

## Stepping into His Power

Layne Lebo & Sherry Selkirk

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At its heart, the Bible is a collection of stories recounting how God has worked in the lives of his people in history. As we read God's Word we're reminded who God is; we recall how He has worked in the lives of his people; and, we're encouraged and provided with hope about how God will work in the circumstances of our lives. The Psalms, unlike much of the Bible, are written as poetry rather than narratives, but they also look back to the past and highlight how God worked then as a reminder that God will also be faithful in the present day and in the future. Listen to the words of Psalm 77:1–15:

I cried out to God for help;  
I cried out to God to hear me.  
When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
at night I stretched out untiring hands,  
and I would not be comforted.

I remembered you, God, and I groaned;  
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.  
You kept my eyes from closing;  
I was too troubled to speak.  
I thought about the former days,  
the years of long ago;  
I remembered my songs in the night.  
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

“Will the Lord reject forever?  
Will he never show his favor again?  
Has his unfailing love vanished forever?  
Has his promise failed for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be merciful?  
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:  
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.  
I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

I will consider all your works  
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

Your ways, God, are holy.  
What god is as great as our God?  
You are the God who performs miracles;  
you display your power among the peoples.  
With your mighty arm you redeemed your people...

When we reflect on what God has done in the past, we're reminded that He is faithful and that He still works in our lives today. Our current sermon series is titled, "What God Has Done." Our hope in this series of sermons is that as our staff shares how God has worked in our lives, you'll remember how God has worked in your life and you'll be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "[I'm confident] that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

I'm excited that Sherry Selkirk, McBIC's office administrator, is going to share with us today. Sherry and her husband, Chris, have attended McBIC since college, and they've been heavily involved in serving at McBIC since soon after they graduated. They've served in youth ministry and continue to serve in our worship ministry. Sherry has served on our Church Board, and since 2014, she has been our office administrator. People think based on my title of lead pastor that I'm McBIC's leader, but leaders understand it's often their behind-the-scenes administrative support people who really hold everything together.

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I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. But not only for this moment of stepping out in front of you, but for being a church that has been instrumental in getting me to a place of saying yes to something like this. You've been a church that has allowed me to grow in my walk with Christ and allow His power to be used through me. That I am even standing here in front of so many people speaking is the testimony of God's power at work in me. I remember early on being asked to speak for things and quickly saying no. Singing is one thing, something I've grown into, I still get nervous doing that – speaking was just not an option.

As we began as a staff to talk about each of us sharing during this series, I was reminded that for years, I didn't think I had a testimony, I didn't have anything to share. You know, you've heard those powerful testimonies of peoples lives dramatically changed once they've found Christ, going from a life of living for themselves and then God meeting them in that space and changing the trajectory of their lives, their entire future. Well, I don't have that kind of testimony, so what would I ever have to share? Slowly God began to show me how He **has** changed me, this wasn't a one time dramatic change but a slow steady change over years and

years. For He knows me better than I know myself, knows that a small steady growth is going to be more powerful in me than one dramatic moment. It states in 2 Timothy 1:9, “His grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” **Before the beginning of time**, that’s just crazy to think about. This grace that was laid out for each of us, before you or I were even thought about. It wasn’t because of anything we have done but it was for His own purpose, not mine or yours! For He has saved us and called us to a holy life.

So, this is a part of my story, not a huge conversion story, but one of steady growth and change. A change of one trying to embrace the gift God wants for each one of us: the gift of stepping into His power, love, and self-discipline and walking away from, at least for myself, a spirit of timidity that can so easily consume.

Let’s look at 2 Timothy 1:6-9, this is Paul writing a letter to Timothy and he says:

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So **do not be ashamed** of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

As you may have guessed, I was a shy, timid, compliant child. I didn’t like the attention on me, at least not in front of strangers or a crowd. A true introvert. As a small child, when introduced to someone new, you’d find me hiding behind my mother’s leg, holding tight to the security of someone I felt safe with. At the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, I cried every day. My sister, who was two years older than me, would walk me to my classroom, holding my hand, and then would have to head off to her own room and leave me there crying as I struggled to walk into mine. I remember my parents trying to bribe me with presents if I didn’t cry at school for a day. I don’t recall that working.

One day in the classroom, the teacher, trying to be so sympathetic and caring, was going to read a book to the class. I was crying again, so she tried to comfort me by having me sit on her lap, but that put me in front of the whole class with my tears and just made the tears fall all the more. Somehow over that year, the tears finally grew less and less, but they would resurface again anytime I was thrown into a new situation.

