
**FAITHFUL
WITH A FEW
THINGS:
A TRIBUTE TO
DR.
ZENAS GERIG**

by
Wayne W. Allen

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews concluded with important exhortations designed to encourage the readers to persevere in their Christian walk. The exhortations in 13:7-8 often are not seen in their context because the guarantee of the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ is such a powerful and inspiring promise. When this guarantee is linked with its antecedent, however, even greater assurances of God's blessing are received. Consider the words of the prophet:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:7-8, NIV).

This exhortation is a call to "remember," to meditate on what God has done in the lives of those he appointed to lead the people of God. Those leaders were assigned by God to shepherd the flock, to protect it from the "savage wolves" (Acts 20:29, NIV) that Satan would send to destroy it, to nurture it with the word of God (Jn. 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:2), to guard it from satanic spirits and demonic doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1). In performing their tasks, these leaders spoke the word of God to the flock. The "remembering" is to focus on "the outcome of their way of life."

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In the performance of their duties, these leaders defeated the powers of darkness. When the writer of the epistle penned these lines he doubtless had in mind the example of the first martyrs, Stephen and James, the brother of John. Both men testified to the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ by offering their bodies as sacrifices to God (Acts 7:57-60, 12:1-2). Other great leaders followed, however, who faithfully proclaimed the word of Truth and

demonstrated their faith in action (e.g. Peter and John, Barnabas, Paul, etc.). The outcome of their lives demonstrated beyond all doubt the power of faith in Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews then challenges the readers to imitate the faithful lives of these leaders. What the readers had seen in these great leaders was to inspire them to greater devotion to God because what God did in the lives of those leaders, he would also do in the lives of the readers. This point is driven home powerfully in the following sentence, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The point is that what Jesus did in the lives of the leaders of the early church, he would also do in the lives of the readers. Jesus does not change over the centuries. Age to age he is the same, unchanged. What he did before, he will do again. This is the exhortation of the writer to the Hebrews.

In fulfillment of the biblical exhortation, this study calls you to consider the life of a leader of the church of God in the Caribbean so that you might see that God is still working in the lives of his people, and be challenged to renew your effort for the glory of God and the expansion of his kingdom on earth. Dr. Zenas Gerig devoted his life to God. His life demonstrates the principle expressed in Matthew 25:21, "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (NIV). The study demonstrates two vital principles of Christian service: First, God prepares his servants for the task to which he has appointed them. Second, faithfulness in small tasks leads to an expansion of ministry.

Sovereign Preparation

Those whom God calls, he prepares for service. This principle is clearly seen in the way in which God prepared Dr. Zenas Gerig for ministry in the Caribbean region.

A Sense of Destiny

Great Christian leaders have a sense of destiny, of the call of God on their lives, of divine appointment to service. Mordecai and Esther realized their position was not due to human action (Est. 4:12-17). Paul knew that his apostleship was not of human origin (1 Cor. 1:1, Gal 1:1). Dr. Gerig has long sensed that God had a purpose for his life.

Birth

Zenas Gerig was pronounced dead at birth. He was born prematurely in the midst of an Indiana blizzard on February 27, 1927. The attending

physician saw no signs of life and set the child aside to attend to the mother. However, Zenas' aunt was in the room, and she refused to abandon hope. She continued cuddling the infant until she saw him take a breath. God had plans for this child which were not to be thwarted by a premature birth, a blizzard, or an inattentive physician.

Farm Accident

About two years later another event occurred that revealed God's protection of Zenas Gerig. He was playing near the hay barn when, without his knowledge, his grandfather and his oldest brother pushed a heavy piece of hay loading machinery down the barn hill toward him. The momentum of the machine rolling down the hill could not be slowed. The huge metal wheel ran directly over the little boy and pressed him into the ground. Miraculously, he survived.

Conversion

Zenas Gerig was the sixth of nine children born to Menno and Zula Gerig. The family gathered for devotions every morning. The parents were serious about their children coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ. They prayed regularly for the conversion of their oldest child. When that one came to faith in Christ, all began to pray for the second child. By the eighth year of Zenas' life, the parents and five older siblings were praying for him. Zenas experienced the spiritual birth in the same room where he was pronounced dead at birth eight years earlier.

