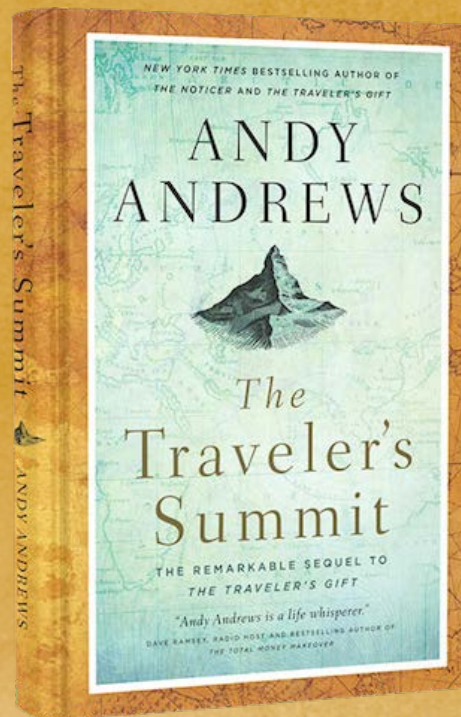


GOD'S SUMMIT WITH YOU: WORDS TO SAVE HUMANITY

A SIX-PART SERMON SERIES *by* DR. ALAN W. MCBRIDE

PART FOUR OF SIX: EXHIBIT SELF-DISCIPLINE



based on

The Traveler's Summit

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I. A SUMMIT WITH GOD'S WORD

A. The Text

¹ Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

¹¹ So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.

¹² And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

¹³ Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

¹⁷ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

¹⁹ So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

I. A SUMMIT WITH GOD'S WORD

B. Paul: "I saw the Light."

The greatest turnaround story in all of scripture is contained in this passage in Luke's Acts of the Apostles. There are many opportunities in the oracles of God in scripture to learn about people whom God used after they turned around their lives. After all, that is what "repentance" means—to turn and go an opposite direction. Moses, Jacob, and the 12 original disciples of Jesus all exhibited the ability to turn around at the call of God.

These turnaround subjects, however, were not actively working against God when they "saw the light." Did you know that the phrase that denotes a turnaround or change of mind, "I saw the light," actually comes from this greatest turnaround story? It was so unlikely, and yet so like God's way of forgiveness, that the conversion of Saul/Paul on the Damascus Road entered common vernacular.

PERSONAL NOTES:

I. A SUMMIT WITH GOD'S WORD

C. Saul's Mission and Conversion to Paul

The conversion of Saul is so well known that the background may be going like over old ground, but for the sake of clarity, allow me to hit the high spots for a moment with you.

Saul of Tarsus was a highly intelligent, well educated, highly placed, and ruthlessly zealous Pharisee in the Jerusalem Temple community. He was a shark-like attorney in the first century with regard to Jewish Law in the Old Testament. He viciously defended the Hebrew laws and statutes. Saul was charged by the Sanhedrin, a Supreme Court and Justice Department combination among the Jews in Jerusalem, to stomp out the movement of Jewish believers in Jesus' resurrection. If he was well known and respected in the Temple courts of Jerusalem, he was even more feared by the common people and especially the followers of "The Way," the early Christian believers in and around Jerusalem.

He was in charge of pursuing and persecuting any Jew who believed and espoused Jesus' resurrection. He was in charge of the mob of Jews who killed the first Christian Martyr, Stephen, whose witness for Christ and death is told about in chapter 7 of Acts. Under Roman rule, the Jewish Pharisaic leadership in Jerusalem had broad authority across the province of Israel to conduct a vicious brand of righteousness.

Saul's identity and vocation were well known in the region. Therefore, the believers in Damascus knew of Saul and his appointment and authority to persecute the believers located in the city of Damascus.

PERSONAL NOTES:

II. A GOD OF “DO-OVERS”

A. Forgiveness - 70 times 7

Have you ever done the math on how many times God will forgive? For some people, it seems like a good question. Peter, the apostle of impetuosity, once asked Jesus (Matthew 18: 21,22) how many times he had to forgive someone who repeatedly sinned against him. Jesus' reply was “seventy times seven.” The actual count in Peter's mind may have been 490 times, but actually, in numerology, the system of meaning behind the use of numbers in the scriptures, Jesus was saying a perfectly infinite number of times. In essence, Jesus was saying, “Pete, you must always forgive.”

Jesus closed the opportunity in that question from Peter by saying, “So my heavenly Father also will do to you...” There is infinite forgiveness from God for sins for true regret of sins. It is like asking how much God loves you. A fellow pastor, Jimmy Aaron, gives the answer, saying, “That's a well that never runs dry.” We are loved by, and serve a God who is the giver of “do-overs.”

