

MARCHING ORDERS

7 Words I Heard From God While On Sabbatical Regarding The Next 7-10 Years

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It's good to be home! I have been on sabbatical from my duties at Lilburn Alliance Church and the College of Prayer International for the past three months. I have been able to devote these days to seek the Lord, draw near to Him, stand in His presence and listen to His voice. More than needing the time to catch my breath and rest, I needed to hear and receive from God what I need for this next season.

Praise the Lord! My time could not have been more profitable. Sherry and I enjoyed every minute of it. We spent about a third of the time travelling, a third of the time with family and a third of the time enjoying life together.

Because each of you prayerfully invested in our time away, and because so many of you have asked, I have decided to do something I rarely do - to put in writing the seven very personal words I distinctly heard God say. I suspect that these words will resonate in your spirit as well. Let's initiate a dialogue on the seven words - I would love to hear your thoughts.

1. **Die to Self**

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

When God first spoke to me on the front end of my sabbatical, He distinctly said, "Die to self." I argued, "Die to self? Really, Lord? Is that really the first thing you need to tell me on sabbatical? Here I am trying to seek you for the next 7-10 years, and you're telling me to die to self? Is this really the place you want to start?" Within the next 20 minutes, God rolled back the curtain of my inner life and revealed more ugliness, pride, lust, deception, insensitivity, selfishness and greed than I could believe. Ouch! Much to my disappointment, I must now admit that I have been led in repentance to renounce the flesh more in the past two years than in the previous 25 put together. I can't exactly explain it, but it is true. *Was I blind? Self-deceived?* I don't know. All I know is that when I hit my 60's, it was like hitting a second adolescence. I admit with a deep sense of disappointment that there is yet much un-crucified flesh that Christ has graciously been bringing to the surface in my soul. I have actually journaled a dozen pages of insights into "sanctification in the sixties."

Powerful Scriptures were used like a surgeon's knife to lead me as I died daily with Christ. Colossians 3:1-11, Romans 8:1-9, Romans 6:1-14, Ephesians 4:22-24, Romans 8:12-16. In a



new and fresh way, I now wholeheartedly embrace the words of Jesus, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"* Luke 9:23. I wholeheartedly agree with Paul, *"May I never boast except in the cross of Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* Galatians 6:14.

God told me yesterday, "You are a leader. In order for you to lead your people where I want them to go in the next 7-10 years, you need to take them the way of the cross. In order to do that, you need to go the way of the cross first. My resurrection life shines brightest coming out of the tomb."

2. Church - The Power of Unity

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:23

As I awoke in Barcelona, Spain, I found myself quoting John 17, the chapter thousands of us were memorizing as part of the Chapter-A-Month Club. After an early morning run where I again quoted John 17, I showered and got ready for the day. I was met by Pastor Juan Zuniga and taken to see the sights. As we walked through the city, we became enthralled in a spontaneous crowd formed of 1,000 cheering Spaniards. The city square in which we stood was alive with energy. Everyone pushed together toward a central focal point.

They were working together, interlocking arms and cheering wildly. It was magnetic. Then, a man who obviously knew what he was doing climbed above the mass into the middle. Then another, and another and another. Quickly, a human pyramid began to take shape. It was impressive. Exhilarating. Full of the joy of accomplishment. I only wished I was part of the inner group. I didn't need to climb on top - in fact I'm glad I didn't! But I would have loved to be part of the group standing shoulder to shoulder with their feet on the ground, lifting the others up to greater heights. Before long, the pyramid stood 8-12 layers tall. Incredible.

The Holy Spirit suddenly said to me, *"Fred, this is the Church. This is what I've called you to. The next 7-10 years will be the season during which you will lift others up to greater heights. To go further than you have."* Those words struck a chord in me. I felt them then and I feel them now. It's in me. God has put in me an overwhelming, all-encompassing love for His Church. I embrace my role to rally a similar dynamic unity into the church around the focal point of Christ and lift others up.

