

Pioneering

Pioneers are the prophetic people who hear God's footfalls when others hear nothing. The Lord is seeking to impart the heart and spirit of a pioneer to each of us, regardless of our mission.

God's prophets and God's people have always run the risk of being misunderstood and opposed on every side. The world system opposes them because they challenge its wickedness and injustice; the religious opposes them because they challenge static religious traditions. Jesus charged the religious leaders of His day with the death of the prophets (Luke 11:49-50). John the Baptist lost his head to Herod — a secular leader. Jesus was crucified by means of a conspiracy of both religious and secular leaders. In the midst of such opposition, pioneers frequently can turn only to the Lord and to other pioneers who understand the road and its dangers. Being a pioneer requires enough security in God to withstand the inevitable reactions to your challenges. Thank God that Jesus, the ultimate pioneer, can nourish, comfort and console out of the nail scars He carries as the trophy of His own pioneering journey.

Rejection or misunderstanding comes with the territory. President Harry Truman once told complaining administration officials: "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen." The "heat" of the pioneer's kitchen includes not only constant new trials and dangers but persistent bothersome critics. If you require men's praises to survive, you shouldn't set your hand to the pioneering task. The pioneer's praises come from the King alone. Almost without exception, men praise pioneers only when they are dead and gone. It is usually only then that their trail-blazing is appreciated by those who travel the well-worn paths, and by those who are no longer threatened by pioneering ways.

While those who follow have the use of maps charted by the pioneer, how did the pioneer himself find safe passage? By making plenty of mistakes and traveling up more than one box canyon. Pioneers make mistakes so that others don't have to.

Pioneers therefore have to dwell in the constant reality that they may be mistaken. Being men and women who learn more from their

mistakes than from their successes, pioneers have the privileged opportunity of providing both personal wisdom and compassion when others make errors (2 Corinthians 1:3-8). They must keep a careful balance: maintaining a deep hunger to follow God's instructions exactly, while at the same time, having the courage to live with the mistakes they've created out of their own imperfect hearing and circumstances. If you are afraid to take chances and fail, you will never make it as a pioneer.

The errors of the pioneer press him into the compassion of God. He must be secure enough in God's love and understanding forgiveness to risk repeated error. The just must live by faith and the pioneer's faith rests on the foundation of moral courage. Condemnation rises and says, "Why did you take that path! You failure, you presumptuous fool to get off the well-worn path of others." The pioneer responds before the Lord that he is not condemned but rather chastened and forgiven. He is wiser now and better attuned to read the signs of the wilderness, better able to lead others away from the follies of the wrong trails he himself has taken. A pioneer falls upon the grace of God in a special way. The pioneer must, at times, move forward even when he is not sure that he is right. He has only the promise within him that God's grace is enough for his faltering, courageous steps.

Enduring the consistency of the pioneer's challenge requires a face "set like a flint." If you haven't set your face before the battle begins, you'll be unable to set it in the midst of the conflict. Faces of flint, hearts of desperate commitment...pioneers must have both.

What is it that we should set our faces and hearts to do? None of us are setting out to cross America in covered wagons. So what is this trail of sacrifice that we are considering? The answer is simple: we are spiritual pioneers, pressing on to discover and flesh out the fresh, and sometimes uncharted, will of God for this current generation of His people.

Every generation has its unique call from God. While it can build on previously laid foundations, it cannot live on the manna of saints past. Songs forged in the heat of a previous generation's battle cannot later be sung with the same power. We cannot preach our fathers' sermons with the same fervor or fire, however true they may be: these messages have another generation's fingerprints on

them. Each generation must instead cut its own path and pioneer its own trails through the contemporary deserts and challenges that uniquely face it on its own march through history. A prophetic people accepts the lonesome, untrampled, new assignment from God.

While religion leads us down the trails of other generations, Jesus cuts new trails for those who dare — His purposes for mankind are yet unfolding. Set your face and buckle your seat belt. You'll need to do both if you truly want to pioneer in the days that are before us.

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