

“DON’T JUST STAND THERE, DO SOMETHING!”

Luke 24:44-53, Ephesians 1:15-23, Acts 1:1-11

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Danielle Kennedy talks about overcoming obstacles. She writes, “My son Daniel’s passion for surfing began at the age of 13. Before and after school each day, he donned his wet suit, paddled out beyond the surf line and waited to be challenged by his three - to six - foot companions. Daniel’s love of the ride was tested one fateful afternoon.

“Your son’s been in an accident,’ the lifeguard reported over the phone to my husband Mike.

“How bad?’ ‘Bad. When he surfaced to the top of the water, the point of the board was headed toward his eye.’ Mike rushed Dan to the emergency room and they were then sent to a plastic surgeon’s office. He received 26 stitches from the corner of his eye to the bridge of his nose.

“I was on an airplane flying home from a speaking engagement while Dan’s eye was being stitched up. Mike drove directly to the airport after they left the doctor’s office. He greeted me at the gate and told me Dan was waiting in the car.

“Daniel?’ I questioned. I remember thinking the waves must have been lousy that day.

“He’s been in an accident, but he’s going to be fine.’

“A traveling working mother’s worst nightmare had come true. I ran to the car so fast the heel of my shoe broke off. I swung open the door, and my youngest son with the patched eye was leaning forward with both arms stretched out toward me crying, ‘OH, Ma, I’m so glad you’re home.’

“I sobbed in his arms telling him how awful I felt about not being there when the lifeguard called. ‘It’s ok, Mom,’ he comforted me. ‘You don’t know how to surf anyway.’ ‘What?’ I asked, confused by his logic. ‘I’ll be fine,’ he said. The doctor says I can go back in the water in eight days.’

“Was he out of his mind? I wanted to tell him he wasn’t allowed to go near water again until he was 35, but instead I bit my tongue and prayed he would forget about surfing forevermore.

“For the next seven days he kept pressing me to let him go back on the board. One day after I emphatically repeated ‘No’ to him for the 100th time, he beat me at my own game.

“Mom, you taught us never to give up what we love.’ Then he handed me a bribe - a framed poem by Langston Hughes that he bought ‘because it reminded me of you.’ It’s entitled:

Mother to Son

“Well, son, I’ll tell you: Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair. It’s had tacks in it. And splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor - Bare. But all the time I’ve been a-climbin’ on, And reachin’ landin’s And turnin’ corners, And sometimes goin’ in the dark Where there ain’t been no light. So, boy, don’t you turn back, Don’t you set down on the steps ‘Cause you finds it’s kinder hard. Don’t you fall now - For I’ve still goin,’ honey, I’ve still climbin’ And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.”

“I gave in,’ Danielle says. ‘Back then Daniel was just a boy with a passion for surfing. Now he’s a man with responsibility. He ranks among the top 25 pro surfers in the world. I was tested in my own backyard on an important principle that I teach audiences in distant cities: **‘Passionate people embrace what they love and never give up.’**”¹

There is a great tendency for us to give up on things when troubles come along, when the tacks start showing, or the boards go missing, and the splinters start piercing the feet. **Many people give up hopes and dreams when barriers or walls appear before them,** and they stop climbing, and they grow weary, and lose their hope for life. And rather than learning how to climb up those difficult stairs in life, they stand still as if they’re frozen, unable, or unwilling, to find a way around those troubles so that they can keep on climbing.

But thank God that we have a Savior who has already gone before us, to encourage us and challenge us and nurture us along the way so that we don’t get stuck in life and give up. Thank the Lord God Almighty that He has provided us with an avenue to follow that brings us beyond the temporary setbacks so that we can continue to grow in our faith and follow God’s guidelines, no matter how tough life gets.

¹ (Jack Canfield & Mark V. Hansen, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, [Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1993) p 238)

And we see that in our lesson of Acts 1 today. This is Ascension Sunday, remembering when Jesus finished His earthly ministry after spending 40 days with the disciples after His resurrection from the dead. Listen to Luke's account in Acts 1:1-11. (READ Acts 1:1-11)

Once again, the followers of Jesus could easily have said, "Well, Jesus is gone, so I guess it's back to business as usual." They could have given up on following Jesus because Jesus was no longer there to lead them. For a second time in just over a month, the disciples were at a loss. The first time was at Jesus' crucifixion and burial, and now when He ascends back into heaven. What were they going to do?

Jesus had spent 40 more days with them after His resurrection day, preparing them to do the ministry that He had called them to do. He kept telling them about all the things that God the Father had prepared for them in the kingdom, and encouraged them to grow deeper in their faith. He had proved Himself to be alive so that they would believe all that had happened. Jesus explained over and over again why he had to die, be buried and rise again. He lifted up the Scriptures to show how He had fulfilled all of the prophecies of the promised Messiah. He had given them all of last minute instructions needed to be prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Yet the followers of Jesus got awe struck. I mean, how many of you have seen a person arise into the air and ascend back into heaven? I can only imagine the sight of it. What a glorious thing to have happen! **But the realization of Jesus' departure sets in and they are all left standing there, mouths probably gaping open in amazement,** looking intently into the sky as if waiting for Jesus to return right that instant to establish His kingdom on earth again, or to take them with Him into heaven.

