

SUMMER DEVOTIONS WEEK #10: August 3- August 9, 2015

Paul says to the church of Thessalonica, *“Your faith in God has become known throughout the world.”* From the bottom of my heart, that is my prayer for you. My prayer is that the same will be true for COV in the 21st century that it was in Thessalonica in the first century, that our faith would be known throughout the world. We intend to become a great mission sending church.

Acts 17:26 says, *“God determined the times set for everyone and the exact places where they should live.”* You are not here by accident. God determined the time set for you, the exact place where you should live. God put you here and God put you now because He wants you to be a part of this movement that He’s going to do around the world. If He didn’t want you in the movement, he wouldn’t have put you here and now. God determined when you’d live. You didn’t choose it. And God determined where you’d live. And guess what? You ended up in a church that means business about the Great Commission. You are not at COV by accident. God had a destiny in bringing you here.

Here’s God’s challenge to us: Habakkuk 1:5, *“Look at the nations and watch. Be utterly amazed for I’m going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told.”* I believe that. And I believe God is using COV to do greater things than we can imagine.

Colossians 1:6 says, *“This same good news that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere just as it changed yours that very first day you heard and understood the truth about God’s great kindness to sinners.”*

God didn’t bring you to COV to sit on the sidelines. You’re here to be a part of this great movement – for the cause of Jesus Christ...and you ought to have a sense of destiny about it. God is looking for people who will say, *“Me God. I’ll volunteer. I’m in. The devotions this week is about being all-in, about building a life of faith, being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.”*

I love you guys. Stay the course. Endure. Keep moving forward. Persevere.

Pastor Mike



Monday, August 3, 2015• Summer Devotions Day #64

Isaiah 6:8 (NIV) - *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”*

People of great faith all have one thing in common – BEFORE God uses them, they say to God in some form – *“Here I am Lord – send me. Use me. I’m your man. I’m your woman. I’m in.”* It’s in that divine moment that God begins to build great faith into your life. When you decide to push all your chips into the pot and dive in. Imperfect as you are, flawed as you are – as we all are – God seizes upon that act of faith and uses us.

In Hebrews 11:6 it says, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”* The only way you can get God's approval is by faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. You may be a great person but without faith it's impossible to please God. You may do all kinds of great things in your life but without faith it's impossible to please God.

Matthew 9:29 says, *“According to your faith it will be done to you.”* Jesus is talking. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible because God says it's your choice. You get to choose. *“According to your faith it will be done to you.”* You get to choose how much God blesses your life. You get to choose how many answers you have to your prayers. You get to choose how much God gets to use you in His plan for the world. How? *“According to your faith it will be done to you.”*

God says, *“If you've got a lot of faith, we'll get a lot done in your life. If you've got a little faith, we'll get a little done in your life. If you've got no faith, you get nothing done in your life. ‘According to your faith it will be done.’”* Faith is the key that unlocks the door to heaven. It is very important that you grow, develop, and strengthen your faith.

So today, would you just say to God – *“Here I am Lord. I step out in faith and ask you to use me for your kingdom. Use for your purposes. I'm all in – by faith. Build my faith and strengthen my faith as never before.”*

Years ago, I read this quote from George Bernard Shaw. It resonates with my soul. I pray it does yours as well.

“This is the true joy in life that being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, that being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish, little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I'm of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. The harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle for me. It's sort of a splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”



Tuesday, August 4, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #65

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

God put you on this earth for a reason. He put you here for a purpose. He has a plan for your life. He has a dream for your life, and God wants to use you for a great purpose, one greater than you could ever imagine. That's why God made you. He made you so He could use you on this earth.

The problem with this is in your mind. You have mental blocks. You have emotional barriers that keep you saying, *“How could God ever use me?”* So for God to use you, for God to bless your life the way He wants to, you have to have a change in your thinking, in your imagination.

