

Life Lesson Lived

By Susan Forde

Introduction

Last week, we talked about wanting more of God's best for our lives, walking in a manner that Jesus walked, getting past good intentions to reality, and what that looked like. We built a bridge to walk across and called the planks, "putting guard rails in place and writing them down", "practicing what we know is God's best" and "showing the proof of our faith" in our actions to measure how we're doing.

Paul admits in Phil 3 that he that he has not yet obtained the fullness of his heart's desire to know Jesus better or to fully understand all of God's work or that he's been made perfect. In other words, he still had room to improve, to learn, to grow and to be continually transformed into the likeness of God with ever increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18). This means demonstrating God's power, His brightness, His love, His truth, with our praise and worship and whatever we do pointing to Him to give Him all the glory. The Message says, "our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him."

Well, I sure can identify with needing to continue to grow and improve, can't you?

In Rom 12, Paul encourages people to offer themselves as living sacrifices saying that it is their spiritual act of worship. In other words, it is their responsibility to God in response to His love, and Who He is and all that He did to deliver us from the bondage of sin and to restore our relationships with Him through the selfless sacrifice of our Savior Jesus.

This is really all about change and continuing to change - straining and press on towards God's high calling for us, just like Paul. We talked about change.

This week I'm going to talk about change again. I'm going to give my personal testimony of how God changed my life, and I'll finish up with some life lessons that are precious to me and that have changed my life.

But first, I'll take this opportunity to let you get to know Tim and me a little better. So although I won't sermonize you this week, I'm certain that you know, God speaks through other people's experiences. So be expectant for a personal word from God.

Tim and I met in the Navy (Picture) over half way through our careers, fell in love and got married. Tim was originally from WY and I was from MN. We both retired with 20 years in 2002. The last year of our active duty in California, we bought and lived on our sailboat which we called Libertycard. After retiring, we left for the Baja and ended up in La Paz in the spring of 2003. That is when we discovered CrossRoads Christian Fellowship. We were welcomed like family from the very start and always welcomed back like long lost friends.

We were full time cruisers and did pop in for a stay in La Paz from time to time. Never made it across to Mazatlan, did visit San Carlos, but really liked the Baja and all that it had to offer. We did a lot of hiking, fishing and spear-fishing, kayaking, scuba diving, snorkeling, windsurfing for Tim and that was all available in the Baja. Oh yeah, we played a little bluegrass too. But in fulltime cruising, we just had enough of the hurricanes, so we went back to the states in Jan 2006 to find work and to try to set ourselves up to do the part time cruising thing that we saw a lot of people enjoying. We never intended to stay gone for very long, but Tim found work in Las Vegas as an ironworker and I found that I could go to Seminary... and year led to year and we are still in Las Vegas.

But you may be wondering how it came to be that we are here right now in La Paz.

That is where my personal testimony comes in...

I Never Walked Alone

Born into a Catholic family, I always knew God existed. I had a heart of love toward godly things. Hind sight is great b/c looking back, I now know **God was walking with me every step of the way.**

Of course the trials of life made **seeing** God **with** me difficult, b/c I was distracted by my problems. I was pushed to over achieve by a demanding mother who was never satisfied, and love was commonly withheld for imperfect behavior. I felt abandoned and like a burden to a hard working father. I grew up with older siblings, & I had a brother just 2 years younger than I. I was an outcast at school, having few friends, so the brother that I was close to in age came to despise me just to survive his own childhood school pressures.

Finally, my own pressures pushed me to believe that I was not meant to survive. But **God was there in that.** He used my attempted suicide in 9th grade to bring about the brokenness that I needed to open my heart to His pursuant love.

Through my grown up sister, God led me to a local Bible believing church. I met Him eagerly & desperately.

I was “born again”!! Try telling that to your Catholic mother. She was on the phone so fast to the priest with her fears that I was damned, but **God was in that too**. The priest **supported** my choice & gave mom an explanation that must have calmed her heart’s fears for me. So I was allowed to go to the church & grow.

Life’s trials didn’t change for me, but my attitude & who I had helping me though them did. So, the rest of high school was tolerable; I simply didn’t care what people thought of me anymore. I just wanted to serve God.