Thank God that He sent two of His messengers to prod the disciples along. As they were all frozen in wonderment of Jesus' departure, these two "men in white" challenged the people there to get going. *"Men of Galilee...why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). In essence they are saying, "Don't just stand there, do something!"

You see, **trials and struggles are only one way to stop us in our tracks with regard to our faith. But amazement at the glory of God is another way for us to find our progress halted.** We get so enthralled at being on the mountain top, experiencing the amazing things of God that we don't want that experience to end. We are so thrilled at being in the presence of something glorious, we forget everything else and become mesmerized by the moment into inactivity and even dormancy. We get so wrapped up in what God has done that we don't want to leave that place and get back to the business at hand. We don't want to leave the mountain top and go back down into the level ground.

We aren't told how long the disciples were there looking into the sky, but it was obviously long enough that there needed to be something to change their situation. So the followers of Jesus were gently challenged to stop gawking at Jesus' ascension, and to begin doing the work that Jesus had called them to do. The angels' question makes us wonder if that kind of travel was so common that they didn't know why the disciples were so amazed by His ascension. Maybe it was another reminder of how different things are in heaven than they are here on the earth. I almost get the feeling they were saying, "So what else is new?" Maybe that's why we have the promise that Jesus would return just the same way that they had seen Him leave.

We have to remember that Jesus came to the earth the first Advent as a human baby, vulnerable and tender. But **when Jesus returns to us again, He won't come as an infant, but rather as the victorious King of kings and Lord of lords. He will not be vulnerable and tender, but full of authority and power.** The way that Jesus will return to us a second time will be very different, so we are to prepare for that event.

But the invitation of the angels to the disciples got their attention and got them moving, for at the end of Luke's Gospel we have the account that "*they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God*" (Luke 24:52-53). Though they did not yet have the Holy Spirit in them to empower them to take the Gospel message of Jesus to all the nations, they did return to the temple to praise God and to pray for Jesus' promise of the filling of the

Holy Spirit. They began to do something, leaving the Mount of Olives and going back to the city of Jerusalem where they prepared themselves for their work. Acts 1:14 tells us, *“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”*

People, you have to remember this: **Every great movement of God begins with the people of God dedicating themselves to prayer, seeking the Lord’s work in their life.** Without prayer, God will not move. If the new Global Methodist Church has any hope for growth and God’s blessings, we must begin to pray for God to work in us and through us to begin a new movement of Methodism for our world. Unless we pray for the future of this congregation, God will not bring about His great blessing to us. Unless we prepare ourselves for the work of the Holy Spirit through us in prayer, God will not empower us to go in His name to reach the people of our city. Unless we pray for faithful followers of Jesus to gather here with us, this congregation will shrivel up and die. Unless we dedicate ourselves in prayer to the work of God by us and through us in the Holy Spirit, we will not gain young families to bring vitality back here to this place. **Prayer is absolutely essential for the preparation of each of us to be the people of God and do the work that God desires of us.** Prayer lets God know that we are ready for Him to move here so that He might work through us so that others might know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And we see that same prayer for the people of the church in the Letter to the Ephesian 1:15-23. Paul, having heard of the faith of the followers of Jesus in Ephesus, prayed. *“...asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe...”* (Eph. 1:17-19).

What if we prayed for God’s Spirit of wisdom and revelation? What if we asked God to move here into this church to empower each one of us to become His witnesses? What if we were to humble ourselves to the mighty power of Jesus Christ and dedicate ourselves to His purpose here in this

place? What if we were to so focus on the will of God in our lives that we ask Him to use each one of us to be His servant? If we were to do that, God would be so pleased to answer our requests that He would turn this church up-side-down for the Gospel and we would be blessed beyond belief.

But we can't just stand there, or sit here, expecting things to change without doing something! God will not work if there is no one to do His work. We've got to be willing to put ourselves under His authority, under His power, and under His leadership before He will begin working here in this place. We come to worship once a week and think that we're doing our part to accomplish God's plan of Salvation for the world. That's like the disciples standing on the top of the Mount of Olives staring at the sky where Jesus was lifted up.

In order to reach the people of the world, we can't just stay here gawking at what Jesus has done. We've got to do something with our faith. We have to put it into practice, so that we live for Jesus every day. To do the work of the Lord we have to do more than just show up on Sunday mornings for an hour or two. Unless we dedicate ourselves to the Lord our God, He will not move.