I am now entering the third season of life. The first season (0-30 years) is the age of learning, listening and decision-making. The second season (30-60 years) is the season of building, expanding, developing and establishing. The third season (60-whatever) is the season of mentoring, empowerment and investing in others. God very clearly defined this next season of my life as a season of mentoring others by lifting them to greater heights. I look forward to serving the wonderful team of leaders Christ has given me. I resolve to serve you as fully as possible.

3. Seek

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13

God has unmistakably said to me, *"My son, I've given you a seeking heart and the gift of leadership to call forth seekers in these last days. Seek me for your family. Seek me for your wife. Seek me for your children. Seek me for your grandchildren. Seek me for your church, your neighborhood, your city. Seek me for your country and for the world. Most men's love will grow cold*



as wickedness is multiplied, but you are part of the resistance. You will call forth seekers to seek me with all their hearts. You will lead many."

Nothing can replace a seeking heart. No amount of knowledge. No years of experience. No degrees, titles, honors, or awards will replace a seeking heart. Yes, everything is by grace, and God gives us the grace of seeking. To seek first. Seek early. Seek hard. Seek until. The secrets of the kingdom belong to the seekers.

Not only will the next 7-10 years be dominated by mentoring and mobilizing seekers, the rest of my life will be characterized by it. Bring it on!



4. Urgency

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." John 9:4

If there is one word that summarizes the difference in me as I return from sabbatical, it is *urgency*. It was no coincidence that I was in Paris only a few hours before the terrible Muslim terrorist attacks that shook France to its core. It is no coincidence that the worst attacks on U.S. soil since 9/11 in San Bernardino took place on my sabbatical. There was no coincidence that right outside the window of our guest house in Bethlehem, a young man was shot in the street moments after we arrived. And there was no coincidence that we learned while staying in Nazareth that they suspect 50 ISIS cells to be in their city alone. It does not even require a prophetic gift to discern that time is running out. Human history is wrapping up.



Jesus was a man who lived with urgency because He was consistently aware of what time it was. *"My time has not yet come" John 2:4. "The right time for me has not yet come" John 7:6. "The hour has come" John 12:23. "Now is the time for the judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out" John 12:31.* Urgency does not mean anxiety, hurry or insecurity. Urgency does, however, mean focus, priority, strategy and efficiency.

Having read 25-plus books on leadership over the past three months, I realize that one of the gifts God has given me as a leader is the ability to focus - to focus on getting a task done and to bring others with me to see it fulfilled. Paul had this gift. *"Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" Ephesians 5:15. Lord Jesus, activate in me the grace to live with a laser-like focus, and rally people with me to finish the task of reaching a lost world through a revived church. I believe you will do it!*

5. Last Days Oil

"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...he will bring glory to me...the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." John 16:13-15

I am more convinced than ever that time is running out. Human history is building to its vortex. Our days are numbered. The darkening is coming. The days of deception are being unleashed. The man of lawlessness is standing in the gates. *"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." 1 Peter 4:7 (2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Timothy 3, 2 Peter 2, Jude).*

An open door to strategically serve the persecuted church has been one of the greatest honors God has given me. It's been humbling to serve Christians in Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, China and North Africa. These believers who live with the reality that they could be killed tomorrow have shown me what is truly going in the world more than CNN or Fox News has. I have learned that the more persecuted the church, the more they are desperate for God. Desperate for prayer.

Oblivious to denominational walls. The persecuted church does not argue over the style of worship or anything else for that matter. Those whose lives are on the line love Jesus with an intensity and urgency that causes all lesser issues to fade away. As Peter declared at Pentecost, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" Acts 2:17. These words are as relevant today as they were then.

6. Lost People Matter

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10

Looking biblically at the depravity of people is like looking over the rim of the Grand Canyon with our toes dangling over the edge. The only difference is that with human depravity, there is no river at the bottom. In fact, there is no bottom. None. People apart from Christ are lost. Utterly lost. Neighbors. Parents. Children. Coworkers. Lost. Utterly lost.