I thought I’d serve God by following in my sister’s footsteps and joined the Navy. I ministered in whatever spiritual capacity I could during boot camp, but in the dental assistant school and my first duty station, I experienced the freedom of adulthood and I gave in to the desires of my youth. I made tons of poor and destructive choices.

Running from God was no good at all. He pursued me relentlessly. I struggled with alcohol abuse, got caught in the downward spiral of alcohol addiction & became seriously ill on two occasions. But **God was there in that** bringing me to a place of brokenness where I would stop & listen. Years went by & I wandered off once again. Not living a wild life, but not acknowledging God. I was living a wonderful life with wonderful things & a loving husband, yet empty, because I was not serving my Wonderful God. I was ignoring Him. He never gave up on me.

One day, the most beautiful thing happened. As I ignored God, suddenly His sweet presence became very strong with me in the room. He gave me the distinct impression that He could bring me back to a breaking point, that all the good gifts He gave, He could take away, but that He wanted to do something else. He gently called me back. He made me feel like the lost lamb that the Shepherd left the 99 to find. (Picture) The picture of Jesus carrying the sheep is very meaningful to me. I never ran again.

The story continues with finishing out our Navy careers, which you heard about earlier. We spent about two and a half years in the Sea of Cortez as live aboard cruisers on our sailboat. We visited many Mexican ports here on the Baja, but the most memorable for me was La Paz, where I found, what I tell my friends is, a treasure, Crossroads Christian Fellowship. Tim & I served in the music capacity whenever we were here. One of the times we were here we met Pastors David & Joyce. I took Joyce to coffee one day and asked her about

seminary. That is when I began thinking seriously about going to seminary. She said that if I went and the timing was right, I could come down to La Paz and act as an interim pastor while they were on home assignment. It could be an internship. Vulnerable...“Yeah, right.” I thought. No, I’d be going for personal growth.

Then Tim & I retired from retirement. We settled down, went back to work, got planted at a church called Grapevine Fellowship in Las Vegas. At that church, I was also influenced by a woman named Marylou to think about seminary. Finally, I started at King’s Seminary in 2007 for personal growth.

When I applied for seminary, I asked Pastor Joyce for a letter of recommendation and she said **again** that I should consider coming to La Paz for my internship while they were on home assignment. “Yeah right!” No, I was going to seminary for personal growth.

In Feb 2009, I was enjoying the sermons available online and decided to write Joyce and tell her that her sermons touched my heart & I was glad they were available. She wrote back to say hi and thanks and for the third time said that I should consider coming to La Paz as an interim pastor during their one year home assignment which happened to start in the summer of that very year. Now, remember, last week I said be careful about seeing everything as a sign, but to me threes in the Kingdom of God are significant, definitely something to consider. So this time, I wrote back and asked some questions.

Love for you began to draw me, doors began to open, and I began to carefully explore this as an opportunity from God to serve God and you. I talked to Tim and had his full support and encouragement. I talked to my pastor and received more support and guidance. And the third confirmation came when I addressed the school and asked them if I could possibly use the experience towards a required class called Supervised Ministry. The answer was yes and I applied and was accepted and I wish I had time to tell you all the wonderful things God did, all the things God taught me, all the encouragement I received and all the doors He opened to allow us to come here and minister to you. We saw some remarkably miraculous things.

Earlier I mentioned my wanderings from God and I know from my interruptions in living for God that there truly is accountability for sins, consequences, but also healing, wholeness and restoration for those who put their trust in Jesus. I am a recovering alcoholic; I offered my testimony at Grapevine Fellowship in Sep of 2009 so that my brothers and sisters there could help me celebrate the 15th anniversary of my sobriety.

I actually never dreamed I would be where the Lord has brought me today. I wish you could see me back then to compare the changes now. I stand here as evidence of what God can do in the lives of people who put their trust in Him and seek to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Life Lessons Learned

When we put our trust in Jesus as our Savior, not only do we experience changes in our lives, but we begin to learn from the Spirit of God. In Jn 14-16 Jesus is speaking to His disciples, comforting them, promising them the Holy Spirit. He just shared Passover with them in Jn 13 and washed their feet as an example of how they were to love and serve one another.

