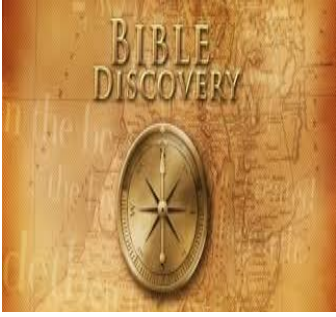
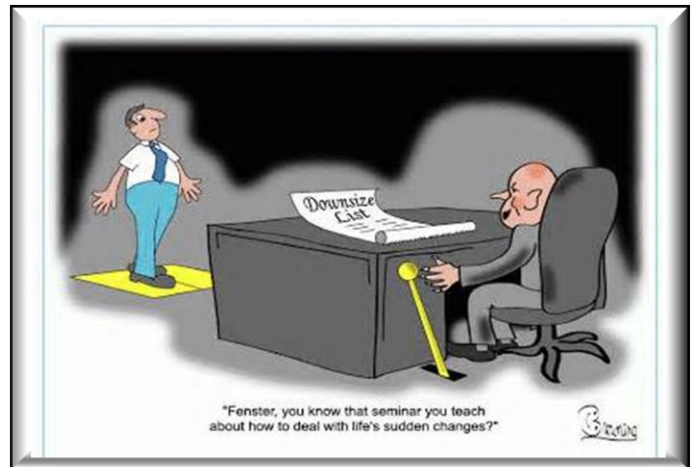


Correcting our Course



Ever think you've got everything under control? You've covered all your bases, got things sorted out; you know where you're going – you're sailing high and free? Quite frankly that hasn't been much of my experience. Perhaps, like me, you've learned that you'll make mistakes, there'll be times when you fail, and there might even be times when you hurt. There's a word for that – we call it **LIFE!** Some would advise you that you can fix those mistakes by honestly taking stock and changing the way you do things. It's a process where everyone's accountable for his or her own actions in a culture not based on blame or fault. It's the first step in ownership of your problems. The second, so I'm told, is having control and responsibility over your life. Worldly wisdom reflects if you see it all as yours, you'll knock yourself out to make it work. Sounds great! So why are so many of us not able to get there? Why do so many of us lack "control over our lives" or at least feel that way? Some even more than others struggle with the routine duties of life let alone achieving great things. Perhaps there's been a time when you could relate to Fenster in this cartoon as he's standing on a trap door facing his boss viewing the "downsize list" which says, "**Fenster, you know that seminar you teach about how to deal with life's sudden changes?**"

Seriously though, perhaps you've a friend or a colleague who's had life give them a beating. Maybe it started out with them hanging with friends in high school – being part of the party crowd, or they stop off at the bar after work – to unwind. But heavier drinking consumed them, caused poor decisions to be made. A weak relationship with God became distant and nonexistent. Their marriage suffered, their job suffered. Part of them wanted to change, knew they needed to change, but by then they were on the down escalator wondering why they ever got on and having no way to get back up.



Or perhaps you've met someone who just seems to have a black cloud over their head all the time. Charlie Brown in Charles Schultz' comic strip certainly fit the bill. Nothing seemed to work out for good ol' Charlie. And do you remember Pig Pen with his constant dust cloud. Who'd not be glad to be him? But many of us are these guys – that's why we laughed – and cried as we watched the cartoon. That's why we secreted our hurts and pain and sorrows because we thought we had to put on a brave front. We've bought into the message that we've got to take ownership and that if it's ours we can trust those around us to help us make it work and that life is all about constantly growing.

Of course we can all relate to troubles coming our way. Like Jim who's about to lose his job because he won't compromise his convictions (we remember the recent discovery of false reporting by VW); like Sherri who's been unemployed with her government assistance running out; or like Stan who's endured surgery to fuse together vertebrae in his spine, and now's feeling increasing numbness on his right side. I'm sorry. I'm not trying to ruin your day; just asking you to consider perspectives we've picked up over the years and then consider this. What's missing? More specifically, who's missing? The Apostle Paul in the midst of all his turmoil could confidently state, "*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*" [Philippians 4:13]

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~ Philippians 4:13

That would've been good advice for Abram when he faced struggles in his life. He was still called Abram at this point. God gave him the name Abraham at his commissioning some years later. Now it would've been one thing if the story at Genesis 12 had taken place when he was initially asked to leave Ur and strike out in faith to God. But that was years before. Abram had seen again and again the hand of God in his life. Abram had been visited by God himself and had been given great promises - surely that was sufficient to steady his ship and keep him afloat? But then hard times hit! There was a famine throughout the land. Abram left the land to which he had been called by God – he turned his back on God and chose his own way to handle the problem. Sound familiar? This was compounded by Abram's fear he'd be killed because of Sarai's beauty. And it seems to have worked! Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's harem (if that could be considered a success for Sarai) and Abram "*acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants and camels.*" Seemed like Abram made a good decision - except for the part where he lied about his wife, and she was given to another man, Pharaoh found out about it and kicked him out of Egypt. That it worked wasn't God's opinion by any means. We're told, "*The Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household.*" Pharaoh sent Abram and his wife and household on their way. Abram winds up not pleasing God and being humiliated in the process. We don't know how long all this took but we see God had the last word!