When my parents would travel and go to a new church, I would be sick to my stomach, anticipating entering this new place. If they asked me to go to a Sunday School class by myself, I would again begin to cry. My parents early on decided it wasn’t worth my tears to push me to go into a class by myself, so they allowed me to tag along with my sister to hers. Even when my sister was able to go into a middle school group, I would tag along. She became my

security—what was familiar, safe, something to hide behind if needed—and thankfully, she didn't mind.

Growing up, my family was a musical family. We sang together quite a bit in front of the church. There were times I would be so embarrassed being in front of people that my face would turn bright red, and then I'd be so embarrassed that my face was red that it would bring tears to my eyes. As I was walking through what for me were traumatic moments, God was stirring in me a love for music. Although I hated being in front of people, my love to sing continued to be greater than my uncomfortableness of stepping out in front of people, so I would continue to sing in front of crowds.

Another moment that triggered me wanting to hide was when I was 7 years old. My sister and I were planning a tea party one afternoon for my parents, and we decided, of course, that we needed music. (I don't do much without music.) My sister went to get the cassette player out of my parents' room, and she came back stating that she couldn't get it unplugged. The cassette player was plugged into an extension cord, which was plugged into the wall, and the cord would not budge from the extension cord. I decided I could probably make this happen and was pretty determined to do something my sister couldn't do. So I tried to unplug the cord from the extension cord, and when that didn't work, I decided to use my teeth.

As you can imagine, I got electrocuted. I tried to scream, but nothing was able to come out of my mouth. The shock, thankfully, was powerful enough to knock my head back against the bed, and the cord fell from my mouth, gratefully stopping the shock. At that point, I was able to cry, and my parents came running to find me with a melted lip. They thought I had toothpaste on my mouth. It had melted a small hole at the corner of my lip. For the next few years of my life, I found myself hiding even more. I'd constantly put my hand over my mouth, especially when I'd laugh or eat so that people couldn't see my scar, embarrassed of the crookedness of my smile.

It was probably about this time when I remember accepting Christ into my life after one of our services at church, quietly by myself in a small corner of the church. This began a relationship of falling in love with the God of the universe, and that love for Him turned my love for music into a love of worshiping Him through music. I remember sitting up in my bed at night, singing at the top of my lungs to the songs from the record player, and in those moments realizing it wasn't just about the music—it was about worshiping our Lord and Savior.

As my love for music continued, I became involved in worship teams at church, a singing group in the community, and also had the opportunity to play my flute for many different events. Without really thinking about it, God was continually working in me to become more and more comfortable stepping out in front of people through this gift of music. I also stepped into the opportunity to do musicals and dramas at school and at church, and I remember one of my first parts I had in a play. The start of my lines were, "I'm not a public speaker. In fact, I'm scared to death..." And I was—scared to death.

My senior year of high school allowed me to have my final surgery on my lip after I had finished growing. I remember the doctor meeting with my mom and I after for a follow-up and saying he was very pleased with how it turned out, and if I wanted to wear lipstick, no one would ever know it was there. I remember my mom and I looking at each other, and it was at that point that I realized that it didn't matter. I didn't need to wear lipstick. I had a scar, this was part of my story, and sometime over the years, I had stopped needing to put my hand in front of my lip to hide that blemish. I was comfortable with it being a part of me. It was just part of my story and didn't define me.

Parts of my story have memories that are etched into my mind. I'm sure you have those as well. As I was preparing for this, God showed me, again through a song, that over the years the securities I've clung to—first my mom's leg, then my sister's hand, which turned into a best friend and even my husband and family—were no longer what I was clinging to. I don't really even know when it happened. It was a slow change. Little by little, my hand lost its grip on what or who I was hiding behind, and the timidity began to peel away. In moments when I was asked to step into new situations, I instead began to clutch tightly to the one who would never let me go. He was the one who would be my hiding place. As it states in Psalm 32:7, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me **with songs** of deliverance."

I'm so grateful for each person that was there for me in those hard moments. My timidity at that young age wouldn't allow me the freedom to step into those situations alone. I believe God placed those people in my life to allow me to know what it was like to feel secure when I walked into what for me were hard situations. He allowed me time to figure out what it was like to sense the gentle nudge, calling, and love of the One who wanted to be the only security I would run to.

I also can, now, thank Him for the tears. Although they felt awful and defeating in those early stages of life, He began to show me that He could use that emotion that made me feel so vulnerable in a different way. He turned those tears for me into a sign of coming to the end of myself and knowing that His power was working through me. When we are weak, then He is strong. Are these moments still hard? Absolutely! Even when we were talking about the possibility of each of us doing this as a staff, in one of our meetings I was so sick to my stomach even thinking about standing in front of you speaking. The enemy wanted me to run away. But thankfully God has allowed me over the years to experience glimpses of what standing in His power feels like.