Every great accomplishment that's ever happened in history began as an idea in somebody's imagination. It starts with a thought in your mind before it actually becomes a reality. Psychologists tell us if you really want to live you have to learn to have a dream. You've got to have a dream in life otherwise you're just existing.

What I want to do this morning is stretch your imagination because that's what God wants to do. He wants you to imagine how God could use you in ways like you've never, ever thought of. If you want to be used by God, if you want God's blessing in your life, if you want His dream for your life... **Look for a promise of God.**

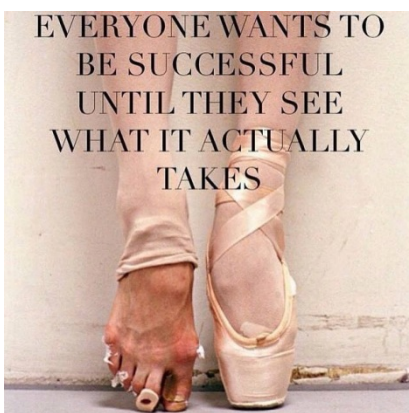
Build your life on the promises of God. Have you ever done that? Pick a promise and build your life on it. That's exactly what Joshua of the OT did, that's exactly what all great people of faith do. The word "promise" is a very important word in the life of Joshua and it's a key to his success. Thirteen times in the book of Joshua, the word "promise" is used. If you were to summarize the life of Joshua it would be "Capture the Promised Land." God had promised it to him. And at the very beginning as they were standing on the edge of the Jordan River getting ready to go into this major campaign, God says, "Let's just remind ourselves of the promise that I made." In Joshua 1:3 God says, "*I promised Moses that I would give you this land. So I will give you every place you go in the land.*"

Notice the phrase "so I will". God cannot lie. If He makes a promise to you He keeps it. If He says He is going to use you, He will use you. If He says He is going to bless you, He will bless you. If He says I will protect you, He will protect you, because God cannot lie.

At the end of Joshua's life many, many years later when he was very old and he was about to die, he looks back over his life and sees that they have conquered all of Palestine. At the end of Joshua 23 he says this, "*Now my time has come to die and every one of you knows that God has given you all the good things that He promised. Every promise He has made has been kept. Not one has failed.*"

Do you want to be used by God? Get in this book, the Bible! This is a book of God's promises, the Bible. There are over 7,000 promises in this book. They're like blank checks, waiting for you to cash. If you're going to grow in faith, you've got to build it on the promises of God. Go find a promise this week that you will build your life on.

For me, one of the over 100 promises of God that I have built my life upon is **Ephesians 3:20 (NCV)** "*With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine.*" With God's power working in you, what could The Lord accomplish?



Wednesday, August 5, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #66

"God gives a fresh start to those ready to quit." **Psalm 145:14 (MB)**

Have you ever wished you could just start your life over? Maybe just go back and do it over again? With God, you can start over. God is a God of fresh starts. That's what we're going to talk about today. Psalms 145:14 says, "*God gives a fresh start to those who are ready to quit.*" Today and the next four days, I'm going to share with you about the

five secrets of making a fresh start – S.T.A.R.T. Things from God's word that will help you regardless of your background, regardless of your past, regardless of how you've really messed up. You can make a fresh start.

One day Jesus was walking through the streets of the city of Jericho. A large crowd was following Him. There was a blind beggar by the side of the road by the name of Bartimaeus. To be blind in Jesus' day meant you couldn't work, obviously you couldn't read or write, and you probably couldn't go anywhere because there were no Seeing Eye dogs, there weren't a lot of these amenities that we have today that help blind folks. So he was reduced to simply begging for living. Everyday somebody would carry him out to the side of the road, set him on a pallet. He would beg for sustenance every day and at the end of the day they would take him back. It was a miserable life. His name was Bartimaeus and that means son of Timaeus or "son of the honorable."