Similarly, King Solomon's life spiraled down due to poor choices. As the heir of David, the man after God's own heart, he started out well; making a "wise" request after God asked him, "*What do you want?*" [1 Kings 3:9-10]. But he was soon seduced by choices not pleasing to the Lord. Solomon's slipping into the abyss didn't come without warnings from God, however. In fact, God spoke with the king, He told him: "*If you will follow me with integrity and godliness..., I will establish the throne of your dynasty over Israel forever*".

Both Abram and Solomon enjoyed a strong, covenant relationship with God, but they were still required to live in a way that pleased their Lord. *Obedience would bring blessing. Disobedience would bring disaster.* Sadly, just as Abram moved into Egypt and set his own course for his welfare; Solomon allowed the seduction of a pagan culture to draw him away from worshiping the one true God. Abram lied and let his wife be seduced in order to secure his own hide. Solomon turned to the lure of the world. How're you being seduced by a sick culture these days? What can help you follow God in true love and obedience? I'm not suggesting God will inflict those around you with serious diseases but He will get your attention if you fail to seek Him.

**"I can live without
a lot of things...but
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without Jesus!**

To put it in perspective, remember Jesus said "*If you deny me, I'll deny you before my Father in heaven.*" That scares me. I can live without a lot of things; I can fail at many things; I can suffer because of illness, struggle because of lost employment and limited funds; but I **cannot** live without Jesus, I can't fail in my walk with my Lord. Never do I want to consider standing on that Day of Judgment and hearing from Jesus, "*I don't know you; I've never known you!*"

Writer, Marc Allen states, "Great success is the result of a great many steps, all moving toward a clearly defined goal." If then we're to know success in our goal to know Jesus, to walk with God and to follow his precepts, if we're to ensure we don't allow the world and its ways to replace our heart for God, if we're ready to renew our love for God as a response to His own love for us, then we must overcome the problem where we leave God's direction, God's plan, sitting on the sidelines because it seems too simple, something we've heard a thousand times before and decide we can do it better ourselves!

For instance we've all heard, "Work smarter, not harder" ~ I've even said it myself. Have we applied such philosophy to our lives? At its heart is the message that we can overcome, we can aspire to be whatever we desire. But then if we dare to dream and press on to create it for ourselves we inevitably encounter doubts and fears. We can press on, battle our doubts and fears, and even appear to win. But how do we know we're on the right course? How do we know when we're off course – going the wrong way?

Again, it's about where we begin. With that in mind I thought of my Dad who's active with restoring pre-WWII bi-winged Tiger Moth aircraft and returning them to flight. I thought of how the pilot must be constantly alert, correcting the course of the plane due to buffeting and wind currents. And I thought of how we too must make course corrections as we get off course over and over again. Buffeted by symptoms such as being frustrated, depressed, confused, angry, upset, and even sad are good indications we've wandered off course again. How do we make these course corrections during all the activities of our daily lives? Well you might pick a popular phrase representing life philosophies to live by – something like, "What will be will be..." or something along those lines and repeat it over and over again until it becomes your mantra. Of course most of the time that just makes you feel silly. Or we can turn to the message of Abram after he left Egypt.

Look at Genesis 13:1-4 again, "*So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. ³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.*" Do you see what happened in Abram's life? When he left Egypt representing his course of action, his own direction, he returned to where he had first built an altar to God – in other words Abram came back to God. Abram chose to follow God instead of himself. Abram chose to please God!

But what does it mean to please God? How does that effect our correcting our course? If we're the Godly ones who follow God – how do we do it? The Hebrew term for "the godly ones" (*Hasid*) comes from the same root word as the term for "grace" (*hesed*). So we then understand as the "godly ones" we come to God as little children without guile, without pretext, without us setting our own plans in place; we're to be among those who turn to God and plead for grace. As his "faithful ones" we're, as the Psalmist writes, "*the people close to His heart*" [Psalm 148:14]; the "godly" run to the Lord for protection and pray to Him in their time of need.

We recognize our great need. We return to our roots when we've gone astray. We please God most when we fall on our face and confess we depend entirely upon Him. Like Abram we get out of Egypt where we've found our life in a mess. I love how it says here, "*Abram went up from Egypt...*" Certainly after what occurred there with the chaffing he got from Pharaoh and the knowledge that he – Abram – God's chosen – had messed up big time – the only way to go was up! When we meet at the crossroads between God's way and man's way which way do we choose? Can we find strength to do the same as Abram and return to God? Can we as we begin a new year resolve to follow God, to lean on His wonderful grace and to trust in Him to lead us and to set our course on the compass of His Word to remain true to our calling? Where are you? It's my prayer we can and we will, the Lord God

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leading us forward. It's my prayer, if you've never crossed the gap in your life which separates you from God, if you've never accepted the cross of Christ as the bridge to eternal life that you will today – saying no to sin, rebellion and separation and receiving God as your Lord accepting His peace, His forgiveness, His abundant life, His eternal life. So go ahead and ask yourself, "Who or what am I relying on?" "How will I please God today?" Do I trust in His grace? It's my prayer that you say "Yes I do!"

I would be glad to discuss with you how you can have confidence in relying on Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Call us drop us an email.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave