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Scripture: God on the Harbour-Front

Being on the edge of a New Year has always led me into spaces of contemplation. I stopped going to places of resolution because the last resolution I made was to take measures to have a toned body, a full head of hair, and a deeply tanned complexion, well...none of that went super well....so, I quit resolutions!

But as time marches on, as years go past, I realize I am not really “in control” of a whole lot! As we approach times like this, with years coming and going, I often contemplate about God’s great immeasurable universe and my place in this beautifully complex earth we live on. I am reminded about the ongoing work of creation that’s happening- the creation of stories all over this world that are being written in the lives of people. God’s creation didn’t ever stop, it continues, in the everyday stories of people, stories of faith that are being born in the lives of those He is bringing to awareness of who He is.... everyday....all over this majestic, mysterious world.

As we ponder and think about stories and fresh starts, I want to tell you a story called, “*God on the Harbour-Front- A Story of New Beginnings.*” I know this story well, because, it’s a story that I am “playing a role” in. It’s a story that goes chapter to chapter, place to place, and from glory to glory.

Today I am going to take you to some places in my life that God has used to guide my journey leading to faith. As I’ve prepared this, I’ve been praying for you- praying that God may encourage

you/challenge you about the story He is writing in your life as well. *None of us are too late for a new beginning...*

This big, big world of ours is actually composed of many small, small, places. My story starts in one of those small, but beautiful places. An island home in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, the island of Newfoundland. Affectionately known too many as, “The Rock”.

My story begins in a little town of what was then 5,000 people on the Northern edge of this island paradise (OK, I’m exaggerating a little with the “paradise thing”). Any further North than this little town, you could literally be swimming with polar bears...don’t laugh, it’s true ☺

This little community, named St. Anthony, was visited by explorer Jacque Cartier in 1534 and by the mid 1800’s was largely settled by NL fisher-people around this harbour for easy access to the ocean as well as protection from the ocean. This harbour, this frigid body of water, would later come to serve as a major landmark where God was pointing me towards Jesus. We’re going to come back here- stay tuned!

My home was here on the northern side of town, North Street. One of the reasons I carried around some extra pounds my whole life is not because I was raised on fruits/vegetables. This place, “Flavour Crisp chicken”, affectionately known to the locals as the “Chicken Coop”, was right at my school bus

stop and is responsible for me being still being semi-addicted to any form of deep-fried chicken. Please, don't judge me....just join me at the Chicken Coop someday ☺ you'll understand! I digress....and now I'm hungry ☺

A quick journey, just a few steps up the street takes us to the home where I spent the first 17 years of my life. This very modest home is a place that has left me with some very foundational memories. The most entrenched parts of who I am today were formed as I learned, grew, and matured...here. I used to play in these woods, building tree houses and forts with my best friend Mike. I used to work in this garage with my dad Wellington and my brother Stefan, and it was here that I learned over many years that I was the only male in my family that was not mechanically inclined. It was in the downstairs bedroom that I spent many hours on my own, growing & cultivating my introverted personality, and it was in this living room that I can still hear my mother saying to me, *"you just wait until your father gets home..."*

This place still brings forward raw emotions in me. Later in my life, after Yvonne and I were married, my dad died in this house, in this living room- he was only 54 years old- this is a memory that also deeply shapes who I am today. But years earlier, at the age of 17, my journey takes me out of this house, and out of this community. Up until this point, I had absolutely no sense of the fact that God was pursuing me. I was about to learn that my story was about to take a turn that me, or nobody around me, had ever imagined would happen.

After grade 12, I followed my friends to University. Not knowing what I was going to study there, I went anyways. This move took me 500 kms away from my hometown of St. Anthony to the western part of NL to a little city named Corner Brook. It was here, in this University town that God was really going to begin teaching me some lessons. I wasn't long into my time in this University setting, and I quickly lost my focus. My "weekday studies" quickly took the back-burner and my "weekend

adventures" became the focus and not the weekday classes at the University. My story began to change as I found myself spending an unhealthy amount of time here. This street was representative of the hustle and bustle of this university town during the day-time, but during the night time, and especially during the weekends, this became a place where many university aged teenagers, truly "free from mom and dad" for the first time, often could find their way into some troublesome adventures.

This place in particular, now with windows and doors barricaded closed, holds many memories of some of my most misguided teenage wanderings. A night-club that was home to some of the wildest and even occasionally dangerous weekend teenage escapades, became a place that I spent every weekend visiting.

One Friday night, well after 2am, something was happening outside of this place that I was way too close to. Let's just say, it was a moment in time that scared me, scared me for what it could have held for my present, and how it could have shaped my future. It was here, that for the first time in my adult life, I look back now and believe, as I reflect now, I believe God was beginning a process of trying to get through me. How does God communicate to a person? Not audibly, not for me to hear, but for me to feel. At 2am or so, outside a wild and rowdy university bar, in the midst of a pretty tense street level situation, I felt something nudge my heart, causing me to ask the questions, *"Is this the way you want to live your life? Is this what you are going to live for?"*

Lesson 1- God often speaks to people at places where we least expect God to speak to people.

