



ENTREPRENEURIAL APTITUDE

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**ACTS 29
COMPETENCIES**

Biblical Foundations

It is important to note from the outset that the Bible does not explicitly talk about entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial aptitude. This paper cannot begin with a simple verse that states a clear commandment, *'thou shalt be entrepreneurial'*. Instead, we are required to search for passages that reveal the nature and practices of entrepreneurial aptitude. In order to do this, this paper will begin with a short yet powerful phrase *'I have become...'*

In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul says "... I have become all things to all people..." Now a statement like that can often leave people feeling confused or even concerned. This is often a statement we hear when Christians are compromising themselves or their beliefs in order to be relevant or liked by those around them. It is safe to say that such interpretation does not speak of entrepreneurial aptitude, but rather of retreat. To fully understand what Paul was talking about, one must read verses 22 and 23 together, "...I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

Far from retreating and playing it safe, Paul's intention is to reach out so that many may hear the good news of the gospel and be drawn to Jesus Christ. He affirms this in verse 23 by saying that he does this for the sake of the gospel and not because he wants to be liked by everyone. Paul is not trying to sell a bestselling book, nor trying to get likes on Facebook. Paul wants others to share in the blessings of the gospel, namely the joy of sins forgiven and eternal life.

Paul was not advocating that we compromise the gospel, not at all. In fact, Paul taught that believers are to "Abstain from every form of evil" in 1 Thessalonians 5:22. Paul would not have done anything contrary to Christ and the Scriptures. Remember, he rebuked Peter to his face for his compromise of the gospel in Galatians 2:12-13. Paul had a mission, given to him by God, that was clear in his mind and nothing was to stand in his way, least of all the pressure to conform to societal norms and preferences.

So how did Paul become all things to all people without seeking fame or compromising the gospel? By being a servant. "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them" (1 Corinthians 9:19). In 1520 Martin Luther wrote a thesis called *The Freedom of the Christian*. He began it with this paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Even with Paul's impressive resume and all that he had attained, he understood himself to be a servant (Philippians 3:4-11, 1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Corinthians 15:9-11). Paul is so blown away by the mercy of God, that he saw himself in his true colours; a man in desperate need of the gospel. Thus, Paul was drawn to Christ and lived his life in full surrender to him. He became one who was about his Father's business; seeking to see many others come to Christ. Before being a servant to all, Paul was first a servant to God (Romans 1:1, Titus 1:1-3).

Thus far, we have deduced that Paul became all things to all people so that he might win some. We have also established that Paul knew who he was in the gospel; a servant to all, so

that he might win more. We can conclude, therefore that Paul became all things to all people for the mission of God – to make disciple of all nations.

Paul elaborates by saying in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22a:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.

Paul says he adapts his teaching to those he seeks to reach with the gospel. He divides the world into the religious with the law, (Jews) and those without the law (Gentiles).

The message of the gospel does not change, but the method in which it is presented is dependent on the different cultures.

When Paul entered a city, he would ask two questions:

1. Where are the synagogues (the religious)?
2. Where are the market places or educational institutions (those considered far from God)?

From his life and ministry it can be seen that, whilst his gospel did not change, his method of presentation did, reflecting his desire to reach many.

Theological Reflections

There are many places in the Scriptures where we see Paul living this out. In Acts 9:19b-22 we read of Saul (who later became Paul) opening up the Old Testament Scriptures to prove to a Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah:

For some days, he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

In Acts 17:1-3, Paul spent three Sabbath days in the synagogues where he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

In Acts 13:14-16, the audience is the same cultural group as in Acts 9, however here the presence of the Gentiles is also mentioned (v16). This time Paul’s message is recorded.

Starting with one of the most significant parts of Israel's history, the exodus, Paul proceeds to tell the history of Israel and through to King David. From here he introduces the Messianic promise (Acts 13:23) and connects it to Jesus. He goes on to deduce that all the Scripture points to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 13:27). In this context, Paul uses Israel's history, the Scriptures, and the Messianic hope.

In Acts 14:8-18, the cultural context changes to that of Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas are in the city of Lystra where they heal a man born lame. The Gentiles saw this act and assumed that Paul and Barnabas were gods (Zeus and Hermes) and started to worship them. Paul responds with these words in verses 15-17:

“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Observe Paul's 'presentation' of the truths of the gospel. It is very different to his presentation to the Jews. He made no appeal to the Scriptures, but built upon the knowledge they had from the natural world. He stressed the evidence in nature of a supernatural Creator, and showed the foolishness of their idolatry.

In Acts 17:22-34, Paul is in Athens and sees the idolatry of the city. As he preached in the synagogue and spoke in the marketplace, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers requested him to teach this new message to the philosophers on Mars Hill. After assessing the situation, he says the following:

So, Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, or is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Again, he does not overtly reason from the Scriptures, but he applies the truth of Scripture to bring a correct interpretation of what is evident to all in creation - that there is a supernatural Creator and man was made to worship him.

