

LAYING HOLD OF DESTINY

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The failure to lay hold of destiny is the tragedy of every generation. Ask people in this present generation to define a successful life, and the majority of them will describe a life marked by little more than self-preservation, adequate comfort, and a sufficient amount of fun and pleasure. Most people see no deeper purpose for their lives beyond the fulfillment of these temporal desires. As a result, they live shallow, trivial lives and never attempt to live up to their full potential. They die without ever releasing the treasures which are stored in their souls, and humanity is thus deprived of untold benefits and blessings.

How does a person lay hold of his destiny and find the determination and faith to fulfill that destiny? As time-bound creatures, we experience life in the present, past, and future. There are three keys needed to unlock the door of destiny, and these three keys relate to the present, the past, and the future. The first key is experiencing the terror and the thrill of existence in the present. The second key is overcoming failures of the past. The third key is breaking the chains of low expectations for the future. Let's consider each of these keys.

THE TERROR AND THE THRILL OF EXISTENCE IN THE PRESENT

Experiencing the terror and the thrill of existence in the present gives a person a vision of destiny. Allow me to share from my personal experience to demonstrate what I mean by the terror and the thrill of existence in the present. At a family reunion a few years ago, my uncle gave me a copy of our family tree. A relative had done extensive genealogical research and traced some of our ancestry all the way back to the 11th century. I keep my copy of our family history tucked away in a filing cabinet, but occasionally I take it out and glance at the names of my long-dead ancestors. It reminds me that I owe my existence to

every one of these individuals. I am obligated to them, as well as to God, to fulfill the purpose of my existence in this present generation.

The terror and the thrill of my existence come when I consider the great number of events that had to transpire over the centuries to bring me into existence. Every link in the chain of my genealogy was necessary to produce the unique individual that is me. Any number of things could have happened in the lives of my forefathers to break one of the links in the chain. A different decision about something as mundane as where to live or where to work could have resulted in a different spouse or a premature death for one of my ancestors. My existence could easily have been aborted centuries ago, but it wasn't. Just the fact that I am here in the present fills me with a sense of wonder and godly fear. It thrills my soul, because I realize that my Maker brought me into existence in this generation for a reason.

Mordecai the Jew knew that Esther had been brought into existence in her generation for a reason. When the Jewish people in Persia were in danger of annihilation, Mordecai urged Queen Esther to intervene. Mordecai closed his appeal to Esther with these words: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

We each need to realize that we have been brought into the world for such a time as this." God put each one of us into this current period of history. He was the One who decided when we would be born. It was His will that we be alive in this present generation, not in a generation of a hundred years ago or a generation of a hundred years from now. He has a destiny for each one of us to fulfill in this generation. We may not see the purpose of our existence in our own lifetime. Ruth, the great grandmother of King David and ancestress of the Messiah, certainly did not see the full picture of

her purpose in her own lifetime. Yet when she made the decision to leave Moab and join herself to the God of Israel and to the people of Israel, she set out on a path which led her to the fulfillment of a glorious destiny.

Like Ruth and like Esther, we each have a reason for being here in our generation. Whether we fill a major or a minor role in the big picture is beside the point. The point is that we each have a role to play. Whether we are small or great, we each have a purpose, just as every part of the human body has a purpose. The simple fact of our existence in the present should be all the proof we need to convince us that God truly does have a plan for us in our generation.

Seeing this truth will cause us to experience the terror and the thrill of existence in the present. This is the first key needed to unlock the door of destiny. This key opens the door wide enough to let in the light of revelation concerning destiny. Merely seeing the light is not enough to take us through destiny's door, though. We need to have the courage and the confidence to go forward and walk in the light. To do this, we need the second key, overcoming the failures of our past.

OVERCOMING THE FAILURES OF OUR PAST

We need to overcome the failures of our past and the crippling influence they bring. Some people who see the light have a pensive longing to go forward and lay hold of their destiny, but they find themselves paralyzed by *kakorthaphiophobia* - the fear of failure. Because they failed so many times in the past, they are afraid to use their talents and abilities to attempt any noble endeavors. Rather than risk the disappointment and humiliation of another failure, they settle for less than God has for them. Like the servant in the Biblical parable who buried his talent, they say, "I was afraid," and these three words become their

epitaph.

Overcoming the failures of our past can be difficult. Failure is usually a very depressing experience. Our goals and hopes and dreams do not materialize, and we feel ashamed, inadequate, and humiliated. It is normal to feel disappointed when we fail at something. However, it is not necessary to let ourselves be emotionally crippled or paralyzed by our failures. One failure does not mean that we are doomed to fail at everything we try. We can try again, even if we have to set new goals that are entirely different from the goals we had originally hoped to reach.