People are lost and they are also valuable. They were valuable enough for God to send His Son. They are valuable enough for Christ to die. Lost people matter -- they matter to God, and they matter to me. Since they were worth it for Christ to die for them, they are certainly worth enough for me to get to know. To pray for. To bless. To love. To invest time and energy in. To listen to. To hurt with. To share their life, their issues, their struggles.

Jesus came on a search and rescue mission; He sends us on a search and rescue mission also. "As the father has sent me, I am sending you" John 20:21. Not only for the next 7-10 years, but for the rest of my life, I will join Christ in seeking and saving the lost. I will, by the grace of God, take others with me.

7. Compassion

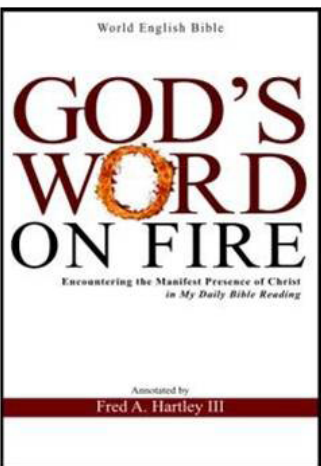
"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion." Colossians 3:12

The Holy Spirit emphatically said to me, "Fred, trust your compassion. I have unleashed within you a significant deposit of compassion. This next season of your life will be dominated by compassion. Not everyone will understand. But trust it. It will prevail. Every new ministry must be birthed in compassion. You have never made a wrong decision out of compassion - and you never will. Compassion never fails. I will use you to build a culture of compassion. Jesus built a culture of compassion and so will you."

Needless to say, these words are overwhelming. Gripping. Convicting. Consuming. As I look at these seven words all together, they begin with Die to Self and end with Compassion. Like book ends. Perfect. As self dies, compassion lives. It all makes sense to me.

Over these three months, I have read over 32 books of the Bible, most recently Proverbs. The one word that ministered to me most deeply was the word poor. "If a man shuts his hear to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered" Proverbs 21:13. James, the half brother of Jesus, said, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" James 1:27. The Lord said to me, "Fred you have been better at keeping yourself from being polluted by the world than you have been at visiting orphans and widows."

Ouch. True. These next 7- 10 years, should God give them to me, will be characterized by compassion. By the grace of God, I will resist the tendency of aging that tends to make us callous, brittle, inflexible, cynical and jaded. Rather, I receive from Christ the grace to be tender-hearted, caring, flexible, gracious, forgiving, kind, with increased capacity for compassion.



Yes, it's done!

My annotated Bible is due to be released this week - in time for Christmas! God's Word on Fire: Encountering the Manifest Presence of God in My Daily Bible Reading will be digitally available for purchase on Amazon Kindle Books. A new Bible for the new year!

It may surprise you, but the Bible is not a religious book; it's a love letter written by the God of the universe to you. Though it was written many years ago, it is a miracle book that is just as relevant as the evening news and just as personal as a text message from your best friend. It has been prepared as a life-giving, Christ-encountering Bible full of practical tools to maximize your daily Bible reading. The version of the Bible used is the World English Bible (WEB), a very good evangelical translation that follows a tight, literal translation.

To top it all off, Sherry and I were able to spend 2 ½ weeks with our precious daughter, Andrea; her husband, Josh; and their active children in Dallas. Most of you know that two years ago, Andrea battled cancer, and God was gracious and healed her. At the time she had four girls. Now God miraculously gave them a son, Josiah James, born November 16, 2015. Josiah means, "The Lord has healed." Only God could have written this story. Glory to God!

It seems to me that the trajectory of my life will continue to take me, by the grace of God, in the same direction as pastor of Lilburn Alliance Church in Northeast Atlanta and President of the College of Prayer to the nations.

Now, however, I will have sharper focus, greater urgency and more compassion. I am so thankful we get to do it together.

Be courageous!

Fred A. Hartley III



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