

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

The Gift of Goodbye

January 1, 2018

January 1, 2018. This date marks the beginning of an interesting few months. Christmas has come and gone (rather quickly for many of us). For most of us, we've had some time off from work, and have put some thought into how we will make 2018 different. We might resolve to lose some weight by eating better or working out more. We might resolve to read more books, spend more time with family, watch less television, pray more, and on and on. We put a lot of significance on the first day of the year. However, like most birthdays, not much is *really* different after the passing of another year. Not much has changed since yesterday (December 31), has it? Sure, we might struggle in writing 2018 instead of 2017, but as far as the majority of our lives are concerned, we have simply started another new day.

What is it about the new year that makes us as a people so excited? While we may not be able to answer that question for everyone, it's hard to ignore the common theme that runs through all New Year's resolutions and celebrations: change. Change, though received differently depending on the person, is an expected part of life. The New Year serves as a collective marker of change, and we think about how we will approach change in the days leading up to the new year. And while there is nothing inherently different inside of us as we enter into the New Year, we know there are areas of our lives in which we'd like to improve. What we need is a guide in helping us to improve, and this leads us to our passage for today.

Deuteronomy 31:1-6

¹When Moses had finished giving these instructions to all the people of Israel, ²he said, "I am now 120 years old, and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has told me, 'You will not cross the Jordan River.'³ But the LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy the nations living there, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua will lead you across the river, just as the LORD promised.

⁴"The LORD will destroy the nations living in the land, just as he destroyed Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites. ⁵The LORD will hand over to you the people who live there, and you must deal with them as I have commanded you. ⁶So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you."

The Israelites, led by Moses, had been through a long season of life. After escaping enslavement under Pharaoh, they traveled in the wilderness. They not only struggled with the natural results of spending a significant amount of time

traveling in the wilderness, they also dealt with many other problems, including and especially the discipline of God for allowing their hearts to wander from him and worship other things. Moses had been their guardian and guide, and on several occasions, he mediated between them and God and spared them more intense punishment for their wrongdoing. At this point in the text, they are about to enter into the promised land, but not without opposition. The people of the land were powerful, big, and intimidating. And now, Moses instructs them that he will not be leading them into this scary endeavor; instead, it will be God who leads them through Joshua.

Those of us who are familiar with the story know that Joshua was a capable military leader who did lead the Israelites through a successful - albeit bloody - campaign into the promised land. However, if we try to put ourselves in the place of the Israelites at this moment and understand that they are now about to enter into this intimidating land without their leader, it had to have been a disappointing and frightening announcement.

We can find several applications in this story, and this past weekend, Ben Snyder touched on one of them. He encouraged us to remember that we should **never underestimate the potential in letting go**. Who knows how things would've turned out had God allowed Moses to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land? We can't be sure of the result, but what we do know, is that God had a very good reason for this decision, and it led to the successful campaign into Canaan. The Israelites - and Moses - had to let go of the relationship they had for decades. In order to accomplish their purpose - of entering the promised land and eventually establishing the nation of Israel - they had to let go and trust that God would lead them.

Ben then added that **the gift that goodbye gives is the opportunity for a new hello**. God knew the Israelites needed Joshua's leadership to successfully conquer the promised land, and the Israelites experienced what a goodbye - to Moses - might lead to: a hello to their new leader Joshua.

What does this mean for us? How can we use the example of the transition from Moses to Joshua? We can start by allowing ourselves to let go of certain things (relationships, opportunities, habits, jobs, etc.) so we can say hello to other things. On a ground level, this could be something as simple as limiting your time on social media every day (goodbye) and replacing that time with some time in scripture (hello). It could mean limiting some of the time you spend watching television (goodbye) and replacing that time with fun activities with your loved ones (hello). The problem is that so often, we do underestimate the potential in our goodbye because we don't see the dividends it could pay! The

New Year, though just another year on the calendar, gives us the opportunity to evaluate the areas of potential growth.

Questions:

In what areas of your life would you like to see improvement (spiritual, financial, relational, physical, etc.)?