Many of the great achievements of history were accomplished by people who had failed many times before they succeeded. Abraham Lincoln experienced many political defeats before he became President. Thomas Edison's perseverance in the face of repeated failures gave the world the electric light. The early sermons of the great evangelist D.L. Moody were so pathetic that a friend told him he would best serve the Lord by keeping quiet. The Bible records the stories of many men who failed and made a comeback. Moses' initial efforts to deliver the Israelites from Egypt resulted in exile for Moses. Forty years later, he returned to Egypt with the power of God. The Apostle Thomas was rebuked for doubting the testimony of the witnesses who had seen the risen Lord, but Thomas later went on to carry the gospel to India, where he died as a martyr. Peter boasted to his Lord, "I will never deny you!" Yet he denied knowing his Master three times. About two months later, though, Peter boldly proclaimed the message of the Resurrection to a large crowd of stunned onlookers, and about 3,000 people were baptized that day as the result of Peter's preaching.

Whether our past has been marked by moral failures, business failures, or political failures, failure can be overcome. The solution to overcoming failure is not some hidden secret. The solution rests in simple things like admission of wrongdoing, acceptance of God's forgiveness, trust in God's

guidance, and old-fashioned perseverance. Regardless of the mess we have made of things, our heavenly Father is able and willing to forgive us if we acknowledge our sins and repent. He is able and willing to help us succeed if we are willing to try again. Accepting God's forgiveness for our sins sets us free from the baggage of our past so that we can go forward and trust Him to help us lay hold of our destiny. Before we can walk in the fulness of our destiny, however, we need the third key, breaking the chains of low expectations for the future.

THE CHAINS OF LOW EXPECTATIONS

The chains of low expectations are like the chains used to tether elephants by the feet. If an elephant born in captivity gets accustomed to having his foot chained to a stake in the ground, he will continue to be restricted by the chain even after he has grown strong enough to break free. Since the elephant's infancy, the tug of the chain has told him that he has gone as far as he can go. He is programmed to believe that he has reached his limit when he feels the tug of the chain. When he becomes an adult, he does not realize that he has grown powerful enough to break the chain. So he believes the lie of the chain for the rest of his life.

Some people are like chained elephants. They are totally unaware of the increased strength that the maturing process has brought to them. They accept the limitations that past weaknesses had imposed on them. When they try to go forward to lay hold of their destiny, they still feel the tug of the chain. The chain tells them, "No, this is as far as you can go. Forget about doing anything noble. Just be content with your own survival and comfort and a few pleasures in life." This message of the chain is often spoken through the lips of well-meaning people who have low expectations of us.

The strength needed to break the chain of low expectations is a strength that builds up one day at a time. One is a small number, but we need to con-

sider the power of one - one prayer, one step of faith, one day of growth, one ping pong ball. Yes, one ping pong ball. Let me explain with a true story. Years ago a boat sank and was stuck in the mud at the bottom of the sea. The owner of the boat offered a generous reward to anyone who could salvage the boat. Several people tried to raise the boat but failed. Finally, one man came up with an ingenious idea. He ran a flexible tunnel from the surface to the sea floor and attached the end of the tunnel to the sunken boat's hull. Then from the surface he fed thousands of ping pong balls into the tunnel and forced the ping pong balls into the hull of the sunken boat. Eventually, the accumulation of ping pong balls reached "critical mass," and the boat was lifted out of the mud and rose to the surface. One ping pong ball by itself could not free the boat from the mud, but the power of one ping pong ball, combined with enough other ping pong balls, provided the accumulation of power needed to pull the ship out of the mud.

Maybe one day of spiritual and emotional growth will not give us the strength we need to free ourselves from the weaknesses that have us stuck in the mud. If we continue to mature, though, eventually we can grow strong enough to break free. There will come a day when we are powerful enough to break the chains of low expectations. If we give up and resign ourselves to a lifetime of weakness and defeat, we will never know when that day of potential victory arrives. We will be like the elephant that remained chained to his post because he did not realize he had the power to break free. We must not base our expectations for the future on the weaknesses and limitations of our past. We do not need to limit ourselves to other people's low expectations of us. We can break the chains and prove them wrong.

The past belongs to our ancestors, the future belongs to our descendants, but the present belongs to us. What we do in the present will have eternal consequences. Let's make the most of it while we are here.