

Sunday school lessons from DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

Week 3: Stopping short: the Stargazer

In the book DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE, Hatch leads his family on a quest to remove the fears of his children. They live in the deep ocean far below the point where the last light reaches. Everything around them has fallen into their world from above, but they are afraid of the bright world and no one they meet has actually been there.

Hatch decides that he will go to the bright world and then come back to take away his children's fear of it. They swim around the spiraling path up a deserted cold vent stack to the tallest point of their undersea world.

As Hatch prepares himself to go up, they meet the Stargazer. The Stargazer came up the same path long ago, but this is where he stopped.

"Hatch asks, 'You stare up at the bright world all the time, have you never wondered what is up there?'

'Of course,' says the stargazer. 'I would like to see the giant creature that makes the light up there. I would like to know, but I am afraid.'"

In the book, it is fear that has caused the stargazer to stop short. Fear is definitely one of the things that can cause us to stop on the path that God has made for us to reach Him. What are some other things that can cause us to stop, or derail us?

<Take responses.>

Focus on worldly pleasures, some being purely destructive some being only "distractive", concerns, worries, work, projects, these are all things that can stop us short. There are many different distractions and reasonable-seeming reasons to stop short, and there's also fear. Fear of being alienated, fear of being alone fear of what we don't know.

The Bible is all about people on the path to God. There are examples all through it, like Samson, Judas or Jonah. They were all set on a path, and stopped short in some way.

We even have Jesus himself, who came to earth to live as we live, who stopped short.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Matthew 26: 36-39

Obviously, and thankfully for all of us, Jesus also demonstrated His faith and courage and compassion to take the next steps, but this is definitely a part of His story that touches us in a powerful way, because even with all the miracles He performed, He felt the way we would feel at that moment. The way we feel at many points of our lives.

We could probably list example after example from the Bible alone and then continue until lunch listing people around us that we can see have stopped short. One of the clearest examples of course is the Israelites, so let's use them as a reference.

Genesis 12: 1

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

Deuteronomy 1: 8

See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.

What is our individual promised land? <Pause>

What is our combined promised land as Christians? <Pause>

What stops us?

- Fear?
- Distraction?
- Focus?
- Convenience?

Joshua 5: 6

For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Deuteronomy 1: 30-40

The Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.’ But for all this, you did not trust the Lord your God, who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, *to show you the way in which you should go.*

“Then the Lord heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, ‘Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the Lord fully.’ The Lord was angry with me also on your account, saying, ‘Not even you shall enter there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it. Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.’

Could we say that the lesson might be not to stop walking toward God until you actually reach Him?

Numbers 14: 19-25

The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

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So the Lord said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and *has followed Me fully*, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."

Numbers 20: 12

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

What has God pushed away from us already in our lives?

What promises do you think God has set before you that you've stood waiting to accept like the Israelites standing at the boundary of the Promised Land?

What are the distractions that keep you from taking all the steps God has set before you?

Fear? Lack of Focus? What are you holding onto that is better than the Promised Land?

Moses lost his temper and he took credit for the miracle of God providing water from the stone for the Israelites. He was a great hero, still recognized thousands of years later as a great leader that cared for his grumbling and thankless people. He went into valleys and over hills with the Lord, but stopped just short of the ultimate goal.

Is it the big barriers that stop you, or the small ones? <Pause>

What seems to be a small one to us is judged differently by God. What are we holding in our hearts that stop us short?

Stopped short of forgiveness?

Matthew 18: 21-22

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Stopped short of boldness?

Philippians 1: 19-20

"for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Stopped short of joy?

Deuteronomy 28: 47-48

“Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Wow.

Stopped sort of righteousness?

2 Samuel 22: 20-29

“He also brought me forth into a broad place;
He rescued me, because He delighted in me.

The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.

For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
And have not acted wickedly against my God.

For all His ordinances were before me,
And as for His statutes, I did not depart from them.

I was also blameless toward Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.

*Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to my cleanness before His eyes.*

With the kind You show Yourself kind,
With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;

With the pure You show Yourself pure,
And with the perverted You show Yourself astute.

And You save an afflicted people;
But Your eyes are on the haughty whom You abase.

For You are my lamp, O Lord;
And the Lord illumines my darkness.

We are all on the path. In the book DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE the stargazer climbed all the way to the top of the cold vent stack and stopped short of the goal that he set. Instead of the revelation and discovery Hatch finds, the stargazer has sat in the cold and lonely darkness for a long time.

What's that place like for us? The place that's just short of what God wants for us, what's that place like? <Pause>

Is it a refuge? No.
Is it a place of peace for our striving spirit? No.
Is it what we sought long ago? No.

If those feelings sound familiar, if they sound like the way you feel, maybe you've slowed down on the path, or maybe you've stopped. No matter how long ago you were saved, you remember the fire and excitement you felt in the Lord, right? We all remember how we felt that we'd discovered Jesus and that we had to tell everyone we cared about so they could also be saved.

We remember the times when we read the Bible and the Spirit settled inside us like a hand in a glove.

We remember the moments after God answered a prayer, when we felt the rush of gratitude and relief.

All those things we remember were on the path, and although we sit here in church we're not at the end of the path. We only stop when we actually reach Him. The path is not the end, God is the end.

A thousand steps behind don't mean anything if you stop short of the next one.

Here's a part of Martin Luther King Jr's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech from 1968...

"I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."