

### You Don't Have What It Takes - You Can't Control The Future

After spending many years being kind of aimless with my life and future, my parents were very happy when I finally decided to enter ministry and become a local pastor. My Dad questioned why I chose the UMC. You see, as UM pastors, we are appointed by the Bishop year by year. Our future is in their hands. While we get some say in where we want to go, we really place our future in the hands of God through the Bishop and my dad questioned if I really wanted to give that much control of my life to others. I thought about it and then asked him if I had made good choices for my own life? I had gone through half a dozen majors in college, dropped out of school for almost a year, traveled across the country after graduation and then worked at a movie theater for three years trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I hadn't done a good job planning my own life when I was in control so I thought maybe someone else could do it better. My Dad couldn't argue with me.

As much as we might try and plan our lives, the reality we all have to face is that we cannot control the future. We can plan for the days ahead. We can set our feet on a certain path and start moving in that direction, but we cannot control the future. My goal in college was to work in Christian TV. As much as I prepared for that future, I had no control over the Jim and Tammy Faye Baker scandal that hit the year I graduated and devastated the entire Christian TV industry. We can plan for the future, we can pray about the future, but we cannot control the future.

Maybe you have heard the expression, *if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans*. God doesn't delight in changing our plans. God is not some cosmic joker who finds pleasure by automatically changing all that we have laid out, but I'm sure God does chuckle when He hears us say that we can control our future. **We don't have what it takes to control the future.**

There is no crystal ball that can show us exactly what the future holds for us and while all our plans may be well thought out and even prayed over, it doesn't mean they will come about. In fact, there is only One who knows the future and that is God, so instead of trying to control

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the future, we need to allow God to lead us into the future He has for us and God's leading always starts at the same place. It starts with **leaving something behind.**

The first person called by God was a man named Abram. Abram was living in Haran when God called him. **Genesis 12:1-4**

***The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So, Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.***

God had an amazing future for Abram. God was going to give him a large family and make him into a great nation that would bless the entire world. God's future was going to be great for Abram, but to get there Abram had to leave where he was. He had to leave Haran. He had to leave the comfort and security of his home and family. He had to give up control over his own future and trust God for something completely unknown. In fact, God wasn't even going to tell Abram where he was going, Abram had to go by faith.

If we want to step into the future God has for us, we also have to be willing to leave something behind. Often this means letting go of our need to control our future. For people who like to control things, like me, that's not easy. We think we know what is best for ourselves and our family so we make our own plans and then ask God to bless them. But God's blessing comes when we leave that thinking behind and step out in faith. Now this doesn't mean we don't plan and pray and even think strategically and use our wisdom and judgment about the future. Those are all good things we need to do, but we also need to humble ourselves before God and ask Him to direct our steps. We need to submit our lives and our will and our future to Him.

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When I became a pastor, I had to trust my future to a Bishop and cabinet I didn't know. I didn't know anyone in the Annual Conference, but I knew God and I trusted God to lead me. When I was in charge of my future, I made a mess of it, when I trusted God, He was faithful. My first church in Altoona was a wonderful experience and I was blessed to be there. It wasn't easy when I asked to leave because I had to leave behind people I loved and a church that was doing great work, but I knew that I had to go where God was leading.

Seven years later I was asked to leave Lewisburg and I really didn't want to go. I fought to be in control of my life and stay right where I was. I liked my life, my friends, the church I was serving and all that we had going on. We had so much more to do and I wanted to stay. While I really wanted to be in control and stay, I asked God to show me the way and God led me to **Matthew 5:4 The Message** ***You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.,***

The instant I read this I knew I was being called to leave. I had to leave behind what was most dear to me to be faithful to the One who is most dear to me. I had to leave behind all my thoughts of what was right for me and what I wanted, and trust that God would lead me into the future He had for me. I had to trust that it would be a better future. So, I left. It was painful and difficult, but I left and stepped into the vast unknown of Bellefonte. God had more in store for me than I could possibly have imagined.

Stepping into the future God has for us always requires us to leave something behind. Abram had to leave his home in Haran. The Israelites had to leave Egypt for the Promised Land. They didn't know how they would get there or how things would work along the way, but they left. The disciples were fishermen with a good business when Jesus asked them to leave it all behind and step into the future God had for them. Jesus said they would now fish for people but let's be honest, that didn't give them a lot of information. They were stepping into the unknown.

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Trusting God for the future really does mean leaving something behind. It might be our plans, it might be our dreams, it might be our comfort and security, it might literally be a home and job, but there is always something that God calls us to leave behind and letting go and trusting God for our future is never easy.

**#1. We want to live by sight and not by faith.** As long as we are in control, we know what the plan is. We know what the path looks like, we can see it, and we can work to control it. If we allow God to lead us, we have to let go of that sight and live by faith. Abram had to live by faith. He didn't know the land where God was leading him. There was no map and God didn't even give him the name of the place he was going. The Israelites had to live by faith because they had never seen the promised land and all it held for them. The disciples had to live by faith and trust that life with Jesus would be better and more fulfilling than the life they were living as fisherman. They had to live by faith and not by sight.

**2 Corinthians 5:7. For we live by faith, not by sight.** While this might be what we *want* to say and how we *want* to live, many of us are still living by sight and we are missing out on the future God has for us and the blessings of that future.

