

Why You Don't Experience Freedom in Christ

A bunch of us girls were gathered in my friend's living room, excited, giggling and each one of us talking over all the rest.

Our Bible and the book we were studying for that month: *The Search for Significance*.

After all of these years, I can still remember the title and what the cover looked like.

I didn't want to admit it at the time, not even to myself, but the book hit far too close to home for me.

The truth is: I was afraid to take it in.

I was afraid that if I truly believed that my worth and value didn't depend upon my capabilities, my performance and my ability to succeed in life, I'd be forgotten. I'd be invisible.

I was afraid that if real freedom in Christ meant that God wouldn't love me more if I was a "good Christian" and did all of the Christian things, then I'd become one of those "greasy-gracey people".

Just like the proverbial circus elephant whose chains that kept him tied to the iron post have been taken off, but he just keeps walking round and round in a circle, completely unaware that he's free ... or maybe afraid to venture too far from what has been familiar.

Freedom can sometimes be intimidating when you've been bound for a long time.

I genuinely wanted everything God had for me, but I was my own

worst enemy, my loudest critic.

Nothing I did for God was ever enough. Just when I was sure I was going to hit the mark this time and really feel that sense of satisfaction deep inside, suddenly some invisible something upped the ante and it was no longer enough.

Defeated, I'd set out to try to hit the moving target that was the pleasure of God...

Never knowing the truth.

It was a chilly morning in late April when my alarm went off.

I grabbed my Bible, my kids' bucket of colored pencils, a pen, a stack of Post-it notes, my tablet and headphones and sat at the table.

I opened my Bible to Galatians, found one of my favorite Bible teachers and set out to really understand what Paul was saying in this important letter.

An hour later, I just sat staring at my Bible. Dazed. Mind blown.

I could slowly feel something inside of me begin to unlock. Missing pieces of the word "freedom" were coming together, and by the end of May, I had learned the most important lesson I've ever learned in my Christian life.

Worth.

Significance.

Value.

Satisfaction.

God's pleasure.

God's blessing.

I will never earn any of these. I don't even have the capability to earn them, and if I could then Jesus died for no reason at all.

I have worth, significance and value because of Jesus' blood. That's it. That's the whole story and there is no sequel.

I have God's pleasure and blessing because He created me, He loves me—that's it. There is nothing more to be added.

And I no longer have to fear becoming a "greasy-gracey person" because of this one commandment, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Jesus also said, "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

Here's the thing:

Freedom in Christ means that we understand that our justification (a five-syllable word that means "just as if you've never sinned") doesn't rely on your ability to do anything. It has nothing to do with you at all!

We are justified by grace alone, by faith alone, through Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

But we keep God's commandments because we love and honor Him, we want to glorify Him, and we want a growing relationship with Him.

You see how freedom changes our motives?

I no longer "do good Christian things" so that God will love me more, I keep His commands because **I** love Him.

And that new motivation is a game-changer.

I am now free to receive the love and validation of God without fear of missing the mark, without fear of not making the cut.

Living free in Christ involves understanding two important

things: my justification and acceptance by God rests solely in the blood of Jesus and I will not use this freedom as an excuse to live in the flesh, because that is, in and of itself, bondage. Rather, I will keep God's commandments because Christ has set me free, therefore I will choose to do what I ought to do, not what my flesh wants to do.

The delicate balance of Christian freedom.

It's not either-or, it is a balance of both: freedom from earning God's pleasure, but pleasing Him by keeping His commands. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together, they live in the country with their two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associates of practical theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of A Little R & R where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

Take These 8 Biblical Stances When Interceding for the Sick

I'm rotating four people through my prayers right now, for one not serious but miserable infection, one very serious infection, one emergency surgery and one planned outpatient surgery.

So I thought I would try to dissect my prayers for these people, in case you need some ideas for how to pray for yourself or for your own folks who have health issues.

Eight Ways to Pray for the Sick

Think Back

In the Hebrew language, the future is considered behind our backs where we cannot see it, and the past is what is clearly in front of us. I know I can't see the future, to know what God will do about a person's illness, but I can look at what He has done before.

