of you with the baby, while you follow with a cooler on wheels, play pen, bouncy chair, diaper bag, blankets, purse, etc. And you better be able to do it in one trip... pack mule my friend.” With that he laughed a little. /

“Here’s the thing,” he said, “When they are toddlers it doesn’t get any better, because now you are not only carrying everything, but they want you to carry them to, if you’re lucky you can talk them into holding your hand instead. When they get a little older its, soccer, ballet, craft classes, acting workshops, t-ball, birthday parties and instrument lessons. You’re still a pack mule, but you’re schlepping around different things, usually heavier things.” The dark look in his eyes told me he wasn’t kidding even if he was at least smiling now. “The sooner you accept your fate and just go with it the better off you will be. If you are lucky, you will be rewarded with barley and hops from time to time... just in liquid fermented form. Now don’t get me wrong. I am (2)

excited for you. Life is a celebration, and this is one heck of a party you are about to go to.” (pause) /

The redemptive power of God’s call is a cause for celebration. It’s like being invited to a party thrown for God’s son that never ends. In today’s scripture Paul says, “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Paul offers words of introduction in his first letter to the Corinthian church, he reminds us of the party favors given to those who have responded to the invitation of fellowship. God enriches, God equips, and God sustains. /

So God enriches us. Verses 5-6 of today’s scripture says, “For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.” (pause) /

The Corinthian church was spiritually rich. Paul writes of two ways in which God had blessed the church. The people were enriched in their speech and in their knowledge. These first-century Christians not only had an ability to proclaim the truth of God to others; they also had an understanding of that truth. / (3)

In Acts 8, Luke tells the story of an Ethiopian eunuch traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip, led by the Spirit of God, joins the chariot, and talks with this man. The Ethiopian is reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He responds, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" So he holds this truth in his hands but has no understanding of its meaning. /

Truth without knowledge can be worthless. For example, I can watch birds flying south for the winter. I see them do so when I'm out walking my dog. Yet specifics as to why or how they know to fly south is a complete mystery to me. I can proclaim the mystery of flying south, yet not understand it. (pause) /

God has enriched (gifted) each believer not only with the power of proclamation but also with knowledge of his will and purpose. Christian can be used by God to proclaim the good news of God because we have a personal knowledge of God. Because of God's enrichment, we proclaim what we know, how God has impacted our lives. (pause) / (4)

God also equips our lives. Verse 7 of today's scripture says, "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." /

Paul offers a word of encouragement, reminding the Christians of Corinth that God has well equipped them for ministry. "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift," writes Paul. When individuals respond to Christ in faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they receive all the spiritual gifts needed to do the work of ministry assigned to them by God." I remember my first "real" summer job. I was sixteen, and for 60 to 80 hours a week, I ranched on a farm just outside of my hometown. On the first morning of work, I was instructed on what clothes would be good to wear for ranching, boots, jeans and tight or tucked in shirts. I would want to get a pocketknife and a pair of pliers or a multi-tool. I was also told not to throw away any of the bailing wire pieces randomly left around on the ground at the ranch as I would be using them often. I was equipped for success at my new job. (pause) /

There is an old expression: "Where God guides, God provides." That's good theology. As we are called into the fellowship of (5)

Christ's kingdom, we are equipped by God to do ministry in the lives of others. We do not lack anything (though perhaps it doesn't always feel the way); we have all we need to love with compassion and witness with sincerity. God blesses us with divine gifts of grace. We are equipped.

(pause) /

We are also sustained by God. Verse 8 of today's scripture reads, "He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (pause) The relationship with humankind, established by God through Christ Jesus, is a permanent relationship. Through Christ, we belong to the forever family of God. We aren't abandoned or forsaken. We are kept strong until the end of our earthly lives when we will be made complete in Christ Jesus. God sustains us in a number of ways. We are fed by God's Word, encouraged by God's Spirit, and forgiven through God's Son. God's sustaining grace is constantly given to us to better help us enjoy fellowship in the Kingdom. Paul offered the same words of assurance to the church at Philippi: "I am confident of this, that the one who (6)

began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (pause) /

///// Party favors remind the partygoer of the joy of the party. As a constant reminder of the joy of knowing Jesus, God enriches our lives, equips us for ministry, and sustains us by his infinite grace. (pause) /

When my friend and colleague Mark shared his apocalyptic vision of being a father to me, a scene from Diehard came to mind. A good Christmas movie, by the way. It's the scene where the cop is driving up to the building and isn't finding anything wrong so Bruce Willis throws something out the window which lands on the hood of the cop's car startling the cop, also causing the bad guys to shoot at the cop's car. Bruce Willis looking down on the seen through a broken window says, "Welcome to the party pal." (pause) /

It was true, about the becoming invisible and becoming a pack mule. I have been both of those things over the years. But God has also equipped me to be more than just a pack mule, to go beyond invisibility. I am and have been a cheerleader, a kisser of sore knees, a splinter remover. I give great hugs, sometimes a little rough, like my (7)

scratchy kisses lately. I teach lessons as a dad and all of it is possible because the Holy Spirit equips me and in that I find Hope. May God enrich your lives, equip you for ministry, and sustain you by God's infinite grace. Amen. ///