How can you start to say “goodbye” to certain things in order to improve in one or more of those areas?

Next Steps:

Spend the next week praying about the different areas of your life in which you might like to see improvement and ask God how he can help direct your goodbyes and hellos.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and its example in my life. I know that even over several thousands of years, it still has very real implications for my life now. Thank you for the example set by Moses, Joshua, and the Israelites in saying goodbye. Help me to grow closer to you by saying goodbye to certain things and hello to others. I desperately need your guidance in this endeavor. I ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Out of Control

January 2, 2018

I was not raised in church. I didn't actually get saved until 2008; and even then, I wasn't very serious about it. I knew my life was a mess, and I knew people were telling me this would make it better. Well, it didn't make it better, not at first, because I didn't change anything else about my life at that point. I was afraid to change, even though I was completely miserable. I was comfortable in my miserable state; I had been there for quite some time! My marriage was a disaster, and my life was out of control, but I couldn't admit that everything was falling apart. I had dreamed of this family and made it my mission to hold it all together, no matter how messed up it all was or how unhappy I or anyone else was. I wanted my life to be a certain way, and even though it wasn't even close, I was too proud to admit that it wasn't, too scared of what people would think when they realized I didn't have this great life and perfect marriage. And I was way too scared of what my life *would* be like if it wasn't like it was. I had no idea what the alternative looked like, and that scared me to death.

When I finally started seeing a Christian counselor and going to Celebrate Recovery and Al Anon, I realized what a control freak I was! I NEVER would have thought that in a million years. I thought I was such a "go with the flow" kind of person. Yeah, not so much! When I finally learned to let go of my illusions of control and let God be in charge, my life started to get better. But I still had to say goodbye to what I thought my life was supposed to be and allow God to guide me. It was really hard to change and scary to realize that I really have very little control over much of anything.

When I started reading, memorizing, and *believing* verses like Deuteronomy 31:8 (see below), it became easier and a little less scary to make changes and necessary endings in my life. Moses had to say goodbye to his dream, his mission in life that he had been on for years and years! But what did he say hello to? God. We always have God with us when change happens. He is always there for us and will never abandon us. Joshua had to say goodbye to not only his leader and mentor but also a father figure and friend. He had to step out of his comfort zone and into the purpose that God had set for his life. How scary was that? But again, God told him not to be scared or discouraged because he would be there for him always.

God has just introduced another major change in my life, and I don't know if I would have even gone through it if I didn't trust this promise. It was a very drastic move out of a very, very comfortable life into uncharted territory again. I know he has been preparing me these last few years for this new season, but it's still scary. But because I trust him, I can now lean into new and unknown situations because I know I'm not in control! If I am allowing God to guide me and always

remember that he is here with me, I will be fine no matter what is going on around me. Don't get me wrong, the transition has been rough. But rather than being terrified, I am excited for what God has planned for me because I know now that his plans are always good, even if I don't fully understand them.

Deuteronomy 31:8 is a great verse to memorize – in fact one of the first that I memorized – and it can be a great source of strength when I once again realize that I am not in control. Yes, it happens still, probably always will ... I am an ongoing work in progress, so I need these tools to help me be strong and courageous, to let go, and to let God lead my life. He does a much better job than I ever did, that's for sure!

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

¹ When Moses had finished giving these instructions to all the people of Israel, ² he said, "I am now 120 years old, and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has told me, 'You will not cross the Jordan River.'³ But the LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy the nations living there, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua will lead you across the river, just as the LORD promised.

⁴ The LORD will destroy the nations living in the land, just as he destroyed Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites. ⁵ The LORD will hand over to you the people who live there, and you must deal with them as I have commanded you. ⁶ So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you."

*⁷ Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, "Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. ⁸ **Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.**"*

Questions: What change is going on in your life right now? Are you scared and discouraged, or are you trusting God's plan? What would it take for you to "let go and let God?"

