

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

January 2016

What is our mission in 2016? In keeping with our story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20, verses 26 and 27 says, *“On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Beracah to this day. ^{v27} Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. (2 Chronicles 20:26-27ESV).* After Jehoshaphat and the men of Judah (means praisers) celebrated in the Valley of Beracah (means blessing), they returned to Jerusalem. They joyfully went back to the people they knew and they shared with those folks the blessings God had given them.

What ultimately was God’s goal when He communicated with Moses on Mount Sinai and gave Him the law? What was Moses’s responsibility once he had heard from the Lord? God made his intentions for Moses abundantly clear in Exodus 19:3. *“Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called him from the mountain and said, ‘this is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell to the people of Israel’”.* Moses had no choice but to go back to the Valley and share what he had learned. That was his mission.

As we stand firm on the peak of our metaphorical mountain, take another look around. What do you see? Beyond the rocks and trees, there is a Valley below, a Valley filled with people. Joel 3:14 says, *“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”* These are the people Jesus died for. These are the ones to whom we are called to minister, to love, to encourage, to help lead in worshipping and experiencing our Lord. That is our mission.

I believe the greatest achievement of the people of Judah in 2 Chronicles 20 is that they completed their mission; they finished well. The greatest statement you or I can ever hope to hear is our Heavenly Father saying, *“Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21)*

In coming to prison, I have made this goal for my life: to say as Paul, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and I have remained faithful” (2 Timothy 4:7NLT).* Paul’s main thing had always been to complete his earthly assignment. In his farewell to the church leaders in Ephesus, he said, *“What matters to me the most is to finish what God started: the job the Master, Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God” (Acts 20:24).* In his last letter, Paul revealed to Timothy 5 keys to finishing well. They are; keep fighting, keep focused, keep faithful, keep fresh and keep fruitful. All of these are absolute requirements if we are to let as many people as possible know about the generosity of God. So..... I’m giving these to you as a starting point here in 2016. So tighten your laces, secure your pack, let’s start heading back down into the valley. God has some profound insights for us as we return.

Principle 1 – Keep Fighting

Well it has been said that all Christ followers must recognize that the Christian life is not a playground but a battlefield where conflicts are won and lost in real spiritual battles. No matter how difficult the fighting becomes for us as Christians, we must never quit. Alfred Plummer observed that, *“Military service is either perpetual warfare or perpetual preparation for it..... The soldier, so long as he remains in the service, can never say, “I may lay aside my arms and my drill, all armies are conquered: there will never be another war.”*

Of course, the enemies we Christians are battling are not other people, especially not other Christians (although it may seem that way at times). There is nothing good that will come from waging war against each other in the family of God. The “good fight” Paul fought was, *one against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12 NLT).* When Paul said he had “fought the good fight”, the Greek word he used for fight gives

us our English word agonize and was used in military endeavors to describe the concentration, discipline, and extreme effort needed to win.

For the followers of Christ, pressures and difficulties are inevitable. Jesus said, *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33). *“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). The supernatural, superpower of Jesus will help us overcome!

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, v15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. v16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; v17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (Ephesians 6:14-17 ESV). Every piece of armor Paul described is defensive except one. That one is the Word of God - the Spirit's sword can utterly annihilate the enemy. When we hide God's word in our hearts and quote it aloud to our adversary during times of temptation; we will not sin against God (Psalms 119:11). More so, the truth of Scripture will force the powers of darkness to flee.

In 2 Chronicles 20 the "weapon" the children of Judah used as they marched toward their enemies was praise. Their praise was effective because it was based on the truth of God and His Scripture. Notice they didn't stop after their enemies were slain. Rather, they continued to praise right into the temple of the Lord. That put them into a position to potentially and eventually finish well. If we want to finish well, we must keep on doing what we're supposed to do - we must keep fighting the good fight of faith.

