

*Hey! Where
are you going?*

3 Steps We Can Take When
Life Seems Uncertain

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Hey! Where are you going?

Fun fact about me- I love to hike. I went to Appalachian State so I lived in Boone for four years. After marriage, my husband and I lived in Aspen, Colorado. At this point, a deep love for the mountains and all their extreme terrain has to offer is ingrained in me. So, every chance I get I make a mad dash for the hills to find a winding trail. I've hiked up "14ers", which are mountains that sit higher than 14,000 feet above sea level. I've trekked through waterfalls and caves in Belize. I even got to hike Mount Longonot (which we affectionately titled "Mount Long and Hot") when I worked at a ministry in Kenya one summer.

There are a few things I've learned through all my hiking experience that I think can help us sift through all our uncertainty, help us find out exactly where we're going and reroute if we want to head to a better place. You see, if we want to stay on the right path and the next best step forward, there are three main things that matter.

1. Your Discipline Determines Your Direction

If you're going to backpack through the wilderness and want to make it out alive, you have to train. You fill a pack with a similar weight you're going to carry and go shorter hikes shouldering that weight. You wear your boots and make sure everything fits. It takes hard work, dedication, knowing your map, and daily practice so that you can survive in the wilderness on a backpacking trip.

Let me tell you how to NOT go about hiking long distances. One time, when I was at App State, a friend asked me to hike part of the Appalachian Trail with her. Sure! Sounds awesome! I knew it would be about seven miles but I was in pretty good shape. I hiked often, worked out, ran a lot. How hard could this be?

The Appalachian Trail is marked by white dots on trees. I, like any good college student would do, looked nothing up. I had no idea what direction we were headed in or where we were going. I just trusted my friend and followed the trail markers. We practiced this zero times and prepared with zero effort. So, when it came time to perform, what do you think happened? We failed. We failed hard.

It wasn't long before we were completely lost. Without food. No water was left in our bottles. We wandered around in the woods on a random trail until we finally came out at a random road looking like we had just escaped out of a murder mystery movie. Because we were so incredibly flattered, a park ranger pulled over when he passed us on the road. "Excuse me ladies. You okay?" He asked. We reluctantly told him we had set out to follow the Appalachian Trail. In return, he politely let us know that we had in fact gone the opposite direction for 12 miles, hiked through a bear sanctuary and made it to the totally opposite side of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

I've never been to jail before, but I'm going to assume that riding in the back of this park rangers car felt just like riding in the back of a cop car after committing a small crime you're ashamed of. My friend and I were dead quiet from sheer exhaustion and I sat with my forehead plastered to the window as I stared out the car window a full almost hour back to campus.

In short, DO AS I SAY NOT AS I DO. Ladies, we have to be prepared. We have to start practicing our faith in everyday ordinary circumstances so that when life throws us a new path to walk down, we don't get lost. We don't just follow whatever dot is in front of us. Or hike through bear sanctuaries.

In my opinion, no one did this better in the Bible than Daniel.

When I say Daniel, what story comes to your mind? Right, Daniel and the Lions Den. I was raised in church. I can still picture the felt board lions and Daniel sitting there petting one on his lap. Aw so sweet. And weird.

But, you see Daniel didn't just wake up the day that he was thrown into a den of lions and decide then to be fully obedient and trust God. He had been walking with God and carrying the weight of his faith his whole life. He had been practicing. He was well trained.

His discipline determined his direction.

If we back up in Daniel's story, he was a young Israelite that was considered royalty at the time that the Babylonian empire took over Judah and destroyed Jerusalem. So, the Babylonian king, King Nebuchanezer chose him and three of his friends who were "young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the kings palace." These guys were hot stuff. They were the cream of the crop. And, besides Daniel, guess who they were... Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Aka Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The names we're familiar with are their Bablonian names but before they were taken captive, these friends still had their Hebrew names (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah). So, if you see any form of these three in the upcoming writings, just know I'm talking about our friends Shad, Mich and Abed.

I don't want to spend too much time here but go back and read Daniel chapters 1-6 and see how these four friends decided to stand firm for God in a culture that clearly despised Him. It's insane. The cliff notes version is this. Have you heard of the Daniel fast? The concept comes out of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego not eating what everyone else was eating. They were offered a daily amount of food and wine from the kings table and completely passed it up.

Daniel 1:8-12 says, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink (NIV)."

