

"Little by Little"

Exodus 23:29-30

There is an epidemic right now in our nation of Christian believers - people who walk with God - who are stuck, who are stagnant, and who are stalled in their faith. A recent study says that nine out of ten churchgoers report feeling spiritually stuck for an average of three to four months out of every single year. This is the current normal operating mode of Christianity in America right now. Imagine feeling stuck and wondering, *"Where is God? Where is my faith going? Is anything happening in my life of any significance? What happened to the promises of God in my life?"* If that's us, then we've settled for far less in God than we originally intended to.

There was a day when we believed God was going to do great things. God was going to take us to places we couldn't possibly imagine - that he was going to bring breakthrough and victory in our life at a level that was going to be a massive testimony for the world to see. And then, somewhere along the way, we got tricked into the paralysis of stuck and stagnant and settling for less and less and less. And if that's us, then we're not alone. Sadly, we're in the majority - given up on victory and breakthrough, and settled for *"I guess this is as good as it's going to get"* and *"I'll just be thankful to God for what he's already done and maybe not expect too much more of Him to do something in my life."*

It's not a mystery why so many are in that place, but that's not what God has for us. He didn't come to set us "kind-of" free. God didn't come to give us just a *little* bit of breakthrough, and then leave us to our own devices. God didn't come so that he could bring us part of the way and then leave us stuck and stagnant for the rest of our walk until heaven someday. In our heart, we should know that's true. Even if we're not experiencing it right now, something in our spirit has got to be going, *"Yeah, that sounds right. I don't know what that feels like, but that sounds right. That sounds like Bible."* That's because it is.

There's a big reason we're missing out on this as believers, and that is that we've actually missed God's pattern for us once we came into his kingdom. God has a clear pattern - a clear order of events that he wants to take us through as we make that decision to follow him and lay down our lives and let him have his way in us. It's a three-phase pattern which is like a template or a guide.

When people sew things, they use patterns - and they lay the fabric down over the pattern that shows the order in which to do things and the lines on which to cut things so that when it's all said and done, they've made just the right cuts and followed the pattern so that they end up with a beautiful garment. Scripture says that *Jesus* has some garments for us that he wants to clothe us in. What are those garments? They are the garments of righteousness, the garments of victory, the garments of freedom, the garments of breakthrough, the garments of overcoming - those things that we couldn't overcome on our own. And we're supposed to walk into heaven not just by the skin of our teeth with flames chasing our booty, but wearing the white robes that he's clothed us in after a life of victory.

There's a process, and interestingly, God laid out this process of what our salvation was supposed to look like long before Jesus came. In fact, he laid it out all the way back in the Book of Exodus with the Israelites when he delivered them from Egypt and brought them into the promised land. God's process with *them* was meant to be a pattern of his process for *us* in Christ much later down the line.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 NIV

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!"

These things happened to them as an example and as a warning, because a lot of the ways that the Israelites responded to God is a warning to *us* to not do the same thing that *they* did. They were written down for our instruction to admonish and equip us upon whom the ends of the ages have come. God says, *"I want you to read this and understand that this is direct instruction for your life. This is the pattern on which you are to cut your life."* And if we'll follow God's pattern, we'll get all the way to what he has for us. Verse 12 says, *"Therefore, let the one who thinks he stands firm, immune to temptation, being overconfident and self-righteous, take care that he does not fall."*

He says, *"If you're not closely following the pattern I've laid out, be careful - you're setting yourself up for a fall."* And this is where many find themselves - they didn't closely follow the pattern as they've walked with God, and somewhere along the way they took a great fall and now they're wondering why they're *stuck* and why they can't get back up. The answer is to *go back to the pattern*.

Three phases to the work that God wants to do in our life

Phase one: Salvation - With the Israelites, this is where God delivered them out of Egypt, out of slavery, out of bondage, out of a kingdom of darkness. He delivered them from the judgment that they were incurring upon themselves day after day after day where they had no hope, no life. God miraculously delivered them out of that bondage and brought them out to a place of freedom. In Christian terms today, we call that being born again - it starts with only the need for one thing, and that's the blood of Jesus Christ. All it takes is for somebody who submits and surrenders their life to the work of the cross to the blood of Jesus in the same way that the Israelites had the death angel pass over them when they put the blood of the lamb on their doorpost and God brought judgment on Egypt and brought out the Israelites out of Egypt.