Bartimaeus thinks, *"This is my chance. I've got to go for it. This is where I could get my fresh start. I'm not going to miss this opportunity,"* and he starts yelling and screaming above the noise of the crowd saying, "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!" That is the first step to a fresh start with God. S. Seize the moment.

The story is in Mark 10. *"As Jesus left town a great crowd was following. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus was sitting beside the road as Jesus was going by. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was nearby, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"* He says "I'm going to take advantage, it's now or never. I'm going to make the most of this." He seizes the opportunity, the moment.

All around you daily there are opportunities for a fresh start. You get them all the time, but you don't take advantage of them. Why? One word: Procrastination.

Procrastination is a strange phenomenon. We think it will make our lives easier, we think it will make our lives more present when actually it just creates more stress. The truth is, you already know the right things to do. You already know them. Not only that, you know the benefits of doing the right things in life. So why don't you do them? You keep saying, "I'll do it later." It's the *mañana* syndrome (not to be confused with the madonna syndrome). The *mañana* syndrome is "I'll do it tomorrow. I'll put it off. Someday I'll... One of these days... I'll get around to it. I'm aiming to." But you never do it.

The Bible warns us over and over about presuming upon tomorrow. I'm not guaranteed a tomorrow, neither are you. You have no guarantee that you will live tomorrow. Whatever you're going to do you better do it now.

Job 9:25 *"My days go quickly. More quickly than a runner, they sprint away."* The older you get the faster they run.

Job 8:9 *"Our life is short. We pass like shadows across the earth."* Your life is really just a blip, a shadow. It doesn't really last that long.

Proverbs 27:1 *"Don't boast about tomorrow for you don't know what a day will bring forth."*

Psalms 90:12 *"Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are. Help us to spend them as we should."*

Ephesians 5:16 *"Make the most of every opportunity."*

What do you need to stop procrastinating about? What do you need to start doing that you already know is the right thing. I think God has you reading this devotion because He wants to say to you - "Stop making excuses. Get on with it. Start living the things you know to do. Give Me your life now. Start living for Me now." Jesus said this in Luke 9:62 (MB) *"No procrastination, no backwards looks. You can't put off God's kingdom until tomorrow. Seize the day."* Stop procrastinating. Do you want a fresh start? Seize the moment. Now.

LET YOUR FAITH BE BIGGER THAN YOUR FEARS

Thursday, August 6, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #67

“The fear of human opinion disables you; trusting in God protects you from that.” Proverbs 29:25 (MB)

If you're going to make a fresh start with faith in your life, you've got to face your fears. You've got to tame your fears, toss them out. Don't let them control you. Fear has an incredible ability to paralyze our potential, to keep us from launching out, to keep us from having faith in our lives.

When we face that choice of faith or fear, if we choose fear it does some things to us. It makes us skeptical. We're afraid of trying anything new when we're afraid. It makes us selfish. We're afraid to commit to God and to others. It makes us short sighted. We focus on the past and not on the future. This is the second step to a fresh start with God. **T.** Tame your fear.

There are a lot of fears that we face when it comes to this issue of faith and stepping over the line to have faith. But Bartimaeus faced one that many of us face. That is the fear of disapproval or rejection. He knew that to shout out at Jesus in that crowd wasn't the right thing to do. He knew that people would look down on him for it but he was desperate, and he knew that Jesus Christ was the only one that could help him.

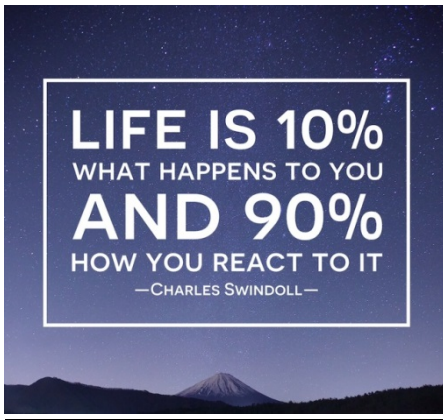
And look at what happened. When he shouted out to Jesus, the Bible tells us in Mark 10 *“Many of the people scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly, ‘Have mercy on me!’”* When he shouted out everyone around him told him, “Don't do that. Be quiet. Quiet down. Don't make a scene. Surely Jesus Christ isn't interested in you. He's got more important things to do.”

