



INTRODUCTION

THE INVINCIBLE POWER OF A HOLY PURPOSE

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It is an unnerving experience. In Birmingham, Alabama, across the street from the 16th Street Baptist Church is a beautiful park. In that park is a metal sculpture of three life-sized dogs raised up on their back legs. The leashes around their necks are restraining the animals from attacking. Their teeth are bared as they appear to be lunging toward their prey. It's possible for the viewer to walk through the dogs as if he or she were the one being attacked. It's a disconcerting experience to imagine being attacked by the dogs. Of course, the statue pulls the viewer back to the 1960s and the civil rights work accomplished in that city.

Many miles away in Memphis, Tennessee, it's possible for you to visit the Lorraine Motel and stand on the balcony where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. On April 3, 1968, on the eve of his assassination, Dr. King preached his final sermon at a church in Memphis. He talked about the events in Birmingham and about Bull Connor, the man who was responsible for public safety in Birmingham. In that powerful sermon Dr. King said this:

I remember in Birmingham, Alabama, when we were in that majestic struggle, there we would move out of the 16th Street Baptist Church day after day; . . . And Bull Connor would tell them to send the dogs forth, and they did come; but we just went before the dogs singing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around." Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on." But Bull Connor didn't know history. . . . that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before the fire hoses; we had known water. . . .

That couldn't stop us, . . . and we'd just go on singing, "Over my head I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons. . . . and old Bull would say, "Take them off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And

. . . we'd get in the jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to; and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham.¹

Dr. King called it "the majestic struggle." These are two words that I wouldn't think to put together, odd but so descriptive. What would enable men and women to go through such a fight? How could they muster such courage to withstand attacking dogs, high-pressure water hoses, and public humiliation? What was the power that kept them going even against the threat of imprisonment and beatings? The answer is simple but profound. They were captivated by the invincible power of a holy purpose. They decided that they didn't want to live in slavery. They wanted a better life for their children and their children's children. They wanted *freedom*.

Consider the invincible power of a holy purpose. Perhaps you haven't had to face attacking dogs, high-pressure hoses, and public humiliation, but you have had your share of high pressure and humbling problems. You see, as a leader in the Church of the Nazarene, you are in a "majestic struggle." You are called to similar work, so shouldn't you be gripped with similar intensity? Isaiah describes your calling with these words:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

When you are captivated by a holy purpose, absolutely nothing can stop you.

We celebrate what God has accomplished and is accomplishing among our churches and districts on the USA/Canada Region in the last hundred years. He has blessed our efforts. We rejoice in what He has done, and we look forward to what He will do among us.

A Holy Purpose Will Challenge Great Leaders

Look around the Church of the Nazarene. We have some of the finest leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ. We have great lay leaders, teachers, pastors, missionaries, and professors. Thousands of people have been won to the Kingdom through your efforts and the grace of Christ. You didn't answer God's call for the money. When you joined the cause of Christ, you knew that you wouldn't be famous. What was it that captured your imagination? It was a holy purpose.

When you accepted the call from Christ to work in His Church, you didn't know it would be this tough. Why do you keep on? You do so because the holy purpose has chained you to the task. You know that these "high-pressure hoses" are just the circumstances of the work that He has called you to. They are just distractions to the mission. We have a world to win. Satan would love to keep you always consumed with the details and the disturbances. But great leaders are consumed with the holy purpose. They are somehow always able to keep their concentration on reaching people and loving God. They never lose their prophetic voice. They refuse to allow trivial matters to captivate their hearts. They will always find a way to keep their focus on the real reason for the Church's existence.

Did you ever think you might like to have served in the earlier days of our church? It was easier back then, or so it seems. But you are not there. You are here. And either God put you where you are right now on purpose, or it was a fluke. Either He is adequate to help you or He is not. I choose to believe that He put you where you are right now and is adequate to help you. You have certain gifts and abilities that are needed right now. May God help each of us to focus on the holy purpose. A holy purpose is the only thing that can truly challenge a great leader.

