

DON'T CALL US, HE'LL CALL YOU

ACTS 5:12-21 NOVEMBER 6, 2019

In her book *Got Your Attention?* author Sam Horn promises to tell you “how to create intrigue and connect with anyone.” The publisher’s description says: “Sam Horn explores...what it takes to really connect with others and communicate clearly and compellingly.” The book, apparently, points out that researchers have found that human beings now have a *shorter* attention span than *goldfish*¹ and so the book attempts to help you earn the “interest, trust and buy-in” of others.

The founder of *Travelocity* said the “book shows how to quickly win respect so people are motivated to listen.” Another entrepreneur and philanthropist said, “[this book gives] powerful insights on how to build a movement that lasts.”²

Attention, trust, clear communication, building a movement that lasts. All of those are good things and all of those things were happening in the book of Acts. What we’ve been reading in chapter 5 the last few weeks is very similar to what we read in chapter 2. After Pentecost, many were believing, signs and wonders were being performed. Now *even more* people were being saved, the miracles are still abundant. And we’ll find that Jerusalem is no longer big enough to contain the work of God. Surrounding towns were getting word of what was happening, as the Gospel began traveling out of the city and on down the road.

Throughout all of this, in a passage full of power and miracles and dramatic revival, I’m struck by how *passive* the apostles seem. Don’t get me wrong - they’re busy. They’re ministering. They’re being faithful. But, no matter what’s going on around them, they seem completely laid-back. Whether they’re in prayer or working a miracle, whether they’re in jail or watching thousands of people get saved, they just keep doing the same thing.

If Acts 2 through 5 were happening today, I imagine there would be some who would pull them aside and say, “You’re not taking full advantage of these once in a lifetime opportunities here. You need to *leverage* your influence and make some moves. It’s time to enter phase two.” Yet, consistently, we see the Apostles *not* working out some ambitious plan. There’s been no strategy sessions. No market research. No restructuring to maximize team effectiveness. No media blitz.

During this historic period, what *should* they have been doing? More importantly, as members of the Church ourselves who are to *continue* the work of God around the world, what should *you and I* be doing? This is *the* question when it comes to our part in God’s work, right? But the problem is that we cannot predict what is going to happen in our own lives or in the community around us. We know the big picture of what God is going to accomplish in this world, but whether you and I have 5 years or 5 days left to live in His service, we simply don’t know. We don’t know what opportunities might present themselves to us. We don’t know if God might do something unusual in our midst. We hope and we pray and we invite Him to do great things, but we simply don’t know. *And* we don’t know what’s going to be happening in the world around us. We cannot predict whether Hanford is going to become the next Silicon valley or the next Sandy Hook or if it will just stay Hanford.

What we *do* know is *how* to walk faithfully in a world that is unpredictable, obeying a God who does not always work in a predictable way. We walk faithfully by obeying what God has revealed and by

¹ <https://www.iflscience.com/brain/do-you-have-lower-attention-span-goldfish/>

² <https://www.amazon.com/Got-Your-Attention-Intrigue-Connect-ebook/dp/B00SGET4UO/>

following in the **calling** He has given us. *What has God called you to do? What hasn't God called you to do?* That's the question. Not "what do I think God should do?" Some of the worst mistakes made in the lives of God's people are when they're out of sync with God's calling. Jonah. Samson. David.

In our passage tonight, I believe we see a remarkable example of apostles showing us how to navigate an unpredictable life, not relying on human reasoning, but rather on the leading of the Holy Spirit. They show us a powerful dedication to *calling*. They knew what they were called to do. They were *focused* on that. In the mean time, they stayed *flexible* and were able to adapt to whatever situation they found themselves in.

So, let's begin at verse 12 of chapter 5.

Acts 5:12 - ¹² Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they would all meet in Solomon's Colonnade.

Why is it that the beginning of the Church age was so full of miracles, whereas today they seem few and far between? Many Bible commentators will say that the signs and wonders were primarily God's way of *validating* the message of the Gospel. They say that, once the apostles died and the New Testament was complete, there was no longer any need for miracles. And, in fact, many of them say that there are *not* miracles anymore, since we have the completed Word of God. There are a couple of problems with that perspective. First of all, it requires us to reject the countless reports of miraculous work throughout church history, up through the present day. Missions organizations, in particular, still regularly report the the supernatural *is* taking place in many parts of the world. The other problem is that we see later in Acts that there were Christians who were *not* apostles, working signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. If their only real purpose was to validate the message of the 12, why would non-apostles be included?

While it seems clear to us that God can and still does work miracles through His people, we can't deny they are much fewer than what we're reading about here. Why is that? Well, first of all, it seems to be God's pattern to pour out many more miracles at certain points of redemptive history. For example: When Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan to take hold of the land, miracles were a big factor. Walls were falling down. The sun was standing still in the sky. Fast forward to David. He's no less spiritual of a man. He's no less important in God's eyes. He's leading the people as they *expand* the kingdom. Yet his reign is not accompanied by the kinds of miracles we see in Joshua. But later, as the era of the prophets began, miracles started to become common place again.

