

5-15-22

Galatians 1:13-24.

Have you ever heard the saying; you are not defined by your mistakes? Or the totality of your life isn't determined by a few bad decisions or choices?

"Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you." —John C. Maxwell

"Life is about choices. Some we regret, some we're proud of. Some will haunt us forever. The message: we are what we chose to be." —Graham Brown

"Sometimes it's the smallest decisions that can change your life forever." —Keri Russell

"The worst decisions in life we make are always the one we make out of fear." — Sherrilyn Kenyon

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

Every day we make decisions that affect our paths, trajectory of our lives. Success and or failure doesn't happen over night they take time and dedication to achieve.

What if we had your life's decisions up on the screen for all to see? Or what if someone that knows you well, could tell all of us some of your more juicer times?

Remember last week I said Paul was not a people pleaser?

Look at what Paul says in **verses 13-14.**

- I. **Until you are no longer sucking in air (dead) God is not done with you.**
 - **Verses 13-14.**
 - Paul states that he persecuted the church, that's putting it nicely. If you were here during any of the studies on the book of Acts, you have heard at nauseum about Paul's poor life choices.
 - **"Beyond measure"** meaning that Paul was obsessed with persecuting God's church and people. It would be safe to say that he looked like a mad man, so focused at wiping it out. **"Tried to destroy it."**
 - Paul was an overachiever, cocky, know it all, passionate, and obsessed at being the best at doing/keeping the traditions (**v.14**). Paul was a try hard, wanna be, show off, for all things traditional for God.
 - By the way, you can be passionate about anything and be wrong! Are we not seeing that today? People are so passionate about what they think is right, wise, and makes sense, that they are acting mad. I often feel like I am in the twilight zone. I keep waiting for Rod Serling to come out, holding his cigarette with the ashes still hanging on. (PowerPoint slide)
 - If Fox News, or News max around at the time of Paul, oh boy, how we would hate him. If we could see snapshots, videos, reels of Paul at the beating death of Stephan. Or how Paul would drag people out of their churches or homes and beat them in the streets or have them thrown in jail. Or listening to him tell his side of what the early Christians were doing wrong. To hear him explain why he was voting for bad things to happen to them. I think it would look like things today, the craziness, the lies, the quietness of law makers and law enforcement.

- I need to be reminded that those that are the vilest, that are doing the vilest of things are redeemable. I know what you are thinking, I argue with myself too.
- There is hope! There is hope! That hope is in Jesus. What does Oneida, NY, U.S.A., and the world need? It needs Jesus! God can STILL RADICALLY change anyone's life!

II. God's grace cannot be contained, understood, or determined by us.

15. Even then God had his eye on me. Why, when I was still in my mother's womb he chose and called me out of sheer generosity! 16.a Now he has intervened and revealed his Son to me so that I might joyfully tell non-Jews about him. -Message

- **Read verses 15-16.**
- Let's be honest. God's grace is scandalous. We have big problems with it sometimes, don't we?
- The law, tradition, is plain, black, and white. There is no gray. If you do this, this will happen. I don't know about you, but it seems easier to live that way.
- But God's grace is messy, doesn't line up with what I think, almost all the time it's not how I would choose how something gets done. If I were to assemble a team according to how God's grace does things, it would be a sight to see. Kinda like Rich Strike's, the horse that won the Kentucky derby. His odds to win were 80-1, only one other time was the odds greater, in 1913 Donerail won with 91-1 odds. Rich Strike's, not the biggest of strongest horse, worth 30, 000 going against horses' worth ten, to hundreds of thousands wins 1.86 million.
- Back to Paul, despite all that Paul had done, when the time was right, God used Paul to reveal the gospel, be His ambassador to the Gentiles....us! **(v.15-16)**
- Very few in this church, or any church would have chosen me to be used of God, if they had known me prior to me becoming a born-again follower of God.
- On the outside I wasn't very responsive to God's leading. I was making dumb decisions daily. I still do, but now I have the Holy Ghost, and other Christians to guide me. I did some vile things to other believers. I mocked God. Again, by all appearances I was a lost cause.
- I know I would have written myself off because I did. But guess who didn't?!
- God. He used different people and avenues to reach out to me, and no matter how many times I would slap his grace away, He kept reaching. I picture the conversation in heaven, one of the angels saying, him?! Jesus are you sure?! There are so many others out there to choose from, Cecil is low hanging fruit. Jesus saying, nope, he is the one I have for these certain people, these certain times. He will face some dark times, he will be heart broken, he will blow it..bigly, he will cause himself more havoc than he even realizes. But what I will do through it all will be beautiful. How my grace is shown sufficient through him will be life changing to many.
- On the inside, in my conscience, my spirit, my heart and brain, I was so desperately seeking for something. There had to be more, I wasn't sold out to things just happen randomly. There was a reason for everything, what was I missing? God's grace.
- Let this serve as a reminder to you and me. God's grace will reach people we don't want it to. Oh yeah, I went there. There are some/many of us, in the darkness of our fleshly hearts, don't want certain people to experience God's grace. They don't deserve it. It doesn't make sense for His grace to work through them or through that circumstance.

III. God often sends us to the desert before He uses us.

- **Read 17-18.**
- Most of us prefer desserts to the desert, but Paul went to the desert.
- When you begin to reconstruct the personal history of Paul, there are some gaps in the Acts account. He meets Jesus on the road to Damascus and goes into the city and starts giving his testimony. But Paul doesn't immediately go to Jerusalem. When you compare **Acts 9** with **Galatians 1:17**, we learn that Paul left Damascus and went immediately into Arabia and then back to Damascus before going to Jerusalem.
- What was Paul doing during those three years in the desert? He was allowing God to prepare his heart for the ministry of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was highly educated, so he had access to scrolls containing the Law and the Prophets. I'm sure he studied the Old Testament and spent time in prayer.
- This is a pattern we find in the Bible. Before God could use Moses, Moses spent forty years in the desert of Midian. Before God could really use Elijah, He sent him to the desert of Horeb for forty days and forty nights. And of course, we know that after His baptism, Jesus spent forty days and forty nights fasting and praying in the wilderness.
- Have you ever found yourself in a spiritual desert and wondered what God was doing? You were thirsty for the living water and hungry for the bread of the Word, but instead, all you found was more desert? Desert experiences can help you grow.
- Many of the 11 years I spent at Sara Bay Baptist Church were desert times. Learning and leaning on the Lord. Going through struggle after struggle was preparing me for what God had laying ahead for me. Over the last 12 years, there have been many desert times, where we looked up to the heavens and said, why God? Or what is going on? Looking back on some of those things we can see how He was working to mold each of us.

IV. God will place the right people in our lives.

- **Read verses 18-19.**
- After three years in the desert, Paul realized he still wasn't ready to launch his ministry. He needed some wise counsel and fellowship with Christians who were wiser than he was. So, he spent fifteen days in the home of Simon Peter.
- Wouldn't you have loved to have followed those two men around for those two weeks and heard what they had to talk about?
- Then Paul spent time with James, the half-brother of Jesus. James became a believer after the Resurrection and leader of the Jerusalem church.
- Every new Christian needs to be mentored by someone or else their growth will be stunted.
- Are you currently mentoring someone to help him or her grow deeper in their walk with Christ?
- Have you sought out an older, wiser Christian and asked them to mentor you? If not, why not?
- Ask God right now to show you someone who would profit from your guidance. Seek them out and ask if you can start meeting with them to help them grow in their walk with Christ. Also ask God to lead you to someone who can help you grow deeper in your faith.
- I am so thankful to all the wise, spiritual giants that God has brought into my life. God puts them in our lives so that we can grow. It is all part of His plan.

V. Strive to reach your godly potential.

- **Read verses 20-24.**
- As we all know a reputation will follow you around for a long time. Sometimes that reputation will arrive before you do! Paul dealt with the effects of his reputation constantly.
- The people of Galatia knew his reputation. But he has already been with them; he has a different reputation among these people. This is the missionary who led them to Jesus. His reputation among these people was as one who had been so radically transformed by the power of God was a cause to rejoice in the church - **v24 "And they glorified God in me."**
- Did you have a bad reputation before you were saved? Has it followed you around even since you have been saved? So, what.... USE IT TO SHOW WHAT GOD CAN DO IN SOMEONE'S LIFE! Your testimony can have a great impact on the lives of people who need a savior. God called Paul, He had a plan for Paul and obviously he reached his potential for God.

Conclusion

Ian L. Wilson tells the story of a London businessman Lindsay Clegg told the story of a warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash around the interior. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, Clegg took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage. "Forget about the repairs," the buyer said. "When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site."

The Lord doesn't want to clean your life up! He wants to completely transform you! The Lord didn't just clean Saul's life up...

- He gave him a new life
- He gave him a new name
- He gave him a new outlook
- He gave him a new relationship
- He gave him a new purpose

If you are saved, then He has done the same for you! Maybe you are consumed with the guilt and shame concerning things you did before salvation... LET IT GO! Your sins are under the blood of Jesus! Maybe you have not done what you should since you have been saved! Today is a new day. You have an opportunity to make a fresh start right here right now.