My prayers become declarations of extraordinary health stories in the Bible. *You brought the widow's son back to life, Lord. You restored the nerves of lepers. You healed people from deadly snake bites. You helped people stand. You are the Creator and healer of our bodies, so of course You're the One I'm going to talk to when I have friends or family who are sick. You are the One who can help this person.*

Tell God What You Want

I'm not one to beat around the bush in prayer. I just come out and say, *Lord, I want you to make this person all better.*

"In the evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick ..." (Mark 1:32a).

Ask God What He Wants

God is excellent at managing things. *Lord, I know for sure that You are smarter than I am and do everything better than I do, so I confess my confidence in your methods regarding this person's illness.*

Pray for Maturity

Trials come to move us forward in our inner maturity. *Lord,*

may the physical trial this person is experiencing have great results in his heart and mind.

Pray for God to Be Glorified

We need some imagination. How might God be using this illness to show Himself to the person or to the family and community? *Lord, show your greatness in this situation. Display Your power and wisdom and care for this person.*

Ask for Encouragement

Maybe this illness will be over quickly or maybe it will be a long battle. Not knowing can be frightening and disheartening. *Lord, give this sick person hope and courage to live with pain and discomfort today. Assure him that you are close and that you care. Give him what he needs to keep going and to have a deep joy.*

Focus on Eternity

Our bodies are fragile. *Lord, I know we do not live forever. Thank you for the reminder that our bodies are wasting away. Thank you for the hope of eternal life. Thank you that someday we get new bodies that won't hurt!*

Thank God in Advance

We know God is at work. *Lord, I thank you for what you're going to do in this sick person's mind, heart, and body. I know you're taking care of this person, and I thank you for your attention to this need.*

Okay, there's a peek inside my conversation with the Lord this week.

I pray if any of you are under the weather or are dealing with chronic health issues that God will give you a boost in your heart today. He sees you, and He hasn't stopped caring, my friend. He loves you. {eoa}

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You Prayed and Are Still Bombarded With Fear—Now What?

Jesus and His disciples are in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. The wind and waves are about to take them out. The disciples are in a panic. Jesus stands up and with a word calms the storm. And then He has the audacity to say to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

“Why were you afraid?” We were about to be dead! Didn't you see?

No wonder the disciples were astonished.

You may be in the same place now. Circumstances and your own mind make it seem as though fear and worry is the only option. You pray, but your head is still afraid and anxious after you pray.

I've been asked by several people recently, “Why doesn't God heal me from my anxiety?” “Is anxiety and fear something a person can ever really get past?” “Why don't my prayers take care of my fear and anxiety?”

I understand the question. I've been there. Only God knows every detail of your genetics, mind, circumstances and so on, and He deals with each person individually. But from my own personal experience and from what I read in God's word,

“giving up” is what’s not an option. You don’t have to succumb to a life of fear and anxiety. There are too many promises of a sound mind, too many directives to “fear not,” too many stories of people (including Peter—and me) who have truly put fear and anxiety in their rearview mirror forever to say that you have to be stuck there.

If you are still afraid or anxious after you pray there may be many possible reasons. But here are three I encourage you to pay attention to. You may still be afraid or anxious if:

1. You keep taking it back.

Sometimes we’re like the child who brings their broken toy for daddy to fix—and then refuse to open our grimy little fists to let God have it. Trying to wrestle things out of God’s hands when He doesn’t do things the way we think He should doesn’t get us very far.

Peter, who learned what it was to go from fearful to fearless, said “Cast all your care on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). The word “cast” in the original Greek is very descriptive. It’s the same word used to describe how the disciples cast their garments over the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the triumphal entry (Luke 19:35).

When you take your fear and anxiety and cast it onto Jesus, don’t keep grabbing it back! When you turn it over to Him, it’s not yours any longer. God’s got this! When those thoughts and feelings try to come back, cast them on Jesus again. His shoulders are big enough to carry it all.

