

Getting to Know History Changers

As I write these words I am in Chicago. We are having a really good conference where I am preaching. As I look out the window, I am reminded of one of my historical mentors, Abraham Lincoln. One of the early dates my wife and I experienced was when we had won a Sunday School contest and we went to New Salem, Illinois where the young Mr. Lincoln arose from obscurity to fame, then the presidency and finally arriving into the hearts of every hungry schoolboy longing to go beyond his perimeters of the mediocrity. I first became acquainted with Lincoln as a very little boy, living outside of Washington, DC. We would often drive by the larger than life Lincoln Memorial and Dad would always slow down and recite some interesting facts on the life of Lincoln. The most memorable fact Dad gave us was, "Senator Bee said as President Lincoln died, 'Now he belongs to the ages.'" What kind of man influences people, not only for the time in which he lives, but in ages to come? To me as a youngster in Washington or a college student walking in the reconstructed town of New Salem, Abraham Lincoln came alive. I have studied his words, his decisions and his life responses to both good and bad. Through my life I have made it a priority to get to know these timeless personalities who defy time and think outside the proverbial box.

The Bible says in Proverbs 13:20, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" Jeremiah 5:5 tells us, "*I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD.*" We are often times surrounded by not-so-wise or not-so-great men. How do we make a point of finding, then walking with these wise and great men?

1. Don't be trapped in the world of littleness.

A few years ago I read the book, "Who Moved My Cheese?" It is a resourceful little book dealing with change. Too many times we accept unpleasant things as things that cannot be changed. We take the well traveled road and refuse to take the one less traveled by. In the book I just mentioned one of the characters dared to ask himself a pertinent question, "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" This is a worthwhile question to ask ourselves because the ones who flee their trapped world of littleness are those who take the risk of making the change for greatness.

The secret of finding greatness is to find and associate with great people. This is one reason Bible study is so profitable -- we begin to run with the likes of Abraham, Job, David, Daniel, Jeremiah and Isaiah. I have enjoyed reading the lives of great moral men who were history changers for good such as Abraham Lincoln, William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon and Adoniram Judson. George Bernard Shaw said, "I hear you say, 'Why?' Always 'Why?' You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream of things that never were and I say, 'Why not?' The inquisitive mind will take us out of the world of littleness and into the arena of

greatness. Find the people who dared to question the status quo and ask, "Why not change?"

The Bible says in I Chronicles 4:9,10: *"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested."* I love this concise, yet telling inspired biography of Jabez. Although sorrow surrounded his entrance into our world, he rose above life's circumstances, family environment of brothers who seemed to not appreciate his chosen honorable lifestyle and he prayed. What an encouragement to all of us! This leads us to our next thought: Prayer!

2. Pray for insight.

This is exactly what Jabez did, he prayed that God would bless him and enlarge his coast. "Enlarge my coast" is an ancient term that speaks of extending the perimeters of your inhabitation. It would be much like a farmer who owns and plows forty acres and asks God for the wherewithal to buy sixty more acres for a total of one hundred acres. Jabez was asking God to help him do what he could not do; to provide what was not within his resources. Are you willing to do this? I love what William Carey, the flagship missionary of the English speaking peoples to the uttermost parts of the earth, said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!" Praying with the aid of God's Spirit whets the appetite for expectation. *"And He (the Holy Spirit) that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God"* (Romans 8:26,27). *"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost"* (Jude 20). God says, *"...ye have not, because ye ask not"* (James 4:2). Look at this biblical contrast, Jesus said, *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive..."* (John 16:24).

3. Read beyond your circumference.

Do not write off history changers of the world who have passed away to be out of your reach. If you can reach for a book, you can discover what these great people were all about. One of the Apostle Paul's last words was, *"...when thou comest, bring with thee...the books..."* (II Timothy 4:13). Earlier in Paul's writings he said to Timothy, *"Till I come, give attendance to reading..."* (I Timothy 4:13). History changers are readers. In reading we discover things previously thought impossible can become possible, because many great people have already done it. For instance, William Wilberforce went against the odds in fighting for the cessation of the slave trade in Great Britain. He spent his lifetime fighting for this glorious cause yet, before the death of this great man, he saw it come to fruition. It is most interesting to read of his alignment with another great soul, John Newton, the slave trader who became a Christian and became one of the most ardent supporters of abolition of slavery as well as author of the song that depicts

his own personal testimony, "Amazing Grace". Reading takes us out of the mindset that accepts mediocrity. Rise above by reading beyond!

4. Act in accordance to revealed knowledge.

It is not enough to admire and read after a Lincoln or Wilberforce, a Carey or a Spurgeon; we must act on the knowledge God, in His mercy, allows to come our way. *"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was"* (James 1:23,24). This refers to a man who sees his reflection in the mirror (the Word of God) and goes away seeing the changes that need to be made and then ignoring and not acting on the revealed knowledge. This can be more than negligence; it can be a sin, for the Bible says, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

It is no accident that Mozart studied Bach or that Beethoven studied Mozart. It is no coincidence that Knox had Calvin for a mentor or in the Bible we read that Timothy was mentored by Paul. Fire begets fire! May we say with Jeremiah, *"I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD"* (Jeremiah 5:5).

-Pastor Pope-