Now when I am asked to step into something that feels uncomfortable and I feel that timidity or fear creeping back in, I'm often taken back to the conversation Moses was having with God at the burning bush. You know, when God was giving him the assignment to go back to Egypt, because through Moses, God wanted to free the Israelites from slavery. In this conversation, Moses wasn't convinced that he was the right person for the job.

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, **“I will be with you.”** – Exodus 3:11-12a

The burning bush and God saying “I will be with you” wasn’t enough for Moses, so God proceeded to show Moses the signs and wonders He would do through him with his staff; turning it into a snake, then turning his hand into leprosy and healing it again, and the ability to turn the water from the Nile into blood. After all that, what does Moses say? In Exodus 4:10-15 (selected) Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant.” (Doesn’t that sound like a bit of timidity?) He continues, “Lord, I have **never** been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant (which has only been a few minutes). I am slow of speech and tongue. The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord: Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

Again, Moses says, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” And do you know what God does? Well, after getting angry, he said, ok – I’ll let Aaron, your brother be your mouthpiece. “I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.” God allowed Moses to hide behind his brother. As the story unfolds, it’s not spoken, but by the end you don’t hear much about Aaron doing the speaking. I believe eventually Moses stepped into what God had intended for him to do in the first place. Like me, it just took some time.

This conversation right here is one of the reasons I am able to stand in front of you today. Now if God asks me to step into something, I want to claim the promise that was spoken to Moses at the front end of that conversation and leave it at that, when He said, **“I will be with you.”** I don’t want my timidity to begin to question God for choosing me. I don’t want to be found saying “Pardon me God, are you forgetting... (fill in the blank) this about me?” No, I want to fan into flame the gift of God which is in me. I’m so thankful that, as with Moses, sometimes God gives us time and even sisters/brothers to stand with us as we grow out of our weaknesses.

God was also gracious enough through the years to allow me the privilege of watching His power be used through me. Maybe those moments weren’t a miracle like Moses had as God turned his staff into a snake—he probably knows that that wouldn’t have gone over well with me. But they were small moments like Him speaking to me in worship and asking me to speak over you as a congregation and receiving confirmation that what I said was what someone needed to hear. God asking me to pray with someone who was hurting on the phone when they called into the church. Giving me one question to ask another mom on the soccer field, which caused her to break down, and through that conversation open a door for me to pray with her. Driving way out of my way to get to a Chick-fil-A on a trip (cause sometimes you just need a Chick-fil-A) and me asking God why I was there—why did I just add a half hour to my already long drive—and then walking into that Chick-fil-A to find someone in the corner crying and He asked me to go pray for them. Saying yes to a mission trip and experiencing the most powerful

time of worship in the darkest street in Thailand in the red-light district. And even speaking at smaller events over the past several years. Those weren't me in those moments. That was the power of God working through me (I can't come up with those things). That was me just saying yes to allowing His power to work through me. I've learned, although very slowly, over the years that if he puts a "burning bush" in front of me and asks me to step into something, that I want my response to be, "Yes, Lord, **if you will go with me**" and leave it at that. For in Ephesians 3:20-21 it states, "Now to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to **his power that is at work within us**, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"

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I loved hearing Sherry's story, because knowing her, it's wonderful to hear how God has worked in her life to bring her to the place where she is today. But I also appreciate Sherry's story, because it reminds us of an important Biblical principle called "the Priesthood of All Believers." The priesthood of all believers sounds complicated, but it simply means God has ministry for all of us to do... not just pastors and missionaries. You all come here on Sundays, and during worship, you sit out there and participate in worship as our worship pastor, Dave Hershberger, or one of our volunteer leaders lead, and you listen to a sermon preached by me or another member of our staff. It's tempting to believe that ministry is done by paid professionals or by highly trained volunteers. But as Sherry so clearly explained, God has ministry for every one of us to do, and a barrier many of us face in embracing his calling for us is fear or timidity.

I'd like to read a verse from 1 Timothy 4:12—from a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé, Timothy. "*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young*" (1 Timothy 4:12). "Young" might fit there as your obstacle, but you might also insert "a volunteer," "shy," or "a new Christian," or you can fill in the blank for yourself. "*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are \_\_\_\_\_, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*" **What is holding you back from stepping into everything God has for you?** Is it timidity or fear? Is it the thought that you're not adequately trained or experienced enough? Is it the sense that others are more qualified? My hope is that as you've listened to Sherry's journey and reflect on your own life, you'll step into all God has for you.

During our response time in singing this morning, I encourage you to listen to the Holy Spirit's direction. If there is something holding you back from stepping into what God has for you, I encourage you to go to one of our prayer partners. They would be happy to pray with you.