

CHALLENGING THE TRANSITION TIMES IN YOUR LIFE

Deuteronomy 31:6

Baccalaureate Speech, Mount Vernon Nazarene College

Dr. E. LeBron Fairbanks, MVNC President

May 17, 1992

Introduction:

1. Graduation from Mount Vernon Nazarene College marks a transition time in your life.
 - a. It is not the first transition period you have experienced.
 - b. Nor will it be the last.
 - c. But it is a critical time for you, when key decisions are being made which impact your life.
2. Remember when you first enrolled for studies on this campus?
 - a. Moving from high school to college was another transition experience.
3. I remember my first semester in college.
 - a. My traumatic moments and necessary adjustments were rather normal, as I reflect back upon those early days in my college life.
 - b. One night I was burdened and restless. I could not sleep.
 - c. In order not to awaken my two roommates, I slipped into the bathroom which joined two dorm rooms. I had my Bible with me. (1) I will never forget the scripture I read that night--or morning! (2) I read Deuteronomy 31:6 - "Be strong and of good courage, fear not nor be afraid of them, for the Lord, thy God, He it is that does go with you. He will not fail thee nor forsake thee."!
 - (3) The passage became a life verse for me and has held me steady in the key transition times of my life.
4. As you begin another transition period in your life,
 - a. I believe this passage of scripture, which became so significant for me almost thirty-two years ago, can be decisive for you.

b. The passage gives us three challenges, as we face transition times.

1. Challenge #11: Be courageous - "Be strong and of good courage!"

A. The context of the passage tells us of the transition period being experienced by the Israelites.

1. Moses was transferring the leadership responsibilities for the

Israelites from himself to Joshua, and said to the Israelites, "I am

no longer able to lead you."

a. God had chosen Joshua to lead the people of Israel across the Jordan.

b. Then, Moses spoke the words of the text three times to Joshua and the Israelites: "Be strong and courageous!" "Be strong and courageous!" "Be strong and courageous!"

B. But what does it mean to be "courageous"?

1. Dr. Jack Archer, in a recent article in the North Central Ohio

District newsletter, referred to Texas Ranger, Captain L. H.

McNelly

a. He was thin as a bed slat, weighing hardly 135 pounds--the very opposite of the macho image of a ranger. Captain McNelly repeatedly told his men that "Courage is a man who keeps on coming on."

b. No one likes the "wimp" label because it signifies a person without courage.

2. Churchill, after the war, returned to his alma mater for a speech.

His entire address was contained in these words to his listeners:

"Never, never, never, never, never give up!"

C. There are some things in life for which you need to be courageous.

and never give up.

1. Be courageous about scriptural principles.
2. Be courageous about personal convictions.
3. Be courageous about Christian ideals.

4. Be courageous over things that are:

pure,	noble,
honest,	lovely,
true,	admirable,

a. These qualities in Philippians 4:9 describe the elements of

moral courage.

b. Be known as one who has moral courage!

c. Stand for something! Don't fall for everything! Choose carefully your battles!

- (1) Martin Luther King said, "A person is not prepared to live, unless there is a cause for which to die."
- (2) Senator Mark Hatfield gives us a word picture of courage when he describes Mother Teresa's courage in the presence of extreme poverty! He writes, "Several years ago, I had the privilege of spending time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India. As I walked through the city's streets, I found myself overwhelmed by the poverty and suffering surrounding us. Finally, I asked Mother Teresa if she did not grow discouraged facing the enormity of need in Calcutta and in the thousands of other places like it around the world. She responded, 'God does not ask me to be successful. He only asks me to be faithful.'"

D. In transition periods in your life, be known as one who, like Mother

Teresa, has moral courage, is faithful, who just keeps "coming on, and never gives up!

Challenge #1 - Be Courageous!

II. Challenge #2: Be fearless - "fear not nor be afraid of them."

A Moses was telling the Israelites and Joshua not to fear the nations

and their leaders on the other side of the Jordan River.