Fort Wayne Bible College

When Zenas Gerig graduated from high school, the United States was embroiled in the Second World War. Because of his ability to do farm work, especially to drive a tractor, Zenas Gerig was granted an exemption from military service, but was obligated to work the farm instead. Menno Gerig urged his children to attend Fort Wayne Bible College (FWBC) because he believed that a knowledge of the Scriptures and training in Bible study would benefit them. After two years of farming, Zenas Gerig enrolled in FWBC, primarily to follow his father's wishes. This, too, was providential.

Formal and Informal Training

The time at FWBC was a time of training for ministry. Important lessons were learned through the formal experience in the classroom.

However, equally important lessons were learned informally through active participation in ministry.

A Call to Divine Service

A vital lesson was learned through Dr. Jared Gerig's class on the Book of Acts. Through this course, Zenas Gerig was convinced that God had called him to full-time Christian service. God had delivered him from death at birth, spared him from injury when he was two, and regenerated him at the age of eight. Clearly, God had a purpose for his life. The message of the "Acts of the Holy Spirit Through Some of the Apostles," as the book has been called by some, made it clear to Zenas that God's purpose for his life was to serve as a minister of the gospel.

A Providential Contact

In the providence of God, Rev. J. A. Ringenberg, former President of the Missionary Church Association in the USA but then serving in Jamaica, spoke in a chapel service at FWBC. He spoke of the great opportunity for ministry opening at that time in Jamaica. There was a need for trained pastors. Zenas took time to speak privately with Rev. Ringenberg. During the conversation Zenas mentioned that he was interested in serving in Jamaica. "After all," he commented years later, "foreign missionary service without having to learn a language sounded like a pretty good deal."

A Beginning in Divine Service

In partial fulfillment of the pastoral theology course, Zenas Gerig wrote the by-laws and constitution for an interdenominational youth fellowship in his home town of Auburn, Indiana. This experience opened the door for him to write the by-laws for the Auburn Missionary Church and Sunday School.

Later on, Zenas sought the counsel of the pastor of the Auburn Missionary Church. Should he seek seminary training, or should he go immediately into the fields which were white for harvest? The pastor's words were prophetic, "Zenas, the Lord has given you the gift of administration. You will never be sorry for any time you spend in further training." Zenas determined that he should attend seminary, and eventually was led of God to The Biblical Seminary in New York, New York City.

During his time in seminary, Zenas acquired a wife, a son, and much experience in the gospel ministry. He held an assortment of jobs to pay his way through seminary, but he still had time to serve, together with his

wife, Esther, as youth leader at a Presbyterian congregation in New Jersey.

Toward the end of his seminary years, Zenas was contacted by Rev. Clarence Birkey, director of the foreign service arm of the Missionary Church Association in the USA. Rev. Birkey explained that there was a need for a seminary trained man to pastor a church in Jamaica. Zena and Esther accepted this call to divine service.

Summary

God sovereignly prepared his servants for the ministry in Jamaica. Zenas had sensed for many years that God had a purpose for his life. He had discovered the spiritual gifts which God had given him for ministry. He was now prepared to enter into that ministry.

Servant Power

The Apostle wrote to the Corinthians,

So then, men ought to regard us as the servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1 Cor 4:1-2, NIV).

Zenas Gerig was given a trust, spiritual gifts and training for ministry. He was also given a place of ministry, a place where he was to use his gifts and training for the glory of God and the expansion of the Kingdom. The key note of his ministry is servant leadership. He followed the admonition of the Lord, demonstrating that greatness in the Kingdom is predicated on service to the Body of Christ. He also demonstrated that faithfulness in small things leads to an enlarged ministry.

Pastor

The first ministry assignment for Gerig was to pastor a young congregation, Emmanuel Missionary Church in Mandeville. The church had been in existence for five years when the Gerigs arrived in October 1954. Since the church had been served by four short-term pastors, the greatest need was for organization. Utilizing the skills acquired in his pastoral theology course, Gerig prepared a constitution for the church. He organized fellowship groups for men, women, and youth. The Sunday School was revitalized and set new attendance records. Evangelism teams were formed and sent out from the church. Faithful

service resulted in strong church growth, and a vision for enlarged ministry.