Next Steps:

We all struggle at times with letting go of the control we perceive we have over our lives. As you encounter these situations, step back to consider God's most frequent command in the Bible: "fear not." As you navigate the twists and turns of this life of change, take comfort in the depth and breadth of God's loving hand, and appreciate that he is in control.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise to never leave or abandon us. Help me to hold this promise close in my heart and never forget it, so that when change comes, I am ready to trust you through the transition, knowing that you are always with me. Amen.

Wherever You Go, I Will Go

January 3, 2018

“The only thing that is constant is change.” As this popular aphorism suggests, we all encounter change on a regular basis. Inherent within change is the necessity to say “goodbye” to certain aspects of our lives. We say goodbye to people and relationships, to seasons of life, to jobs ... and the list goes on. In fact, given the constancy of change, we eventually say goodbye to most aspects of our lives. While some of these goodbyes are unwelcome, even the most painful experiences can serve as catalysts for new opportunities. Indeed, as the Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho wrote, “If you are brave enough to say goodbye, life will reward you with a new hello.”

Each day during this final week of the Gift of Words series, *LivingItOut* is exploring a character from the Bible who had to say “goodbye” but in turn received the blessing to say “hello” to a new opportunity.

Today, we will unpack the story of Ruth, one of the most inspiring women of the Bible. Ruth overcame tragedy and a myriad of obstacles on a journey that would define her as an enduring example of loyalty, love, and courage.

The Story of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is set in a tumultuous period in Israel’s history, during the time of judges in the second millennium B.C. Against the backdrop of famine and general disarray in Israel, a man named Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Kilion, relocated from Bethlehem to Moab in search of sustenance and a more secure life. But soon after arriving in Moab, a series of tragedies befell the emigrant family. First, Elimelek died, leaving Naomi a widow. While this was a difficult blow to the family, Naomi took comfort in the fact that she still had two sons to help care for her and carry forward the family name as heirs to Elimelek.

Following Elimelek’s death, both Mahlon and Kilion married Moabite women – Ruth and Orpah, respectively. However, within a decade, the family’s situation regressed from bad to worse, as both Mahlon and Kilion died, leaving all three women of the family widowed and facing a bleak future. During the time of Ruth, a woman without a husband or heirs was most often destined for a life of poverty and hardship.

Soon after the deaths of her sons, Naomi learned that God had again blessed the people of Judah with good crops (Ruth 1:6). With the famine now over, she decided to return to her homeland of Bethlehem, along with Ruth and Orpah. But during the journey home, Naomi experienced a change of heart. Worried that she was literally leading the two young widows away from their only

measure of refuge (in their own homeland), she encouraged them to turn back for Moab in hopes that they would be blessed with the security of another marriage (Ruth 1:9). As Moabites, Ruth and Orpah would have been forbidden to wed Israelite men, meaning that in Bethlehem they would be even further assured of a life of destitution and despair. In short, Naomi did not want them to suffer the same fate she now envisioned for herself.

Initially, both Ruth and Orpah resisted Naomi's request. Naomi persisted and Orpah eventually relented, returning to Moab. But despite Naomi's repeated appeals, Ruth remained steadfast in her commitment to her mother-in-law.

Ruth 1:16-18

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

Upon arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth asked Naomi for permission to "go into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it" (Ruth 2:2). Naomi agreed and Ruth soon found herself gathering grain behind harvesters in a field that belonged to Boaz, a relative of her departed father-in-law Elimelek. Being a kind man, Boaz took note of Ruth and ensured that she was treated well by the harvesters. Knowing of her commitment to Naomi, Boaz continued to watch over Ruth, providing an open invitation for her to gather grain left behind by the harvesters (Ruth 2:15). Touched by her daughter-in-law's unrelenting loyalty and love, Naomi turned her focus to finding Ruth a permanent home so that she would be provided for (Ruth 3:1). Soon thereafter, Naomi encouraged Ruth to approach Boaz, who agreed to serve as her kinsman-redeemer and eventually took her into his home as his wife (Ruth 4:13). The couple were later blessed with a child named Obed.

Ruth 4:14-15

¹⁴ Then the women of the town said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. ¹⁵ May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!"