Having being nudged this way, was a new experience for me. I had never up until this point felt that prompt, it was the beginning of learning how to discern what God's voice sounded like, or at least felt like. It was the beginning of a significant period of reflection, *"Is this how I want to live my life? Is this what I am going to live for?"*

Months had passed, and still in university, I was pondering what happened that night in front of that night-club. *What had I felt? Was this unsettled feeling something that would pass?* It didn't pass- the deep contemplation continued.

I had moved out of the university dormitory and found a more contemplative space to live here. A safer distance away from the ongoing pressure of following the university crowd, I found some space here to reflect on whatever was happening in my life. Ironically enough, since my time living there, they renamed it to the "Nu-Dawn Manor". Little did I know, while living here, that God was working to bring about a "new dawn" in my life. This was a place where I had many restless nights trying to discern whatever this nudging was. I had to learn what this nudging was and find a way to deal with it, one way or the other.

So, a confused, but eagerly listening, young man takes a weekend to go back to a place where he knows food and comfort abounds- to his parent's house, in St. Anthony. I take my van and pack it full of hungry and poor university students who also want to go home to get their refill of love, food, and cash from their parents (Some of you post-secondary students/post-secondary parents) know what this is all about. I was going home for a break; what I didn't know and didn't realize was that in actual fact, I was going home to get broken.

Upon my arrival home, after giving my laundry to my wonderful mother and getting some healthy food from the previously mentioned "Chicken Coop", a conversation began in this house that would forever change the course of my story. I have withheld a little piece of information from you so far, but it represents a critical piece, a hinge-point, in this story.

My dad, was a born again, church going, Christian. The only one in our family. A single light of faith in his household. He wasn't perfect, but he lived a quiet faith, and for the most part, went to church week after week, alone. He never pushed his faith

on me, my siblings, or my mother. He just tried his best to live it. In the dailies and the weeklies, he lived it. And he respected us enough to not force us to live it. He respected us in our lifestyle choices, and we tried to respect him in his.

But this weekend, he did something out of character that caused great distress. He did something that I certainly didn't expect. He asked me (well he asked my mom to ask me- he knew I'd freak out), if both my mom and I would go to church with him that weekend. He knew this would be potentially explosive. And was it ever! He was smart for not being around when mom told me about dad's request. The request elicited so much anger, resentment, and rage in me, that I couldn't fully understand, or even believe, the ridiculous, immature response that I was putting forward. But boy, was I angry, and the answer from me, to my mom, was not just a forceful "no", but a forceful "no" with a few colorful words preceding "no".

So, as a way to vent my anger, I got my mother to bring me to a house party that was happening in our community that night. It was a house party where many of the students that I was going to university with in Corner Brook were in attendance. I drowned my rage, anger, and resentment in an immature, embarrassing, shameful, drunken rage. It was one of the few nights in my life I don't have full recollection of. To be honest, it is a night I don't care to ever remember fully. Maybe you've had nights like that.

LESSON # 2- Thankfully, God doesn't run from people just because they've had nights like that. In my case, God came closer to me, despite me/because I had/ having a night like that.

On that Sunday morning, as I tried to process where my life was headed, the only thing I knew for sure, was that my Father's church was not a place that I needed- in spite of all my confusion I was convinced that church would only make that confusion worse. My resolve was steadfast- I wasn't going, "you can't make me" ☺

So, to try and recover from my Saturday night immaturity, and again, to do what the crowd was doing, I decided to take in a Sunday afternoon event that may need some cultural explanation. This event took place on the harbor-front. This harbour-front event was definitely not one that I expected “God to be in attendance”.

In the wintertime in our community, the harbour that I showed you earlier, would completely freeze over. It became a major thoroughfare that provided access from one side of the community to the other, without having to go all the way around by road. This was a major snowmobile highway. Like the snowmobile version of the Hwy. 401 for those of you who may find that language more helpful ☺

On many weekends, there would be organized snowmobile drag races on this frozen harbor-front. A quarter mile frozen race track would be marked off and high-powered snowmobiles often traveling well in excess of 100 mph would do time trials and drag races up this frozen stretch of harbor. It was a community spectacle and gathering place for sure. And on a Sunday afternoon, after a very rough Saturday night and early Sunday morning, this is where I found myself in an effort to try and forget my personal sense of confusion and my enraged frame of mind at my dad’s “*crazy and never gonna happen*” request for me to join him at one of his “church services”.

