

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

What Could Be?

August 6, 2018

Leaving the house on time is never easy when you have kids. There can be many reasons for running late, but for my family the culprit most often is a misplaced pair of shoes. Sometimes, we discover that the missing shoes were taken off during the last car ride home! Other times, we find them under a bed or in the basement. Most often though, they are lost in a giant pile of shoes on the floor of the front hallway closet!

Last week, I decided that I had finally had enough! As I found myself on the floor of the closet rifling through the pile of shoes for the third time in two days, I thought to myself, this is ridiculous, and I began to imagine **what could be if** I had a shoe rack.

If only I had a shoe rack, then shoes could be organized, children could be ready to leave on time, and frantic searches through the closet could be a thing of the past! The more I thought about it, the more I believed that a shoe rack had the potential to change my life!

This weekend Ben Snyder asked us to answer this question: “What one thing has the potential to change your life?” Often, when we think about our lives being changed or **what could be**, we include an “**IF**” in the statement. For example, we might say something like, “Imagine what could be if I had a different boss.” “Imagine what could be if I was more talented in a certain area.” “Imagine what could be if I had a bigger house.” Or in my case, “Imagine what could be if I had a shoe rack.”

Ben taught us this weekend that the difference between our potential and our limitations is how we leverage “**IF**.” Specifically, the difference between our potential and our limitations is **WHO** is at the **CENTER OF “IF**.” Putting God at the center of our if is actually the one thing that has the potential to change our lives.

When we put ourselves at the center of the “if”, it limits what could be. However, when God is at the center of the “if”, the potential to what could be is limitless. In fact, with God our **limitations** become our greatest **potential** for purpose.

2 Corinthians 4:7

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

Today, our church begins “21 Days of Prayer,” and you are invited to be a part of it. Over the next 21 days, we are coming together to seek God first and to offer him everything that we have. As a church, we want to put God at the center of what could be! Together, we faithfully trust in his power alone to create lasting impact in our lives, our church, and our world.

Putting God at the center of our lives is where we get our potential to do great things and to make a difference for him. We do that through prayer and through trusting him with everything that we have to offer.

Questions:

How are you leveraging your “if”?

What steps can you take to make God the center of your “What if’s”?

Next Steps:

Dedicate yourself to growing in the area of prayer.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer. You can find out more at cedarcreek.tv/21days. (Download the personal prayer guide. Share a request for prayer. Download the parent resource)

Prayer:

Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” God, today I surrender myself to you. I give you my personality, my passion, my past, and my placement knowing that you can do more with them than I could ever imagine. Because of you, I have great potential. Thank you! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 1

Today's Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Our Leaders – Nation, State, and City
(1 Timothy 2:1-2)

From Failure to Rock

August 7, 2018

Bible scholar John MacArthur describes Jesus' chosen apostles this way: They were a motley crew of ordinary, uneducated men, not showing any exceptional talent for speaking, leading, or teaching. Blockheads. Perhaps worst of all was Simon, the one Jesus picked to lead this merry band of misfits. Jesus gave him the name Peter, which in Greek is Petra, or Rock. But repeatedly, Peter shows us that while operating under his own will, he was anything *but* a rock. For example, when trying to kill one of the men who came to arrest Jesus, he missed his head and cut off his ear instead. He was a never-ending whirlwind of opinions and actions, and he typically failed when it mattered most.

At the last supper, Peter proclaimed, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you" (Matthew 26:33). But a few hours later, he denied knowing Jesus *three times!*

How did this failed mess of a man go on to give arguably one of the Bible's most powerful sermons and lead thousands to Christ on Pentecost? In John 21, we read that Jesus called him out, and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he stopped being Simon and became Peter, the Rock.

After a night of fruitless fishing, Jesus calls to them from the beach and tells them to lower their nets on the right side of the boat. They then catch so many fish that they can't haul in the nets. Peter, realizing it's Jesus, "*threw himself* into the sea" (John 21:7, ESV, italics mine) to get to Jesus. The exchange that follows changes Peter forever, changing him from failure to rock.

John 21:15-17

¹⁵ After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him. ¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you." "Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said. ¹⁷ A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."

Jesus explains to Peter that he has two jobs: follow Jesus and be a shepherd to his sheep. Previously, Peter had failed because his decisions were based on his belief in himself. He was trying to operate on his own, and that's why he failed. What a relief that God does his best work with nothing. (Check out Genesis 1:1 for another great example of this.)