A Holy Purpose Will Produce Results

God is blessing the Church of the Nazarene today. We are seeing Acts 2 movements in places like Bangladesh and the Horn of Africa. But God is also working here in the United States and Canada. In 2009, 60,000 people found Christ in our churches. Every three and a half days we started a church. Perhaps our growth isn't as dramatic as some other places in the world, but we are moving forward here. Tom Ranier says that if a church has a ratio of twenty to one, that is twenty congregants to win one person to Christ, it is a fairly strong evangelistic church. He says that of the 400,000 Christian churches in the United States and Canada, only 3.5 percent reach this threshold. Our research says that when you consider the attendees in our Nazarene churches, the ratio is nine to one. We are producing new Christians and discipling them. We rejoice in every victory God gives us.

But we know that in the United States and Canada in our church, as in most other denominations, our growth rate has slowed. We can keep soothing ourselves with the above statistics and never admit that the "emperor has no clothes." The fact is that last year our membership just slightly increased. The last few years we have not kept pace with population growth. We could sit back and quickly give reasons for this, like "Our church is a hundred years old, and many of our other congregations are aging," "There is an increasing distrust for organized religion in the US and Canada," and "Postmoderns are not attracted to church." You've heard the litany. We could keep rehearsing it,

or we could be captivated once again by our holy purpose and driven to our knees pleading for God's help. We could decide again that we have a message the world needs. We could once again be brokenhearted by the sin and hurt around us. We could determine to establish strategies and plans that would signal that there will be no more business as usual. And we could decide that we are going to do everything we can to see this trend change.

You say, "Well, perhaps we could see it change, but how will we do that?" I am glad you asked. Recently our District Superintendents Advisory Committee met with the ministry leaders from the Global Ministry Center and we talked about what the church in the United States and Canada needed in order to move forward. Hundreds of leaders across the United States and Canada offered insight and feedback during the Pastors and Leaders Conferences held on our nine regional universities during the summer of 2010. Five key strategies are developing, and we share them with you. There is great potential for the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada, and these strategies will help us achieve it.

1. **INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.** We must develop, train, and release passionate leaders with a Wesleyan-Arminian focus.
2. **VIBRANT CHURCH RENEWAL.** We must help each local church discover new life.
3. **CLEAR AND COHERENT THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY.** We must facilitate communication and collaboration among the Global Ministry Center, educational institutions, ministers, and laity through print, electronic media, civil conversation, and clear preaching.
4. **PASSIONATE MISSIONAL OUTREACH.** We must release and encourage our people to embrace with open arms and hearts both the needy and the new people groups among us.
5. **MULTIFACETED NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT.** We need to continually foster an environment and enthusiasm for starting new churches through our districts and local churches.

These five strategies are represented in the five sections of this book. Leaders have written chapters that offer insight, illustration, and importance to the strategies.

We are moving forward in this direction, believing that God will help us. Do you remember the Old Testament story in 2 Kings 7 about the four lepers? They were sitting at the gates of the city starving. They had a choice to enter the city, where the people were also starving, or go to the enemy camp of the Arameans, where they could get killed. They made their decision. They said, "Why sit here until we die?" They thought, "We might get killed over there, too, but at least we will try." You know the story. They went to the enemies' camp and discovered the enemy had left. Thinking they were being attacked,

the Arameans had all run away, leaving their food and valuables. The four lepers now had everything they needed. What had happened? The Lord saw that the lepers were moving, so He went before them and helped them. This is an incontrovertible mission principle. You will find the workers and the resources in the harvest field. We just need to make our move. It is still an important question—“Why sit here until we die?”

These are our five key strategies, and together we are developing initiatives for each one. Your involvement will be important to the success of this adventure. We plead for your prayers. We plead for your engagement. A holy purpose will produce results.

A Holy Purpose Is Absolutely Unstoppable!

In my library I have a copy of the 1836 Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This book was published less than fifty years after the death of John Wesley. They made it small and inexpensive so that it could easily fit in a person's pocket and be available to every Methodist home in the United States. It begins with an interesting few lines: “Dearly beloved brethren, we think it expedient to give you a brief account of the rise of Methodism both in Europe and America.” (This is a quote of John and Charles Wesley themselves.) “In 1729, two young men in England reading the Bible saw they could not be saved without holiness: followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737, they saw, likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified: but still holiness was their object. God then thrust them out to raise a holy people.”