Another factor is that we know, *from* the teaching of the apostles, that, in this Church age, God's plan is, generally, to show His strength in our weakness. To show His power in our suffering.

We're told here that the Christians were still meeting there in the Temple complex, despite the warning they had received from the Sanhedrin. They were undeterred and had a unified courage.

Acts 5:13 - ¹³ None of the rest dared to join them, but the people praised them highly.

The rest here, many scholars believe, refer to *unbelievers*. The sense is that, in the wake of the incident with Ananias and Sapphira, there were no posers trying to sidle up to the Church and just fake it. One other possible translation is: "And of the Levites non dared to prevent them [from

holding meetings in the Temple].”³ The apostles were not only seen as men with great power, they were also esteemed as men of integrity and righteousness, which they were. They weren’t fakers or hypocrites. They practiced what they preached. They lived out their Christianity faithfully.

Acts 5:14 - ¹⁴ Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—crowds of both men and women.

More than ever, multitudes of people were being born again into the family of Christ. The language here is a good reminder that the goal of our ministry and evangelism is not to add people to a *cause* or to a particular group, but that they be added *to the Lord* and His forever family.

Now, we would love to see crowds of people here in Hanford, rushing together to give their lives to Jesus. We would love to be a part of a genuine awakening and revival. That’s not what’s happening right now. “Well, then what should we do to make that happen?” Well, what did the apostles do to make it happen? Nothing! They were simply “doing” what they had been doing even *before* Pentecost: Meeting together. Teaching God’s word. Praying. Worshiping. The Apostles weren’t working any kind of program to make revival happen. They were just faithful and available and sticking to what they had been told to do.

Acts 5:15-16 - ¹⁵ As a result, they would carry the sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ In addition, a large group came together from the towns surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Commentators disagree over whether Peter’s shadow was actually healing people. Some say it was just a superstition of the people and so, *of course*, the shadow wasn’t *actually* helping anyone. On the other hand, verse 16 could easily be lumping in these shadow folks when it says, “they all were healed.” It’s not unheard of since, in Acts 19, we’ll find that some of Paul’s handkerchiefs were successfully used to heal the sick and cast out demons.

The things that stand out to me are that, first, we’re seeing an overflow out of Jerusalem. The story of Christ’s Church is spreading. In a few short years it will have reached the far corners of the empire and it continues to grow and spread today. Nothing can stop the spread of the Gospel.

But second, (and this is more to the point of living out our callings) this whole situation with Peter’s shadow reveals the fact that he was not *stopping* to heal each of these people! At least on some of these days, they brought them out, he kept walking. This is surprising behavior if you’re a miracle worker! But even though Peter was *clearly* flexible to be used by God in unusual ways, though he was *sensitive* to opportunities like with the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate, he didn’t see himself as a *miracle worker*. If you asked him, he’d have said, “That’s not my job. *My* job is to be a *witness*.” I know that’s true because he says it over and over again. In Acts 1:8 Jesus told them “you’re going to be My witnesses.” And Peter took that calling to heart. That’s what he was about. Acts 1:22 he says, “We need someone to replace Judas to become a *witness* with us.” He says in verse 25 that *that* is the apostolic service. Later, in Acts 2:32, he identifies himself as a *witness* in his very first sermon. He does so again in Acts 3:15. He’ll do so *again* in Acts 5:32. If you asked him, he would say, “I’m *called* to be a *witness*. *That’s* the job.” He was *flexible* but *focused* on living out that calling. And so, when revival is breaking out, or when miracles start happening or when persecution hits, we

³ F.F. Bruce *The Acts Of The Apostles*

don't see him saying, "Ok, let's change the program." He just keeps walking in his calling. And, *sometimes*, that meant walking *past* people who were there for a healing.

In the mean time, we see that God did not need scheming or marketing or brand development to get the word out. People were coming from *outside* Jerusalem now, without the apostles going on tour or buying ad space or starting a viral marketing campaign.

We also note some powerful realities about Christianity itself in these verses. We're seeing in this text that Christianity actually makes a difference in the lives of believers. *And*, it works for everyone. It doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, healthy or sick, from this town or another. It doesn't matter if you're from the first century or the *twenty*-first century. Christianity is just as real and just as powerful and just as life-changing as ever. It works in Jerusalem. It works in Rome. It works in Hanford. It works in San Francisco. Real Christianity crosses every boundary.

