

Human Strategy vs. the Holy Spirit: Is It a Fair Dichotomy?

PARSONS, G.H. (2002) Human strategy vs. the Holy Spirit: is it a fair dichotomy? *Mission Frontiers*, Jul-Aug, p. 22. Available at: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/human-strategy-vs.-the-holy-spirit> [Accessed 20/06/13]

If you've been around missions "junkies" as I call them (I'm one myself!), you have seen it. It comes in many shapes and sizes, but one of two basic approaches is involved: either planners or dreamers.

Planners like to lay out all the details and have things in place for various contingencies.

Dreamers have a sense for what God wants to do, and they want to follow the Spirit's lead, so they go down to the airport and decide then which flight to board.

Planners get upset when things happen they didn't plan for. Dreamers don't get upset because they figure that this turn of events was what God wanted.

Obviously, I've built a straw man here. The characteristics on these extremes on this continuum are rarely found in one person. But it illustrates the tension present in trying to mix our culture's penchant for organization and what the Scriptures seems to demonstrate as the leading of the Holy Spirit.

There is no question that God has a plan. Space here won't allow the 12 hours of Biblical teaching you get in the first five lessons of the *Perspectives* course on this or how it links with Strategy. (See www.perspectives.org for more info on that.)

However, there is a determination in the midst of Christ's life that points to His awareness and accomplishment of what God wanted. In John's Gospel, He says that He was sent to do the will of the Father and to accomplish His work.

While Christ's particular work was different than ours, He was no less dependent on God during His time on earth than we are. God, it seems,

directed His life and ministry at every step. Christ spent time in prayer to know what the Father wanted.

There are a number of references in John's Gospel that refer to Jesus working on specific things (4:34; 5:17, 30; 6:38-40; 8:42; 9:4; 12:48-49; 19:28). In Matthew 16:18b, he says, *"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*

Ultimately we see the gates of the new Jerusalem open, day and night, as the nations walk by the light of the glory of God as they bring their glory (given to them by Him) into it (Rev. 21:22-27). Building His church is central to Christ's purpose.

We can see that the plans and activities of Jesus on a day-to-day basis were not quite as haphazard as a surface reading of the Gospels might lead some to believe. Yet, even with the purposefulness at the core of his activities, Jesus never seems to be put off by people. He never seems to be interrupted - that may be the hardest lesson for many of us to follow.

On the other hand, He seems to put some people off. He doesn't seem to care what people of power think of Him. He is not trying to impress anyone - except the Father.

How do we apply all of this to our strategy or planning?

1. We, like Christ, must totally depend on God. We must spend the time with Him in His Word and prayer to be sure we are hearing from Him.
2. We must be accountable to those He has put around us. He has given us further instructions about His Body, the Church. This can be a hard one - especially for those with vision who want to rush ahead at times. At the same time, those who are inclined a bit more toward planning and organizing tend to try and constrain those with "knife between the teeth" vision a bit more than they like.
3. Learn how to fit in, given our gifting and background. On the global level, there are times when those of us from the U.S. are way too forceful, entrepreneurial and independent— even those who are not dreamers. If there is one thing most folks in the non-Western world can't understand, it is that kind of independence. We see it as the foundation of our nation. They see it as weakness and an

excuse to do our own thing and not being connected—to families, church, or others in community.

Learn how to fit in, given our gifting and background.... There are roles for all of us in this global task. God has given the task to all of us. As the international scene changes, we need to draw that much closer to God and those we serve among to effectively work out His plans for today - in the power of the Holy Spirit!

There are roles for all of us in this global task. God has given the task to all of us. As the international scene changes, we need to draw that much closer to God and those we serve among to effectively work out His plans for today—in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He's been on staff at the USCWM for 19 years.