Phase two: The wilderness - out into the desert to the foot of Mount Sinai, and his purpose is two-fold with the Israelites and with us today. That is to establish God's authority as King and Lord in our lives. Also, to bring us into a personal relationship with him. It's not one or the other. It's both. Some Christians understand the authority of God - *"Oh, he's King. He's Master. He's in charge."* - but they lack the *relationship* side which brings God's love and mercy and brings it to life to where we feel like we can *approach* God.

Some people understand the *relationship* part with Jesus and they're like, *"Oh yeah, he's my buddy. He's my guy. He's my genie. He helps me out or whatever."* But, they don't understand the authority of God." We can't have one or the other - we have to have *both*. And so God kept them in the wilderness. The Israelites were at Mount Sinai for almost a year. During that time, the presence of God showed up on the mountain and he spoke audibly in the way that the Israelites could hear him. He's delivered his Word to them and gave them the Ten Commandments and taught them the statutes and the and the judgments and how to live their lives, - how to walk with him and how to relate to him, and how to be established in his authority and to be in relationship with him.

And God brought the Israelites to the promised land, to receive the inheritance and to walk in all of the goodness of the things that God wanted to do in their life. What did they do? They shrunk back. They spied out the land and ten out of twelve spies came and said, *"We can't do this. There's no way. It's too difficult."* What were they really saying? *"God, we don't trust You. God, we're not submitted to Your authority. And God, we haven't established a deep enough relationship to be able to trust that if You tell us to do this, it's because we can do this."*

What did God do? He said, *"All right, take a forty-year lap in the desert, back to the beginning of phase two again."* But, the next generation who got it, rose up and said, *"Okay, we get what God's trying to do in our life here. He's establishing his authority in us. He's establishing relationship with us."* And, led by Joshua and Caleb, a generation rose up who trusted in the Lord, who realized that if God said it, it would happen. If God told them not to be afraid, they didn't need to be afraid. If God said he was going to set them free and deliver them, he was going to do it. All they had to do was follow him.

Phase three: Inheritance and Victory - so finally, after a second round, there was a generation led by Joshua and Caleb who were about to go into phase three. Relatively few people even today ever truly enter this phase of their relationship with God - their walk with him. There are so many Christians who got saved and wandered in the wilderness for the rest of their life because they just couldn't figure out if they were willing to submit to the authority of God in their life or if they were willing to enter into that deep abiding relationship that would allow them to go where God always wanted to bring them. Instead, they remained on the edge of the Jordan River.

It had been 430 years since God originally promised the land of Canaan to Abraham. And here they were at the moment where it was actually about to begin to take place. These are also the things that God has planned for *our* life, and that he wants us to enter into. He's had all that figured out from long before we were born. The moments that he's trying to bring *us* to and that *we're* so close to right now. They have been long written in his Book since before we were born. That's what the scriptures tell us.

They weren't crossing over the Jordan River into an awards ceremony of promises and blessings. It wasn't like, *"Okay, guys, cross the Jordan River - the rest of your life is just a banquet of blessings."* What were they actually crossing over into was war. The inheritance that God had for them and the victory that he had for them came with them entering into a battlefield for the rest of their life. Some of them didn't understand or expect this, and so they were taken by surprise when God brought them up.

And the land was full of giants. It was full of evil people. It was full of child sacrifice. It was full of what the Bible says were the Nephilim and the Anakim, which were the hybrid offspring of fallen angels and people, literal demonic spirits who had infiltrated the land.