The devil whispers things like that to a lot of us. When that opportunity for faith comes into our heart, “God surely wouldn't be interested in you. Don't make a scene. What would people think of you?” Those kinds of thoughts often keep us from having faith. When you see that need, that opportunity to change, to be healed, all kinds of shouts from inside of us and outside of us tell us not to rock the boat.

Whose disapproval do you fear the most? Whoever that is, that person is your god. They can keep you from having faith or invite you to have faith. Peer pressure isn't just for kids. We all face it in our lives in many, many ways. And the fear of disapproval is a struggle for all of us. We were talking about words like “co-dependency” and what it meant to live life for somebody else's approval, and God's word was warning us about this.

Proverbs 29:25 says, *“The fear of human opinion disables you; trusting in God protects you from all that.”* That's an incredible protection that God can give us. The truth is you really wouldn't worry so much about what others think of you if you realized they didn't think about you anyway. People are not thinking about you, they're thinking about themselves. Just like you are.

God is asking you to do something greater than you've ever done before, different than you've ever done before. He's asking you to depend on Him in a way you never have before. Don't you think that's going to feel a little bit scary? Of course it is., and in that moment you and I have the choice. Am I going to fall back on my fear and stay the way that I was? Or am I going to look forward with faith and step forward in faith?



Friday, August 7, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #68

“You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’” James 4:15 (NIV)

The third step to a fresh start with God. **A.** Announce your faith. Go public with it. Announce your goal, your intention, the change you want to make in your life, what you’re asking God to do. Clarify what you really want and then state it publicly. You need to tell everybody because a secret faith is a shallow faith. If you’re going to make a change you need to go ahead and make a public announcement about it and say, “This is what I’m asking God to do in my life.”

In Mark 10:51 it says, “Jesus asked him [Bartimaeus] ‘What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man answered, ‘Teacher, I want to see.’” He said, I want my sight and I want to be healed.

Question: Why in the world did Jesus ask this? He walks over to a guy who’s a blind beggar, sitting on the floor, on the ground by the road and asks, “What would you like Me to do for you?” Didn’t He already know what the guy needed? Yes, He was the Son of God. Couldn’t He read His mind? Yes, obviously. Didn’t He know what the guy’s problem was? Absolutely. Why in the world would Jesus look at him and say, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

He was doing it for Bartimaeus’ benefit. By asking that question He allowed Bartimaeus to publicly announce his faith. Because Bartimaeus said, “I want You to heal me!” You don’t ask a guy to heal you unless you believe, unless you have faith that he can do it. By asking Him, “What do you want me to do for you?” and Bartimaeus saying, “I want You to heal me. I want You to give me sight.” He’s saying, one, I believe You are who You say You are, the Son of God. And two, I believe You have the power to change me. And three, I believe You can and will change me. It was a statement of faith. He was announcing it publicly.

Here’s the amazing thing. Jesus Christ asks you the very same question right now. “What do you want Me to do for you?” He asks it every day, every morning. He asks, “What do you want Me to do for you?” If Jesus Christ were to come to you right now and ask that question, how would you answer? You’d better think it through because He is asking you. He’s asking you right now and every moment of your life, “What do you want Me to do for you?” God wants to use you. He wants to bless you. He wants to make changes in your life. He wants to do incredible things in your life. Things you can’t even imagine. But you have to ask, and you have to ask in faith.

Did you know that every time you set a goal it actually is a statement of faith? When you say, “Here’s my goal in life, here’s my objective,” then you’re saying this is what I believe God can do in my life by this time.” Goals are statements of faith. Every time you say, “This is what I want God to do. This is what I want God to change, this is my dream, my goal, my vision, my objective.” You are publicly announcing your faith if you believe God’s going to help you to do it.