Jesus had to bring Peter face to face with the true depth of his sin and, consequently, the true depth of God's grace and mercy before he could stop relying on himself and truly turn himself over to Jesus (John Reilly sermon, "Peter, The Disciple"). When we allow Jesus to show us the same truth, he can use us right where we live to accomplish his amazing work.

John's recounting of Peter's story shows us how God uses bent and broken people to do amazing things. His requirements? Have a humble and repentant heart, and a desire to love him and to love others.

2 Corinthians 4:7

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

Questions:

Have you recently examined why you follow Jesus?

Ask yourself if you truly "wait on him", or do you do what *you* think is best?

Next Steps:

Find a way to take that love you profess for Christ and cast it onto others over a meal or a game of golf, or even working in the garden with a neighbor. Let go of being your own god. Commit Isaiah 55:8-9 to memory.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer. You can find out more at cedarcreek.tv/21days. (Download the personal prayer guide. Share a request for prayer. Download the parent resource)

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for revealing my true motivations to me. Help me to stop putting myself at the center of my world and replace it with your lordship and a deep desire to humble myself. Help me to love you more than myself and to serve others because of your love for us. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 2

Today's Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Our Pastors, church staff, Group Leaders, DreamTeam members.

Raise Your Voice and Be Heard

August 8, 2018

Being thrust into a public speaking role was exactly the scenario Moses found himself in, despite having some issues with speaking publicly. He was chosen by God to step outside his comfort zone and to lead the Israelites out of their Egyptian slavery, a task that would involve talking to both the Israelites and the Egyptians, even the Pharaoh himself!

Exodus 4:10

But Moses pleaded with the Lord, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled."

Imagine dozens and dozens, perhaps even hundreds and hundreds of eyes staring at you, eagerly hanging on your every word, waiting to hear words of knowledge, wisdom, and hope from your mouth. That is a pretty intimidating scenario for most people. I definitely felt this way as a graduate student when I presented, for the first time, my research findings to all the big names in my field at a conference near London. I most certainly did not feel at the time that I had lots of wisdom to share, just my graphs and data. I was clutching my notes with one hand, even though I had memorized them, as if my life depended on them, and hoping that none of my slides were out of order or upside down. (Yep, we still had projector carousels with actual slides in those days!)

Today, I enjoy public speaking, and I frequently have to speak to large groups as a scientist or university administrator. So, the story of Moses intrigued me because I initially could not understand why Moses had any issues with public speaking. Having been raised at the Egyptian royal court would have afforded him an excellent education, so being knowledgeable or knowing how to carry himself should not have been an issue. There are some theories that maybe he had a speech impediment or physical handicap, but nothing like that is mentioned in the Bible. Whatever the reason, Moses was clearly grasping for excuses to avoid what God was calling him to do.

Yet, he was in a unique position as an Israelite raised and educated in Egypt, a position that allowed him to accomplish something amazing and grand!

Because he chose obedience and used what he probably felt was a limitation (not being a good public speaker), he found that with God by his side, his potential was limitless. He put God at the center and trusted him, and he was able to use his voice to free God's people.

Questions:

What do you feel are your limitations? Have you ever felt like you had something important to say at a crucial moment, perhaps to help someone? Did you use your voice, or did you stay silent?

Next Steps:

Look for opportunities where God has placed you in a unique position to use your voice to help others. Practice using your voice in these moments while trusting that God is by your side.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer. You can find out more at cedarcreek.tv/21days. (Download the personal prayer guide. Share a request for prayer. Download the parent resource)

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for giving us opportunities to raise our voices and be heard in order to help others, even if at that moment we feel terrified to speak up. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 3

Today's Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Our City – Toledo, Perrysburg, Whitehouse, Findlay, Oregon, and Northwest Ohio.

Look at the Provider, Not the Problem

August 9, 2018

The life of Joseph is a prime example of how our response to circumstances is more important than the circumstances themselves. Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Circumstances such as those could leave anyone questioning, “Why?” “Why me?” Such an experience could paralyze us into inaction as we contemplate *what might have been* had things turned out differently. Such tragedies might even taint a person’s trust in God or turn that person away from him. But what did Joseph do?

Joseph stayed true to God. He did not turn from him. He did not allow incidents he had no control over to negatively affect his character. Instead, he simply continued to act with integrity. He worked hard in all situations and trusted God for the results. And what results indeed! Everywhere Joseph went (including jail), he gained the respect of people in power—who in turn gave him more and more responsibility, until he eventually became a very powerful person himself. This Hebrew ex-convict who was sold into slavery became the ruler of the entire land of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh! It appeared at times that Joseph was climbing the ladder of success so quickly, he didn’t have time to ask, “Why me?”