From all these passages the point is clear. Paul always critiqued the culture through the lens of the gospel. This resulted in different presentations of the same truth in order to shine the light of Christ into a specific cultural context. Many would refer to what Paul is doing as “contextualization”. However, for the purposes of this paper, we should take it a step further and call it “entrepreneurial contextualization”.

Having seen this in the New Testament, we will now consider this approach in Old Testament passages. After decades of God sending prophets to call Israel to repentance, Jeremiah tells the story of God sending judgement on his people, Israel. It is interesting to note the change of tone in Jeremiah between chapter 28 and 29. Jeremiah 29 begins the story of hope that God would rescue his people from captivity and draw near to them in love. Jeremiah 29:11-14 holds a famous promise:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you...

Here, God's people are in a foreign land among people whom they considered to be unholy and far from God. Notice what God says to the people of Israel as a condition to the above promise. Jeremiah 29:4-7:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

This would have shocked the average Hebrew person to the core. Essentially, God was calling his people to immerse themselves into a pagan culture. They were to build a home, plant gardens and to marry into this foreign culture. They were to be a blessing to the city. They are not called to worship foreign gods, but rather they were called to dwell among a foreign people in order that the Gentiles might see the love and grace of the one true God.

In order to do this well, especially in the beginning stages, the Hebrew people would have had to practice "*I have become...* so that I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). This would have required some serious re-thinking and re-shaping of their expectations. It would have required deep repentance and a return to a God-centred view of the world. Israel needed to turn from selfish disobedience to the worship of Yahweh and to blessing the nations. We can say that this fresh understanding of their context was an example of entrepreneurial aptitude.

Finally, Jesus demonstrates the greatest example of, "*I have become,* so that I might reach some". John 1:1 says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". Then in verse 14, John says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John starts his gospel by saying that Jesus left heaven and took on flesh; he became fully human, while being fully divine, in order that he might save those who put their faith in

him. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus has become our great high priest, “who is [able] to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Jesus became all things to us, so that we might be able to confidently come to him. Here was the ultimate act of servanthood. This is how Jesus reaches us; this is how the gospel reaches us.

Cultural Engagement

In all these situations, God’s people, and ultimately God himself in the second person of the trinity, were fuelled by the desire to take the gospel to those who were unworthy of God; those who seemed unredeemable.

Today, that might be the drug syndicate in your city, or those who believe in other religions. It might be the de-churched millennials who are seeking spirituality, or it might be the scholars who champion atheism. These are the very people that Jesus came to save. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick ... For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12-13.)

The reality is that all of us are sick and in desperate need of a doctor, but the church has often retreated and focused on reaching certain pockets of culture that are perceived to be ‘easier’. The church, however, is called to reach all people. It is in the cultural groups where Jesus is neither named or known that we need to send entrepreneurial church planters. Church planters who can take the timeless truths of the gospel and re-imagine what it would look like to apply that gospel. Entrepreneurial aptitude is the ability to gain a hearing for the gospel and to present the gospel in order that it confronts cultures in fresh ways.

The phrase “Entrepreneurial Aptitude” has been commonly used to describe people who are great at starting new endeavours, highly innovative and strategic visionaries, energetic and self-starters. Those who score highly on entrepreneurial aptitude tests have been said to have the ability to enlist others on the ventures they start. Church planters need these skills. They need to start a new venture, raise money, recruit people, but crucially they need to apply the gospel to new cultures, as servants, so that they might save some.

Missional Significance

Paul knew that you not only had to present the truths of the gospel in a different way, but you would have to develop innovative methods to manage the ‘new’ household of God that now had Jew and Gentile as fellow partakers of the gospel. In Ephesians 3:6 Paul says:

“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The culture was changing, Paul had to learn and adapt, so that he might meaningfully engage. This was considered ground-breaking in Paul's day and it led to the establishing and flourishing of new churches and movements anchored in the gospel across all people groups.

Acts 29 is a diverse, global family of church-planting churches. If we are serious about the great commission, seeking to see every square inch of this globe reached with the good news of Jesus Christ, it will require great missional innovation. The world is changing rapidly with advancing technology and globalization. The methods churches, networks and movements were using five to ten years ago are quickly becoming obsolete. Entrepreneurial aptitude that is saturated in a desire to see people saved is crucial to reaching this ever-changing world.

Entrepreneurial aptitude is when one seeks to understand the culture of someone different to them in order to create new norms of reaching that culture. It is pioneering something new for the sake of communicating the unchanging truths of the gospel. It begins from simply living out the principle of *'I have become'*.

Further reading and reflection questions are available at acts29.com/competencies.