**#2. We are afraid of failure.** What often keeps us from moving forward with God is a fear of failure. As long as we are in control, we can manage the risk and keep ourselves from failing, or at least from failing in a big way. We would rather live with the disappointments and limitations of life as we know it than risk leaving that comfort and security for a life with God.

**What is one thing you would do today if you knew you couldn't fail?** I love this question. It gets me thinking about how my fear is holding me back. What would I do, what would I attempt to do, if I knew I wouldn't fail? Honestly, the possibilities are endless, which means that every day I am limiting what God wants to do through me. Fear of failure ties us to what we know, what we are secure in, what

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we can see with our own eyes, but God has so much more for us if we would just trust Him.

**#3. We don't trust God.** What it really boils down to is that we don't fully trust God. We don't trust God to love us enough to provide for our future. We don't trust God to be strong enough to help us in the future. We don't trust God to be for us and to be there for us as we step into the unknown. We just don't trust God enough to leave behind what we know, what we can see, and all that we have planned. Instead of trusting God for our future and leaving everything behind for everything God has for us, we spend our time worrying and yet Jesus gave us this powerful picture of why we shouldn't worry. **Matthew 6:25-33**

*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "*

*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Our fear of failure, our inability to live by faith, and our lack of trust in God keeps us trying to control our own future but we don't have what it takes to control our future and God has more for our future than we can imagine if we will trust Him.

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When we are willing to step out in faith and trust God, God will bless us. When God called Abram to leave his home, the comfort and security of his family, and his own plans for his future, God also gave him these promises. **Genesis 12:2-3**

***I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;***

***I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.***

***I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.***

God promised to make Abram into a great nation. This actually was the promise of a son to Abram and Sarai who up until now had not had any children. Children were a sign of God's blessing and here was God saying that He was not only going to give Abram a son but many sons, so many sons that their offspring would be more numerous than the stars in the sky. From Abram and his family would come a great nation.

God also promised that Abram's family would be blessed. They not only were going to be numerous, they were going to be prosperous and well cared for. God was going to give them all they needed and then some. God was promising to bless them in every way needed and then the third promise was that God was going to bless the world through them. Three powerful blessings all awaited Abram, but he had to be willing to leave.

When God calls us to leave, it is always with a promise of a blessing. It might not be a financial blessing, it might not be earthly prosperity and a future without struggles, burdens, or pain, but it will be a future blessed with the presence, power and peace of God.

At the end of Jesus' earthly life, He told His disciples to go into all the earth. *Leave Jerusalem*, he said. *Leave the comfort of your home and your friends and leave the security of the life you now have and go make disciples.* A call to go but then a promise - *I will be with you.*

Every time I left my plans behind and trusted God for the future, I found that God was already there and God was at work. When I have

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been willing to live by faith and not by sight, when I have been willing to trust God to know what was best for me and how to provide for me, I have found the power of God already at work and the blessing of God ready to be poured into me.

We don't have what it takes to control the future and when we try, when we make all our plans and then ask God to bless them, God laughs. Or maybe God cries. Either way, God is trying to tell us that we don't have what it takes to control the future, but He does. God knows the plans He has for us. **Jeremiah 29:11.**

***I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you & not to harm you, plans to give you hope & a future.***

Do you know when God said this to His people? It wasn't while they were sitting in comfort and ease in the promised land. In fact, the people had been defeated by Babylon and driven out of their homes. They were living in captivity. They were living in a foreign land. They were oppressed and being controlled by foreign powers, and they didn't think they would ever see their homeland again. For two generations they had no hope of a future, but then God said, *I know the future I have for you. Will you trust me? Will you worship me with all your heart? Will you seek me with all your life?* Jesus said, *seek first the kingdom of God and then all these things, all the things you long for in the future, all the things God has for you in the future, will be yours.*

We don't have what it takes to control our future. We can't find our future in a crystal ball or in our best laid plans. But God has a good future in store for us. God knows the plans He has for us and they are good plans, prosperous plans, blessed plans. To step into God's future, we have to be willing to leave behind our need to be in control and our need to see everything before we move forward. We don't have what it takes to control the future, but our future is secure and blessed in the hands of God.

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### **Next Steps**

#### ***You can't control your future***

What part of your future do you try the hardest to control?  
When have you had to walk by *faith* and not by *sight*?

#### **Read Genesis 12:1-9**

- What did Abram have to leave behind?
- What promises did God make to Abram if he left?

Reflect on other times God called people to leave things behind to walk into a new future.

- Moses and the Israelites
- The disciples
- The followers of Jesus in the book of Acts

Were things always easy for them when they walked by faith?

Three things that can cause us to try and control our future:

- A desire to walk by *sight* and not by *faith*
- Fear of failure
- Fear of fully trusting God

Which of these three do you struggle with the most? Why?

How would you answer this question: *What is one thing you would do today if you knew you couldn't fail?*

What fears does this reveal in your life? How are these fears limiting you?

When we don't trust God, we worry. Read **Matthew 6:25-33.**

- What things are you most worried about today?
- How can you place these things and your future in God's hands?

#### **Memorize Jeremiah 29:11**

*"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*