Principle 2 – Keep Focused

The apostle Paul was up to the challenge. He viewed his entire life as a race, a race he did not intend to lose. He wrote, *“I discipline my body like an athlete training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified”* (1 Corinthians 9:27 NLT). Apparently his disciplinary techniques worked. Near the end of his life he wrote to Timothy, *“I have finished the race.”* (2 Timothy 4:7). Read Paul's powerful resolve to remain focused in Philippians 3:12-14; *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. v13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, v14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (ESV).*

Have you ever watched the end of the World Series or the announcement of the gold medal winners at an Olympic event? It's exciting to see them have their moments as they jump up and down, hug their teammates, shed tears. They've earned their celebration. They've been training and striving for it for years. Paul's "gold medal" was far greater than anything this earth has to offer. His was an incorruptible, heavenly prize, the upward call of God in Christ".

I see a lot of earlier stage Christians (new in the faith) have a motivation for serving God but it's often for their own purposes. They have a ladder to climb and personal goals to reach. They are driven by success. I'm not saying that's necessarily bad if by success we mean being all we can be for God's glory. That kind of success is a wonderful thing. Having God's hand on our lives ensure that we develop into people God can use to the fullest extent on this earth. Nonetheless, personal gain, no matter how pure our motives is just that - personal. At some point we need to shift our focus from personal success to seeking significance and striving to make a lasting impact on our world and on others.

I don't believe it is too big a stretch to say that as the children of Judah collected the spoils during the days after the battle, they enjoyed a much needed time of rest and refocusing. No longer was success their pressing goal; that pinnacle had been reached. Now they turned their attention to taking what the Lord had blessed them with and investing it in their families, children, nation and temple. They had a new and greater prize awaiting them. No wonder they returned with such joy to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 20:27). They had accomplished their original mission; now they had revitalized and redefined vision, passion and purpose. Wow, talk about revival!

If having to be "up" day in and day out is a challenge for you in your walk other than a 30 minute Bible study or and exhortation, short teaching or musical program, the writer of Hebrews gives us some important pointers to keep focused for the long haul. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us*

also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ^{v2} looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

Distractions will take our attention off our goals. These act as weights that slow us down, discourages, and even detour us. Satan has a whole bag of tricks designed to distract and ensnare us. I see on a daily basis men wanting to lead or teach - or be in the choir, etc., yet they'll stay back from the house of the Lord to watch their favorite football team or get upset that the TV isn't on their soap opera channel - distracted.

Discipline is required to keep us focused. It's the tortoise and hare story - you know the one. Anybody can have a great start, but seasoned runners know how to set a pace that will allow them to remain consistent and energized for the high hills and long stretches ahead.

The direction of our focus is obviously imperative (it helps to know which way were supposed to go!) Our minds should be "*on things above, not on earthly things.*" (Colossians 3:2). Seeing Jesus and becoming like Him - that is our high calling, nothing more, nothing less. We should live a life of authenticity, accountability and humility.

Divine power is absolutely required for us to focus and finish well. In fact we are not the finisher of our faith. *And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6 ESV)*. This power from on high - the Holy Spirit is the most neglected person in the Trinity. We forget that we need to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. When the word tells us to be filled with the spirit; it's a continuous action. We must pursue more of the Spirit in our lives every day, and yet so few live like that.

Determination is also needed to maintain focus. We all should have a carefully crafted mission statement for our lives. It should be written and shared with someone who will help us stay accountable to it. What lies ahead for believers should pull us toward heaven and our Savior. We shouldn't need to be pushed and prodded every week. In fact, if we constantly need motivating and propping up just to get us to do what were called to do then we've lost sight of Heaven's splendor. The men of Judah didn't need someone behind them urging them to return to Jerusalem from the battlefield. They went joyfully. And when they came into town, they didn't first go into their homes. They went straight to the temple. They were drawn to it because their first priority and first love was their Lord.

