

'The Pilgrimage Initiated by God'

by Mark D. Partin

Mark Partin's sermon shares his personal journey of surrendering to God's calling and experiencing faithfulness, revitalization, and mission work in his ministry.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:11

Topics: "Gods Calling", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Mark D. Partin shares his journey of surrendering to God's calling, reflecting on his initial resistance and attempts to escape his calling to preach, only to be humbled by God's faithfulness and confirmation of his purpose through specific signs and verses in the Bible. Despite his doubts and struggles, Mark acknowledges that he is a servant of God, continuously experiencing God's favor in his life and striving to walk in obedience and reflect his Father. Through various pastor roles and challenges, Mark learns the importance of depending on the Holy Spirit, small group discipleship, and leading with God's guidance, ultimately witnessing the revival of God's people and experiencing the fulfillment of his heart's desire.

Transcript

Who am I? Who is Mark Partin? The "world" would probably be impressed if I could say that I am a well-known pastor preaching to the masses in a cathedral-like building. Some may find it stirring if I could say that I quickly accepted Christ's invitation of salvation and that I have since continued to walk in obedience without hesitation or question. However, the reality of who I am scoffs at what would impress the world. In actuality it is not about who I am; but whose I am. I am God's child. I have been His child since the age of ten. I strive to walk in obedience and reflect my Father. At times, I graciously submit to His calling; and at times I foolishly wrestle as if I know what would be best. Simply put, I am a servant of God that has experienced God's good favor in my life.

The first blessing that I received from God was that I was born to Christian parents. My parents shared the Truth of the gospel with my two brothers and me. I was ten years old when I responded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. Five years later God called me to preach. Confused, scared and consumed with the selfishness of a fifteen-year-old boy, I vehemently rejected God's calling. I ran from God and indulged the desires of my flesh. I thought if I ran, I could escape God's calling. If I ignored it, it would go away. If I didn't accept it, it wouldn't exist. During this time I would half-heartedly ask God for specific confirmations of His calling. I think in a way I was arrogantly challenging God to do things I thought were impossible. I hoped that God wouldn't be able to deliver my

outlandish requests and my responsibility to preach would be severed. I could then resume my "normal life." The reality was that I was trying to rid myself of any guilt that would be associated with my disobedience.

I am now ashamed to say that I was trying to make a mockery of God's calling by "throwing out the fleece," fully anticipating no response. This truly demonstrates the weakness and shallowness of my faith at that time. In my current place of spiritual maturity, I would never advocate the throwing of fleece. Thankfully God meets you where you are and He was faithful to do so even at this time in my life.

One fleece that I threw was that I demanded God to provide me an opportunity in which someone would deliberately ask me to preach. God honored my request and someone did ask me to preach. I haughtily dismissed it as coincidence.

I threw out my final and ultimate fleece when I grew tired of living only to please myself. I felt empty, useless and alone. I conceded to God that if He really wanted me to preach, He must put it in writing. I was certain that I had put God in a box and that my mental anguish and turmoil would finally be over. Again, I was wrong. I was reading scripture and was alarmingly taken aback when I came to the following verse:

"Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." II Timothy 4:11 NIV

As I read these words I was overwhelmed that God not only did what I had so arrogantly demanded, but even went a step further. He hadn't just provided His written answer in any ordinary book or on any old piece of paper. He allowed me to see confirmation of my calling in the Holy Bible. I was greatly humbled that He even responded to my demand. But it was because of His placement in His own Word that finally caused me to succumb and completely surrender my life. I announced my calling to preach and began the pilgrimage that God desired for me.

I received my Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Cumberland College in Williamsburg, KY in May of 1982. The following year God blessed me with a wonderful Christian wife, Charlene Scott. Charlene fully supported the pursuit of my pilgrimage. We moved to Raleigh, North Carolina so that I could continue my studies. Charlene later completed her formal education in teaching. Unbeknownst at the time, God had other plans. Instead of teaching, God would use Charlene's talents and abilities of singing to one day complement my calling.

I completed my studies with a Masters of Divinity with Languages in 1985 from Southeastern Theological Seminary. God then placed me as Pastor of First Southern Baptist Chapel in West Union, West Virginia. West Union was a tiny town with a population of 1,000. The entire county, Doddridge, only had a population of 7,000. First Southern Baptist Chapel was part of The Church Growth Assistance Program through the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board, presently known as the North American Mission Board. We were missionaries of the Board participating in a program that provided financial assistance in new work areas that could not afford a pastor on their own. The Board would supplement our salary for a four-year period. The amount would be reduced each year, regardless of the church's current financial ability to compensate for the loss.