From the moment that God made the promise to Abraham 430 years prior that he was going to give him this as their inheritance, Satan had 430 years to plan his defense against the people getting there. He'd been stacking that land with enemies and demonic spirits and principalities and strongholds for 430 years in anticipation of the arrival of God's people. He booby-trapped everything. And God let him do it. Because for God, it was going to be no problem for him to deliver it out of the hands of the enemy. But man, were they going to have to trust God. And man, they were going to have to be established in the authority of God in their life, or they would lose heart, get afraid - quit and stall and fall short and get stuck far short of what God actually had for them. Does this sound familiar to our lives right now?

God has a tremendous inheritance for us, but it lies behind a sea of enemies that we're meant to follow him in victory over. Some of us may be thinking, *"God, this isn't what I thought, God. This is a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. This is taking a lot longer than I thought it was going to take. This is more treacherous, God, than I thought it was going to be - more contentious - this is more painful, God. This is so much more work than I thought it was going to be, God. This is so much scarier than I thought it was going to be, God."* Here's the reality of Life in Christ, if you want the inheritance and the victory that he has for you, it is a *fight* and it is a *battle* - and God doesn't hide this from us.

1 Timothy 6:12 NIV

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Paul says, *"Timothy, I want you to fight the good fight of the faith. It's a fight, Timothy, and it's a good fight because it's a fight you'll win if you stay with God."* So, they were facing giants, and we will face giants of opposition to whatever God has for us in *our* life, whatever he's called us to. The ten spies all saw the opposition. They saw the fight they were have about to be in. They saw the giants, and the Bible says that they *dreaded* those giants. But Joshua and Caleb also saw the opposition, but Caleb said, *"Man, these giants are our bread."* He said, *"Literally, I eat giants for breakfast, and this is just an opportunity for God to show off!"*

So, we have a decision to make. When we see the fight that we have to face - when we see the giant standing between us and whatever God has called us to, or whatever this Word says that God intends for us to live out and have, do we go, *"Man, that's my dread."* or do we go, *"Man, that's my bread."* Are our giants our *dread* - or our bread? Giants are the "breakfast of champions" for the believer!

We need a steady diet of challenges that are far beyond us to teach us to lean into the Lord. God does this on purpose because our hearts are so rebellious - they're so fickle - that if God doesn't force us to lean into him by giving us challenges that he intends to help us through, we'll go about it ourselves and think we did it ourselves. We need a steady diet of challenges. If we run from the battles that are in front of us, we are literally running from our inheritance. There's only one way to what God has for us, and it's through what we're facing that scares us the most. It's through. It's not *around*. It's not *under*. It's not *over* - it's through. This is why God tells Joshua three separate times to be strong and to be very courageous - not in *himself* - but in the Lord - because he was about to enter into enemy territory that stood between him and everything God had for him and God's people.

Deuteronomy 7:21-22 NKJV

"You shall not be terrified of them; for the Lord your God, the great and awesome God, is among you. And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you."

God said, *"You shall not be terrified of them for the Lord your God."* So why should we not be terrified of what we face? Here's why. *"For the Lord your God, the great and awesome God is among you."* That's first and foremost right there is, we have to understand and know that when we show up in front of something that scares the pants off of us, God is in our midst. You are not alone. He says, *"You're not going to be terrified because I am among you. I am with you."* It goes on. It says, *"And the Lord your God will drive out."* Who will drive it out? Are we going to drive it out? No. It says, *"And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you."*

He will drive out those nations before you "little by little". He doesn't do it in one big nuclear explosion of God's goodness and power. God says, *"I'm going to give you victory little by little."* Why? It says, *"You will be unable to destroy them all at once."* God's saying, *"Look, I'm bringing you into an inheritance that is big and broad and includes many things, but it also includes many enemies that you have to face, and I'm not going to defeat all your enemies at once. We're going to do them one at a time. We're going to do it little by little, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you."* God says, *"We're going to do this at My pace."*

Exodus 23:29-30 NKJV

"I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land."

God says, "Look, I'm going to help you defeat one enemy at a time. And every time you follow Me and let Me drive out an enemy before you, you're going to increase. Your spirit's going to increase. Your faith is going to increase. Your confidence is going to increase. Your boldness is going to increase." He says, "And when you've increased, it's time for the next one - a bigger one. And little by little, we're going to go through these one by one by one, step by step, little by little."