PERSONAL NOTES:

II. A GOD OF “DO-OVERS”

B. Churchill’s “Second Act”

Winston Churchill, the prime minister of Great Britain during the darkest years in England’s modern history in World War II, plays a prominent role in the book we are reading, *The Traveler’s Summit*. Early in the story, Churchill refers to himself as a “second act man.” Churchill then goes on to explain that he was not known for his “first act” at governance in England during the 1920s. During that time, Churchill was Britain’s point man as colonial secretary. He held the highest foreign policy role as secretary of state, and he was the chief finance officer for the sprawling British Empire as chancellor of the exchequer.

He would be a footnote in world history, if mentioned at all, except that he was one of the few cautionary voices warning against the designs of Germany’s chancellor, Adolph Hitler. Out of government during the ‘30s, Churchill was then the lone voice warning against Hitler’s growing power and Germany’s growing aggression toward its neighbors. His “second act” came when his bulldog leadership saved Britain and much of Europe as prime minister during the war years.

Known now as one of the world’s greatest wartime leaders, Churchill’s “second act” is a theme throughout *The Traveler’s Summit*, because you choose whether you are a “first act” person or whether you will push through the intermissions of life, persevere, and utilize the opportunities that God gives.

The idea of “second acts” is closely aligned with God’s forgiveness. Often, our first act comes to a close in life because we made a mistake, suffered a loss from which we could not recover, or simply failed in grand fashion. The second act will never come for us if we do not learn from our mistakes, try something new, or forgive ourselves for the actions God has already forgiven us for.

PERSONAL NOTES:

II. A GOD OF “DO-OVERS”

C. Be Effective for Christ—Forgive Yourself

“If we confess our sins, He is just (trustworthy) to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1st John 1:9) In my role as pastor, I have had many opportunities to spend time grieving over people who have not incorporated the wealth of God’s grace enough to forgive themselves for sin. Many people also hold themselves in such states of loathing that they believe they have to punish themselves for the rest of their lives, even though they are spotless in eternity because of the blood of Jesus.

Frequently in our world, people never get through the “intermission” after sin. Intermission is a time for us to learn from our sin, more deeply appreciate Jesus’ sacrifice and love through forgiveness, and prepare for new beginnings—our “second act.” I grieve that many Christians with great gifts to give to God and humanity stumble in the intermission and cannot take the stage again for their second act.

Frankly, **God cannot use us effectively in His purposes when we have not learned from mistakes, accepted Jesus’ forgiveness, and forgiven ourselves.** But, we have a God who is in the business of offering “do-overs.”

PERSONAL NOTES:

III. PAUL'S SELF-DISCIPLINE

A. Paul Forgave Himself

Back to Saul: There is no explanation in Acts for the change of his name to Paul, but in the 13th chapter of Luke's account of the ministry of apostles, his name appears as "Paul." I believe that the encounter with the resurrected Jesus and his conversion was such a radical change of repentance that he decided he must repent his name.

Paul's "second act" came because he fully accepted the forgiveness of Jesus for persecuting people who had found the way to true salvation through faith in a resurrected Savior. Then, **Paul forgave himself.**

PERSONAL NOTES:

III. PAUL'S SELF-DISCIPLINE

B. The World Impact of Paul's Second Act

Paul exhibited self-discipline to begin his second act and become the person whom Jesus would use. God planned for Paul to be one who would do much to carry out God's plan for the saving of civilization.

Remember that this man is responsible for the establishment of nearly 2/3 of the New Testament. It was his experience with Jesus and the revelation that Jesus gave him which shaped the theological stance of salvation by grace through faith. Paul was the one who established the practice of evangelical mission, which has changed the shape of much of the world.

Paul is responsible for the timely expansion of the message of Jesus Christ into Europe through the broader Roman Empire. When I consider how, through Europe, Jesus' message and purpose to save civilization impacted education, medicine, the arts, the rule of law, and political systems, I realize that God accomplished much that still moves humanity and shapes civilization.

PERSONAL NOTES:

III. PAUL'S SELF-DISCIPLINE

C. The Self-Discipline of Self-Forgiveness

Paul exhibited self-discipline in terms of the efforts of mind, body, and spirit over time to bring to pass all that he accomplished. He wrote out of his own well of self-discipline to believers at Corinth in II Corinthians 10:5 that he brought "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The greatest thing he did, and from which all else he did for the Gospel, was forgiving himself. Every time a memory of his former life would creep in, he would give it to Jesus for safe-keeping again. Paul exhibited the self-discipline of self-forgiveness in order to be fully used by God. God used him greatly!

PERSONAL NOTES:

IV. ANANIAS' SELF-DISCIPLINE

A. One Hit Wonders

I know you are familiar with “one hit wonders.” Usually, this phrase refers to a song by a musical group or soloist that hit it big. In 1983, the UK band Katrina and the Waves released a song entitled “Walking on Sunshine.” The song, written by Kimberly Rew, was huge, though the band, Katrina, and the songwriter have not been known for anything else. Yet, due to their shrewd decision to keep the rights to their song, it has earned them \$1 million a year since it was written. The song has consistently remained on song lists of radio stations, but especially, it has been a boon for its advertising appeal for dozens of companies, products, and services. Katrina and her Waves probably don't mind their status of “one hit wonders.”

