

TAKING A STEP OF FAITH

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Do you believe in the sovereignty of God? I’m sorry that’s not stated correctly. Do you really believe in the sovereignty of God?”

That’s the question I asked a good friend of mine who was considering a career change that would involve moving his family. He called to get my advice. What he did not know is that I was making a change myself. I asked him that question because I didn’t think it was a coincidence that he called me when he did. We talked for a while. I told him what I was about to do and all he could say was, “Wow!”

This morning I want to ask you the same question. ***Do you really believe in the sovereignty of God?*** Do you believe in it enough to lay everything—your career, your family, your security, your character, your reputation—everything on the line? Or, do you only believe in God’s sovereignty when things go your way? Let me give you an example of what I mean.

Let’s say you are up for a huge promotion. You are more than qualified, and it is something you have wanted all your life. Your company narrows their choice down to two people—yourself, and someone else. You know the other person up for the promotion is not a Christ-follower, although she is qualified. You pray about this situation, and you get others to pray with you. Piously, you pray for God’s will to be done, trying to convince yourself that you will be content, regardless of the outcome.

But then, when you don't get the promotion, it hurts. Outwardly, you stick to the line, "It was God's will." But inwardly, you are seething. How could your company be so dumb to choose the other person!

Resentment sets in next. You are no longer content. You start to feel like the company doesn't appreciate your abilities. Within a year, you leave that place of work with a bad taste in your mouth.

Here's the question: *Why did you pray for God's will to be done and then not accept the outcome as God's will? Is that not hypocritical? Do you really believe in the sovereignty of God? If so, then live like it!*

The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."¹

When was the last time you did something that made absolutely no sense, only because you were convinced that God said so? When was the last time you really took a step of faith? When was the last time you trusted sovereignty over self.

My Story

In July, 1980, at 15 years of age, I stood before my home church and told everyone that I felt God was calling me into ministry. For a teenager, that was a huge step of faith. I have been involved in ministry ever since, pasturing my first church when I was 23. I am now 41 years old, and God has asked me to start all over. Every profession has a career path with an upward trajectory. In pastoral ministry, the

¹ Proverbs 3:5-6.

trajectory (based on human perception) is that you pastor churches of ever increasing size and influence. That's how success is measured. What makes no sense is to leave a church of size, influence, and security to restart a church that has voted to fold. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and *lean not on your own understanding...*"

When I was 23 years old (and fresh out of Bible College) my wife and I accepted the pastorate of Franklin Free Will Baptist Church in Franklin, Tennessee. On our first Sunday, there was less than 30 people present, many of whom were my friends from college. We stayed 14 years, struggling to build a church, navigating through a series of change that culminated in selling the church's campus, changing the church's name to Franklin Community Church (and changing the philosophy and methodology), and relocating to a school.

After a few months of meeting in the school, the church bought 28 acres on Hwy. 96 West. During the due diligence period, the city of Franklin announced plans to expand the city limits beyond the property. Also, a developer announced his intentions to build a 3,000 home subdivision (called Westhaven) along Hwy. 96 West...right across the street from the 28 acres. We sold the church building for \$610,000 and purchased the land for \$640,000. Things looked bright, but all that was about to change.

A year or so after purchasing the land, I received word that the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) was going to expand Mack Hatcher By-Pass, making it encircle the city. One of their proposed routes came right through the church's property. If they chose that route, and we did not sell the land to them, they would condemn it and take it under "imminent domain." Over the next few years, I

stayed in constant contact with TDOT, fighting to save the land. But as time went on, it became more and more likely that they were going to take the land. To say this took the wind of our sails would be an understatement.

Then, four years ago, First Free Will Baptist Church in Russellville, Arkansas contacted me about becoming their pastor. At first I wasn't interested, but as I prayed about it, I began feeling led to accept their invitation. God gave me permission to leave Franklin; and He gave me peace, by reminding of the story of Moses. Moses wasn't allowed to "finish the job." He wasn't allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land. I left Franklin, confident God would provide a Joshua for them. In December of 2003, my family took a step of faith and moved to Russellville.

About the time I was getting settled in to a comfortable ministry in Russellville (late December, 2005), a friend of mine from the church in Franklin (a person I had led to the Lord, baptized, and disciplined) called me with some very distressing news. Things at the church had fallen apart. There had been fighting and divisions. People had left in droves. In August of 2005, they voted to dissolve as a church and put together a five person committee to be responsible for selling the land and distributing the assets.

My friend was on that committee, and the reason for his call was that the committee was not getting along. Some on the committee were doing things that were at best unethical and at worst illegal. Members of the committee were threatening to sue other members. My friend convinced me that if I did not step in, some very bad things would happen. He asked if I would allow him to recommend to the church that I be given the authority to close down the church and distribute the assets. (By this time the land was valued at over \$2 million.) I told him that was too big a job for one person.

