

September 26, 2010

"TAKING THE INITIATIVE "
Part 3: 50 Days of Faith Series
Joshua 1:1-11

Have you ever wished that you could live your life over? Have you ever wished that you could just go back and do it again? Get a fresh start? Maybe you'd do some things differently because of something you know now but you didn't know before? A man wrote a letter to his pastor. He said, 'Dear Pastor, Thank you so much for all that you've been teaching me about how to grow spiritually. For the first time in my life I'm starting each day with the Lord and I've joined a home Bible study group and it feels good. God is really changing me into the person He wants me to be. But honestly, Pastor, I regret that I didn't do these things sooner. I wasted so many years doing other things and neglecting a relationship with God. I can now see how I would have avoided a lot of problems and pain and a lot of worry if I'd done what I'm doing now a long time ago. I kind of wish I could rewind the tape and start my life over.'

Do you ever wish you could turn back the hands of time and start your life over? The problem is 'you can't. It's all behind you now. You can't undo it. But you can start over 'because God is the God of fresh starts . That's what we're going to be talking about today. Psalm 145:14 says, '*God gives a fresh start to those who are ready to quit.*'

We're going to talk about FIVE SECRETS TO MAKING A FRESH START . Each letter of the word START will begin one of the secrets to making a fresh start in faith. God's Word can help you with this fresh start no matter what kind of past you've had, no matter what your background is, regardless of how you've messed up. God wants to give you a fresh start.

One day Jesus was walking through the streets of the city of Jericho. A large crowd was following him. On the side of the road up ahead was this guy named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus was blind and in Jesus' day that meant he had to beg for a living. He couldn't work. He couldn't read or write. He couldn't even get from one place to another without someone's help. He was totally dependent on others. Every day someone would lead him out to a spot along the road and he would sit on a little mat and beg for money. That's how he lived.

One day he heard the sounds of a large crowd coming toward him. When he asked what was going on, someone told him, 'It's Jesus of Nazareth coming with a crowd of people following.' Bartimaeus had obviously heard of Jesus and knew he had been going about healing people. He thought, 'This is my chance. I've got to go for it. This could be the day my eyes are opened and I have a fresh start.' And he started screaming at the top of his lungs to be heard over the noise of the crowd, saying, '*Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!*' Some people even told him to be quiet, but Bartimaeus shouted out all the more. '*Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!*' Mark 10:48b Bartimaeus seized the moment. That's the first step to a fresh start with God.

' SEIZE THE MOMENT .

Don't let it pass you by. Bartimaeus said, 'I'm not going to miss this one. I'm going for it. Jesus is near and this is my chance for a fresh start. I'm not going to waste this opportunity.' The FIRST

SECRET TO A FRESH START IS TO SEIZE THE MOMENT. Don't procrastinate. Don't hesitate. Jesus is near. SEIZE THE MOMENT. Don't offer excuses! Seize the moment. Cry out to God for mercy right now while He is near.

When Bartimaeus got up that morning, he had no idea that he was going to encounter Jesus that day. He just thought it was going to be another ordinary day of begging on the side of the road. But when the opportunity came, he seized the moment.

All around you, every day of your life, there are opportunities for a fresh start with God. You get them all the time. But you don't take advantage of them. Why? One word: PROCRASTINATION . Someone who understands procrastination wrote this:

**I spent a fortune on a trampoline,
a stationary bike, and a rowing machine.
Complete with gadgets to read my pulse
and gadgets to prove my progress results
And others to show the miles I've charted
but they left off the gadget to get me started.**

Procrastination is a strange phenomenon. We think it will make our lives easier, when in reality it creates more stress. The truth of the matter is 'you already know the right things to do. You already know what you should be doing. Not only that 'you already 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. I'll do it tomorrow. Someday I'll do it. One of these days I'll do it.'But you never do.

The Bible warns us over and over about presuming we can put the important things of life off until tomorrow. We have no guarantee that tomorrow will come. We need to do the right things right now. We need to seek God while He may be found. How we live right now will influence what happens to us in eternity. Right now counts forever. *'Jesus said, 'No procrastination! No backward looks. You can't put off God's kingdom till tomorrow. Seize the day!'*

THE SECOND SECRET TO MAKING A FRESH START IN FAITH IS TO TAME YOUR FEARS . Don't let your fears hold you back or control you. You have a choice between faith and fear. If you choose fear, it will paralyze you and keep you from having faith. To tame your fear you've got to choose faith over fear. If you choose fear, it will make you skeptical. It will make you unwilling to change. It will make you selfish. Fear will make you afraid to commit to God and to others. Fear will keep you focused on the past. Fear will keep you from realizing the future that God desires for you to have.

What would you do to get closer to God if you weren't afraid? Bartimaeus showed us how to overcome one of the greatest fears that grip us 'the fear of what others think of us. Bartimaeus tamed his fear of rejection, his fear of the disapproval of others. He didn't care if they told him to be quiet. He wasn't going to let the people around him keep him from crying out to Jesus for help.

