

## ***Focus! or Your Next Bold Move***

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Romans 8:1-11

*“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”*

### *Movement 1 – Decisions*

What is your next decision? What is your next bold move? I remember when I was trying to decide where to go to college, and I felt faced with a mountain of a decision. I had a bevy of options before me, I had a number of choices, and I had to choose carefully. I had to choose carefully because I was told and led to believe that wherever I decided to go to college would effect the rest of my life. My happiness, my success, my life all rested upon where I wanted to study for the next four years. I was faced with a bold decision, and before me, each college pamphlet was in essence asking, what would be my next bold move. Talk about pressure.

What is your next decision, what is your next bold move? We are faced daily with decisions, from what to eat for lunch, to what time to wake up in the morning to what to wear. That last option can often be one of the most stressful decisions one makes in a day. The time we spend standing before the closet, rifling through the drawers, and holding up shirts to pants, wondering if things match speaks to the enormous pressure we face with our wardrobe every morning. What we wear is our next decision, our next bold move.

Hopefully we do not put our attire on the same par as the major life decisions that we all face from time to time. Where to go to college, what to do for employment, and where to live are some of the major decisions that we all face in life. Should we move close to our parents to help them out as they get older, or should we depend on a retirement institution to offer the support? Should we get married now or should we wait? Should we put our child in the advanced class where he or she will be challenged or should we put him or her in the average class so he or she can excel? What is the decision you are facing? What is your next bold move? The character “Neo” played by Keanu Reeves in the movie *The Matrix* was faced with a major decision. He was brought to a room and presented with two pills, one red and one blue. The blue pill will not have any effect on Neo, will keep him in the reality he knows as a programmer and underground hacker. The red pill will “wake” Neo up, and bring him into the reality of a world of machines fighting humans. One will greatly alter his life, and show him the truth while the other will keep things the same. This is a big decision, a major move.

Paul is writing to a community that has faced decisions and is continuing to face decisions. The decisions start with following Jesus Christ. The major decision, the bold move is whether or not to say yes to Jesus. We cannot assume that everyone in the community has already said yes to Jesus. Some may be on the sidelines waiting, wondering and watching. Some may still not be convinced that they are ready to commit to Jesus. Paul is writing this letter to the Roman church to offer doctrinal focus and guidance, to introduce himself, and to invite people to take up the cross. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Paul writes in the beginning of this chapter. It is as much a word of assurance as it is a pitch, a reason for others to make that decision to follow Jesus. Maybe there are some of you who have not

yet embraced Christ as your savior. Maybe there are some of you who have not yet said yes, who are standing on the sidelines, watching, wondering and waiting for that moment when you are ready to decide. Maybe some of you have not yet made that next bold move and you hear the letter, you hear this selection as partly an invitation to Christ. What is your next bold move?

We face decisions of this nature in our life from time to time. They are decisions of commencement, decisions of change. As Frost alludes to in his famous poem, we face two roads in the woods, which one will you take? What is your next decision, your next bold move?

### *Movement 2 – Does it Matter?*

Will our decisions even matter? Will the path we choose to take really make a difference in our life? Are the decisions that monumental to our happiness? Will they matter?

When I work with youth who are considering college I try to remind them that in the end we all need to relax. Yes the college you choose will have an effect upon your future. Yes, it could shape and form the rest of your lives, but for the most part it will not have a negative impact on the rest of your life.

Some would say the same about employment. Some would say that it does not matter what you do for a living as long as you make enough money to live and live comfortably. You could push papers or you could push rocks, as long as you can support yourself and your family. It is not a bold move.

Some would say that it does not matter where you live, because the country is for the most part all the same. Is there a real difference between Wynnewood and Havertown? Is there a real difference between Ardmore and Bryn Mawr? Yes there are some small differences, there is a difference between schools, but a home is a home, a neighborhood is a neighborhood and the move is not that bold.

Some say to the idealists, those who have grand hopes and dreams to change the world that there is not much hope. The problems of the world are so large and you are so small that there is little hope and little chance of anything really happening. What is your next bold move when you believe little will happen?

