

WHEN NOTHING SEEMS TO BE HAPPENING

SUMMARY

This message explores the nature of spiritual maturity and perseverance in the Christian life, drawing on the life of St. Francis of Assisi as a model of faithful response to God's call. Bruce Downes challenges the tendency to measure spiritual faithfulness through comparison with others or through visible success, arguing instead that true spiritual maturity is rooted in recognizing and remaining in the presence of God, wherever one is on the journey. Using Galatians 6:9 as a foundation, the message calls believers to resist weariness on the long road between planting and harvest, and to understand that God is often growing something in us during the very seasons when outward results seem absent. The message emphasizes that calling is individual, that smallness is not insignificance, and that perseverance is not grim endurance but an ongoing recognition of what God is doing in the present moment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Spiritual maturity involves two elements that human maturity alone does not: receiving God's revelation and surrendering to it in action, attitude, and identity.
- Calling is individual. God does not require the same sacrifice, contribution, or pace from every person. Comparing your faithfulness to someone else's is a distraction from your own calling.
- Francis of Assisi obeyed what he understood before he understood everything he was obeying. He acted on the next step without needing to see the full picture.
- The period between planting and harvest is where perseverance is formed. The beginning is exciting because everything is possible. The harvest is exciting because we can see what has happened. But the long road between the two is where perseverance is formed.
- Christian perseverance is not miserable endurance. It is learning to recognize what God is doing while we continue walking with Him.
- Francis's strength was not that he could see the future. His strength was that he was learning to recognize God in the present, exactly where he was.
- Small is not insignificant. Small can mean beginning. Small can mean closeness. Small can mean that God is up to something.
- Presence is everything. God's presence is not dependent on circumstances, numbers, or visible success.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- Galatians 6:9, which conveys the exhortation not to grow weary in doing what is right, with the assurance that a harvest will come in its proper time for those who do not give up

STORIES:

- Bruce Downes's young daughter argued that the ministry's projector belonged to the family because her father had founded the ministry and contributed to it financially, not yet understanding the distinction between personal ownership and stewardship; years later, maturity brought understanding
- A seasoned minister of over 50 years contacted Bruce Downes struggling with the disparity between his own lifelong sacrifice and a staff member's request for work-life balance, prompting reflection on calling, comparison, and perseverance
- The life of St. Francis of Assisi is recounted at length: his wealthy upbringing, his pursuit of military glory, his capture and illness in war, his slow spiritual conversion, his encounter with lepers whom he had previously feared and avoided, his prayer before the crucifix at the broken church of San Damiano where he heard Christ call him to repair His church, and his gradual understanding that this call extended far beyond a single building
- Bruce Downes recounts spending seven weeks alone in La Quinta, California, in prayer and reflection, asking whether he had been faithful enough to God's call on his life
- Bruce Downes describes a community of women from different countries and states who formed a small IMPACTERS group through Zoom over nearly two years and eventually met one another in person for the first time, illustrating the reality and value of small, faithful community

WHEN NOTHING SEEMS TO BE HAPPENING

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work. Pray the **IMPACTERS** Community Prayer .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening

1. When you hear the word "maturity," what comes to mind first? How does your understanding of human maturity differ from what you think spiritual maturity looks like?
2. Bruce Downes described a conversation with his young daughter about ownership of ministry equipment. She could not understand the concept until she matured. Can you think of a spiritual truth that only became clear to you after years of experience?

Going Deeper

3. Bruce Downes described a man who had served faithfully in ministry for over fifty years and was struggling because others around him seemed less committed. Have you ever found yourself in a similar place, measuring your faithfulness against someone else's? What did that feel like, and what did it do to your relationship with God?
4. Paul's words in Galatians 6:9 speak about not growing weary in doing what is right, with the promise that a harvest will come for those who do not give up. Where in your life right now do you feel most at risk of growing weary? What is making the road feel long?
5. The message describes Francis obeying what he understood before he understood everything he was obeying. He fixed the broken church in front of him before he grasped the full scope of what God was calling him to. Is there something God has placed in front of you right now that you have been waiting to act on until you understand the bigger picture? What would it look like to take the next step with what you already know?
6. Bruce Downes said that God sometimes removes visible success so that our identity and dependence shifts away from what we do and back to who He is. Has there been a season in your life where God allowed something to fail or be delayed? Looking back, what was He doing in you during that time?
7. Francis described the arrival of his first brothers by saying simply, the Lord gave me brothers. He saw each person as an action of God, not simply as a helper for his mission. How would it change the way you experience your community if you viewed every person present as someone God specifically gave, rather than focusing on who is absent?

8. The message draws a distinction between worldly perseverance, which is simply refusing to quit, and Christian perseverance, which is learning to recognize what God is doing while continuing to walk with Him. What is the difference in practice? What does it look like in daily life.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

9. Bruce Downes asked a searching question during his time of solitude: if he were called home today, would God say, well done, good and faithful servant? Without comparing yourself to anyone else, how would you honestly answer that question for your own life right now?
10. The message suggests that the deepest gift on the long road may not be seeing the destination, but discovering the presence of God on the road itself. What would it mean for you personally to shift your focus from reaching a destination to recognizing God's presence where you are today?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your next gathering:

Practice Presence Daily Set aside five to ten minutes each day this week to simply become aware that God is present with you, wherever you are. No agenda, no requests. Just awareness. At your next meeting, share what you noticed.

Identify Your Next Step Like Francis, who obeyed what he understood before understanding everything, write down one thing you believe God is asking of you right now that you have been delaying until you have more clarity, more resources, or more people around you. Share it with a trusted person in your group and ask them to pray with you about it.

Reframe Who Is in the Room Before your next gathering, take a moment to look around at the people who are actually present. Rather than thinking about who did not come, practice saying quietly, the Lord gave me these people. Reflect on what that shift does to your heart.

Examine Comparison This week, notice any moments when you find yourself measuring your spiritual commitment against someone else's, either feeling superior or falling short. When you notice it, pause and ask: Lord, what are you asking of me, not of them?

Read and Reflect Read Galatians 6:1-10 slowly across several days this week. Pay particular attention to verse 9. Journal your reflections on where you are between planting and harvest in your own spiritual life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we come before you and acknowledge that spiritual maturity is not something we manufacture. It comes through encountering you, receiving what you reveal, and saying yes to you. Forgive us for the times we have looked to the left or the right and measured ourselves against others. Forgive us for the times we have confused your silence with your absence. Teach us to recognize you in the present, in the people you have given us, in the small steps you are asking of us, and in the quiet

work you are doing in our hearts. We give you our weariness. We give you our impatience. We give you our desire for results. And we ask that you would grow in us the kind of perseverance that is not miserable endurance but joyful recognition of what you are already doing. In the name of Jesus. Amen.