Some 3,500 years later, the name of Ruth lives on – in the Bible and in the lineage of its most important character. Ruth's son Obed would have a son of his own, named Jesse. And he, in turn, would become the father of King David. And so, the humble Moabite Ruth, who demonstrated unfailing courage and commitment to Naomi amid tragedy and hardship, is forever connected to the genealogy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Ruth's story serves as a poignant illustration of God's rewards for persistence and belief. In a life marked by difficult changes, Ruth demonstrated the courage and commitment to pursue the road less traveled. She said "goodbye" – to her first husband and then to her homeland. And through her loyalty to Naomi, she was presented with the "hello" of a new beginning – the blessing of a new life and child with Boaz.

As we say goodbye to 2017 and greet the new year, Ruth's legacy of loyal love serves as a reminder of the rewards that await us when we say "hello" to God's gifts.

Questions:

Consider the goodbyes that you have said in the past year. Have you resolved these endings as a means to moving forward in the new year?

In what areas is God inviting you to say "hello" by stepping into something new? Think of at least three areas in which you are being presented with new changes and opportunities. What can you do to ensure that you embrace these new beginnings before you?

Next Steps:

As you begin the new year, set aside time to consider the elements of your life that have changed or are in the midst of changing. Take care to acknowledge the endings, and consider the opportunities of stepping into new beginnings with confidence and faith.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank you, as always, for the gift of this ever-changing earthly life. Help me to have the courage and wisdom to embrace change and to follow every "goodbye" by demonstrating the courage and willingness to say "hello" to the new gifts you place before me. Amen.

A Long Way from Home

January 4, 2018

As I am writing this, I am sitting comfortably at my own desk, in my own room, with a blanket, a cup of hot chocolate, and a cat. But by the time this devotional is published, I will be in Russia.

Some of you may be thinking, "Wow, that sounds exciting!"

The more sensible among you, however, might realize what this really means. I will be in Russia during January. One of its coldest months. Historically speaking, going to Russia in the winter has never been a wise decision.

Don't misunderstand me - I am beyond excited for this trip. But I'm still allowed to be nervous. I always start to panic the week before a big trip because that's when I realize how much there is to do. I haven't even begun to pack.

And besides, it's Russia. In the winter. I'm leaving my cozy room, my desk, my piles of blankets, and my cat to go to Russia in the winter. (I'm told they will have hot chocolate there.) Honestly, being nervous just sounds like good sense at this point.

Travel is great. It's exciting and eye-opening. I can think of no way I'd rather spend New Year's Eve than in Moscow at midnight, and I wouldn't give up this opportunity for anything right now - not even for the comfort of my own room.

But travel is also uncomfortable - especially if you're not just traveling for fun - because it *does* involve giving up things - the comforts of home, familiar faces, and your daily routine.

In my experience, it's always worth it. Still, if the idea of going to a foreign country, far from your family and the place you've called home, doesn't make you just a little apprehensive, then you probably have no idea what it's like to be in a foreign country, far from your family and the place you call home.

In today's *LivingItOut*, we will explore the character, Abraham, who had to say "goodbye" but in turn received the blessing to say "hello" to a new opportunity.

I can only imagine how Abraham (then Abram) felt when God said to him, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)

Of course, Abraham was able to take some of his family - his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot - with him, as well as all of his wealth.

I get one suitcase under fifty pounds and a carry-on.

Then again, I'll only be in Russia for 10 days. In another couple weeks, I'll be back at my desk, writing another devotional. Abraham, on the other hand, was making a permanent move. He never returned to the land of his father.

Also, while I have a detailed itinerary outlining where I'll be, when I'll be there, and what I'll be doing while I'm there, Abraham was flying blind. Yes, he had God's guidance and assurance of safety, which is more reliable than any man-made schedule, but God didn't give Abraham a step-by-step schedule of his journey - the people he'd meet, the trials he'd face, where he would make camp each night. He was traveling by faith. He was asked to say, "goodbye", to something comfortable and familiar and to say, "hello", to an unknown opportunity.

(As much as I want to have faith that strong, for now, I'll book my hotel rooms ahead of time.)