I think it is God's design to start "Beginning Shepherds" with a small flock so that more time can be devoted to one-on-one communion with Him. God must have thought that I especially needed extra time

and preparation with Him, as my first flock consisted of a mere 15 people. Looking back, I can now say that I was grateful for such a small congregation as it allowed ample time for me to learn to pray, to study, and to preach. It allowed me intimacy with God. This was my "wilderness" of preparation and time of learning to be dependent on God. It was during this time that God first burdened my heart for the revival of His people, His church. I received confirmation of the validity of this burden and knew God had personally bestowed it upon me while I was attending a Prayer Conference on Spiritual Awakening in Parkesburg, West Virginia. I was introduced to Dr. Henry Blackaby's ministry at this conference and I knew immediately that God had deliberately put me in this man's path. He and I shared the same burden for true revival and spiritual awakening from within the church.

After serving as pastor at West Union for 3 ½ years, God called me to pastor Riverwood Baptist Church in Saint Albans, West Virginia. This church was also a part of the Church Growth Assistance Program. God must have gained trust in me as He expanded my responsibilities to a flock of 45 church members. It was during my four years of service at this church that God challenged me to either depend upon the Holy Spirit or to trust and rely upon the established personalities and programs within a church.

Many of Riverwood's church members were employed by the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptist and were therefore very knowledgeable about the Bible and church programs. I was surprised that despite their knowledge and commitment to engage in a vocation in ministry, there was no evidence of their dependency on or empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The church was built upon principles defined by the psychology of man: obtaining growth via knocking on doors; making a specific number of visits within a week; self-promotion and advertisement of the church; etc. I struggled with this philosophy because I had been raised with an understanding to depend upon and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. I found myself at a crossroads of following the members' lead or risk standing alone following the lead of the Holy Spirit. I chose to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. It was this defining moment that solidified my allegiance to God and His Word rather than man.

God also taught me the necessity of small group discipleship training while at Riverwood Baptist Church. I still believe this is imperative to building and developing the Body of Christ in order to expand His Kingdom.

In January 1993 God called me to pastor Indiana Avenue Baptist Church in LaFollette, Tennessee. I begged God to send me elsewhere, anywhere but there. Indiana Avenue desperately lacked life and was void of the presence of God. Over the years the congregation had dwindled down to about 85 members, three-fourths of which were senior citizens. Noticeably missing were youth members, young adults, children and babies. Finances were meager. The church was barely paying the bills.

With two generations missing, inadequate funds and no evidence of God's presence, this church was clearly in the midst of a slow imminent death. There was no future. And I dare say there was really no present, only the shell of a once existing church. I could not fathom why God would call me to a church where even He was not present.

Thankfully God's will prevailed and I began to serve as pastor of Indiana Avenue Baptist Church in 1993. Our family, now including two small children (MaKayla born January 21, 1991 and Colby born November 9, 1993), struggled financially because with the move we also incurred a \$6,000 reduction in salary. We know that our challenges and struggles served only as a pillar to strengthen our dependency upon God. He always met our needs. Our fears and reservations diminished with each of God's blessings and

provisions. Fear was replaced with an eagerness and readiness to follow Him.

The church easily and willingly yielded to my leadership and God began the revitalization process. My initial concentration was on facilitating worship that strongly proclaimed the Word of God as Truth. We began small group discipleship training using many materials including Henry Blackaby's study, *Experiencing God*². I also taught that stewardship is a necessity and that giving should come out of obedience.

Signs of life began to emerge bringing hope in much the same way as the Spring blossoms that first appear after a long, dormant winter. The church body began to grow including people of all generations. Cries of babies could be heard in the nursery as well as the buzzing of teenagers gathered in the hallways. Young adults began forming their own Sunday school classes and Bible studies. The sounds and sights were refreshing and encouraging. People began recognizing the importance of good stewardship and became obedient in their tithes and offerings. As the physical body grew, individuals also grew spiritually. Intimate relationships were being forged with God, creating a desire to know Him more and seek His will. People wanted to follow God in obedience; both personally and corporately. God was once again reigning over Indiana Avenue Baptist Church.

In 1999, with the church foundation back in tact, God began to expand our territory. He invited us to become involved in missions. A handful of men responded and went to Mexico to assist with a construction project while witnessing and enjoying Christian fellowship. From this one trip God has blessed and multiplied. Mexico has become an annual mission trip for the men of our church. An average of 30 men have returned each year since 1999 and have built churches, an orphanage, a parsonage, a medical clinic and repaired existing buildings.

The initial Mexico mission trip has spawned mission trips to other parts of the world. We have had teams, both male and female, young and old, serving in Honduras, Sri Lanka and South Africa. It has been amazing how God has brought together His people to serve in such a mighty way. Looking back from where our church was in the mid 1990's, it can only be explained by the hand of God as to where we are today.

Revival of God's people first became a desire of my heart many years ago. Since then it is evident that God has graciously and faithfully laid a path that has led me to experiencing my heart's desire. The culmination, thus far, has been the experience of the Revival at Indiana Avenue Baptist Church in 2006. It was so magnificent that I could have never imagined it. God has given me immensely more than my heart's desire.

Who am I? I am a child of God continuously in amazement of His love, His grace, His mercy, and His amazing splendor. The closer I grow to God, the more I hunger for an even deeper relationship. I strive to walk in His light and reflect His image in everything that I do. Simply put, I am a man created by God that is willing to be used by God.

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