1. The "thems" to which Moses referred were well known by the Israelites.

2. The "thems" in your personal life as an MVNC graduate may likewise be known.

a. They may be people, like

- an employer

- another employee on the job

- a neighbor

- even a family member

or

relative

b. The "thems" in your life may be circumstances, like

• finances (or lack of finances) - responsibilities

• physical infirmities

- inabilities

3. The "thems" in your life may not be so obvious, like
fear ... the fear of failure, - insecurities
or even the future.

uncertainties

- anxieties

As I have walked through the final stages in the search for a new

Dean of Student Development, I have been tempted to fear:

- o "imperfect" decisions
- disapproval
- comparison
- misunderstanding
- negative comments
- * even rejection

4. The "thems" in your life may be your dreams and aspirationa.

B. Whatever the "thems" are in your life, be as fearless as William

Borden, Jr. Let me tell you about him.

A ship named "The Invader" was custom-made in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1905 for William Borden, Sr.--founder of the milk company by that name. It is now located in San Diego, California. There were no heirs to assume ownership of the boat; thus, it was sold at public auction. That's how it ended up in San Diego.

The Bordens had a son, William Borden, Jr., who was given every advantage imaginable throughout his youth. Frequently, they reminded him that he was the person chosen to inherit the company, and that he should begin "grooming" himself for the awesome responsibility.

Then one day, it was off to college he went.

While there, some friends introduced him to Jesus Christ. That's when *everything* changed, especially his dreams!

He announced to his father that he would be relinquishing his future in the company to become a missionary to the Orient.

The parents' shock was almost too much to bear.

Mr. Borden scrambled to do all within his power to talk his son out of his "foolish" decision. He offered further enticements. He attempted to induce guilt. He even tried scare tactics, warning his son of a plague that was spreading through the Orient -- but to no avail. The boy's mind was made up. His dream was to follow God's dream for his life. And so he departed.

After a few months, William, Sr., received a letter from the missionary board. As he began reading, tears welled up in his eyes -- his son had died. He had contracted the fatal disease. Mr. Borden's intense sorrow soon turned to anger as he thought about "what might have been." If only ... if only ...

The funeral came and went, but the sorrow remained. In fact, it intensified.

But Mr. Borden was about to learn how his son handled the "thems" in his-life.

Some months later, a small package arrived in the mail. It was from another missionary who had been the son's close friend.

The letter inside spoke of their friendship, and the son's tremendous ministry. The letter concluded with this postscript: "Mr. Borden, you will find your son's Bible enclosed. It meant so much to him, and I know it will to you."¹¹

The father began to thumb through the Book he knew very little about. Then, just as he was about to close it, he noticed some words scratched on the back flyleaf. The date beside corresponded to the week before his son's death.

Upon closer inspection, he discovered that this was his son's own hand. His heart was overwhelmed as he slowly and softly read to himself:

NO RESERVE
NO RETREAT
NO REGRET

The words were like sharp knives that punctured Mr. Borden's calloused heart. Yet those words caused him to begin rethinking his priorities.

His son had a dream--a dream with eternal significance. In following that dream, the young man risked everything; but, in so doing, what he gained was immeasurable!

William Borden realized this now. Sure, he still grieved, yet he no longer grieved with resentment. Rather, his grief was tinged with deep respect.

C. These words, "No Reserve"
"No Retreat" capture the spirit of our text.
"No Regret"

1. "Fear not, nor be afraid of them."

2. The words of Borden's son and the text inspire us, hold us steady, and give to us a holy resolve in the transition periods when the "thems" of our life seem to overwhelm or capture us!

Challenge #1: Be Courageous! "Be strong and of good courage."

Challenge #2: Be Fearless! "Fear not nor be afraid of them."

111. And, finally, Challenge #3: (in the passage) Be confident (in God) - "for the Lord, thy God, He it is that does go with you. He will not leave thee nor forsake thee."

