

Following the Cloud, Listening for Trumpets

Numbers 9:15-23 and 10:1-10

Tim Sanders, former chief solutions officer at *Yahoo!*, once suggested the following about figuring out what is truly important in our lives.

Take your life and all the things that you think are important, put them in one of three categories. Name the categories GLASS, METAL, and RUBBER.

Things of rubber, when you drop them, will bounce back. No harm is really done if these things get dropped. So, for instance, if I miss a Seahawks' game, or getting to that "must-see" movie, my life will bounce along fine. Missing a game or even a season of football will not alter my marriage or my spiritual life. I can take or leave things in the RUBBER category.

Things of metal, when dropped, create a lot of noise. But you can recover from the drop. If you miss a meeting at work, you can get the CliffsNotes. If you don't balance your checkbook, your bank likely keeps very good electronic records, and will notify you if there's a problem. Yeah, dropping METAL things will create some noise in your life, but you can recover from it.

Things of glass, when dropped, shatter into pieces and will never be the same again. They may be able, perhaps, to be glued back together, but they are altered forever. Likely be missing some pieces; probably can't hold water again without leaking. The consequences of this brokenness will forever affect how the GLASS is used.

You're the only person who knows what those things are that you can't afford to drop. More than likely, they have a lot to do with your relationships with spouse, children, family, and friends.ⁱ

He's wrong, of course. No, not about the categories, but he's wrong in saying "You're the only person who knows what those things are that you can't afford to drop." There's at least One Other Being, who exists in 3 Persons, who knows *exactly what* is GLASS in your life, and how to handle it. Your heavenly Father knows what's truly important in your life. Your living Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, knows what is truly precious in your life. Your holy resident, the Holy Spirit of God, knows unerringly what in your life simply cannot be dropped without irreparable consequences.

And so, what we REALLY need --- especially for what is GLASS in our lives --- is God's guidance, the Lord Jesus' direction, the incomparable coaching of the Spirit. Especially when we are journeying in the wild. So, what does it look like to receive and follow and be responsive to the Lord's direction, especially when it comes to "that which is glass" on our journey?

Perhaps you will be surprised to think that there are answers, illustrated, in the book of Numbers, chapters 9-10? Find p. 118 (ESV), Numbers 9:15 in our exploration of this truth

BY FAITH
God's children FOLLOW GOD'S PRESENCE,
RESPONSIVE to GOD'S SIGNALS

I. BY FAITH, God's children FOLLOW GOD'S PRESENCE

The Cloud Covering the Tabernacle Numbers 9:15 On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. ¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. ¹⁷ And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped. ¹⁸ At the command of the Lord the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the Lord they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp.

¹⁹ Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not set out.

²⁰ Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the Lord they remained in camp; then according to the command of the Lord they set out. ²¹ And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. ²² Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out.

²³ At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out. They kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.

This is one of the places in the story of Israel in the Scriptures where God's people shine!

They understood that their God sought to **personally express His presence** *in the middle* of their lives together, in this specially designed worship center. But it was also His plan to **personally lead them** to where they needed to go and when they needed to go.

How utterly amazing this must have been. A suspended tower of fire over the tabernacle – surrounded by a cloud during the daylight hours, burning brilliantly at dusk and through the entire night—an inferno like that which consumed a tower in London this past week.

It is in Bible passages like these where you and I must be active, not passive. Not simply to read it and go on but to lean in and ask questions thru which the Holy Spirit may unlock the meaning:

- What is happening here?
- Why is God doing this?
- What is He teaching His people?
- What is He forming as a life habit?
- And, where else do I see what I'm observing here – about following the Lord -- affirmed in New Testament teaching?

By FAITH, God's children *trusting the leading of God's presence*-- moving when the Presence moves; "at the command of the Lord." Stopping when the Presence stops, "at the command of the Lord." What does that look like today?

Churches – groups of Jesus’ disciples – must have the very presence of the Lord in their midst, a true sense that He is in the middle, and that together, we are moving as the Lord Jesus moves, going where the Lord Jesus wants us to go.

Revelation 1:12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Families, homes must have a sense that because mom and dad and all the kids are God’s children together--Jesus’ disciples--that we are a unit that puts the Lord at the center of who we are and what we do and where we are going.

- Hey dad...it’s Father’s day...a day for you to square your shoulders again, look yourself in the mirror and ask, *“How am I helping my family understand and practice following the presence of God in our lives?”*
- Hey mom and dad...how very much your kids need you to help them frame their lives and their future in terms of this simple challenge: Where is God’s presence in your life leading you? Leading you to school and in school? Leading you to date (is God’s presence in your dating relationship)? Leading you to make key decisions? Our kids deserve our mentoring them to know what it means to follow the Lord in all things, every day

Men and women – **businesses you own and run, careers which you are developing** – these things, because you belong to Christ and you are the Holy Spirit’s tabernacle, must and can have the presence and leading of God in them. Because you are very aware of God’s presence, and intentionally eager to have God’s leading.

Churches, families, businesses and careers... we all individually must have this framework – “I’m doing this in my life; I’m going here in my life; I’m in this spot in my life...because I’ a tabernacle of God’s presence (1 Cor 6:19-20), and through Scripture and by the Spirit God’s presence leads me...” especially about the things which are GLASS (most important) in my life”

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy pow’rful hand.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar*

*Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliv'rer, strong Deliv'rer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield*

BY FAITH
God's children FOLLOW GOD'S PRESENCE...