Principle 3 Keep Faithful

Ask yourself, "Am I where I am today because this is God's perfect will for me, or could it be that God can't elevate me to the next level of influence because he cannot trust me"? Or could it be that the hearts of others are more pure, their hunger to know God more intense, and their walk with God more consistent! One thing is for sure. All sin and selfish motives and ways must be eradicated from your life. You must be trustworthy!

In 1 Timothy 1:12 Paul wrote, "*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.*" The NLT puts it this way, "*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him.*"

Obviously God takes our faith, or lack of it - very seriously. Read Matthew 5:45-51. Jesus describes what the Master will do for the servant He finds carrying out His orders and what He will do to the one disobeying His orders. Jesus reiterates this profound cause and effect, faithfulness verses unfaithfulness in the very next chapter 25:14-30.

We are being faithful when we do what God tells us to do. When we consistently and willingly obey Him without hesitation, He knows we can be relied upon. The children of Judah proved themselves reliable. God instructed them to "*stand firm and see the deliverance of the Lord.*" (2 Chronicles 20:17). The result of their simple obedience was peace all around them (^v 29-30).

Not every person who starts off well winds up with a happy ending. Some, in fact, recant their faith and renounce Christ rather than suffer for Him. There are notables in the Bible who didn't finish so well. Neither

did Moses, David, King Asa, and a few others. They had great starts but somewhere along the way they stumbled. *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV). Even Jehoshaphat the star of our story made a serious error in judgment towards the end of his life. The last detail we read of him was his entering into an unholy alliance with the wicked king of Israel (2 Chronicles 20:35-37)

It's sadly interesting to note that all these men of the Old Testament were in their "second half". That season of life when they had their greatest opportunity to have a positive impact on others and leave a great legacy. Unfaithfulness can sneak up on us at any age, no matter how long we've been Christians. If we're not careful we can become "ineffective and unproductive" in our walk. It's happen to others, it can happen to you or me.

Principal 4 - Keep Fresh

Nothing stale tastes good! The "Hot Donuts Now" sign should make everyone's mouth water! God enjoys people who are fresh too. Christians who still have the joy of the Lord and a passion to know Him more, regardless of their age! These are the ones who represent Him best because they demonstrate the fresh life He has given them. We have the Creator of the Universe and the overcomer of death living inside us. Life should be bursting out of a Christian. In fact Jesus said, *"I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10b).

Let's look at 2 Timothy 4:8; *"will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing."* What tipped me off to Paul's fresh faith was the "not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. Understand Paul wasn't sitting in a plush hotel, eating fruits and berries while servants catered to his every whim. Paul was in a cold, dark cell with chains on his feet and hands (2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:13). He was facing certain death. Many people under such circumstances would have blamed, even cursed God. But being locked up couldn't prevent Paul's heart from jumping with joy as he yearned for His Lord's return. Although he was dying his spirit was "being renewed every day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)

How do we remain fresh year after year? How can we be constantly renewed like Paul was? *The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. v13 They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. v14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, v15 to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.* (Psalms 92:12-15 ESV).

First, we need to stay planted in God's word. Strong trees must be firmly rooted in good soil. Psalms 1:2-3 says that those who continually delight "stay fresh" and meditate on "the law of the Lord" will be "like a" tree planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth its fruit in its season, whose relief shall not wither. And whatever he does shall prosper.

The second necessary element to keep fresh and green is to stay prayerful in God's presence basking in His perfect light. We must cultivate a life of continual prayer, praise and dependence on our Father. "Pray without ceasing" as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us.

Finally we must stay pure in God's holiness, free from outside pollutants. If God does not dabble in sin then neither should we. Sin slowly but effectively poisons our sensitivities to the Holy Spirit and steals our joy and innocence.

Choosing to live in "the courts of the Lord" is wonderfully freeing and downright fun at times. *"A happy heart is good like medicine"* (Proverbs 17:22). And when we have God's peace and joy in our hearts, laughter comes easily. Paul was in his late sixties when he wrote his final letter to Timothy. He stayed fresh and on fire for the Lord even into his twilight years.