Can you imagine? A massive steak.. Maybe some french fries with rosemary and that really good flakey sea salt... pass you at the table and Daniels like, "Nah. I'll take a raw carrot thank you." Maybe it's because I'm pregnant and that sounds amazing. But, I genuinely don't think I could do it.

But, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have some serious discipline. Look what happens. Verse 19 says, "he found not one equal to Daniel, Shad, Mesh, and Abed. (NIV)"

Their discipline determined their direction. They were headed down the path God had for them because they were disciplined enough to not eat unclean food and it paid off. They were the healthiest out of all the kings servants.

If we quickly breeze through Daniels story, you see this same kind of thing over and over. In chapter 2, When the King can't find anyone in the whole kingdom to interpret his dream, Daniel seeks God and speaks up to interpret it. In chapter 3, The king erects a statue and orders everyone to pray to it and he watches his best buds Shad, Mesh, Abed. refuse and get thrown into the fire furnace. But, what happens? There's a fourth person in the fire. God joins them right in the middle of their greatest trial and they come out without even the smell of smoke. The King begins to worship the one true God. There's some other crazy stuff such as a floating hand writing on a wall.. I'm telling you, it's like a soap opera meets a horror movie. Go check it out. But, when we get to Chapter 6, that's where we find our famous felt board story coming to life. Daniel is thrown into the lions den.

At this point Daniel has, because of Gods immense favor on his life, climbed the political ladder and he is now over all the satraps. A satrap is something like a senator or governor. His colleagues are so jealous of all the favor God has dumped on his life that they plot against him and trick the new king into making a rule where, for the next 30 days, no one in the whole kingdom can pray to anyone but the king.

But, **Daniel's discipline determines his direction.** Check out Daniel 6:10-11, "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. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help (NIV). "

Daniel keeps practicing the spiritual discipline of prayer, no matter what the cost. They found him on his knees talking to God and that is why he was thrown into the lions den. BUT it's his discipline that also enabled him to survive.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, **because he had trusted in his God** (NIV, emphasis mine)."

-Daniel 6:19-23

He had trusted his God! **His discipline determined his direction.**

So, what are your disciplines? What are your habits? Are they setting you up for success and pointing you toward God? Or are they leading you in the wrong direction? Are they making you spiritually healthy or are you feeding your heart and mind junk food from the king's table? Are you getting spiritually, mentally and maybe even physically fit to endure life's journey or have you been coasting through life and faith?

We have to find healthy faith disciplines so we can walk the straight and narrow path that is following Jesus.

Take some time today to reflect. Sit alone or talk to God or a friend and evaluate your habits. How long are you on social media? Are you spending time in God's word? Are you involved in Christian community on a regular basis? Are you serving? Are you letting the news or God's Word write the headlines of your emotions? Where do you spend most of your time and money? Are you taking good care of your body, a body that God has gone so far as to call a temple, a house of the Holy Spirit?

Your disciplines, the choices you make every day (whether you like it, or know it, or not) are determining your direction.

Here are a few questions to come back to later:

What are my current disciplines? What direction are they leading me in? Where do I actually want to go and what disciplines do I need to begin to practice to get me there?

Okay, moving on. These points are shorter, I promise.

2. Your Hope is Where You're Headed

When you're hiking, you put your hope in reaching a destination right? We're going to that waterfall or this mountain peak. From that hope, you map out your path, maybe even find a second route in case something crazy happens, and (mountain girl pro tip) you're always looking for the fastest way to get back to your car if it rains. Because, it WILL rain.

Hebrews 6:19 is a verse many of you have probably heard before. It says, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain (NIV),"

God's purpose for us, the final destination that this whole chapter in the Bible really tells us He wants us to reach, is to find salvation through Christ Jesus. This is the epic journey He's really been trying to take us on since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. Before verse 19, the author reminds us of the covenant God made with Abraham to deliver His people through his family line. God never wavered on that promise because, finally, in Matthew 1, Jesus enters the picture. Immanuel, God with us. He is our hope! When we're uncertain and don't know what step to take next, we can always start running straight to His arms. It's the exact place God mapped out for us to end up all along.

Let's go back to that verse. "(This hope...) It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain (NIV)." Now that phrase may seem a little strange but DON'T MISS IT because it's powerful. Our hope in Jesus gives us access to the very presence of God. Check this out.