II. BY FAITH, God's children are responsive to GOD'S SIGNALS.

The Silver Trumpets Numbers 10:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp. ³ And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁴ But if they blow only one, then the chiefs, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall gather themselves to you.

It appears that the last preparation the Israelites were to make before beginning their journey north was the crafting of and use of...and the paying attention to...TWO SILVER TRUMPETS—trumpets fashioned and played by the Sons of Aaron (10:8) with energy so that in a moment's notice, two-million Israelites could together know what God wanted them to do. So, what did God signal through the use of these trumpets?

First, to gain the people's **READY ATTENTION ABOUT** what's **NEXT**. Sometimes LONG blasts were used to summon the whole congregation around the tabernacle, or to summon just the leadership of the tribes. Perhaps one long blast called for the nimble breaking of camp – the cloud/God was moving and so the tribes on the EAST were to go first, then those on the SOUTH, followed by the Levites carrying the tabernacle, then those on the WEST, followed by those on the NORTH. A second long blast signaled the beginning of the march.

Second, short, urgent trumpet blasts **SOUNDED AN ALARM** – an enemy had been sighted, there was a need to get protected and battle-ready, and it was time to go to WAR. Verse 9 is very interesting...urgent trumpet blasts signaled, "We won't win any battle without the Lord."

⁹ And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, *that you may be remembered before the Lord your God*, and you shall be saved from your enemies.

But third, the trumpets were also to be used to **CELEBRATE and WORSHIP** (10:10)

¹⁰ On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings.

They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I am the Lord your God."

Responding to God's TRUMPETS – TO MOVE...TO LEAN INTO GOD IN BATTLES...TO

CELEBRATE and WORSHIP.

- Numbers 10:8 “The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations.” [Every generation should learn **to listen and respond** to God’s signals]
- Numbers 10:10b...reminders of us before God, reminders to us of God’s sovereign presence in our lives. [Every generation **understanding how desperately we need God** to be aware of us, to be the most important, sovereign, active presence in our lives]

Do I have your permission to ask us the two obvious questions from a passage like this?

Obvious Question Number One – what would happen to Israel if they ignored the trumpet signals?

Think about it. The Fiery Cloud moves, taking them where they need to be and when...and they simply ignore it...and God himself leaves them behind. Or the short blasts signal a strong enemy is approaching ready to tear the encampments and the people in them apart...and no one gets ready, no one aligns in an order for protection, no warrior straps it on and gets prayerfully, dependently prepared. What would happen to Israel if they ignored God’s trumpets?

Obvious Question Two – how responsive am I when God sends a clear, trumpet signal into my ears? I hear it...but what do I do with it?

- A young man once asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus’ trumpet call to him was to get rid of the stuff in his life (his possessions) and follow Him. A clear trumpet call... ignored.
- Jesus directly told the Pharisees that unless they believed in Him, they would die in their sins. A clear trumpet call... ignored
- Jesus directly told Pilate “I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” And all Pilate would do was to start a relativistic argument with Jesus about “What is truth?” A clear trumpet call... ignored.
- Paul reminded King Agrippa that the King knew the prophets and could see how Jesus – as Messiah -- had fulfilled all the Scriptures had predicted. And all Agrippa could do was to wave Paul off. A clear trumpet call... ignored.

Those are all negative examples. But positively, think about the joys of not only hearing God’s signals, but responding to them! God’s clear leading in your life, God’s wonderful presence in your life, being where you are because God has brought you there, prevailing in battles because you trusted in God’s strength to protect and overcome.

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CONCLUSION

Sometimes, because every human being is made in and expresses the image of God, singularly important truth can come from an unexpected source. From someone we may not agree with about a lot of things, but nonetheless became an instrument of an important, if not life-shaping idea. In the 13th century, a Persian prophet from the region we know of today as Iran, whose shortened name was Rumi,ⁱⁱ made this insightful remark:

There is one thing we must all do. If we do everything else but that one thing, we will be lost. And if we do nothing else but that one thing, we will have lived a glorious life.ⁱⁱⁱ

What would you identify as that “one thing”?

My candidate:

***FOLLOW HIS PRESENCE,
RESPOND TO HIS DIRECTION***

3 questions

#1 What are THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS – those things made of glass – IN MY LIFE? Things that I cannot afford to mishandle, or drop. If I do, they and I will never be the same?

- ✓ Your marriage
- ✓ Your intentional discipleship investments in your kids
- ✓ How you run your business? Pursue your career?

#2 When it comes to the most important things – AM I HANDLING THOSE THINGS BY FAITH? Am I putting God’s presence and God’s leading in the middle of those things? Am I listening to God’s signals – His Word, His Spirit, His Wisdom – about those things? Am I following His presence, and responding to His direction?

- ✓ “Is God making My Day?”
- ✓ “Is the Spirit flowing through me?”
- “How are my investments doing?” (LIFE QUESTIONS)

#3 Is there any SIGNAL FROM GOD right now that I am ignoring? Because I want to, or because I’m not willing to trust what I’m hearing from God?

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ⁱ Tim Sanders, www.sanderssays.typepad.com (August 25.2006).

ⁱⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumi>

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in John Lloyd & John Mitchinson, *If Ignorance is Bliss, Why Aren't There More Happy People?* (New York: Harmony Books, 2008), 259.