They scolded him and he cried out even louder. *'Lord, have mercy on me.'* I want to be what I was created to be not what I am right now. I want to be better. I want to see.

If you want a fresh start with God then you'll have to seize the moment and tame your fears. Forget what others might think of you! Proverbs 29:25 says, *'The fear of human opinion disables you; trusting in God protects you from that.'* Faith enables you to think more about what God thinks of you than what other people think of you. When you focus on God's opinion of you more than other people's opinion of you, you'll experience a fresh start with God. Seize the moment and tame your fears.

THE THIRD SECRET TO A FRESH START WITH GOD IS TO ADMIT YOUR NEED . Go public with it. Let people know your desire to have a fresh start with God and a deeper relationship with Him. Let others know your desire to be changed by God. The Christian faith is not about us making ourselves better. It's about God making us better. It's about God changing us into the people He wants us to be. It's about admitting your need to God and one another, and allowing God to change you for all the world to see. That's what we do every Sunday when we read the Prayer of Confession together. We are admitting our need for forgiveness before God and one another. If we want a fresh start at living our lives, then we have to admit what needs to change in us in order for that to happen. We have to admit it in a way that shows we believe in God's ability to change us.

Jesus heard Bartimaeus shouting out to him and so he went over and asked, *'What do you want Me to do for you?'* The blind man answered, *'Teacher, I want to see.'* In this simple reply, Bartimaeus was saying, 'I want to see and I believe you can make me see. I think you can heal me. I've heard people talking about the miracles you've done and I want a miracle in my life. I believe you can heal me.' All that is packed into the reply, *'Teacher, I want to see.'* That was a statement of faith for Bartimaeus. He publicly expressed his faith that Jesus could heal him if he wanted to.

Jesus asks you the same question. *'What do you want Me to do for you?'* What is it that you want God to do for you? What do you need to have changed in you in order to have a fresh start? Are you asking for something just so your life will be easier? God's not really interested in making our lives easier. God wants us to admit our need and trust Him to meet that need. He wants our prayers to be statements of our faith - public proclamations of our confidence in Him, in His love, in His forgiveness, in His power to make a difference in our lives and give us a fresh start.

THE FOURTH SECRET TO A FRESH START IS TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE . The blind man seized the moment, tamed his fears and admitted his need. What he needed to do next was simply receive God's grace . In this case God's grace came in the form of physical healing. *'Jesus said to him, 'Go on your way. Your faith has made you well.' And immediately the man regained his sight.'* (Mark 10:52) He received God's grace. In the gospel of John we read, *'From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.'* (John 1:16) How do you receive God's blessings in your life? - through faith. The Bible tells us, *'[God's] promise comes by faith, so that it may be grace.'* (Romans 4:16a) Bartimaeus didn't just admit his need for everyone to see. He exercised faith and believed that Jesus could help him and he was willing to receive that grace. Sometime people get stuck at this step. They believe God can help them but they don't let God help them. They don't receive the grace. They continue to live with their weakness because they feel so badly about themselves and living in defeat is all they feel they deserve 'a kind of self-punishment. Jesus doesn't want us to punish ourselves. He paid the penalty for our sins in FULL. For us to try and punish ourselves is to rob Christ of what he has done for us. Don't do that!

Another thing that keeps us from receiving God's grace is our fear of what it will mean 'how it will change our lives. Imagine if Bartimaeus refused to accept Christ's healing because he was afraid of how it would change his life. Think about it 'he was going to have to find another job. He couldn't beg for a living anymore. His whole life was going to change. He could have let that hold him back but he didn't. He received God's grace.

THE LAST SECRET TO STARTING FRESH IN YOUR FAITH IS TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP . I don't know exactly what that will mean for you, but I know you need to do it. Taking the next step means something different for each person in this room. What is it that God is calling you to do? For some of you the next step may be to ask Christ to be more real to you and take up residence in your hearts. Maybe you've never really done that or maybe you've allowed Him to be crowded out of your life over the years. For some of you it may mean getting into a study group where you can begin to grow in your faith and understanding of God and have a group of people to hold you accountable. For some of you it may mean examining your life and rearranging your priorities so that God is at the center. For some of you it may mean getting involved in some ministry in your church or community. For some it may mean going on a mission trip where you serve unselfishly as you are needed. For some of you it may mean asking God to forgive you for not wanting to give up control of your life to him. What will your next step be? Don't put it off. Seize the moment. Admit your need. Receive God's grace and take the next step.

I came across an article that appeared in the *L. A. Times* that talks about how important it is to do things now while you can.

'My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and he lifted out a tissue wrapped garment. '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 remembered those words and I thought about them through the funeral and the days that followed the unexpected death of my sister. I thought about all the things 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.'