Well, meanwhile, what's the devil trying to tell us all the while in this? The devil's trying to say, "Hey, you can't defeat this enemy that's in front of you right now because look at all this other crap in your life. You got all these other things going on and you think God's going to help you with this." And so, he tries to distract us by overwhelming us and say, "Man, you are far too far gone, far too messed up. And if you think you can focus in on this one area, man, all this other stuff is going to hinder you. You might as well quit and stall and give up right now." But God says, "No, no, no. I'm going to do it with you - little by little."

God didn't even burden them with worrying about what the tenth battle was going to be or the tenth enemy. He said, "Let's focus on the first one - little by little." It says, "Little by little, I will drive them out from before you until you have increased, and you inherit the land." The word *inherit* means *to fully possess something* - literally to apprehend something. The picture that this creates is that God doesn't want to give us a *partial* victory. He doesn't want to get us kind of free. He wants us to *fully possess* - to apprehend and to *fully inherit* - areas of freedom and victory and breakthrough and success in our life as he directs us little by little, step by step. That's the plan.

God's not worried about all the stuff that hasn't happened yet. He's focused on what he's called us to face *right now*. Face the enemy. Don't worry about the rest of it. We don't *arrive* in the kingdom of God - we apprehend it little by little. We don't arrive - we *apprehend*. To apprehend doesn't mean we *earn* it. We don't earn it - because who wins the battle and who drives the enemies out? The Lord does. What's the key to all of this is, did we complete phase two? Do we have his authority established as Lord of our life? And do we have a relationship with God established to where no one on this earth and no devil from hell could convince us for two seconds that God doesn't love us - that he's not for us - that he hasn't made us a son and a daughter - that he hasn't called us to greatness.

Nobody should be able to talk us out of that because we're established in our relationship with God. And we say, "Man, God, it's Your will, not my will. You're Lord, I'm not. So, Your way is best. God, lead me step by step, little by little, and I will have that victory. And it won't be partial. It's going to be complete." God didn't just call us to put us in a holding pattern until eternity and we die someday. He has an inheritance for us so we can accomplish his purpose and advance his kingdom now.

Ephesians chapter 1:17-19 NKJV

"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."

This is Paul praying for the church that they would *get* this, that they would get their inheritance. And Paul says, *"I'm praying that at a spirit level, at a heart level, that you would begin to comprehend how much God has for you - that you'd get a hold of it, and when you get this, you're going to have a hope that is not displaceable - that you're going to know this hope of his calling."* He says, *"And that you would know what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."* That's us. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his mighty power? Paul prays that the Church would know three things. He said, *"I'm praying that you would know how much hope you have in Jesus - that you would know the riches and the magnitude of the blessing of his inheritance - and that you would understand the enormity of his power that is were at work towards you to accomplish it all."*

In other words, God's giving it all to us and he's promised to do all the heavy lifting to deliver us into it. God's saying, *"I'm only looking for somebody who will follow my voice and follow my lead."* That sounds like something we could do, doesn't it? And yet so many don't listen. Every "promised land" that God has called us to is guarded by an equal and opposite enemy. And that enemy is meant to intimidate us from fully possessing and inheriting what God has called us to. The enemy is trying to make us frantic. God's coming to us in the meantime, and he wants to focus us in *one* area. He wants us to apprehend with his help for complete victory in one area at a time where we're totally surrendered to him in that area and he can give us total victory and freedom. It's focused. It's strategic. It's intentional. It's confident. And when we do this God's way, we can do it in what the Bible calls perfect peace.

Prayer

Father, in Jesus name, open the eyes of our understanding that we might perceive the riches of the glory of Your inheritance for us. Holy Spirit, for those who are in the wilderness, that You would give us the courage to submit to Your authority in our lives and the boldness to understand that You love us and want a relationship with us. God, for those who are standing at the edge of the river looking at the enemies before them, God, that You would identify one enemy, one area - a first step where you're going to lead them little by little into victory today. God, start that victory right now as we pray. In Jesus' holy name. Amen