The singer and songwriter Ani DiFranco wrote a song with just that title, “Your Next Bold Move.” One of the lines of this song states,

*You want to track each trickle back to its source*

*And then scream up the faucet*

*‘til your face is hoarse*

*Cuz you’re surrounded by a world’s worth of things you just can’t excuse*

*But you’ve got the hard cough of a chain smoker and you’re at the arctic circle playing strip poker and it’s getting colder and colder every time you lose*

*So go ahead make your next bold move*

*Tell us*

*What’s the next thing you’re gonna need to prove to yourself*

Ani DiFranco is painting a picture of a landscape of despair and hopelessness. She is claiming that the world is so broken, so lost that there is not much one can do. You may feel frustrated, you may feel angry, but what can you do? What is your next bold move?

It is as if you are playing a game of chess and you know that you are going to be in check mate in three more moves and there is nothing you can do to get out of it. What will be your next bold move? Is there even a next bold move?

Many would have told the early Christians in Rome that it would not matter who they followed or what they believed. Many would have told them that it didn't matter. Do we not hear the same thing today? Do we not hear today the claim that it doesn't matter what we believe. It doesn't matter who we follow or what we claim because in the end all we face is death. What we believe here and now doesn't change the fact that we all still have to pay our bills, earn money, and support ourselves and our families. What we believe doesn't change the fact that we all still have to go to school and make a decision of what we want to do. What we believe doesn't change the fact that life continues with or without us. Go ahead and make your next bold move, because in the end it doesn't matter.

### *Movement 3 – Flesh and Spirit*

This is the speech of the world, the speech of flesh. This is the speech of despair, of hopelessness and of death. This is the speech of those who do not have peace, hope and the promise of the Lord. This is the speech of the flesh. If we are fully in the world, if we buy into the message of the world, the message of the flesh than we have no other choice than to believe that it doesn't matter what we decide. All we can do is buy into the idea that our purpose is to live, make money, support ourselves, and then we die. This is the message of the flesh. But Paul reminds us of another option. Paul reminds us of the message, the hope, and the life of the Spirit. In the Spirit we find the life in Christ Jesus which sets us free from sin and from death. In the Spirit is life and peace. In the Spirit we submit and follow the Lord and we can truly live. Paul reminds us that life in the flesh is death, life in the flesh is captivity to the law, is a life of sin. Life in the Spirit is righteousness because of what Christ did, is doing, and is going to do. Paul Tillich says that on our own we face despair, because we lack a certainty. On our own, in the flesh, we lack a certainty that we are blessed, we lack a certainty that we are redeemed and a certainty that we are loved. Yet with the Spirit, we are given the certainty that we are “children of God.”

So what is your next bold move? What is the next move that you are going to make? I am not asking about the specifics, I am not asking about jobs, college, or even what you are going to wear. I am asking if you are going to live in the flesh or in the Spirit. I am asking if you are going to embrace the peace and the life that you can find in the Spirit, or if you are going to stay in the way of the world. What is your next bold move?

Think of Moses when he encountered God in the burning bush. Moses had a life with his father-in-law. Moses had a wife, a family and a good life by all accounts of the world. Yet God called him and Moses had to decide if he wanted to live the life he knew or if he should follow the Lord.

Think of the disciples in the boat when Jesus came into their lives. They had a life; they had something to stand upon by all standards of the world. Yet Christ called them and they had to make a decision to stay and live in the flesh or to follow the Spirit and follow Christ.

Think of Paul on that road to Damascus. He was living in the flesh, persecuting Christians. He had power, he was known and he believed he was doing the right thing. Yet through the sound of thunder, through the blinding light Christ called Paul, and Paul had to make a decision. Paul had to decide if he wanted to stay in the life he knew or if he should live in the way of Christ.

What is your next bold move? Where will you go next? Will you follow the world, the flesh or will you follow life, the Spirit, Christ?