Back when God's people worshipped in the temple, there were several curtains and rooms that created boundaries for believers from the presence of God. Only the chief priest, when he had made all the right sacrifices, could enter "behind the curtain" into the Holy of Holies. We don't have time to dive into all the logistics of this here so I strongly encourage you to make a note and look this back up later. The very, very short of it is that the Holy of Holies is the place where God's presence would dwell. Know what that means? Unless we were a high priest, we were out. You and I were out! We couldn't just walk into God's presence. We didn't have a church we could sit down in and experience the Lord. We didn't have women's events where we could pray and laugh and worship and have full access to the God of the Universe. We weren't righteous or clean enough to walk into the presence of a perfect God. But Jesus... BUT JESUS! Do you know what He did?

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple and really the entire world tore from top to bottom. Get that TOP to BOTTOM. God ripped that curtain down so that He could now, through Jesus' death on the cross and defeating our sin with His resurrection to offer us new life, come and dwell with us. His presence was unleashed upon the whole world, giving anyone who would believe in Christ as Lord full access to the very presence of God. This is CRAZY when we think about it right?

THIS IS OUR HOPE. This is where we want to end up... right in the presence of God. You can now experience the nearness of God in the shower. Or while you're feeding your dog. Or when your fighting with your kids. Or laughing with your friends. Or literally anywhere!

Where is your hope? I might be about to hit some of you where it hurts but I promise, promise, promise that it's out of love, okay? Here we go....

If you've placed your hope in people, you're chasing after approval or acceptance. If it's in finances, you're chasing the dollar. If it's fame or personal glory, you're chasing your own tail hoping you'll save yourself. If it's in the government or institutions, you're constantly look for the "right" rules and "right" people to do the "right" thing and feel hopeless and let down when they get it wrong.

But if your hope is in Jesus.... You're running to His arms. You're headed in the right direction, right toward the very presence of God.

Where is your hope?

Here are a few questions to come back to later:

Where is my hope? What have I put my Hope in? How do I pivot and put my Hope in Jesus?

Sister, what have you put your hope in? Because, that is where you're headed.

Last but not least...

3. Your Friends Help You Finish

Did you know that the Bible was actually written to be read in community, not necessarily for individual study? Isn't that wild? We live in an incredibly hyper individualistic society but in Biblical times, they did everything in community. They depended on each other to just survive.

I'm an avid reader and writer, so I often am examining the "authors intent." When I'm analyzing any type of written work, I know I should always ask these questions: What is the author really trying to communicate? What are the four W's (Who? What? When? Where? Why?)? What's the atmosphere they're trying to set? Who is their key audience and what are they trying to tell them?

The author's intent, which is ultimately God, for the Bible was for it to be read aloud in a group and discussed. Why? Because we were never meant to make this faith journey alone. Along with our hyper individualistic society comes a complex that I'm going to call the "superman complex." We love to make ourselves the hero of the story. So, what do we do? We read the Bible and we're like "Well if I was Moses." Or we say "I just want to be an Esther. Don't you want to be an Esther?" While there's some legitimacy to that and we should all aspire to be like these great people of faith, God didn't write the Bible so that we could insert ourselves as the hero. He wrote it with Jesus as the Savior. We weren't actually meant to be super woman. The reality I'm sure we've all come to figure out one way or another is that we can't save ourselves. We need Jesus to be the hero. And we need others to help us follow Him.

My husband was a youth pastor for years and was full of one-liners. Mainly because that's all students would pay attention to before they were pulling out their phones or trying to check out that cute Christian girl on the front row. Some of his famous ones were:

You show me your friends and I'll show you your future.
You are who you hang out with.

Life's journey is hard. There are mountains and valleys. There are rocks and boulders and cliffs. Some of the paths that life takes you down are going to make you want to give up and quit. You have to surround yourself with a team who is going to remind you, "Don't give up!" They're going to give you water when your thirsty, throw you a cliff bar when you're hungry, carry you when you cant take another step, and help you figure out the map (the Bible) when you've lost your way...

Hebrews 10:23-25 says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (NIV)."

You see, we can't make it without each other. God designed us for community. So please, get plugged in at a church, find Christian community, and then walk beside each other and cheer each other on each step of the way.

Quick recap...

Your Disciplines Determine Your Direction
Your Hope is where Your Headed
Your Friends Help you Finish

If you feel like you're uncertain about life, if you don't really have a sense of direction with where you're headed here are the three things you can do: change your disciplines, establish your hope in Jesus and nowhere else, and surround yourself with christian community so that you can finish strong.