A The affirmation for these transition times is this--God will be with you

1. Choose to believe that God is faithful to his word.

2. Paul, in the midst of a typhoon and shipwreck could say (in Acts 27:25), "Take courage, men, for I have faith in God that He will do it just as he promised!"

3. Jon Johnston, in his book titled, Courage, tells of a recent trip to China. Johnston writes:

On a recent trip to China, I met a true hero. This man was asked to recant his faith shortly after the Communist Revolution, and he emphatically refused.

That earned him a life sentence in a Mongolian prison.

After nearly twenty-one years, at age 65, he was released and put under house arrest in Beijing. Someone put us in contact, and I had the rare opportunity to converse with him about those years of incarceration.

He smiled as he thanked God for helping him to persevere; and, for his recent release--which was totally unexpected.

He spoke of the extreme hardship that he had to endure. It was beyond belief. Many of his fellow prisoners couldn't take the abuse and died; but he was somehow able to endure.

I asked that he might offer a word of prayer. His words were electric. It was like being in the presence of an Old Testament prophet.

Johnston continues: After we prayed, I looked at him and naively said, "I can hardly imagine what you went through. You were literally tortured beyond belief."

Without batting an eye, or giving the slightest hint of self-pity, he looked at me and said, "*What / endured was nothing compared to the Crucifixion.* "

- a. Would that be your reaction to 21 years of torture in prison?
- b. The next time your problems seem overwhelming, which could be tomorrow, remember that, as God sustained this man in the Mongolian prison, He will be with you!

B. He will be with you ... even when spiritual lapses occur.

1. Gideon questioned God when the pressure was on.
2. Moses kept repeating to God, "Ask someone else, I am nobody, and without abilities."

C. God will be with you ... in the lonely times.

1. Someone said, "Loneliness starts where the buck stops."
2. A. W. Tozer states, "Most of the world's great souls have been lonely. Loneliness seems to be the price a saint must pay for his saintliness. (p. 133)

God will be with you ... even when spiritual lapses occur.

He will be with you ... in the lonely times.

D. God will be with you . . . in the public times.

1. View yourself as a servant leader who will be used by God to make a difference for Christ in the world-
 - a. Regardless of your vocational choice.
 - b. Regardless of the location of your assignment.
 - c. Regardless of the risk, rejection, or responsibilities.
2. Remember, one person can make a difference in this world." You are that person.
3. God will challenge you with great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.
4. In whatever difficult time you face in your transition periods, God is faithful, and will be with you!
5. And "go with you through the transition... regardless of how long it takes!" a. He will not fail you!! b. He will not forsake you!! c. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me Challenge #1: Be Courageous! Challenge #2: Be Fearless! Challenge #3: Be Confident in God!

Conclusion

1. My closest friend in high school, until I became a Christian in my senior year, wrote these words in my high school year book: "As for your future, I just don't know!" (And, he probably had every reason to feel this way.)
2. In God's providence, He caught my attention in the first semester of college life and gave me a promise.
 - a. "Be strong and of good courage, fear not nor be afraid of them, for the Lord, thy God, He it is that does go with you. He will not fail thee nor forsake thee."
 - b. This passage has sustained, empowered, and guided me through every transition period of my life--
 - initial years of marriage - first pastorate
 - college graduation - overseas assignments
 - graduate school - my call to MVNC
3. I've been preoccupied this week with the final stages of the Dean of Student Development search,
 - a. since the Board of Trustees, who receives my recommendation and elects the individual to the position, meets tomorrow morning in a breakfast meeting.
 - b. The text has inspired and guided me this week as I am going through the transition to a new Dean.
 - c. But I thought of Dee Kelley this week, who will also be going through, a transition during the next several months to a new assignment. Dee, in a very personal way, I give you the gift of this verse to guide you as you face a transition in your life.

4. And this passage can be God's lifelong promise to you as you face this and other transition periods in your life.
 - a. O Lord, may it be so in the life of every graduating senior sitting before me, I pray. Amen.