

My Personal Retreat and Revelation 4

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Opportunity, Invitation, Revelation, and Position

My personal retreat became a study and an application of the truths of Revelation 4. Now the following principles will become the foundation for every one of my personal retreats: opportunity, *a door standing open*; invitation, *come up here*; revelation, *I will show you things*; and position, *immediately I was in the spirit*.

Opportunity

Personal retreat comes only when I take the opportunity, becoming intentional about clearing my schedule. An open door does not need to be spontaneous to be spiritual. Opens doors of opportunity can be intentional, and, for me, they must be intentional. I must open the door of opportunity for my personal retreat to happen. It requires intentionality in scheduling and determining to protect the day.

Making opportunity is not a man-made attempt to touch God. His eternal invitation has already been extended. He has already sent the invitation to come, to draw near, to receive, to accept, to come away, and come higher. His invitation clears the way for the opportunity.

Invitation

John heard the invitation when he heard the words, "*Come up here*." I have to hear the same words. The invitation is not just to get away from the busyness of life. The invitation is to come higher than where I am currently. For me, that invitation to come higher is my constant reminder that personal retreat is a higher calling than any activity in which I currently engage.

Revelation

Personal retreat is higher than my ministry, higher than weekly activity, higher than next month's presbyter meeting, or next quarter's District Council. I realized that seeing my personal retreat as just another activity of ministry enabled me to easily reschedule, postpone, or cancel, if I deemed necessary. Only as I clearly hear the invitation to come higher will my personal retreat have a high fence of protection.

The invitation to come higher comes with a purpose—not simply fellowship, rest, recovery, or restoration. Though all those can, have, and will happen in my retreat times, the goal is revelation. My purpose is the same as John's—that *I might show you*. The purpose to come higher is not to elevate an experience, but to elevate understanding, perspective, vision, and knowledge. The goal of my retreat is to allow God space and margin to speak, to stop the clutter of the

world, and hear the voice of God with clarity.

Position

John said, “Immediately I was in the Spirit.” He found himself in the best possible place—*in the Spirit*. If revelation is the goal of retreat, “in the Spirit” is the position of the retreat. In the Spirit is not a description of an overwhelming emotional moment. This prepositional phrase serves as an adverb to describe where, to detail a position.

Revelation 4:2 repeats Revelation 1:10 as John uses the same words to describe his position—“*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*.” Position dictates and precedes any Pentecostal experience. John’s location was not the same as his position. So many times I have made the mistake of spending the majority of my planning on the location of my retreat and not the positioning of my spirit. I can easily get from one physical location to another, even transcontinental locations.

The greatest challenge for my personal retreat is not the location, but rather the positioning. The challenge of retreat is to get my soul surrounded by His Spirit and to become enveloped in a spiritual mindset. The beauty of being “in the Spirit” is the reversal of asking the Holy Spirit to be part of our world. It is actually the privilege of coming into His world. Fellowship with God opens the eyes of my heart to see and unclogs my spiritual ears to hear. Opportunity, invitation, revelation, and position serve as my four-step check-list for a true spiritual retreat.

Balanced Leadership

As Revelation 4 proceeds, the next scene unveils another powerful tool for my retreat.

John is before the throne. There were four worshipping creatures before God so unique that John could only use metaphors to describe them. John relates what he saw as creatures, like a lion, an ox, a human, and an eagle. Closest to God, in the midst of the holiest place of Heaven, were four creatures that represent different characteristics. In an environment full of Father God, full of the Spirit, full of Jesus, Revelation 4 describes four beings. Each is identified by characteristics that play a vital role in the throne-room picture.

These four beings illustrate the balanced life of a leader and the character that one forms in a relationship so filled with worship and close intimacy. They exemplify the character required to come before the throne and the character one develops by being in proximity to God. These characteristics serve as a challenging check-list of evaluation, inspection, and improvement for my personal retreat.