2. There are no legs on your prayers.

Trusting God to take care of it does not mean sitting back and doing nothing. Just the opposite. While we don’t rely on our own actions, neither do we become inactive. “Get up off your face. You’ve got issues to deal with!” God said to Joshua (see Josh. 7:10). God’s intervention almost always involves guiding

you to take some action on your part.

Even scientific research demonstrates that those who see themselves as collaborating together with God generally come through challenges with more strength and resilience than either those who sit back and wait for God to do it all or try to do it all on their own.

The key is not to spin your wheels trying to force something to happen. You take any action steps you know to take, such as optimizing your physical lifestyle, learning to take control of your thinking and developing skills in any needed area. At the same time, you continue to seek God's input, guidance, healing and peace. It's both-and.

3. **It's just "not yet."**

We as human beings get impatient. It's part of our nature—instant gratification for everything. Sometimes we're in the middle of a process that God is using to create us to be who He needs us to be. I often talk to people who wonder whether they are "doomed" to a life of misery when God's in the middle of doing something. What a tragedy to give up before we're finished!

The middle can sometimes be the hardest. Learning to trust God when everything's not OK takes going through stuff with Him. If you are consistently seeking to hear His voice in your journey and you aren't hearing anything new, just keep doing the last thing He told you until His voice breaks through again.

Perhaps it's a good time to remember the Serenity Prayer once more:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Reprinted with permission from Dr. Carol Ministries blog. Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is a physician, author and speaker.

Is the Alexandria Shooting a Wake-Up Call?

“The light shines in darkness” (John 1:5a).

Words fail to express my horror, outrage and grief over the shooting that took place Wednesday morning in Washington, D.C., when a gunman opened fire on Republican congressmen practicing for a baseball game. What has happened to our beloved nation of America? I think I know at least part of the answer—God is missing. Because we have told Him to get out of our culture, our government, our schools, our business, our marketplace. Therefore He is slowly backing away, taking with Him His protection, peace and blessing. The impact of His gradual removal from our national life has never been as shocking to me as yesterday morning.

If we do not return to God, if we do not get right with God, if He does not return to us, then yesterday morning is just one tragedy of many more to come. But the light shines in the darkness of hatred and violence and anger and evil. Could it be that this shooting is so stunning it will wake us up? Could the hidden blessing be that people would say, “Enough is enough! We need You, O God of our fathers! Please return to us as we return to our faith in You”?

Which is why the following brief remarks given on the Senate floor by my dear friend Senator James Lankford are so powerful. I want to share them with you:

What Holds You Back From Receiving God's Best

Let go of the small; lay hold of the large.

What are you grasping, holding so tightly ... that you might be missing the opportunity in front of you today?

Could you be using up your energy and focus by looking back to a better time, relishing thoughts of:

- A memory of past success?
- The sweet victory of yesteryear?
- Your fleeting moment of being "someone"?

Our thinking can become small over time when we hold on to the success of the past at the expense of seeing an opportunity for the future.

I love the way Jesus seized teaching moments like this with the disciples, even captured them for us today. Look at this one:

Over 5,000 people had followed Jesus to a mountain outside the city. He was moved with compassion for them. He knew their pain, and He healed their sickness.

It was a full day, and He knew the people had grown hungry.

The disciples suggested they send the crowd into the city for food.

Jesus confronted their small thinking with His answer:

“They do not need to depart. You give them something to eat”
(Matt. 14:16).

He was about to unpack a powerful teaching moment.

The best the team could come up with was “only five loaves ...
and two fish” (Matt. 14:17).

Thinking too small.

Jesus’ answer for them was the same as it is for you and me:

Bring your small thinking here to Me.

The disciples hungrily relinquished the meager lunch to the
Master for what would become divine multiplication

... feeding the multitude

... with 12 baskets left over.

Jesus is the solution for small thinking.

Will you pry your fingers from yesterday’s meager, small
thinking and give it to the Master?