There are also “one hit wonders” in scripture. Faithful people who show up once in scripture and have a brief part to play in God's plan to save humanity. Ananias of Damascus is a one hit wonder.

PERSONAL NOTES:

IV. ANANIAS' SELF-DISCIPLINE

B. Ananias' Obeys and Touches Paul

About the time that Saul/Paul was following Jesus' instruction to go to Damascus and wait to be told what to do, the Holy Spirit of Jesus was speaking to Ananias, who lived in Damascus. Jesus told him to go to a certain house on Straight Street (what a great name for a street in this account of Paul and Ananias!). When he arrived at the home of a man named Judas, on Straight Street, Jesus told Ananias to go touch Paul with his hand, so that Paul would receive his sight again.

The instructions were simple and the meaning profound. Have you ever been in a fog of concentration or daydreaming, and it took someone getting your attention by touch or voice to snap you back to reality? Jesus called Ananias to be the human to represent Christ to bring him to his new reality as a child of God through Christ! **I believe that God is calling you to be one who touches the lives of others to bring them to a new sense of God's reality.**

PERSONAL NOTES:

IV. ANANIAS' SELF-DISCIPLINE

C. Two Forms of Self-Discipline

In the passage found in Acts 9 that deals with Paul's dramatic conversion, God is showing you that there are **two ways he is calling you to exhibit self-discipline**. Paul exhibited self-discipline in his mind, body, and spirit to accomplish incredible things for God's Kingdom and Jesus' purposes to reform civilization and save humanity. The first step for Paul and for you is spiritual—exhibit self-discipline by forgiving yourself.

PERSONAL NOTES:

IV. ANANIAS' SELF-DISCIPLINE

D. The Traveler's Summit - King David

In *The Traveler's Summit*, the author brings Israel's greatest historical leader into the summit in heaven. King David regally approaches the other Travelers there to answer the question about restoring humanity. As he is seated at the table, he offers a two-word answer to save civilization, which is the central theme of this message—“**Exhibit Self-Discipline.**” The Jewish king elaborates from his experience by pointing out that self-discipline involves “control over one’s self. Heart, muscle, and mind.”

Andrews goes on to write that exerting self-discipline is a process of identifying what you really want. King David says wisely, “Make yourself do something you don’t particularly want to do in order to get a result you *would* like to have.”

Ananias, in Luke’s account of Paul’s conversion reaches one-hit wonder status because he exhibited self-discipline, doing something he did not want to do in order to get something he wanted.

PERSONAL NOTES:

IV. ANANIAS' SELF-DISCIPLINE

E. Jesus' Summit with Ananias

Spend a moment with me considering that there is a crucial personal summit that Jesus has with Ananias in Damascus that day, regarding a command to go and minister to Paul. He explains clearly to Jesus what Jesus already knows. Isn't it funny that we always want to tell God what God already knows about us—He knows everything...Ananias says that he is scared to go to Paul. Paul's reputation and mission in Damascus from the Temple Sanhedrin had already reached the believers in Damascus.

We can identify what Ananias did not want to do. Now we need to briefly consider what the goal of the self-discipline that Ananias exhibited was. He overcame fear and doubt and did something he wished not to do, because he really wanted to **please God by obedience**.

Because Ananias only shows up in seven verses, we have no idea what may have been his "second act." His first act was crucial in so many ways for the playing out of God's overall plan to save humanity and restore civilization. It is impossible to say if Jesus would have sent another person to minister to Paul, but we don't have to speculate because this follower of Jesus did go to Paul. Consequently, we are part of the largest faith group in the world today.

PERSONAL NOTES:

V. JESUS' SUMMIT WITH YOU

Jesus had a summit with Saul/Paul. Almost immediately after, God met with Ananias. He meets you here and now to ask if you exhibit self-discipline. Please understand that these two examples in one passage of scripture illustrate that if you are not willing to exert control over mind, body, and spirit, you will not accomplish all that God has planned for you as a player in His plan to save humanity.

In this personal summit with you, Jesus is asking you questions with the same fervor he asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?"

Jesus asks you;

- "Have you been stuck in the intermission and not able to move forward to begin the "second act" I have called you forward to embrace?"
- "Have you been active in a first act toward my purposes?"

Most importantly, Jesus asks you;

- "Have you exhibited self-discipline to forgive yourself for actions and attitudes which I have already forgiven and erased from my mind?"
- "Are you willing to control your desires in order to obey me?"

Pray with me please:

"Jesus, my Lord. I deeply desire to follow You and be actively engaged with You in saving others. I believe that You have called me to be part of Your plan to restore civilization. Please work in my heart and mind, by Your Holy Spirit, to identify the areas of my life where I do not exhibit self-discipline.

I know that I am a forgiven child of Yours, but I need to forgive myself to move forward with You. Utilize me to obey Your commands to impact Your world. In Your holy name.

Amen."