The First Being: A Lion

The lion represents righteousness, authority, boldness, fight, voice, and rest. Righteousness, boldness, and authority are all connected. Proverbs 28:1 says, “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.” Righteousness produces boldness. Spiritual boldness is a prerequisite for moving and walking in spiritual authority. Boldness and authority, rooted in personal charisma, is shallow. Authority founded in righteousness taps into the power of God and created a deep and abiding boldness. It represent the authority needed to move mountains and establish kingdom works.

As I survey my gifts and calling, I need righteous based authority and boldness. The Apostle Peter says that our enemy walks around as a lion (1 Pet. 5:8). Our enemy’s

desire is to counterfeit a lion. The best defense against a counterfeit is the true lion, full of righteousness, boldness, and authority.

The lion is the picture of might and fight. Proverbs 30:30 describes a lion as mighty among beasts and an animal that refuses retreat. The aggressive fight of a lion stems from its offensive mindset. Boldness and authority produce an offensive attitude and agenda.

The lion knows how to rest. Lions normally sleep up to sixteen hours per day. The security that no predator will succeed in any attack and a sustaining diet create an environment in which the lion can rest. Boldness that enjoys the peace of authority creates an atmosphere free from stress and promotes rest. I must learn rest, based on the mindset of security, soundness, eternal sustenance, and a life free from stress.

Another characteristic of a lion is its voice. Lions roar to communicate their position. A lion's roar is the loudest of any big cat and can be heard up to five miles away. Their voice is a powerful tool, not necessarily in battle, but rather in instruction and strategy to other lions. A far-reaching and distance-traveling voice is powerful and necessary.¹

The lion helps form the following questions for inspection:

- Where is my boldness and authority pushing back the enemy?
- Where and what am I currently fighting?
- Am I creating a stress-free, rest-filled environment in which to work and live?
- How far is my voice reaching?

In meditating on these questions, I came away with the following conclusions. I need to develop a deeper level of authority. I need

to show more boldness in leading change. I operate under an apostolic gift set in Russia among our churches and leaders, but tend to move in a pastoral gift set when in the United States. God is speaking and using others to change my mind-set. The challenge I face is to move in that apostolic role at all times. My voice needs more volume in the sense of having a greater reach. I have been called to write books, which is one means by which I can extend my God-given voice. Developing strategy in district ministry has been overwhelming and very time-consuming. Although my personal retreat did not generate great clarity in denominational ministry, it brought reassurance that the strategy talk is about to shift into solid structure. The phrase, "battle plans are for the battle field," kept surfacing.

Second Being: An Oxen

People use oxen for plowing, pulling wagons and carts, threshing grain, and providing the pulling power for grinding. A calm temperament serves as one of the most important requirements for an ox. They must have a willingness to respond to commands and be content to do the same sort of work day after day. Hard-working oxen must accept the burden of the yoke and responsibility to ready the field for harvest. Oxen are slower than horses, but are capable of pulling heavier loads and working for a longer period of time. Proverbs 14:4 reminds that the harvest is a result of the strength of the oxen.²

The study of the ox helps form the following questions for inspection.

- Where am I focusing my work?
- Have I been relentless in my effort?
- What yoke of burden have I allowed God to harness me with?
- Where am I grumbling and complaining about the yoke?

- What is my work producing?
- What area of the harvest am I laboring?

In meditating on these questions, I came away with the following conclusions. I have allowed too many disruptions to my work. I get distracted by what other people think, feel encumbered by decisions from previous superintendents, and experience a lack of self-discipline. I am wasting too much time on things that do not matter. I must learn to filter everything through the lens of the temporal and eternal. I can do better in developing sound weekly disciplines. I need more of a burden.

