

Life Changing Moments

I was in my early 20s and was thinking about my father's health. There wasn't an immediate threat, but knowing how bad his diabetes was (he was a double amputee), you'd think about what was more likely to come sooner rather than later. What concerned me (I've shared this several times) was the thought of not having him as a biblical resource. But this wasn't healthy. It's right to lean on those older than you, but at this point I should have known more. He wasn't a help, but a crutch (no pun intended). This coincided with a time I was trying to turn my life around. I'd not been faithful for a few years, and the weight and consequences were taking their toll. So I had a moment. It scared me. It shamed me. It was not a bad thing, because it led to godly sorrow. This turned into consistent bible study, a connection with God, an understanding of my own, sharing the gospel, and it went from there. It put me in a better position for marriage and, eventually, for preaching the gospel.

That's my condensed story. I'm going to be very honest - I don't want this for my children. Those were scary times, and there wasn't any guarantee my heart would change. It's not ideal. It may be a reality, but wisdom teaches us to stay by God's side. But today I'm dealing with reality. The reality is that the body of Christ will have those who fall away (many never return), or those who walked with the devil before they were led by the Lord. Even here at North Collin, this has occurred. You know, there's a balance of not using the pulpit to pick on someone, yet addressing issues that more than one person struggles with. There's wisdom in not getting too specific to the point of unnecessary offense, while never getting specific enough to hold any personal meaning.

Some of you have changed your minds over the past year, and I'm so happy for you. Those who are aware want nothing but the best for you, and the best thing for you is a growing relationship with Jesus. What caused this change? Is it the weight of serious changes? Marriage? Children? Did you hit rock bottom? Did you have some kind of scare? What causes that spark?

Consider powerful moments that changed the course for:

- Abraham (Gen. 12): Told To Go
 - Sometimes men/women aren't making any steps forward because no one has called them to action.
 - Be on the lookout. Many times you see something in them. Encourage them.
- Solomon (1 Kings 3): Prayed For Wisdom
 - Sometimes the weight of a new role puts things into perspective. Perhaps entering into a marriage, considering children, etc.
 - Be on the lookout for those in such phases. Strike while the iron is hot!
- Josiah (2 Kings 22): Found The Law
 - Josiah began to seek the Lord at a young age and did what was right, but in the 18th year of his reign (when he was 26), the law was found, and he realized how much the people had broken covenant with God. This isn't exactly the same, but many times our

young people are familiar with God, but they don't have a deep understanding of God. When they finally dig into the Bible for the first time, it hits them like never before.

- Be on the lookout. Invite these young people to a Bible study at your homes or over breakfast or a cup of coffee. Open the words of life with them!
- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15): Came To Himself
 - This son represents all of us in that we've all gone our own way and sinned against God. Many times we have to hit rock bottom before we return to the Father. This is admittedly a nerve-wracking state because many sons don't return. In this parable, the Father doesn't go out to find the son. I think all these parables show different realities. It's not that God doesn't make the effort to bring a sheep home, but He doesn't force one back into the fold.
 - Be on the lookout for those who may be hitting rock bottom and show signs of returning. Be there to encourage and point them back home. Know the balance of compassion and charge. Don't lower the bar; remind them of the charge to obey God, but be compassionate and patient. They may be fighting old habits, and as we know, they're hard to break. Above all - thank God for His patience.
- Saul (Acts 9): Walking A Road
 - Saul had no clue what was in store for him. He thought he was serving God, but his theology was off. He didn't see Jesus as the Messiah, but he was very passionate and a man of conviction. Yet, he was wrong. Sometimes our struggle isn't unholy living, but rather inaccurate thinking. It can rob us of a relationship with Christ. Christ has met many of us on that road and has opened our eyes to areas of ignorance. He's removed blinders. This isn't just studying God's word but reading with unprescribed glasses.
 - Be on the lookout. You may see a brother or sister struggling to see God correctly. We must have patience and humility. This can be a long and tedious road when one's mind is made up. It's ultimately between them and Jesus. Try to help, but don't take it personally. Again, thank God for time. Thank Him for allowing us the opportunity to change our minds and healing the eyes of our hearts.
- The Thief (Luke 23): Ridiculing The Son
 - Yes, both men at Jesus' side threw insults at Jesus. They mocked him and acted in disbelief. That is, until the power and grace of Jesus began to sink in. Finally, God's love penetrated the heart of a thief. He came to grips with reality: Jesus was good. He was not. You may be here this morning, and you've been keeping Jesus at an arm's length. Perhaps you've begun to look at Jesus more closely. See His compassion and loyalty. You see Him as presented in the word, and the Him working through His people in the world.
 - Be on the lookout. Remind our neighbors that Jesus is looking to save those who have hurt Him. They can only be saved by Him. Our goodness will never force the gates of heaven open, but neither will our sins demand they stay closed. Faith in Jesus is the key to the Kingdom, which Jesus has graciously provided. Do you want to be with Him in paradise? Then believe in Jesus. Forgive those who have wronged you. Change your mind about Him. Embrace who He is and be united in His death through baptism. Let Him wash your sins away. But as the Hebrew writer says, "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." **Heb. 3:13**