For years too many of the best and brightest potential leaders of the Jamaican church sought training off the island and never returned to Jamaica. This training needed to be available in Jamaica so that the "brain drain" would not continue to impoverish the Body of Christ in Jamaica. After careful consideration, the Missionary Church in Jamaica concluded that it would have to open its own baccalaureate institution. Dr. Gerig was asked to take up the task.

Dr. Gerig considered the challenge carefully. His pastoral experience had convinced him that the greatest need of the Jamaican church was a baccalaureate level pastoral training programme in Jamaica. However, he thoroughly enjoyed his pastoral ministry in Mandeville. He loved the work of a pastor. He loved the climate in Mandeville. The thought of moving to Kingston to live was not a pleasant one.

As he considered what God would have him do, he came across an article in a *National Geographic* magazine. The article was titled, "Kingston, Hub of the Caribbean." As he considered this, it became clear that God had called him to Kingston to establish a baccalaureate level pastoral training programme. The Jamaican church needed quality indigenous leadership, and this could only be achieved by offering the training in Kingston. As no one else was willing to take on this task, he accepted the challenge.

Clearly, faithful service in a few things, pastoral ministry, opened the door to responsibility for more things, a pastoral training program.

Educator

Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) opened its doors at 1 Belmont Road, Kingston, in January 1960. There were four full-time students and two part-time students enrolled in the institution. In addition, night classes were offered to the laity who desired further training. Two important lessons were gleaned from the early years of this ministry.

The first was the power of faith. Was it possible for a baccalaureate programme to thrive in Jamaica? The need certainly was there, but would the people of God support it by sending their future leaders there for training? The school began small but grew in numbers yearly. By 1966, there were thirteen students, but in 1967 the student body dropped to eight. This led to the second lesson of these years, the reality of spiritual warfare.

The spiritual warfare focussed on two issues, dissatisfied students and physical illness. In 1966 Satan launched an attack against JTS, seeking to prevent this advance of the Kingdom of God. Several of the students

were upset when they learned that they would not be granted an external degree from London upon graduation. Rather than simply withdrawing from JTS, they remained enrolled and fomented discontent among the student body. This was the reason for the drop to only eight students at JTS. New students were not willing to enter such a situation. The Overseas Department of the Missionary Church, USA, Dr. Gerig's sending agency, questioned whether such small numbers justified the continuation of the programme.

The second aspect of the spiritual war was the health of Dr. Gerig's wife, Esther. Esther had struggled with poor health from the time of her arrival in Jamaica. Her condition worsened in 1960 when JTS opened. Health problems multiplied and many treatments were necessary over the years, including heavy medications and surgery, but healing was not realized. It appeared that the Gerigs would be forced to leave Jamaica. By 1974, however, it became clear that this was an attack of Satan designed to prevent the success of JTS. Claiming the victory through the power of faith in Christ, gradual improvement was granted so that they were able to remain in Kingston to continue the ministry to which God had called them.

Persistence in prayer and spiritual warfare brought increasing victory for both Esther and JTS. The student body more than doubled in three years, and continued to grow steadily. This required a larger campus and more teaching facilities. Additional personnel were needed. The power of faith was vindicated as all the needs were met. By 1980, there were 64 students and the school was securely in its new quarters at 14 West Avenue, Constant Spring, Kingston.

Faithful service in these few things led to greater ministry for the Gerigs.

Facilitator

Dr. Gerig's work to establish the programme of Jamaica Theological Seminary brought him into contact with other Christian leaders from all across the Caribbean region. Christian leaders on other islands were facing many of the same problems that confronted JTS, especially the issue of accreditation of the degrees and programmes offered at JTS and other Caribbean Bible colleges. When Christian leaders from the entire Caribbean region met informally to address this issue in June, 1971, the group asked Dr. Gerig to serve as chairman of the Steering Committee to develop its purposes, constitution and programme. This led to the formation of the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA, originally the Caribbean Association of Bible Colleges).

At the first organizational meeting of this new body, Dr. Gerig was asked to present a paper on "Recognition for Caribbean Bible Schools." This was the first effort at establishing minimum standards of excellence for membership in CETA. This led to the formation of the Accrediting Commission of CETA in 1977, which Dr. Gerig was elected to serve as coordinator. The Accrediting Commission formulated standards for both baccalaureate and diploma programs that were formally adopted by CETA in 1979.