Will you participate with Jesus to meet the needs of the
larger crowd?

God’s ready to feed the hungry ... through you.

Notice, Jesus set up a scenario where the disciples felt
inadequate; they did not have the answer to the hunger of this
crowd.

Who is waiting on you to catch up? To feed them? To supply
their needs with your goods, services, solutions?

If you clutch your small thinking, you’ll miss the opportunity
to “feed them.”

You don't need to send your client, your customer, your audience away ... because you don't think you have the goods.

You know something. You know Jesus who has the multiplication factor.

Let go of your small lunch and realize that God has invited you to become a solution.

"You give them something to eat."

Read the full account in Matthew 14:13-21 and ask God to help you elevate your perspective today.

It's time to let go of small thinking.

Lay hold of the large.

Feed those around you with hope, product, finance, unique solutions only you will bring.

I'm watching spiritual professionals, industry changers and world changers step up in business, music and media by letting go of what was already a huge success because God wanted to expand their borders to larger reach.

More of that to come.

It's time.

Linda Fields, author and speaker, founded 7-MPact Marketplace Ministry.

God May Be Calling You to Topple These 'Christian' Idols in Your Life

I'm not talking about a Buddha statue sitting on a fireplace mantel of a Christian home.

I'm not talking about Christians who have some sort of feng shui going on: that dream catcher on a bedroom wall or the prayer rug pointing east; thinking they can mingle the God of the Bible with other gods and religions.

Nope—not talking so-called inclusive Christianity.

I grew up in the church of the 80s and 90s, when Christian idolatry was in full swing.

Mega-TV evangelists broadcast in every Christian home were the last word and authority on theology, and few people took the time to examine whether or not this name-it, claim-it theology was actually biblical.

The Christian music market was exploding into the stratosphere as Christian music artists moved from doing concerts in churches to doing them in huge stadiums.

The topic of church growth was burgeoning, and megachurches were beginning to burst at the seams.

The bar for success was raised, and there was a clear distinction between successful ministry and the minister who was, well, average.

Combine that with the blossoming message of "Don't settle," "Don't be average," "Mediocre is a bad word," "Reach for the stars" and "You can be anything you want to be."

Image and perception became crucial.

Measurable results were the goal.

God's call was equated with notoriety, nickels and numbers. If you were successfully fulfilling God's call, surely people would know about it and the more God blessed your ministry, the more the word spread.

God's blessing was equated with:

The amount of popularity you enjoyed

The size of your bank account

The square footage of your home

This definition of success came with a great price. Once the ante was upped, those who achieved success now had to maintain it.

The perception of a perfect life, a perfect marriage and a perfect home had to be maintained.

Because anything less than perfection meant that God's blessing must be waning.

Who are we really worshipping?

We were made to worship.

Mankind was created with a desire to look to someone greater than himself as a standard for achievement. And God's design was that He would be that standard.

We were designed to look to God as our standard.

We were designed to make God's approval our measure for success.

There is great danger in elevating fallen man to a standard of success and achievement. Not only because it sets them up for failure at some point—it is a mirage. It is a distortion of

truth.

The very foundation of idolatry is distortion. It takes what God designed—worship—and distorts the image so that someone or something else becomes our object of adoration.

And it's hard to see it in our own lives.

It sneaks in with our favorite speaker or blogger, a singer or worship leader we highly respect. If we are not careful, that respect begins to turn into adoration, and that adoration comes with certain expectations of what that marriage blogger's marriage and family must be like ... what that worship leader's personal life must look like ... what that pastor's home life must be like ...

And suddenly, in the news we read about a moral failure and divorce, their son announces that he's gay, or that worship leader was spotted in bar drinking beer or smoking a joint.

That image is shattered.

Our idol has fallen from its throne and shattered in a million pieces on the floor, because he or she wasn't created to be worshipped and adored.

They were made to worship, not be worshipped.

Friends, Christian idols are falling from their thrones one by one. Hardly a week goes by that I don't read of a pastor's moral failure, financial crisis, divorce, or family crisis.