But we may be asking, “Why him?” with regards to his success. The answer is in Genesis 39:2: “The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did...” The fact that God was with Joseph is mentioned several times in his story. This realization was not lost on Joseph either. He told his brothers, who sold him into slavery:

Genesis 45: 5, 7-8a

⁵But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives... ⁷God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you!

Joseph was able to see gifts from God in his horrible circumstances because he kept his focus on God.

Questions:

What lessons does Joseph teach us regarding the handling of crises in our lives?

What are some tangible ways we could move our focus away from a problem and shift it to God instead?

Next Steps:

If you are in a valley in life and don't see any way out, try taking your focus off the depth of the valley and turn your attention to God. Pour your heart out to him. Cry out to him in anguish, if need be, and tell him that you don't understand why you are in the position you are in. Then, ask him to let you see the situation through his eyes. Ask him to help you see *his* purpose in your struggle.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer. You can find out more at cedarcreek.tv/21days. (Download the personal prayer guide. Share a request for prayer. Download the parent resource)

Prayer:

Lord, we are so fallible and weak sometimes. We get distracted by everything around us and forget to look to you. Help us remain steadfast and continue to serve you with integrity, even while the walls seem to be falling in around us. Let us see your strong arms that prevent those very walls from crushing us and allow us to see how you are going to use this situation for your glory and our good. Amen.

21 Days of Prayer - Day 4

Today's Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Our Nation – Pray for national missions (partnering churches and church plants)

A Hard Act to Follow

August 10, 2018

I feel like Esther could have been part of the last series about how to follow God when you don't fit in. Here she was, a good Jewish girl whose parents died after being exiled from Israel to Babylon, leaving her to grow up in her Uncle Mo's household. Suddenly, she finds herself in the palace of King Xerxes, and the next thing you know, she's the new queen! Talk about a girl's dreams coming true! But, she hardly settles in before the villain of our story appears—that evil Haman! He has it in for Esther's uncle and the rest of the Jews living in Persia. Haman sets a plan in motion that would lead to the destruction of the Jews if nothing was done. And it appears that God has positioned Esther to intervene!

There's always something, isn't there? That fly in the ointment. You get into that college. You finally get the job you always wanted. The person you want to marry says yes. You get the loan for that house, that car, that boat. You feel like maybe you are set up for the life you've always dreamed of, but life seldom has a fairy tale outcome. Circumstances rear up that demand a response and a decision. Will I put God first, or will I opt out?

The outcomes of our choices are not usually as severe as Esther's might have been. When Mordecai told her about the edict Haman had issued under the king's seal and told her what she must do, she replied, "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days" (Esther 4:11).

But Mordecai's response to her says it all.

Esther 4:13-14

¹³ *Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed.* ¹⁴ *If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. **Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?*** (emphasis added)

For just such a time as this. What a phrase, so filled with a need for introspection. It is about asking, begging God for clarity! When your “for such a time as this” moment comes, do you know what you’ll decide? You *can* know. You can decide here and now that what you answer, regardless of the question, will bring honor and glory to God. Your choice probably won’t bring physical death, as it might have for Esther. But it could result in the death of a dream, the death of what you thought you would have when you got that job, or you married that person, or bought that _____ (fill in the blank). You can trust that God has a better, bigger plan for your life, one you will only find if you choose to follow him. That’s what Esther chose! I hope you read her story! It’s right up there with the stories by John Grisham and James Patterson! Worth the read, and worth consideration of the question, “Where now has God placed ME for such a time as this?”

Question:

How do you answer that question? Are you willing to believe that God has a better plan for your life than the one you imagined?

Next Steps:

Pray and ask God what’s next for you and him. Listen. Commit.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer. You can find out more at cedarcreek.tv/21days. (Download the personal prayer guide. Share a request for prayer. Download the parent resource)

Prayer:

Lord God, I am inspired by the story of Esther, who showed up in a tough place because you called her. Help me show up to the hard places you have called me. I want to be used by you to further your kingdom, for your honor and glory. Thank you for putting me in the place I am now, for such a time as this! Amen.

21 Days of Prayer -Day 5

Today’s Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Our World – Pray for pastors around the world, for new leaders to be developed and new churches to be started.

21 Days of Prayer -Day 6 (Saturday)

Today’s Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Pray for the weekend church services as we share the life-giving message of Jesus.

21 Days of Prayer -Day 7 (Sunday)

Today's Prayer Focus for 21 Days of Prayer: Thank God for who he is. Spend some time in worship.