So, standing on a frozen harbor in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, I was doing my level best to focus on the NL version of the “Fast and the Furious”. As these snowmobiles were racing up through Marguerite Bay to the roar and fanfare of cheering spectators, I couldn’t quite get to focus on the races. There was an internal distraction that I just couldn’t deal with. As I was standing about right here, at the mouth of Marguerite Bay, with snowmobiles racing past me at a dangerously close distance, I found myself not looking toward them, but actually turning away from them, there was something that, a nudge that I just couldn’t stop feeling, that was leading me to turn my back to the

“fast and furious action”, and to turn towards what the locals would call “the bottom of the harbour front”. It didn’t make a lot of sense to turn away from the racing action for a couple of reasons.

Number 1- the last thing you want to do when a snowmobile is racing past you at a speed of 100+mph at a distance of 20-30 feet from you, is turn your back to it ☺

Number 2- there’s nothing down there in the bottom of the harbor front to look at, a few houses, the chicken coop (OK, I have to stop thinking about the chicken coop)☺ But, there was certainly nothing down there that would be more interesting than the racing spectacle that was happening right in front of me.

But **THAT** nudge, **THAT** nudge, that feeling, to turn around and look this way, wouldn’t relent. So, I eventually turn my back towards the action, and look to the opposite end of the harbor front. And when I did, when I made that turn, little did I know, that I was going to feel, sense, and experience the voice of God, really clearly, for the first time. The couple of times before, I could say I heard my conscience, leading me away from wrong and towards right- something that happens to most of us even on a daily basis. But what I was about to experience wasn’t that. *I was about to experience God on the harbour-front*, and my story was drastically about to change.

As I turned, and looked up, what did I see? What do you think was brought into my field of vision as I stood on a frozen harbour front in the North Atlantic Ocean? ***My dad’s church***, even though it was quite far away, it was really all I could see. I couldn’t see the front of it, only the back of it. But it seemed like no matter what way I turned, all I could see was this church. ***In that moment, there seemed to be no snowmobile races, no cheering crowds. Nobody only me.... and God on the harbor-front.*** And then, again, in my heart, I believe I sensed this distinctly strong nudge. It was the same nudge I had the night in front of the night-club in Corner Brook

that led me to ask questions like “what was I going to give my life to”? It was the same nudge I had felt night after night as I laid awake in the Nu-Dawn manor. Now it was a nudge that turned my attention to my dad’s church, and then, that was followed by what I now know is described in the bible as the “still small voice”, or the “little whisper of God”. As I was locked in a gaze that had me transfixed on my dad’s church, That little whisper, that still small voice, simply left this message impressed on my heart....”you need to go to church tonight, I’m waiting for you there....”

So, to make a long story short... the nudge that I felt outside a night-club, the nudges that I had been feeling in an apartment building in a university city many miles from home, the nudge that I had felt on this frozen harbor front, now culminated as an unmistakable deep inner direction/impression. Even then, I knew that this was something different than I had ever experienced before. I knew, in as much as I could know at the time, that God was speaking to me. And then, my mind was made up, **I had met God on the harbour-front**, and I knew if I would listen to that voice, and do what it said, that I would meet him again in this church.

And meet Him I did. The story of what happened in this church that night is another story for another time, but I met the risen Christ in this place. I met him through the music I heard, I met him through the sermon that I heard, and I met Him through the people who were there. Before that church service was over, I said to Jesus, *“I don’t know what I have that you want, but whatever I have, take it and make something from it...”*

Lesson 3- It’s not what you have that he wants. It’s you that he wants.

My story was changed in a way that nobody saw coming. I certainly didn’t. To this day I’m so thankful, ever more thankful, for the way I met God on the Harbour front.

My story is still being written, but it is a more beautiful story today than where it was headed. That I know for sure.

Maybe God is writing a story for you, a friend, or a family member, that you don’t quite understand yet.

Learnings from God on the Harbour-Front

I. God often speaks to people at locations where God is not “conventionally thought” to be at work.

- God began dealing with me outside a night-club at 230 in the morning and picked it up again months later on a frozen harbour in the North Atlantic Ocean.
- Don’t think that it “may not be God” who is speaking to you simply because of your location!

II. God will relentlessly pursue us into spaces of shame/brokenness. He won’t abandon us in those places.

- During one of the worst nights of my life, trying to drown my own anger in excess, God was with me and didn’t abandon me because of an experience I am ashamed of. God pursued me through that.
- Don’t lose sight of what God is doing because you’ve had some less than proud moments. We’ve all had them- God is with you through them.

III. God wants “you” more than anything you can “do” for Him.

- I said to God, “I don’t know what I have that you want...” He wanted me....
- Don’t think that “God doesn’t want me, because I have nothing to offer Him”. He wants you, and He will do something beautiful through you that you never expected.

Amen.

Points to Ponder

God on the Harbour-Front

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you heard God's "voice" in an unconventional place? Where was it? What did you sense God was saying?
2. Can you remember an event or season in your life where you doubted God's presence, only to find out later that he was very much present and at work in you during that time?
3. Is there someone in your network of family, friends, or co-workers that you are eagerly awaiting for God to intersect their story? Has God truly intersected your story?
4. What has God unexpectedly brought forward from your relationship with Him that you were able to offer back in service to His church?