We read of Christian stars gone rogue with their personal behavior and their theology being hijacked by political correctness.

God is shaking our perception of Christian success.

There is no formula for spiritual success.

Spiritual success can't be measured by notoriety, numbers and

nickels:

How perfect your family looks
How perfect your marriage looks
How many book deals you have
How big your bank account is
How Pinterest-perfect your home looks
How branded your face is

God has a different kind of measuring, and it's His pleasure.

You can't see that, you can't elevate that or wear it like a badge.

You can't even measure that, blog about it or write a book about it.

Because God's pleasure wasn't meant to be bragged about, it is based on the reality of our relationship with Him, not perception of reality.

Each person looking to God alone as the standard, not to fallen man as a paragon of Christian success and God's blessing:

Do you look at things from the outward appearance? If any man trusts that he is Christ's, let him consider again that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. For even if I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord has given us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed, lest I appear to frighten you by my letters. "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." Let such a person consider this: that as we are in word by letters when we are absent, we will also be in deed when we are present.

For we dare not count or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. They who measure themselves by one

another and compare themselves with one another are not wise. But we will not boast beyond measure, but within the boundaries which God has appointed us, which reach even you. For we are not overextending ourselves as though we did not reach you, since we have come to you, preaching the gospel of Christ. We are not boasting of things beyond our measure in other men's labors. But we have hope that when your faith is increased, our region shall be greatly enlarged by you, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you and not to boast in another man's accomplishments. But, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself who is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

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5 Steps to Healing Your Heart When Your Spouse Fails You

Your spouse cheated—emotionally or physically. You found pornography on their smartphone. Your spouse abuses alcohol or drugs, is physically or verbally abusive, spends money you

don't have, flies into a rage or cuts you down verbally without warning. You cannot trust they will do what they say or be where they say they will be. Promises are not kept. There is no trust in your marriage.

How are you supposed to live with someone you cannot trust?

Love is to be given freely, unconditionally. You cannot earn true love, control it, or pay for it.

But trust is different. Trust must be earned. Trust that is given indiscriminately is foolish at best and often destructive. Trust is fragile and can be lost in a moment. Rebuilding trust is enormously difficult, and is much costlier than building it originally. Trust is priceless.

So what are you to do when trust has been broken? Is there any hope? Is it ever possible to move on?

Rebuilding trust in marriage can be done. It takes both partners' investment to make it work, and it takes time. But this article is especially about your own heart in the process. Here are five important steps to take when there is no trust in your marriage.

When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

You married a sinner. You married someone who has—and will—let you down. The details of your spouse's brokenness are as unique as they are, and you're in the most intimate position to see it and be hurt by it. Hoping and wishing for your spouse to be different doesn't make it so. Ongoing addiction, abuse or unfaithfulness are too common in our world. It is neither useful nor godly to deny the reality of who your spouse is.

That may sound harsh, but it's not. Marriage as God intended it is a place where both partners have their deepest wounds exposed and experience healing and transformation through

being loved in the process. We are each fallen, and marriage often exposes our fallenness at its worst. The question is not whether your spouse is a sinner; the question is what they are doing about it.

Own your own stuff.

Your spouse married a sinner too. You may have been blind to the truth, inflicted deep wounds on them, enabled bad behavior, refused to extend love, placed unrealistic expectations on your relationship and engaged in plenty of destructive behavior yourself. Every dysfunctional marriage includes two people.

This is not about assigning a percentage to how much blame your spouse gets and how much shame you carry yourself. Instead, it's about bringing it all into the light. God can do amazing things when brokenness is turned over to Him. Your role is to do that with your own stuff, and to be a safe enough place for your spouse to do the same.

Treasure the truth.

Some of your spouse's brokenness may be irritating, annoying, even painful. Some of it may be truly destructive. Only you can determine where your own marriage falls in that continuum. Unless your spouse has turned their life completely over to Satan they are a kaleidoscope of weakness and strength, childishness and maturity, bad and good, brokenness and healed-ness. As are you.