Then in chapter 16 He says v7 “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

He says that the Spirit will **guide** them (v13) and earlier in Jn 14(16-17), that His disciples will know Him and that He lives **with them and will be in them.** (Jn 14:26), Jesus tells them that the Holy Spirit will **teach** and remind them of what Jesus said.

This is also true for us now. The Holy Spirit is a precious gift given to us by God to enable and empower us to do His will and His work, b/c we cannot do it on our own. He guides us, lives with us and in us and teaches us. But we have to remain sensitive to the Spirit of God and the voice of God, and that takes an intimate relationship with Him. You will be amazed at all the growth you will experience just by making yourself available to God for God, to know Him better.

So, some of the lessons I have learned:

1) (This first one has two parts. I’m going to read the two parts together and then expound.)

Part 1 – I’ve learned (and this from personal experience) that God can and will use anyone who has a willing heart to serve, even if we don’t feel qualified. God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called. (**Part 2** - And then the question comes, “How do I know if I am called?” I’ve learned that the opportunity is the call and to make the most of every opportunity. Eph 5:16, Col 4:5)

Now about part 1: God doesn’t call the qualified...Examples:

- **Moses:** But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be **with** you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” (Ex 3:11-12 NIV)

God saw the potential of Moses’ sensitivity to His leading as God would lead Moses and His people on a great adventure out of Egyptian bondage.

- **David:** was a shepherd, the youngest son of a man with a bunch of boys likely stronger and better fit to be king, but God chose David to be king; b/c God saw his heart. “The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 15:7)

God saw the potential of David’s sensitivity to His voice in relationship to God. v 13 says “... from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.”

- And **Saul**, from Acts - AKA Paul. As Saul, he was a great and passionate persecutor of the Christian brothers in their efforts to spread the good news about Jesus.

Well, God saw the potential of Paul’s passion used for the will of God and chose him to preach to the Gentiles (Eph 3) which is also repeated by Paul in **his** own testimony on three other separate occasions. (Acts 13:47, Acts 22:21, Acts 26 17.)

Part 2 - And then the question comes, “How do I know if I am called?” I’ve learned that the opportunity is the call and both Eph 5:16 and Col 4:5 tell us to make the most of every opportunity.

Time:

- **Chronos:** expresses a duration of time. God Who needs no time, created time as the marking of the durations of life... days, weeks, months, seasons, years.
- **Kairos;** expresses an opportune or seasonable time. 2C the right time. 2D a limited period of time.¹ It’s an opportunity... a time suitable for a

¹Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G2540). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

purpose. God appoints certain times for the unfolding of His purpose or will. A kairos time.

We have to make the most of our time here on earth and not miss the opportunities.

James says in 4:14, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”²

Job compares our lives to a flower that withers away and a fleeting shadow. (Job 14:1-2)

Lk 14:16-24 Jesus is telling a story... about a man who prepared a banquet and invited guests. When the time came for the banquet, his guests all began to make excuses.

One said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

Another said, ‘I have just some oxen, and I’m going to try them out. Please excuse me.’

Yet another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

When the man heard this he became understandably upset and told his servant to ‘Go out to the streets of the **town** and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ But there was still room, so the servant went out to the **country** and brought those folks along so that the man’s house would be full.

And the man said, ²⁴ ‘I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’ ”

The original guests didn’t make the most of the opportunity due to their excuses.

That also reminds me of a story of a salesman in the city of Bodø, Norway, who lost a sixteen-car sale b/c he didn’t make the most of every opportunity.

...The story goes...A young man in a sweater, overalls, and rubber boots entered a car dealer’s shop in this city just north of the Arctic Circle.

“Have you got cars on hand?”

“Sure we have,” the salesman answered.

“I want sixteen cars, if I like the model.”

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jas 4:14). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

“I have no time for jokes—buzz off,” answered the salesman. The man did—right across the street to another car dealer, selling a different make of cars. He made similar inquiries and got full service. The man in overalls really **wanted** sixteen cars and paid in cash—500,000 Norwegian kroner (\$77,000 at the time). He belonged to a sixteen-man crew of a Norwegian trawler that caught record quantities of herring that season. Each fisherman netted 70,000 kroner during the season. They decided to buy new cars and to buy all sixteen at once, to get the highest possible discount.