Acts 5:17 - ¹⁷ Then the high priest took action. He and all his colleagues, those who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

How did Luke get this insider information about their jealousy? Was it a word of knowledge? Maybe a whistleblower came forward later and gave him an interview. I'm sure their jealousy was *obvious*. These guys kinda wore their sin on their sleeve. But here we see that they were jealous of the influence that the apostles had over the people. But, it's really just that they were held captive by the Devil, who was making new moves against the church. The apostles weren't really *wielding* any influence. They weren't seeking followers for themselves. They weren't trying to win elections or take power. But the high priest had had enough.

Acts 5:18-20 - ¹⁸ So they arrested the apostles and put them in the city jail. ¹⁹ But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple complex, and tell the people all about this life."

With all the miracles going on and all the work being accomplished, why didn't God just *not allow* them to be arrested? That had happened in Jesus' life. Or why did these men who were casting out demons, healing the sick and doing all sorts of signs and wonders, why did they need an *angel* to come and get them out? Didn't Moses hold up his *own* hands and the sea was parted? As I investigate the story, there doesn't seem to be a lot of rhyme or reason to "why this and not that."

The truth is, in the Bible, sometimes God leaves people in jail, sometimes He sets them free. Sometimes people are healed, sometimes He says His grace is sufficient. Sometimes we want to go to Asia, God wants you to go to Macedonia. Sometimes you want to build a Temple, God says, "That's not your calling."

This is why it is absolutely essential that we be filled with the Holy Spirit and know what God has called us to do. Paul explained to the Corinthians that, "no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." And that "now God has revealed these things to us *by* the Spirit."

So, here, the Apostles aren't making a plan. They're not scheming. They're not trying to help God out with what He should decide to do in the situation. Throughout this passage they're *silent*. Simply walking with God consistently and being full of the Spirit. Now, the angel turns them loose and, effectively, says, "Go keep doing what you've already been doing. Go preach in the temple all about the life of Christ." And we note that the angel encourages them not to just preach *part* of the

message, the parts that are popular or palatable or make for good headlines, but to preach *all* the words of the Christian life.

Acts 5:21a - ²¹ In obedience to this, they entered the temple complex at daybreak and began to teach...

I don't know what the hours of the Temple were, but it seems they went right away, as soon as they could. Daybreak. I'm not sure how many people were coming to the temple at dawn. Maybe their very first audience that morning was made up of priests and Levites. We know from Acts 6 that many of the priests *were* getting saved, thanks to the willingness of the Christians to preach to them.

So, here's the deal: The apostles were just doing what they were *called* to do. Commentators criticize them for not taking the Gospel out to Judea and Samaria. They suggest that God *sent* the persecution because the Christians were doing such a bad job getting the word out. But that's not what we're seeing. The message *was* spreading. Crowds of people *were* being saved. Other towns *are* getting the word. Heaven was breaking through in all sorts of miraculous signs and wonders. And the apostles are being faithful to their calling. Jesus had called them to be witnesses and that's what they were doing. Along the way, they were ready to respond and be used in unusual situations as the Spirit saw fit. They were *focused* but *flexible*. And the results were wonderful as God moved.

So, what about us? What should we be doing? Well, what are you called to do? We find our *general* callings in God's word. Things that we *all* are commanded to be a part of. But God has a *specific* calling for your life. I can't tell you what that is. But the Holy Spirit can and He *wants* to. Your job is to discover it and then answer that call. And then, what God does with you and in your midst is His business. No matter what it is, it will be great. And it *probably* won't be what we could've predicted. At least not all of it. Because God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts.

If you pay attention to pop culture at all you've probably heard more than a few things about Kanye West's recent conversion and his new album *Jesus Is King*. A lot of people are talking about it, not just around the water cooler, but on NBC News and in Time Magazine and on Jimmy Kimmel Live.

I don't have anything to say about Kanye West or his album, but what I find interesting is where this all started. Because, all over the country we have people talking about this and Christianity and there's this big spotlight on the issue. And here's what happened: Somebody who works for Kanye West suggested to him that he go to church. So, at some point, Kanye West did that. For a couple weeks in a row he slipped into the service at a church in Santa Clarita that meets on the campus of Masters University.⁴ The sources I found said the church is maybe 400 people. And the pastor there preached the Gospel. Eventually Kanye had a conversation with him and then another, then started meeting with him weekly. And now the entire nation is having this conversation about Jesus Christ.

That pastor, as far as I know, did not get into a meeting and say, "How can we get people talking about Jesus coast to coast. I know...let's get a celebrity here." Rather, it seems that the Christians there at Placerita Bible Church were just doing what they always did, doing what God called them to do, and the Lord *unpredictably* decided to use them for something that we couldn't have predicted.

We're to walk in our calling according to God's leading. That's the deal. Systems cannot replace or anticipate what God might want to do. But the Spirit will *show* us as we follow Him and focus ourselves on answering our call while we stay flexible to whatever God might want to do.

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2019/10/october-web-only/2019-10-01-masters-seminary-grad-takes-kanyes-crowds-to-church.html>