Under the leadership of Dr. Gerig, JTS was the first institution to be accredited by this new accrediting agency. The accreditation team was chaired by Dr. Paul Bowers of Kenya, then General Secretary of the International Council of Accrediting Agencies, the accreditation arm of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. In 1991, Jamaica Theological Seminary became the first institution to be granted accreditation by the University Council of Jamaica, the accrediting agency of the Government of Jamaica.

Dr. Gerig's involvement in the expansion of JTS and the formation of CETA and its Accreditation Commission, as well as his involvement in the formation of the Jamaica Association of Evangelicals in 1965 and the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean in 1977, led to his participation in the General Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) in Switzerland in 1974. This assembly laid the plans for the formation of the Theological Commission of the WEF. Dr. Gerig was invited to represent the Caribbean on the commission. When this commission formed an accreditation arm in 1980, Dr. Gerig was again asked to serve as the Caribbean representative.

Again, Dr. Gerig's faithful service paved the way for an expansion of ministry. His work at JTS opened the doors to international ministry. But there was still more to be done, for God was not finished with his servant.

Coordinator

In 1983, after many fruitless attempts, a Jamaican principal was secured for Jamaica Theological Seminary. But a new challenge awaited Dr. Gerig. A new "brain drain" was weakening the church in Jamaica. The colleges which had recently upgraded their standards to receive accreditation from CETA needed quality leadership. Again, they sent their best prospects abroad for training, and, again, they did not return. Clearly, a graduate level training programme was needed in the Caribbean.

In 1981 a Steering Committee was formed to do a feasibility study. Dr. Gerig was asked to chair the committee. Following two years of study, the committee returned a positive report to the CETA Association Meeting. The report included a proposed constitution, written by Dr. Gerig, for the new institution. CETA approved the report, formed the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST) and appointed Dr. Gerig as Coordinator with the duty of bringing the new institution into existence in accordance with the approved timetable.

Subsequently, it was determined that CGST would be located on the campus of JTS. Even with sharing the campus of another institution, it was estimated that the development of CGST would cost US\$1,000,000. Despite the challenges, CGST opened in 1986 with twenty students. The school continued to expand its facilities to accommodate its growing student body, which reached 105 in the 1996-97 academic year. In 1993 it became the second theological institution granted full accreditation by the University Council of Jamaica, which operates under the portfolio of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Jamaica. It was preceded only by its sister institution, JTS. Through all of this, Dr. Gerig gave strong and inspirational leadership.

Conclusion

God has worked through the life of Dr. Zenas Gerig. While there are many lessons that can be learned from a consideration of his life and ministry, there are three principles that merit particular emphasis.

Indigenous Leadership

Indigenous leadership is essential to the growth of the church in any country. Dr. Gerig recognized this truth at a time when many opposed it vigorously. In the mid-1950s, the writings of Roland Allen, Melvin Hodges, and John Nevius were only beginning to be popularly acclaimed. Many churchmen were unconvinced that indigenous leadership was capable of leading the local churches.

Dr. Gerig recognized this truth and acted upon it. There was opposition; there were those who did not agree. Yet, Dr. Gerig committed himself to the task of preparing Caribbean leaders for the Caribbean church at Jamaica Theological Seminary. Subsequent events have vindicated his decision.

Cooperation Rather Than Competition

When Dr. Gerig arrived in Jamaica, the various branches of the Body

of Christ retained the excessive denominationalism of the United States and Europe. Dr. Gerig recognized that there was more to be gained by cooperation than by competition. First and foremost, there was the demonstration of the truth of the gospel by the love of the brethren one for another. He took a leading role in the formation of the Jamaica Association of Evangelicals and the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association.

Servant Leadership

Perhaps his greatest contribution to the cause of Christ in the Caribbean has been through his demonstration of leadership through service. Throughout his career in the Caribbean, Dr. Gerig has sought to do the things that would facilitate the expansion of the Kingdom of God. Assignments others were not able or willing to accept, he accepted as an act of service to God and the Body of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews challenged the people of God to remember their leaders, to consider the outcome of their lives of service to God, and to imitate their faith. What God did through Christian leaders in the past, he still does today, and will do again in the future. Dr. Zenas Gerig is living proof that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the same through all the ages.