—*Prairie Overcomer*

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These are stories about missed opportunities.

In other words, no task is meaningless for the kingdom of God, no task is too small, make the most of every opportunity, b/c it may be God’s call to you. The opportunity is the call.

2) We cannot put God into a box... What I mean by that is that there is always more of God available than we could ever hope or imagine. He is able to do more than we could ever think to ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). God is unlimited and God has unlimited resources. He can pour out from His unlimited bounty of blessings and provisions, but it is not for our own indulgence, to sit back and relax and enjoy it. It is all for His glory.

What does that mean? That we must be **willing** to use whatever He gives us to glorify Him and do His will, to complete His desires, to become all that He wants us to be and to continue the work of Jesus’ love and compassion, reaching out to selflessly to help our brothers and sisters and the lost, advancing the kingdom of God one selfless act of love at a time.

3) Before I go on to the third, I want to say, I love to worship, talk, think about and give glory to God. I’m obsessed with God.

I do not like to think about or talk about the enemy of our souls. But I would do you a worse disservice to ignore that he exists and neglect to warn you or remind you that he has set his goal to do the opposite of God’s best is for your life.

³Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications.

I've learned that the enemy uses people to cause division.

- Eve was used by the serpent in giving the forbidden fruit to Adam.
- Cain was used by the enemy to murder his brother.

He doesn't care about you or what happens to you. He deceives, disguising himself (2 Cor 11:14). He plants seeds of doubt about the faithfulness of God and the truth of His Word (Gen. 3:1) and misuses Scripture (Mt 4:6). He is called the father of lies and was a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44). He is our adversary, seeking to devour us (1 Pet 5:8). We need to be reminded that he schemes (2 Cor. 2:11)

He wants to destroy us. One of the easiest ways to destroy is from within. He works from within the church through offense, gossip, un-forgiveness and hatred. That is why unity is so important to God. That is why God wants us to have servants' hearts. That is one of the reasons why Jesus came – to be an example of giving up everything. “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 Jn 2:6)

4) Finally and I saved the best for last. When I started Seminary, I have to vulnerable again, I was overwhelmed with all the knowledge and I was learning among people who were already serving as pastors. I told you earlier, I was going for personal growth; that never changed really. So, many times I would get overwhelmed and feel confused. I found myself distracted from my objective of gaining personal growth leading to a deeper relationship with God. I found that I needed something to redirect me when this happened, something concrete that I could grasp a hold of when the learning took off in potentially all kinds of avenues of facts, opinions, debates, and personalities. I call it my True North. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. (From Mk 12:30, 31.)

Conclusion

So, we talked about change today and specifically how God changed my life through a personal encounter and relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ and what He did in His life, suffering, death, and resurrection. By the grace and forgiveness of God through my faith in Jesus, God has restored and reconciled me to a relationship with Him. Through the relationship He fills me up to overflowing with so much abundance that I am compelled to respond by ministering to God in worship, by sharing or ministering with love and nurture to my brothers and sisters within the body of Christ, and ministering to the world by evangelism, that is reaching out to continue Jesus' work of love and

compassion towards others... lost, the hopeless, the less fortunate, oppressed, broken hearted.

You have an opportunity this morning. An opportunity to respond to whatever God has been speaking to you. You have an opportunity to continue to change, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, to make the most of every opportunity, to seek to deepen your own relationship with our heavenly Father, by recommitting to spend time with Him every day. He wants to talk to you through His word and He wants you to talk to Him about your life, your thankfulness, your concerns.

Some of you may not have yet experienced this personal relationship that I have spoken of. You have an opportunity to experience your own personal life changing relationship with God in which you begin to change and grow in His love and for His purpose. It is a free gift from God as you respond with childlike faith by putting your trust in Jesus alone for that relationship and for forgiveness of sins. All mankind falls short of God's glory and that causes separation with God. A gap in our relationship. We can't earn our way to a relationship with God no matter how good or nice we think we are. It just doesn't do the trick to cross the gap. We can only respond in faith that what Jesus did for us in His life, suffering, death on the cross is all we need. His resurrection is the proof of the victory of His life of obedience that He selflessly offered His life and obeyed the Father's plan and will to save us.

Call to respond...