



Getting 2021 Off to the Right Start

What Do You Expect of 2021?

When I was working on my master's degree, I met a recent college graduate at church who I found attractive and we started going out to eat together and to movies. Our relationship never progressed beyond simple friendship. I had romantic feelings toward her but she never seemed to reciprocate those feelings. Neither of us were dating anyone else and yet it was becoming clear to me that we were never going to be more than friends. As summer approached, we both were scheduled to work at a conference center in the North Carolina mountains. She would work in housekeeping and I was to be the chaplain for the staff. We had separate starting dates, I would be going up there four days later than her. With this young woman out of town, it was a perfect opportunity for me to make an adjustment to my life. I decided that it was time to start going out with others and see what God had for me. That weekend I went out with two different young women, both I found attractive and fun people. Monday morning, I rode with a third woman to the camp, a seventeen hour trip. During the ride, I considered which of these three women I wanted to begin dating. I had completely stopped considering the woman I had been seeing the past year as any longer an option. I got to the camp at three AM. All the buildings it seemed were locked and I had no idea where I was supposed to stay. I wandered into one building that had the front door open, found there was a lobby with lots of couches and fell asleep on one of them. It turned out that the chaplain, (me) was sleeping in the girl's dorm, which I discovered when I woke up in the morning. Later that day, my friend asked me to go hiking with her on one of the trails. As we walked, she suddenly took my hand and for the first time ever we were walking hand in hand. It was shocking to me and I later found out from her that during our four days apart, the woman that I had gone out with for over a year and refused to call it dating, realized that she had fallen in love with me. What a strange turn of events that was. It flipped both of our lives upside down as within a year and a half, we were married.. One electrified, perhaps even inspired moment completely reworked two lives and many more also.

Likewise World War II had its moments that turned every one of the others on their head. You could make the case that a single decision made in an instant changed the course of the war and altered the history of the world. Nearly 400,000 allied soldiers were trapped near the French village of Dunkirk. The British high command had decided to try to evacuate the soldiers but it seemed almost impossible, that the best they could recover would be twenty five percent of the men. The rest would be killed or taken prisoner. At the end of May, 1940, circumstances were dire. German forces were closing in and threatened to obliterate the British and French armies. While the British were organizing the rescue of the troops, Hitler made a decision that changed the course of the war. His army commanders advised that they wait before attacking the Allies so that they could gather reinforcements. The commander of the German air force thought it best to wait just a bit because he boasted that with the British and French trapped near the beach, his fighter planes and bombers would destroy the Allies. German tank divisions had broken through the lines of the Allies and were on the verge of leading the assault on the British and French troops near Dunkirk. All seemed lost. The German army was nearby and ready to join in the attack on the trapped Allies. Hitler though was afraid that if his armies attacked, they might suffer costly losses. He decided in a meeting with

his generals to wait. That delay was enough to make it possible to rescue not 25% of the British and French troops but the entire group on the beach. In a moment, a split second, the hopes of the British were revived when the army was saved because Hitler made a decision to wait three days before attacking.

When we come to a new year, we tend to think of it as a lump sum, as a whole. "Oh I hope that 2021 is better than 2020 was!" Years never work that way. They always are for us thousands of many small pieces. Each year, including the coming one is really more 365 days. Each day though is 24 hours and those hours are all really 3,600 smaller parts. Many of those vast number of moments are forgettable, what we might consider inconsequential. Yet then, out of the blue, one moment comes along that changes not only the year for you but even your life. What happens if you're not ready for it, if you aren't prepared for what God is doing at that moment and can't see what it means for you? The difference between victory and defeat can be determined in a moment of one's life, in a single decision that is either guided by God and His perfect knowledge of what to do or it is not. The problem is that you never know when that key moment will arrive.

We are all familiar with the account of Daniel in the lion's den. It is a great inspiration to us and has provided hope to millions of believers. It was though in a moment, an instant that Daniel took his place as one of the great heroes of the faith. Daniel was one of the most powerful men in the Persian empire. Plenty though were jealous of his power and a group of political leaders came up with a plan to have Daniel removed. They knew he was a worshipper of God so they convinced the Persian emperor to enact a law that anyone who worshipped a god other than the emperor himself over the course of the next month would be executed. In an instant, a moment, Daniel made a decision that marked his life forever. **Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.** (Daniel 6:10 NIV) We cannot say how many, but it must be immense the number of us who have been inspired by Daniel's faith to remain loyal to God when we've heard of his willingness to brave the lion's den in order to continue following the Lord. Little did Daniel know what awaited him the day he heard of the king's decree, how amazing that year would become when it certainly may have seemed like it was going to be disastrous.

Mary Magdalene is known now because she was one of the first people to see and talk with Jesus after He arose from the dead the first Easter morning. She came a long way from the days when she was possessed by seven demons. **When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.** (Mark 16:9 NIV) What a dark and dreary life that must have been. We can't say exactly what it was like for her specifically but in every example described by those we have known or read of those who have been possessed by demons, it has been horrible. Everything from terrifying seizures to uncontrollable urges are recounted. How could Mary have been ready for how wildly her life was going to change that one day, that one split second when Jesus cast the demons out of her. It went in an instant, from hopeless to joyous and crazy cool. You cannot know what lies ahead for you in 2021. Whatever you think the circumstances of your life might be could change in a flash and you need to be ready for it spiritually.

I almost laugh at times when I read the account of David's early days. He was a shepherd boy, an unknown teen when one day his life completely changed. **David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.** (1 Samuel 17: 14-15 NIV) For someone with his raw talent, it must have been nearly unbearable to sit around and watch his father's sheep graze. David's gifts for music, heroism and leadership were all dying on the vine. Yet one morning, he woke up without a bit of insight over what was about to come. He had been going back and forth to the battlelines to visit his older brothers who were in the Israeli army. Goliath, the Philistine giant had challenged any of the Israelites to a one on one death match. Whoever won, that person's side would be declared the battle winner and the opposing army would be made prisoners and slaves. Like he

had done day after day before, David showed up at the Israelite camp with food for his brothers. We all know what happened next. David wound up fighting Goliath with the sling and five stones and killing him. Instantly, David went from inconsequential shepherd boy to national hero and eventual king.

You have no idea what tomorrow brings. What seems so peaceful and relaxed may suddenly send you into a hurricane. You may think you are going nowhere and all of a sudden your life is turned upside down. Never forget that each day is God's day, He has created it and is in charge of how it goes. **This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.** (Psalm 118: 24 NIV) If you want to be prepared for what God has in store for you this day, and you never know what it might be or the dramatic changes it could bring, you must be in tune with Him, aligned with Him so you can make sense of what just happened. Consider making the five minute switch. Make five minutes of your early day completely given over to God to prepare you for what lies ahead. Here is how you navigate this. Spend two minutes and read something from the Bible. Then take two more minutes and silently sit in God's presence. The last minute pray for every request that comes to mind. Some may want to supercharge their day by making a 15 minute switch or even a 30 minute switch. The goal is to give the Holy Spirit time to get your heart and mind ready for what God will do with you that day. If the LORD is in charge of your day, and He is, then you need some time with Him to prepare you for what is ahead. Try out the 5 minute switch this week. See what God does with you this coming week. Get ready for the adventure He has in store for you!