Of course, there's one last detail that probably made Abraham's journey far more difficult than mine will be. Abraham was 75 years old when he left his home.

Sure, we're told people lived far longer back then, and I imagine that longevity came with improved health. Still, asking a 75-year-old man to pack his things, say goodbye to most of his family, and set out into the unknown ... well, it feels like a bit much.

But God did ask this of Abraham. And "it was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land ... He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents." (Hebrews 11:8-9)

And you know what? I don't think Abraham regretted it, because God kept his word. Not only did God protect Abraham and his family during this journey, but he also blessed Abraham with his long-desired son. And though Abraham did not live to see it, through that son, God blessed Abraham with an entire nation, which eventually inherited the land God had promised him.

And not only *that*, but God blessed others - all of us, in fact - through Abraham. Through the stories of his nation, we were blessed with the Bible, God's word. And through Abraham's lineage, and that of his promised son Israel, we were blessed with our Savior, Jesus.

Here's my point. God does not call us to easy, comfortable lives. He likes to challenge us - some of us (Abraham) more than others (me). Either way, it can be intimidating, even frightening.

However, when God calls you to something, he will not let you down. Not only will he bless your life through this calling, but he will bless others through you. Sure, he won't bless all people everywhere through you, like he did through Abraham. But in some way, others will benefit from your faith and obedience, even if it's something as humble as helping students learn English.

So don't worry, and don't be afraid (or at least, don't let your fear stop you). When God calls you to something, he always makes it worth the journey.

Hopefully, he'll call you to somewhere warmer than Russia.

Questions:

Do you feel God has been calling you to something? It doesn't have to be something big, like moving to another country. It could be going on a short-term mission, moving to a new town, or even finding a new way to serve where you are right now.

How can you step out of your comfort zone to better serve God this year?

What is the next step in your faith that God wants you to make?

Next Steps:

Act. Our faith is meant to grow. Define a change you can make to improve your faith this year, then set realistic, trackable steps to achieve it.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your servant Abraham. Thank you for his faith and obedience - without it we would not have your holy Bible as we know it. We ask that you would help us to grow in obedience as well, following the paths you've called us to even when they seem challenging. Help us to listen to your guidance and trust in your protection. Your will be done. Amen.

I Am Going Away

January 5, 2018

In Acts 1, we read about the last days of Jesus' ministry on earth:

³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God ...⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.

The ascension of Jesus in Acts 1 signifies the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. Do you ever wonder why Jesus had to return to heaven? Wouldn't it have been better if he had just stayed with us on Earth and continued to teach and perform miracles? The disciples, followers of Jesus didn't want him to leave either. When Jesus talked with the disciples about leaving them, it caused them great distress.

John 16:5-6

⁵ "But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. ⁶ Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you."

Although the talk of his leaving agitated the disciples, the Bible never mentions tears or mourning when he actually ascended into heaven. This could be because Jesus' departure ushered in a time of even greater intimacy with him through the Holy Spirit. Although thinking of being separated from Jesus caused the disciples great anxiety, the actual bodily separation from him brought them something even greater. The Holy Spirit allowed Jesus to be present with all of us all of the time.

Matthew 28:20

²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The ascension is only partially a conclusion or "goodbye" to Jesus' life and ministry on Earth. It is primarily the introduction of a new beginning of Jesus' ministry through his Church empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The disciples had to say goodbye to Jesus in order to say hello to their new purpose of advancing the good news and establishing the Church.

Their new beginning was a life with real purpose.

Questions:

What have been the most difficult goodbyes in your life so far?

How have the goodbyes in your life been an invitation to new opportunity and purpose?

Do you feel that God is asking you to say goodbye to something in your life?

Next Steps:

The Disciples had each other for support as they said “goodbye” to Jesus being on earth. They also provided encouragement to each other as they stepped into new opportunities. Take a few moments and identify the people in your life who can support you during a “goodbye” and encourage you in your new “hello”.

Prayer:

God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for knowing what we need, even if it's not what we want at the time. Please show me anything in my life that I need to let go of or say goodbye to. Please help me adjust and accept new beginnings. Amen.