

"HOW TO BE A SPIRITUAL PIONEER"

(Acts 4:23-37)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Not everyone can be a pioneer. Very few are called to be pioneer missionaries. But nothing keeps you from adopting a pioneer Christian mind-set. I find in Acts 4:23-37 three qualities worthy of every believer and available for the asking. As the first Christians asked for confidence in the face of persecution, you can ask the Lord for these pioneer qualities to be more effective in whatever circumstances you face.

First, *ask for compassion*. I don't mean compassion for yourself. Ask the Lord to give you compassion for others. The Bible distinguishes between the emotions of compassion and pity. Pity feels sorry for someone less fortunate but remains passive. Given time and distance, pity fades away. Compassion, on the other hand, remains unsatisfied until you follow through with tangible help.

What have you done for someone else in the past week? What did you do for the sheer purpose of helping another person, prompted by nothing but compassion? What have you given? If you struggle to answer, pray for compassion. I will warn you, however. When you ask for compassion, you're asking for an itch not easily scratched. But I can think of no better way to make your faith real. James writes searching, convicting words:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (Jas. 2:15-17)

Second, ask for initiative. Pioneers don't sit in one place waiting for opportunities to come to them; they go where the opportunities exist. If you desire to tell unbelievers about Christ, you must go where unbelievers live. That takes initiative, a willingness to leave your comfort zone and to insert yourself where you might not be expected. It's not comfortable. It's not convenient. The risks can feel overwhelming. But that's the frontier of faith. Initiative is the "want to" that overcomes inertia and puts faith into action.

Third, ask for vulnerability. Ask for the courage to admit your own inadequacies and needs as you seek help from others. To get anything done in the kingdom of God, each person needs help from others within the community of Christ. Recognizing our need isn't enough; we must make ourselves vulnerable enough to seek assistance and then to accept it.

When you put those three qualities together—when you integrate them and live them out—you're a pioneer Christian. Regardless of your place of service or your circumstances, you will become like members of the first church: tough outside and tender inside.

