

LIVING OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE



TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH WHERE OTHERS WILL NOT – GOD IS WITH YOU

The Bible is full of examples of people who, for whatever reasons, had to live outside of their known surroundings. We read of **Joseph** who was sold into slavery and ended up in Egypt; **Moses** had to flee to Midian; **Joshua** leads the nation into the promised land; **Daniel** (under Nebuchadnezzar) and **Nehemiah** (under Artaxerxes) were taken into captivity to Babylon; and later on in the New Testament, we read of countless people, including **Peter** and **Paul**, who operated far beyond their borders, whether because of their own choice or forced. What do these people have in common? All of them took a stand for what they believed in and did not conform to the situations they found themselves in. How do we as Christians today cope living outside of our comfort zones?

WHAT IS A COMFORT ZONE?

We become attached to situations and environments that offer protection and where we do not really have to exert ourselves. When you were young, your comfort zone may have been your bedroom and a cosy duvet in winter. It protected you from an external onslaught – cold. As you grew older, you were exposed to more situations and you gradually became involved in some that tested your ability to cope with new surroundings.

Of course we do not go out looking for trouble, but the comfort zone we find ourselves in often does not allow us to grow. If you do the same things over and over, you are stifling growth. In the examples cited above, God allowed people to be taken out of and away from their known environment and placed them in surroundings that were foreign to them in many ways. However, they succeeded, and this allowed them not only to succeed where they were, but it paved the way for their descendants to benefit.

EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE

There are many examples of people who achieved extraordinary things because they either got out of their comfort zones willingly, or God took them out Himself. Here are a few.

Joseph

Joseph's exile was the result of the jealousy of his brothers, who sold him in order for God's plan to be realised:

²³And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; ²⁴And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. ²⁵And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And

his brethren were content. ²⁸Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. – **Genesis 37:23-28**

In Egypt, Joseph became a very influential person (Genesis 39:2), without ever conforming to the heathen lifestyle of those around him or bowing to sin (39:7-9). Even when this righteous action resulted in him being put in jail (39:20), God protected him (39:21). Later on his position in this foreign country would assist his own people to survive the famine that was in their land (41:56). Living out of his comfort zone in a foreign country prepared Joseph to pave the way for his own people to be saved from the famine he told the Egyptian king would come over all the world (Genesis 41:27). Joseph stood strong and overcame sexual temptation. He could have given in and enjoyed the moment, but God had a better plan. Obedience on Joseph's part ensured that plan would be put in place successfully.

Moses

Born in Egypt long after Joseph had already passed away, God allowed Moses to experience living in a foreign environment to prepare him for what was to come. Thinking that he did the right thing to protect his own countryman against the Egyptian (Exodus 2:14) he had to flee to Midian (west of today's Gulf of Aqaba, in Saudi Arabia). There he married and laboured, while back in Egypt, his people suffered (Exodus 2:23):

⁹Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. – **Exodus 3:9-10**

Despite his objections (read from Exodus 3:11 to 4:17), God chose Moses for a specific task. Our inabilities (Genesis 4:10) do not limit the power of God to accomplish His purpose for us. Moses finally accepts the challenge, out of his comfort zone, and prepares to return to Egypt (Exodus 4:18).

Joshua

We read about Joshua who was at the point of entering the promised land. Together with Moses, he left Egypt and led his people into the desert. After a 40-year slog through the Sinai desert, they are ready to enter the promised land. Then Moses passed away (Deuteronomy 34:5). Here was someone who suddenly found himself outside of his comfort zone, facing a challenge he did not think he was ready for. God instructs him to cross the river Jordan (Joshua 1:2) and occupy the land. Joshua is instructed to be strong. God's comfort is this:

⁹Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: **for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.** – **Joshua 1:9**

Joshua always had Moses to fall back on. This was his comfort zone. Focus for a moment on the highlighted part of the quoted verse. God tells Joshua that He will be with him wherever he goes. Moses does not lead Joshua anymore, God does!