Notice it says, “God thrust them out to raise a holy people.” They were thrust out, or compelled, by Christ to take the message to hurting and helpless people. They knew the dangers and the difficulties of this majestic struggle, but they were totally captivated by God to do this work. John and Charles Wesley believed the Bible taught that men and women needed to be holy before they could enter heaven. They believed that we could be sanctified after we were justified, and this holy purpose thrust them into their world. A holy purpose is absolutely unstoppable.

The five thousand churches and eighty districts of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada continue this holy march. Perhaps you are saying, “But I am just one—one person, one church, one district. We don't have much influence. We can't imagine ourselves as a mighty army.” Nothing could be farther from the truth, my friend. Many of our individual churches may be small, but together we are a mighty army. Together we gave over \$65 million to missions in 2009. Together we won over 60,000 to Christ. Together we started new churches. Together we educated future ministers and laity. Together we saw young people find Christ and their calls to ministry. Together we took the message of heart holiness to people of all colors.

Together we sent out mission teams all over the world. Together we are a mighty force for God.

What makes us unstoppable is that we are consumed by a holy purpose. If our purpose for being a church is not a holy purpose, we will not make progress. One influential leader in Evangelical circles today said, “Don’t worry about the growth of your church, focus on fulfilling the purpose of your church.” He is right. Our purpose is not to grow the church. Our purpose is to introduce people to Jesus and His abundant life. Our purpose is not to build big buildings. Our purpose is not to have great worship experiences. Our purpose is not to provide religious activities and great programs. All of these are good things, but they cannot be our purpose. Our purpose is to lift up Jesus and His message of holiness. Our purpose is to make Christlike disciples. People will come to our churches to see Jesus. They may come once to see a new building, but the only thing that will bring them back consistently is if they see Jesus while there. Dear friend, if your purpose is anything less than holy, you will not find progress. God knows the motives of our hearts, and we must be certain that we are working for a holy purpose. If your purpose is to win some award, it is not invincible. If your purpose is to further your own career or just make it long enough to retire, it is not invincible. But if your purpose is to meet the deep needs of people by lifting up Christ, you will be invincible.

Eventually we must come to the point where we stop thinking of our own welfare and think about those who desperately need God. Do you remember the story of the Good Samaritan? The Levite looked at the man in need lying on that “dangerous road” and asked, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”² “But then the Good Samaritan came by [and reversed] the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”³ That’s the question we must ask ourselves in the United States and Canada; not what about me but what about him? What about her? What are their needs? We must be captivated by the thought that if they are to make it to heaven, they will need to be holy. As Nazarene leaders, we have the answer to their deepest needs.

What I want to say to you is, we must march again. We must not let anyone stop us. Oh, there will be naysayers. Some will say, “My church is too small. We can’t do anything for God. We have no money. We are not big enough to offer programs for the whole family. Our building is not adequate. We have a shortage of parking. We don’t have enough qualified workers.” The naysayers will be with us always. But if we could just be consumed by our holy purpose, we could march on. No church is too small to reach people. Every district can grow. No economic crisis can stop us. No disappointing demographic can keep us from reaching people. There may be a Nazarene church in every city in your state, but they haven’t reached all the lost people yet. We will need churches of all kinds and sizes to reach them. On our region,

every other person we pass on the street isn't on any church roll. Probably 50 percent of the people in your area are not known by any church. There are people out there that need God.

Dogs and fire hoses couldn't stop the march of the holy purpose called freedom. In the same way, economic crises, aging congregations, ebbing budgets, disappointments and discouragement cannot stop the march of the holy purpose of Jesus Christ. They laid Him in a cold, damp tomb. With tears, they rolled the stone, locking Him away. But a holy purpose is absolutely unstoppable. He burst forth from that tomb and the march of resurrection power continues to this day. We must not be sidetracked, held back, or prevented in any way from following through with His holy purpose. With the power of the resurrected Christ flowing through our lives, nothing shall be able to stop us from reaching men and women with the gospel of Christ and the message of heart holiness. May the same Spirit that thrust John and Charles Wesley upon their world, thrust us forward to take our message to the hurting people of the United States and Canada.