Third Being: A Human

Humans on earth represent frailty, vulnerability, and need. Humans in heaven represent the power of redemption, grace, and mercy. This being in heaven is a reminder of the power of forgiveness, the power of mercy, and the influence of grace. This human reminds me of victory over addiction and victory over sin and every evil habit. The human in heaven is a testimony that nothing is too difficult to redeem, nothing too far gone that God cannot reach him or her. The human picture in heaven keeps a balance between grace and mercy. Perfection is not the prerequisite and perfection does not rule. Grace and mercy, generously applied, produce an opportunity to succeed and excel to the highest level.

Studying the human qualities brings me to the following questions.

- What are the weaknesses in my life that I am identifying?
- Where are my areas of victory?
- Where do I need to apply grace?
- As a recipient of forgiveness, who and where am I currently struggling to extend forgiveness?

Meditating on these questions, I came away with the following conclusions. Several interpersonal issues quickly surfaced. In several relationships, I have been expecting too and not extending the needed mercy. As I discussed things with several close colleagues and friends, they advised me to understand and acknowledge my own humanness and expressed concern regarding my expectations and timelines regarding certain projects. An overwhelming sense of thankfulness exploded when I focus on the grace and goodness of God.

The Fourth Being: An Eagle

Four of the eagle's many qualities are vision, altitude, metamorphosis, and nurture. An eagle has a great range of vision. On a clear day, the eagle has the incredible ability to see another eagle fifty miles away. High flying eagles also have the ability to rise to a solitary place in higher altitudes where no other bird can reach. Eagles can actually reach an altitude of 10,000 feet! With a vision range of fifty miles and a flying range of up to 10,000 feet, the eagle can cover massive territory.³ The last eagle quality is the manner of nurture they give to their eaglets. Research has shown that no member of the bird family is more gentle and attentive to its young ones than the eagle.⁴

The eagle speaks to my ability to worship above circumstances, see a far-reaching vision into the Word and will of God, adapt along the way to stay fresh and fruitful. The eagle also speaks of my ability to raise up the next generation of church leaders. As I reflected on these character qualities, several questions surfaced.

- What is my vision?
- What am I seeing as current trends in the church?
- What is happening on the horizon of culture?

- Where am I stuck?
- What is preventing me from flying, from feeding, and from fighting?
- What areas need change?
- Who am I nurturing?
- Who am I helping to fly?

In meditating on these questions, I came away with the following conclusions. My challenge is the metamorphosis of changing from pastor to superintendent. I must move away from some old structures so I can learn to feed, fly, and flee under this new mantle of responsibility. The challenge has been to shift from a very hands-on discipling pastor to a denominational district office position. The need is to be more intentional in discipling a larger group and developing systems to be successful from a distance. I must learn the balance between moving from counseling immediate crises to envisioning future change for our entire state. I am letting the different rhythm of district ministry cause frustration instead of

understanding the timing and momentum is different. I am also challenged to take time to look on the horizon of culture and trends as it applies to church strategy for the future. I must not allow circumstances to alter my vision. Three core words—vision, nurture, and change—must be forefront in all I embrace and engage.

The vision of my personal retreat is to get alone, get still, get focused, and get into the Word. The value of my personal retreat is the intense and intimate time that happens with the Holy Spirit. The goal is intimacy; the benefit of reaching that goal is revelation. The revelation that unfolds in my personal retreat is multi-faceted as it involves insight into the Word, introspection, and instruction into my actions and decisions. It is always a challenge to get in the correct position of personal retreat, but once there, it is difficult to leave.

¹ “Humankind, “Lion,” Onekind.org, accessed December 7, 2015, http://www.onekind.org/education/animals_a_z/lion

² “Animals; “What are the Characteristics of an Oxen?” Animals.mom.me, accessed December 6, 2015, <http://animals.mom.me/characteristics-oxen-6065.html>.

³ “The 7 Characteristics of an Eagle and Why They are Lessons For Good Leadership,” Nairaland.com, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.nairaland.com/1145749/7-characteristics-eagle-why-lessons#13595800>

⁴ Ibid.