Psalms 103:3 tells us that God longs to satisfy the desires of his children *"with good things"* and to renew their youth *"like the eagles"*. It is His will for us to remain fresh and relevant as we represent Him to each generation. He can show us His ways if we are not so set in our ways. He will soften our old hearts and give us new hearts if we will simply choose to live daily in His courts of praise.

Principal 5 – Keep Fruitful

We need to learn one more principle from our anchor story in 2 Chronicles 20. Jehoshaphat, the musicians, and the victorious army returned to Jerusalem, worshiping their deliverer at the top of their lungs. Then, *“The fear of God came upon all of the kingdom of the counties when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel, (v29).* The profound truth we cannot miss is the impact their trust in the Lord and their obedience to him had on everyone around them.

Before we reach the bottom of the metaphorical mountain and finish our journey, think about something – Who first told you about Jesus? Who on earth more than anyone else helped you trust Him as your Savior? Since you become a Christian, who has taken the most time and shown the most interest in helping you grow in the faith?

If you and I are strong, healthy Christians today, chances are good it is because somebody deliberately invested his or herself in us by teaching us about the Lord and about following Him. Stop and thank God for those individuals who have loved you enough to point you toward heaven and to grow in your walk with God. Psalms 92:14 describes Christians who are fresh and green; *“They will still bear fruit in old age; they are still refreshing those around them and reproducing themselves by leading others to know their God as they do.”*

Please read 2 Timothy 1:2. Paul had no relation to Timothy that we know of. So why do you think Paul called Timothy his son? Paul had invested many hours over the years teaching and nurturing Timothy in the faith. He may have even led Timothy to the Lord on his first visit to Lystra. In essence, Paul had reproduced himself spiritually through Timothy. It was therefore appropriate for him to refer to Timothy as his son. Furthermore, Paul called Timothy his “dear son”. He had grown close to Timothy and loved him deeply. Even as Paul was near the end of his life he was pouring into Timothy so that he would *“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1)*

People are still pouring their lives into helping others grow and become the strong men and women God wants them to be. S Truitt Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-A tells a story in his book [Eat Mor Chikin Inspire More People](#). It goes like this:

“Woody Faulk’s parents had divorced when he was 4 years old.... He was on a Scout trip when word came to him that his mother had been killed in an automobile accident. His grandparents were deceased, and his father had not been in contact for years, so Woody was sent to live with an aunt and uncle in.... Atlanta. They brought him to my Sunday school class, and I soon became aware of his situation. I immediately noticed his high standard and capabilities. He visited Jeanette and me at the farm several times, and I asked at one point to let me see his report card. He said later that I was the first man ever to ask him about his schoolwork. Knowing someone was genuinely interested, he made straight A’s from that point on. Jeanette and I grew to love Woody... He became like an adopted child to us... When Woody graduated, I told him I hoped that he would come to work with Chick-fil-A. He is now Vice-president, Brand Development. When Woody and his wife, Rae, married, he asked me to serve as his best man....

Mr. Cathy went from being a perfect stranger to this young guy to being the best man at his wedding! That is exactly what can happen when we simply make time and take time- to invest the experiences and understanding God has given us in another person.

No one set a greater example of one-on-one mentoring than Jesus himself. Think about how Jesus prioritized His time while He was on earth. He knew He had only about 3 years to impact the world. Yet, He invested the majority of his time with just 12 men. He hand-picked these disciples and instructed them every day. They got to see His attitudes, His methods, His reactions to difficult situations. When they got off track, He was right there beside them to correct them and redirect them.

Jesus invested His last hours on this earth not with huge masses of people but rather His 11 disciples. These were the ones He knew He could trust to finish His work of reaching the world. He had reproduced and multiplied Himself through these men. And they went out and multiplied themselves. Then the disciples’ disciples went out and made even more disciples. Thus the gospel of Jesus Christ spread throughout the entire known world in a matter of years!