Let me give you an example. "At a young and tender age, Patti Wilson was told by her doctor that she was an epileptic. Her father, Jim Wilson, is a morning jogger. One day she smiled through her teenage braces and said, 'Daddy what I'd really love to do is run with you every day, but I'm afraid I'll have a seizure.' Her father told her, 'If you do, I know how to handle it so let's start running!'

"That's just what they did every day. It was a wonderful experience for them to share and there were no seizures at all while she was running. After a few weeks, she told her father, 'Daddy, what I'd really love to do is break the world's long-distance running record for women.'

"Her father checked the *Guinness Book of World Records* and found that the farthest any woman had run was 80 miles. As a freshman in high school, Patty announced, 'I'm going to run from Orange County up to San Francisco' (a distance of 400 miles). 'As a sophomore,' she went on, 'I'm going to run to Portland, Oregon' (over 1,500 miles). 'As a junior I'll run to St. Louis' (about 2,000 miles). 'As a senior I'll run to the White House' (more than 3,000 miles away). In view of her handicap, Patti was

as ambitious as she was enthusiastic, but she said she looked at the handicap of being an epileptic as simply ‘an inconvenience.’ **She focused not on what she had lost, but on what she had left.**²

Who had ever heard of a woman running 400 miles, much less over 3,000 miles? Patti put her mind to it, focused on the goal before her and worked hard to achieve it, despite her “handicap.” If our focus is on growing this church, on making a difference in this community, on doing the work of the Lord Jesus in a majestic way for His glory, we have to give ourselves completely to the task before us. That means we humble ourselves in prayer, we diligently seek the power of the Holy Spirit, and we ask the Lord to move through us to do His work.

Sure, we have obstacles that might make our life challenging. Yes there are things that might cause us to want to quit and stand still, wanting others to do the hard work for us. **Yes, there might seem to be an impossible task before us, but when we pray, when we give ourselves to doing something for the work of the Lord, God goes before us to remove all the obstacles to allow us to succeed in His work.** That exactly what He did for Patti Wilson. Listen to what she was able to do.

“That year Patti completed her run to San Francisco wearing a T-shirt that read, ‘I Love Epileptics.’ Her dad ran every mile at her side, and her mom, a nurse, followed in a motor home behind them in case anything went wrong.

“In her sophomore year Patti’s classmates got behind her. They built a giant poster that read, ‘Run, Patti, Run!’ (This has since become her motto and the title of a book she has written.) On her second super marathon, en route to Portland, she fractured a bone in her foot. A doctor told her she had to stop her run. He said, ‘I’ve got to put a cast on your ankle so that you don’t sustain permanent damage.’

“Doc, you don’t understand,’ she said. ‘This isn’t just a whim of mine, it’s a magnificent obsession! I’m not just doing it for me, I’m doing it to beat the chains of the brains that limit so many others. Isn’t there a way I can keep running?’ He gave her one option. He could wrap it in adhesive

² (Jack Canfield & Mark V. Hansen, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, pg. 256-257)

instead of putting it in a cast. He warned her that it would be incredibly painful, and he told her, ‘It will blister.’ She told the doctor to wrap it up.

“She finished the run to Portland, completing her last mile with the governor of Oregon. You may have seen the headlines: ‘Super runner, Patti Wilson Ends Marathon For Epilepsy On Her 17th Birthday.’ (Certainly she could stop now, right? Wasn’t that enough already? Well....)

“After four months of almost continuous running from the West Coast to the East Coast, Patti arrived in Washington D.C. and shook the hand of the President of the United States. She told him, ‘I wanted people to know that epileptics are normal human beings with normal lives.’

Mark Victor Hansen says, “I told this story at one of my seminars not long ago, and afterward a big teary-eyed man came up to me, stuck out his big meaty hand and said, ‘Mark, my name is Jim Wilson. You were talking about my daughter, Patti.’ Because of her noble efforts,” Mark says, “he told me enough money had been raised to open up 19 multi-million-dollar epileptic centers around the country.

“If Patti Wilson can do so much with so little, what can you do to outperform yourself in a state of total wellness?”³ Patti Wilson could have been defined by epilepsy. But she chose to define her life as who she is with epilepsy. **We, too, can be defined by our limitation, our brick walls or hardships. But we should chose to be defined as the people of God with His Holy Spirit in us instead.**

What can we do through prayer, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? **To humbly do the work of the Lord right here, we have to dedicate ourselves to do something.** It may seem completely nonsense, absolutely impossible, and way beyond any of our capabilities. And maybe so. But when we humble ourselves before the Lord in prayer, when we stop standing there, and do something for the Lord, He will surprise us over and above what we can ever imagine. Let’s pray...

Father, thank You for the challenges in our lives that drive us back to You. Give us the courage not to be defined by those challenges, but rather face them boldly because we have Your Holy Spirit within us. Use us, even as we are, to do a great work for You. Let us be defined as Your people, doing marvelous things for Your glory, in the powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

³ (Ibid., pg. 257-258)