I suggested that I contact my former deacons (all of whom had left the church) and see if they would serve with me. So, in December of 2005 the church (about 15 people) voted to dissolve the other board and allow myself and five deacons to serve in an advisory capacity to sell the land and distribute the assets. It was also decided that the land should be sold to another church or ministry and that it should not be sold for a penny more than what had been paid for it (\$640,000); and it could be sold for less if we felt like it would help another ministry.

We set out to find a compatible ministry to bless with the land. I talked to one pastor and told him we would sell his church the land for \$100,000 if that is all they could afford. A mission's ministry contacted us about the land, and we even entered into contract negotiations with a Bible College. But nothing ever worked out. Time and time again, something happened that interfered with selling the property. We could sell the land to a developer for over \$2 million, but we could not give it away!

At the beginning of 2007, after another deal had fallen through, we started asking ourselves if God wanted us to keep the land and restart the church. The more we, as a committee, prayed about it, the more we sensed God was not done with Franklin Community Church. In April of this past year, we met with the members and discussed options. The members asked me to pray about coming back and restarting the church. I returned to Russellville and prayed about it for several days; and then met with the members again. They voted to restart the church and call me as pastor. I accepted. During this time I also found out that TDOT had decided on a route that would place the By-Pass on the other side of our land. When the By-Pass is completed, the church's property will be on the corner of Hwy. 96 West and Mack Hatcher By-Pass, and will be

one of the busiest intersections in the city! God had protected the land from the government, and from being sold; and He did it without my help!

Once again God has asked me to take a step of faith; and this step is the biggest one yet. He has asked me (and my family) to leave a comfortable church, with a large membership and considerable influence in our denomination; to return to an unstable situation, with no promise of success, very few people, and very little money to begin with. He is asking me to do this in an area where the median price of homes is over \$400,000, and no money for us to buy a home. When I was 23, on my first Sunday in Franklin, there were less than 30 people. I am now 41, and I am praying there will be at least 30 people when we start having services again on July 1st.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”²

Taking a Step of Faith

Everyone takes a step of faith when they ask Jesus to come into their life and take over the controls. Sadly, however, followers of Jesus seldom take another step of faith after that. Here’s the question: *How can you be a follower if you are not walking, and how can you walk without taking steps?*

How, then, do I take steps of faith?

1. Kneel.

² Proverbs 3:5-6.

The very first thing you must do in order to take a step of faith is kneel before God. The act of kneeling is an act of humility, repentance, worship, and service. The Bible makes it clear that one day, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” If you don’t kneel now, you will bow later. The difference is, instead of being an act of humility, repentance, worship, and service; it will be an act of judgment, shame, guilt, and condemnation.

2. Stand.

When the Queen of England bestows the rank of Knighthood on an individual, that individual approaches the Queen with their head down and when they get to the Queen they kneel. While kneeling, the Queen says a few words while touching both shoulders with a sword. The Queen then says, “Rise!” And the individual, who bowed a lowly servant, stands a Royal Knight. From that moment on, he is different. From that moment on, he will do whatever the Queen asks, even if it costs him his life.

Should we be any different? When you bow before God a sinner, you rise a saint. The Bible says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”³

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”⁴

³ 1 Peter 2:9-10.

⁴ Romans 12:1.

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”⁵

3. Walk.

First you kneel. Then you stand. Then you walk. But in which direction do you walk? The prophet Isaiah mentioned a voice standing behind God’s people, directing them. From the New Testament we understand that voice to be the Spirit of God, and so Isaiah’s words apply to us. He writes, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”⁶ But remember, *you cannot walk until after you have kneeled and stood.* As you walk, listening to the voice of the Spirit, remember, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”⁷

4. Run.

Once your muscles gain strength through walking, you can run. But running is hard work. It’s exhausting, and the sweat and toil makes you want to quit. No one ever said following Jesus was easy. No one ever said taking steps of faith was a cake-walk. Quite the contrary, following Jesus is a grueling marathon.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

⁶ Isaiah 30:21.

⁷ Proverbs 3:5-6.

The Bible says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”⁸

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”⁹

5. Kneel.

Yes. In some ways this kneeling starts the process all over again. In other ways, however, this kneeling pictures the end of your stepping out on faith; and is a kneeling of victory and rest. The Psalmist writes, “Come, let bow in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.”¹⁰

“Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, ‘they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne

⁸ James 1:2-4.

⁹ Hebrews 12:1.

¹⁰ Psalm 95:6-7.

will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”¹¹

CONCLUSION

Following Jesus is a journey of faith, a journey that requires many steps. Paul, quoting the Old Testament, writes, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”¹²

What step of faith do you need to take this morning?

Do you need to kneel before God and give Him the controls of your life?

Do you need to stand, accepting His grace and mercy, recognizing that you are now a child of the King?

Do you need to walk, taking that step of faith, even though it makes no sense but you know it is what God wants you to do?

Do you need to run? Are you running into obstacles? Are you tired of running? Do you need His strength and perseverance?

Do you need to simply kneel in worship, resting in the presence of a loving God who cares for you more than you care for yourself?

What step of faith do you need to take today?

¹¹ Revelation 7:13-17.

¹² Romans 1:17. The OT quote is from Habakkuk 2:4.