Being honest about the truth helps in making decisions. How destructive is your spouse's behavior? How willing are they to go through the process of change? Complaining about your circumstances won't help. What will help is getting honest about where you are and the choices you do have. Only you can wrestle with God about whether or not your marriage is too destructive to save. Don't be quick to write it off.

Keep an open heart.

You have a choice to make about the state of your heart. It's possible for your heart to be open to your spouse but still have necessary boundaries in place, such as limitations and controls on spending, internet filters on every device to lessen the ease of accessing pornography or an intervention requiring them to get help for an addiction. Lack of trust in one area does not necessarily mean the end of the relationship, or of intimacy and growth.

A closed heart, on the other hand, can magnify your spouse's irritating fault into a mountain, and your criticism becomes the defining problem in the relationship. By your words or attempts at control you can stifle any growth and maturity your spouse may have otherwise been open to.

Making the decision to have an open heart will allow you to see the truth, and give God the opportunity to both heal you and restore your marriage.

Trust the only truly trustworthy One.

No human being is completely trustworthy. Humans cannot be. Every person, including your spouse, will in some way let you down and leave you at some point. Maturing people strive to be as trustworthy as possible, but we always have limitations.

Only Jesus can truly say, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Only He will never let you down. Learning to trust Him is a process; I encourage you to decide to go on that journey. Bring your stuff to Him, and see what He does with it. Give Him the chance to show you Himself, to carry you, strengthen you, grow you and use you.

I pray for God's healing and restoration of trust in your marriage. It's within His power to do so. That depends on both your choice and your spouse's choice.

But regardless of the state of your marriage today or tomorrow, you can be assured that Jesus will always be there. Him, you can trust.

Reprinted with permission from Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley's blog. Dr. Carol is an OB-GYN, doctor of ministry, author and speaker.

This Temptation Can Distract You From Your Burning Bush

“Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us” (Eph. 3:20).

I have recently been reminded that every so often Christian leaders and pastors have a very sobering choice to make. It seems for me that about every three to five years I am faced with this decision. This choice is one that determines our level of effectiveness, the growth of our faith, our level of obedience, and ultimately our level of satisfaction in this life.

Through the cycles of life, leadership and ministry every one of us has to choose, on a regular basis, between stepping out further on the difficult path of faith or settling down on the well-worn seat of mediocrity.

At some point, we are all familiar with both decisions. Somewhere in the genesis of our ministry or at the beginning of a new assignment we have felt our passion and excitement merge with the necessary energy to be bold and courageous. We find the strength to pray and believe that God will do

something bigger than our own abilities. At other times following difficulty, failure or disappointment we suffer from lack of vision and decide to back off, let up and settle down.

Lest the distinction between these two decisions be misunderstood, let me make clear I am not talking about becoming a sleepless workaholic, one who ignores, for the sake of work the greatest priorities in life. Every leader must first rest, spend time in the Word, pray and lovingly serve their family. What I am talking about is not exclusively an action; it actually has more to do with vision than it does with cluttering our calendars. It's more about faith than function. For some of us, stepping out may first mean stepping back and realigning our priorities around those found in Scripture.

One may take the comfortable road of settling down and end up with more to do than if had they stepped out in bold faith for God. We limit God when we only see the tasks of life that we perform as His plan. The work of God is not so much about what I can do as it is believing and trusting Him for the supernatural work only He can perform. This is experienced through faithful commitment to the Word of God and prayer. One is settling down by merely marking off a list, being comfortable with weekly accomplishments: year after year going through the motions of ministry without ever really risking anything for God's kingdom. This road is paved with safety, comfort, passivity, predictability and only performing the maintenance tasks of life and ministry. The other is hearing God's voice through His Word and prayer and stepping out into an uncomfortable, risky, aggressive, spontaneous, sometimes controversial yet transformational path. This path is marked by a sincere belief that God wants to do something powerful in this world for the sake of the gospel and His glory.

The allure of settling down has caused many to fall short of the best God has for them. The ministry becomes a casual routine distracted by a myriad of good, safe, predictable

things. The excitement is more about a fulfilling hobby or a relaxing pleasure than the unseen, unfulfilled work of God in their life and ministry. Prayer is scarce, spiritual burdens are light and sermons are little more than a last-minute, inspired download.

I am reminded of Moses, whose life started with such great promise. However, somewhere in the middle of his life, after failure and disappointment, he found himself settling down into the safe, comfortable, and obscure ministry of "keeping sheep" in anonymity (see Ex. 3:1). His youthful zeal was gone as he labored day after day chasing his father-in-law's flock. In hindsight, we see the providential hand of God in Moses' life on the "back side of the desert." Yet he had decided that this was where he would spend the remainder of his days. When God spoke miraculously to him through a burning bush, this call was received with fear and doubt. He no longer believed God was capable of engaging him in a mighty work. And yet we know that the plan of God for Moses was the transformational work of leading the people out of bondage.

At the heart of this for me is the question, "What am I willing to believe God for today in my life, my family, and His kingdom in this world?" I have been blessed to watch God do some great things in the churches I have pastored. And yet it seems with each new blessing and experience of God's grace comes the temptation to settle down. Isn't this enough? Can't we just be content, Lord? Must we step out again? What about my comfort? What if we fail? These questions and a thousand more are the arrows of the enemy to stifle our faith and chase us to a place of comfortable repose.

After years of ministry and preaching, after a decade or two of shepherding "our Father's flock", how easy it is to hide in those safe places. How common it is to be afraid to believe again for something transformational for the sake of the gospel. Like Moses, we question our own ability and even the potential of God through us. Let us be reminded that God has

given each of us a “burning bush.” The Word of God burns with truth and grace and the communication we have with God each day at that bush will once again set us on fire to do a mighty work for God in this world.

By grace, let’s resist the temptation to take the easier way. Let’s commit ourselves to the most important things. Let’s believe again for the impossible, dream again for our church and its gospel impact in our community. Be burdened for the person it seems is the most lost. Expect God to move in our churches this weekend, anticipate the transformation that accompanies the work of the Holy Spirit. Be it bold or subtle, let’s make today about stepping out, not settling down!

“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”
–William Carey

Copyright ©2017 Troy Keaton. All rights reserved. *Troy, his wife Janel, and their four children came to EastLake Community Church in Moneta, Virginia as the founding pastor in 2005. Much has changed over the course of the past several years. His oldest daughter Natalie married a wonderful young man, Keith Bryan, and recently gave birth to Carson. Allyson has just graduated from Ohio Christian University and will be teaching at Smith Mountain Lake Christian Academy, T.J. is a student at Liberty University and Trever is finishing up his sophomore year at SMLCA. One thing has remained the same for Pastor Troy and his family: They are passionate about knowing God and doing something significant in the kingdom. Troy loves spending time with his wife and kids. He enjoys doing home improvement on their house in Hardy. He loves to golf and fish and has an unfulfilled desire to run a marathon.*

Reclaim Your Victory With These 3 Spiritual Steps

Have you tasted victory, been in a sweet spot of success, and ... somehow, lost it?

The secret of successful leaders is that they know how to get back up and go after the victory, again and again.

Everyone I know who has achieved a measure of success has repeatedly experienced loss and failure; the successful ones dare to get back up and go again as many times as necessary to reclaim victory. Let's unpack how this works.

1. You need to know what victory looks like, smells like, tastes like. Remember what you were doing when you tasted victory. Where were you? What were you doing? Who were you working with? What was a day like? Write out your success experience and allow yourself to "go there" ... Capture the essence of victory with your words on paper.
2. Acknowledge what has changed and describe the gap in your current reality and the victory you once experienced. Can you feel the sting of that loss when you get still? Go ahead and acknowledge the pain, betrayal, dip, mistake, blow from your blind side, devastation, daze...
3. Now it's time for the come-to-Jesus meeting.

Look with me at a favorite biblical leader who tasted the thrill of victory and the devastation of defeat, led with passion and purpose, fought many battles, ran for his life, and is remembered as a man after God's own heart—David. He was at what appeared to be a pinnacle of victory bringing the ark back with much publicity, involvement of thousands of leaders, in what should have been a glorious day. He was so excited to bring the ark and "it seemed good," like the perfect thing to

do. Then the unthinkable happened when Uzza reached out to steady the ark; he didn't honor the protocol and God intervened by striking him dead – during the very public display of David's strategic, yet flawed, leadership skills. Everybody saw it. In that moment, David's dream died, and he became angry at God.

Has your dream died? Has God killed it? Are you at the end of yourself? For me, it was the season in my life I call the Red Bird Season when I believed God had pulled the plug on my dreams. You have your own story.

There is a time in every life for the come-to-Jesus meeting.

For David, we pick up the story in I Chronicles 13:12b and hear him ask the pivotal question. "How can I ever bring the ark of God to myself?" So David would not move on his dream again until he got the protocol and direction from God. Seems he'd asked everyone but God at that point, even consulting hundreds of men...

There's much that transpired in the space between the recorded verses of this story. When your dream dies, a part of you dies with it. There is grief, shedding of tears, anger, reckoning, mind-wracking endless conversations with yourself and finally, with God.

For me, God aired the pain of every unanswered question I had in my heart—pulled them out one by one. It's as though He asked me, "Linda, how about this problem?" These were things I thought I had settled, but there was obviously more work to do in my heart and we weren't moving forward until we had the meeting. It lasted for days. It was sweet and bittersweet. As the Lord and I dialogued through my different pain points I heard Him say: "Don't you think I saw that? Don't you think I heard that? Don't you think I had you? "... and over those days etched in my mind forever, every complaint in my heart dissolved. I was aware that I was extremely well loved by God

during the death of my dreams.”

And I began to ask how to proceed from this point. I would like to share more of my story with you, you can access this premium content here:

Linda Fields *is an author and founder of 7-MPact Marketplace Ministries at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City.*

Embracing Holy Spirit's Gift of Inconvenient Intercession

It's 5:09 a.m., and the sun is coming up over the Rockies. I've been awake for an hour talking to God about a student whose progress is concerning to me, as we end the school year. Behind this name trails the name of a friend's kid and another friend's kid who are making bad choices right now. Their faces and souls hook themselves to my prayers like monkeys in a barrel.

Sleep would have been nice.

Except people require emotional work, and I'm starting to come to grips with this. In fact, I think it's a gross oversight that we don't write this more concretely into our contracts.

I will wear skirts or slacks to work.

I will not park in the visitor parking.

I will take attendance every day.

I will attend all staff meetings.

I will commit to 13 hours of sleeplessness in order to pray for and to think of how to help a student who is not doing well.

Signature_____.

Parents should have to sign something like this before leaving the hospital with a new baby:

Show us you know how to properly install a car seat.

Show us you're willing to cry for this child and to labor over him in your thoughts and prayers. Will you agonize on behalf of this person? Sign here.

Seth Godin says:

Emotional labor: That's the labor most of us do now. The work of doing what we don't necessarily feel like doing, the work of being a professional, the work of engaging with others in a way that leads to the best long-term outcome ... Of course it's difficult. That's precisely why it's valuable. Almost no one gets hired to eat chocolate cake.

I think of Jesus in the garden. He was willing to be completely miserable on my behalf. He lost sleep. He prayed and prayed and prayed. He made himself physically ill because of love. He said to his disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Wait here, and keep watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38).

Jesus put himself in a place of emotional misery and did not run from it.

He did this work for me.

He did this work for you.

So I ask—are you willing to do emotional work on behalf of the people God has put in your life? Will you stay awake and pray

for them? It is a great internal act of service. {eoa}

Christy Fitzwater, *pastor's wife and Spanish teacher, is an author and blogger based in Montana.*