There is one qualifier when you set a goal, when you say, “I’m going to do ‘this’ with my life.” you need to add the phrase, “... if it is God’s will.” Because you don’t know the future, you don’t know what God has in store for you. You don’t know what His plans are. You’re not sovereign. He is. You say, “Here’s my goal... if it’s God’s will.”

James 4:15 "You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that.'" We can't predict the future so we don't want to be presumptuous but that doesn't mean you don't set goals, that you don't make statements of faith. You do make them.

Why should you announce it publicly? The more people who know the more support you've got. If you want to make a major change in your life and you keep it to yourself, "This is what I'm hoping God will do in my marriage... this is what I'm hoping God will do in my life..." that's a pretty shallow faith. You don't even have enough faith to share it with somebody else. The more people you share it with, the more people can pray for you, the more people can support you, the more people can help you, and the more people can encourage you. You need to go public. And the all important question - When? When will you go public?



Saturday, August 8, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #69

"From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." **John 1:16 (NIV)**

The fourth step to a fresh start with God. **R.** Receive God's Grace... Mark 10:52 says, "Jesus said to him (Bartimaeus), 'Go your way. Your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight." He accepted the grace of God. I know that there's a lot of hurt in all of our lives. Some of you are carrying major conflict, major pain, major disappointment, and major grief in your life. Some of you are quite lonely and you feel that happiness has passed you by. You're kind of like the blind beggar Bartimaeus on the side of the road. You're in a lot of misery. The truth is you can put on a happy smile but inside you're hurting. You're in a lot of pain.

Jesus Christ wants to give you a fresh start. The emphasis is on give. You don't earn it. You don't work for it. You certainly don't deserve it. You don't buy it. You don't do a bunch of religious rituals. You just receive the free gift of God's grace and the ability to make a fresh start. Regardless of what your past has been, regardless of what you've done, regardless of the things you've brought on yourself.

John 1:16 says, "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." How do you receive God's blessings in your life? You do it by faith. With Jesus' help you can make a fresh start. We need God's help.

I heard a story this week about a little boy. His father asked him to go to the back yard and move a big bolder. He goes in the back and he pushes it and it won't move. He pulls it and it won't move. He uses a lever and it won't move. He ties up his dog and tries to pull it with a rope and it won't move. He tried all these different ways. He finally comes back in and says, "Dad, I can't do it. It's impossible." The father says, "Son, Have you tried everything?" He said, "Yes." "Have you tried everything?" "Yes! I have! I've tried everything!" The father said, "You didn't try asking me to help you."

Many of you are in situations where you've tried all kinds of stuff. You think, "It's impossible. It's never going to change. It's never going to be any different." Have you tried asking God for help? Have you tried receiving God's grace and letting Him give you power that you don't have on your own? Receiving the grace of God.

Bartimaeus was blind but he had enough vision to see that Jesus Christ could help him out. He had enough vision to see that he needed grace. Do you? Do you realize how much grace you need in life or do you just think you can go through life on your own? Spiritual blindness is far worse than physical blindness. Because you don't realize how much you need God's grace in your life.

Grace isn't just for salvation. It's not just for you to get your sins forgiven and get you into heaven. Grace is for the daily mistakes in life. If you don't have grace in your life then you're going to be filled with regret. When you're filled with regret you get stuck in the past and if you're stuck in the past you can't make a fresh start.

I don't know what regrets you're carrying but I do know that the grace and forgiveness of God is available and you can begin a fresh start. Receive God's Grace right now. Absorb His grace into your soul. Into your mind and heart. Move forward by faith.



... and that is **WHY** the chicken crossed the road.

Sunday, August 9, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #70

"If people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing..." James 2:14 (NCV)

The fifth step to a fresh start with God. **T**. Take the next step. What is the next step? I don't know for you. For every one of us reading this devotion, it's going to be different. Every one of us is at different stages in our faith. I don't know what step you need to take but I do know you need to take it. For some of you, the next step for you is to accept Jesus Christ into your life. Some of you have already done that.

