

Planning for Spontaneity

Are you a planner ... or do you prefer to fly by the seat of your pants?

I'm sorry. That didn't sound very spiritual. Let me put that in churchy language: Do you make plans ... or do you just let the Spirit lead?

Order v. freedom. These two approaches don't have to live in opposite corners, but unfortunately, the "Orderites" view with disdain the "Freedomites," and the "Freedomites" look down their spiritual noses at the "Orderites."



It's nothing new. Early in the church, in the 2nd century, the Montanist Movement arose with an emphasis on the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. They saw the church as becoming too structured; conversely, the established church saw this movement as venturing into heretical

territory with too much emphasis on prophetic revelations instead of the written Word of God. There was some validity in the accusations of both groups.

Another example comes from colonial America. The established churches with their rules and order looked down on those who emphasized the "inner light" (to borrow a Quaker term). While schools like Yale and Harvard were still institutions with a Christian emphasis, they had concern over the "spiritual enthusiasm" of students influenced during the Great Awakening.

The tension continues, as churches stare down each other over the question of how much emphasis should we give to the Holy Spirit. Order v. freedom. This should not be an either/or matter. It should be both/and. We need to plan—and we need to let the Spirit lead.

"Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40).

Confession: I am a planner. I live by this verse. I have written previously about my love for to-do lists. My prep for Sunday's sermon begins on the previous Sunday.

Planning is good, but too much reliance on that plan can be bad. On previous occasions as I've prepared to lead a Bible study group, I have created teaching plans I was sure

would lead those in my group to (1) bring five more people with them next week, (2) go on the mission field, and (3) spearhead revival in America. But then someone would raise a question or an idea would surface that wasn't in my well-orchestrated plan. I can't help but wonder if I have been guilty of quenching the Spirit because I wouldn't deviate from my plan.

Once when I was preparing to lead a group through Experiencing God, I was captured by something I heard from the author, Henry Blackaby.

Plan, but be prepared for the Holy Spirit to work.

In the Book of Nehemiah, we find Nehemiah grieved by a report he received about Jerusalem. He rightfully turned to God and prayed for the city and for himself. He wanted God to work. He sought God's leadership, but at the same time, he planned.

The king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king ..." (Neh. 2:4-5).

And Nehemiah laid before the king a detailed plan. He had prayed. He had planned. He prayed again. And now he presented the plan he had prayed over.

Order and freedom are not mutually exclusive. Planning and relying on the Spirit should go hand-in-hand.

- Creating plans without a reliance on the Spirit's leadership is presumptuous on our part. *I can figure this out on my own,*
- Simply waiting for the Spirit to lead us at the critical moment is equally presumptuous. *God will tell me everything I need to know at the last minute.*

How important is a printed order of service to your congregation? Does the worship service follow a rigid plan or does it allow for some spontaneity?

Prayer—a dependence on God—must permeate our planning and our action. God will often change our plans at the last moment, but if we have been dependent on Him through the whole process, we are in a far better position to know what is of God and what is not.

Plan, but be prepared for the Holy Spirit to work.