Nehemiah

Nehemiah serves as a captive in a foreign country (Nehemiah 1:1), as a cupbearer (1:11) in the court of the heathen king, Artaxerxes (2:1) He hears reports of the state of Jerusalem and its walls, and this disturbs him deeply. When the king asks him why he is sad (2:2-3) he prays the shortest reported prayer ever:

³And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? ⁴Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? **So I prayed to the God of heaven.** ⁵And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. – **Nehemiah 2:3-5**

In an instant, Nehemiah's comfortable life in the palace is changed and he gets the opportunity to go to Jerusalem and help to rebuild the walls. The book of Nehemiah is probably the best example of proper project management. He planned everything to the last detail (2:6-9). The important lesson is that Nehemiah was in a foreign country and there God prepared him to return and accomplish His purpose for His people.

Daniel

Daniel's life resembles that of Nehemiah in many ways. Both were taken into captivity and served heathen kings. Both were recognised for their faith in God, and they were great examples of living Godly, with powerful prayer lives. Compare for example, Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 1:5-11) with that of Daniel (Daniel 9:3-20). Both were concerned about the affairs of their own country, especially that of Jerusalem.

While Nehemiah had the opportunity to return to his home country, Daniel never did. Both of them lived outside of their comfort zones in that they were bold and took a stand for what they believed in, irrespective of the repercussions.

Peter

By far the best practical example of getting out of your comfort zone is the situation Peter found himself in one night on the open waters of the Sea of Galilee. This freshwater inland sea was known for storms that would form in the area without much warning and this is the backdrop against which the account is told. To understand the events, first read Matthew 14, summarised here:

- We first have the account of the death of John the Baptist (14:1-12);
- Jesus then feeds the hungry masses (14:15-21);
- Jesus commands the disciples to sail to the other side of the lake while He took care of the people. After that He went to pray alone (14:22-23);
- In the middle of the sea, the disciples are struggling with a storm (14:24);
- During the fourth watch (3 am in the morning), Jesus goes to them (14:25);
- Peter challenges Jesus and He tells him to come (14:29);

- Peter gets overboard, walks on the water, and seeing the waves around him, sinks (14:30);
- Once Jesus is in the boat with them, the storm ceases (14:32).

One can write a really long essay about this event. In short, the boat was Peter's comfort zone. Seeing Jesus overcome two natural phenomena, the storm and gravity, Peter wanted to do the same. He issues a challenge to Jesus that if it really is Him, then He should call Peter to also walk on the water, which He does. Peter boldly (in faith but impulsively as always) gets overboard and instantly overcomes both gravity and the nature of water surface retention – he is walking on water! However, he sees the waves around him, his faith wilts, and he sinks. Fortunately he is not alone. Jesus comes to the rescue immediately.

Our lives are often like this. We get out of our comfort zones, but as soon as the reality hits us of what we have just achieved and we look at the situation around us, we lose focus and sink.

Later on Peter would again buckle under pressure. When he is identified as being part of Jesus' company, he denies Him (Matthew 26:69-75). It was only once the Holy Spirit was poured out on them (Acts 2:1-12) that Peter was bold enough to start his ministry (2:14). Now empowered with God's Spirit, nothing could prevent him and those following him to boldly proclaim the gospel of salvation.

Paul

Peter is mentioned before Paul because of chronology, but if ever there was someone who thrived out of his comfort zone, it was Paul. While Peter would preach among the Jews, Paul was adamant that he would go to the gentiles where no seed had previously been sown:

²⁰Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: ²¹But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand. –
Romans 15:20-21

He could have decided to stay on the relative calm of his known environment, preaching as a Jew to the Jews, but preferred the challenge to operate outside his comfort zone and reach those who would otherwise never have had the opportunity to hear the gospel.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What is your situation? Think for a minute of the comfort zone you are finding yourself in. You may certainly be comfortable, but quite possibly this does not allow you to grow. There is more to the life of a Christian believer than to always take the easy road. You may be facing an opportunity that could be life-changing, but your comfort zone is holding you back. Jesus says "Come!".

Will you?