Maybe your next step is to be baptized, to publicly announce, "I am going to be a Christian. I am a follower of Christ." Maybe your next step may be to join COV – become part of the spiritual family here at COV. Maybe your next step of faith is to join a life-group or maybe God is saying to you – start to tithe or find a ministry to start serving in. Maybe your next step of faith is to share your faith with that friend at work and invite them to church. I don't know what your next step is, but I do know this: you've got one. God will never be finished in taking you deeper in faith. You will never just arrive. There is always, always, always a next step toward faith, toward love, toward joy, toward happiness. You have to take a step of faith and cross the road.

If you don't take the next step you're going to get stuck in a rut, and the only difference between a grave and a rut is the length. You're going to die. Your heart is going to shrivel up and your heart is going to grow cold and you're going to feel more distant from God rather than closer to God. You need to take the next step of faith. Some of you say, "I've been aiming to. I've been aiming to join a life-group. I've been aiming to get into ministry and start serving. I've been aiming to invite that person to church." You need to stop aiming and you need to pull the trigger. Stop procrastinating. Get on with it. Move.

Mark 10:52 Bartimaeus "...regained his sight and he began following Jesus on the road." Mark 10:46 says, "Bartimaeus was sitting beside the road as Jesus was going by." Notice the phrase "sitting beside the road." That's before he meets Jesus. Then notice the phrase "he began following Jesus on the road."

Which of those two phrases describes your life – sitting beside the road or following Jesus on the road? Which of those two lifestyles do you think is more fulfilling? Sitting beside the road or following Jesus on the road? Which do you think has more joy, more meaning, and more satisfaction? Sitting beside the road or following Jesus on the road? Which one do you want to represent your life? Sitting beside the road or following Jesus on the road?

There's only one way to follow Jesus on the road. Take the next step. Faith is more than just believing. Faith is more than thinking about Jesus, more than talking about Jesus, more than having opinions and convictions about Jesus. Faith is action. It is movement. It is activity. Faith is something you do. In fact, the Bible says in James 2:14 "If people say they have faith but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing."

What are you waiting on in order to take the next step of faith in your life? What's your excuse for procrastinating? Do you realize that none of us are guaranteed a tomorrow? None of us! You'd better get on with it now if you're going to do what Jesus has planned for you, because you're never guaranteed a Monday.

This story was in the LA Times a while back. "My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and he lifted out a tissue wrapped package. 'This,' he said, 'is not a slip. This is lingerie.' He discarded the tissue and handed me the slip. It was exquisite. Silk, handmade and tipped with a cobweb of lace. The price tag with an astronomical figure on it was still attached. He said, 'Jan bought this the first time we went to New York eight or nine years ago. She never wore it. She was saving it for a special occasion. I guess this is the occasion.' He took the slip from me and put it on the bed with the other clothes that we were taking to the mortician. His hand lingered on the soft material for a moment then he slammed the drawer shut and turned to me, 'don't ever save anything for a special occasion! Every day you're alive is a special occasion! I remember those words and thought about them through the funeral and the days that followed an unexpected death. I thought about all the things that my sister hadn't seen or heard or done. I also thought about all the things she had done without realizing that they were special. I'm still thinking about those words and they've changed my life. I'm not saving anything any more. We use our good china and crystal for every special event such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped or the first camellia blossoming. 'Someday' and 'one of these days' are losing their grip in my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing or hearing or doing I want to see it and hear it and do it now. I'm trying very hard not to put off, hold back, procrastinate or save anything that would add faith or laughter or substance to our lives, and every day, every morning when I open my eyes I tell myself 'This is a special day.'"

Where do you get the faith to begin a fresh start? There's only one source. Jesus Christ. Take a step of faith now. Today at this very instant.