#### *Movement 4 – Prayer and Worship*

Where does this life start? How do we see it lived out? It is one thing to say, “Yes,” but how do we follow through and knowingly live in the Spirit of the Lord?

Start with prayer. Start with the intimate, close relationship you have with God. Start with prayer. For we can pray in the flesh. We can pray the selfish prayer, the prayer that asks for a new bicycle, a bigger house, or something else that we think we might need. We could demand actions of God, we could try to force God to do something that we expected and claim we need (when it is really a “want”). This is a prayer in the flesh. This is a prayer that is selfish, that is looking to the material life, and trying to avoid death. We could pray the rote, routine prayer that we have been taught. Our mouths could move, our mind could recite, but our heart would not be it. We could just be doing the legalistic tasks that we believe we all are supposed to do. This is a prayer in the flesh. This is a prayer that is only trying to fulfill obligations to cover bases. This is a prayer that is hostile to God, that is against the desire and will of God. Remember what prayer is, a conversation with the Lord. Imagine you are calling your friend, or even your parent on the phone and you start demanding certain things. Or imagine you talk to your parents with a script, saying everything in a mechanical kind of way. Is this any way to be in a relationship, to be in connection with the Lord? This is the way of the flesh.

But we have received the Spirit, and we can pray in the Spirit. We can be honest with the Lord through our prayer, we can be open in our prayer, and we can listen in our prayer. Paul Tillich once said about prayer that “everyone can *say* the Lord’s Prayer, but how many of those who say it has received the power to *pray* it?” With the Holy Spirit you have the power to pray as if the very words are your own. With the Holy Spirit you have the power to pray as if you are saying them for the first time. You can fall on your knees and say, “My father, who is in heaven, holy is your name” and feel the power of the prayer. You can honestly pray that “God’s kingdom come,” and feel the desire, the hope and the energy of such a possibility rise in your heart. You can say, “thy will be done” and feel the conviction and the desire to do God’s will, while at the same time you can feel the grief for the times you have not fulfilled God’s will. You can say, “on earth as it is in heaven,” and realize there is a promise and a truth calling you. You can pray for daily bread and trust that God will take care of you. You can pray for forgiveness and the power to forgive and know that through the cross that power is there. You can ask for help in the midst of temptations and know that God will guide you and will protect you from evil. Then you can declare the glory and the honor to the Lord.

In the Spirit you can make this prayer. In the Spirit you can get past the smoke and the mirrors that we often create around the Lord and fully come into contact, have a connection with God. Pray with this honesty, pray with this sincerity, pray with the Holy Spirit and you are taking that first step into the way of the Lord.

Let this form and approach to prayer seep into your worship. The world of the flesh demands and expects worship to be showy, flashy and big. This is not the worship of the Spirit. This is a worship that is often so stuck on doing things in a particular way that is often so stuck on doing things in a specific way that it becomes hostile to God. This is a worship that seeks only self-aggrandizement. Yet the honest worship listens for God. The Spirit led worship is open to the movement and the surprises of the Lord. The worship of the Spirit looks to be transformed by the Spirit. It is a time when you bring your honesty, your fears and your hopes, offer them to the Lord and then wait for a response. As a community, lifting each other up, supporting each other, we can enter into a worship of the Spirit. Like pieces of clay we can be shaped and formed into the children of God that we are all called to be.

Start your life with the Spirit through prayer and through worship. Honest, open and authentic and you will start your walk with the Lord.

#### *Movement 5 – Action*

Then move to action. Move to the doing, the living and truly following the Spirit. It is important, it is essential to start with prayer and worship for they are the foundation of our faith and relationship with Christ, but we need to move to action. This week at Estes Park we heard a number of powerful and challenging speakers. One of them was Shayne Clayborne, who works with a group called, “the Simple Way,” in North Philadelphia. Clayborne spoke about the impression people have of Christians. Christians are seen as hypocritical and judgmental, at that is because of our actions. To counter this, Clayborne encouraged the youth to show that they are Christians, to show the love of Christ for all to see. Clayborne said that it was not so much about telling, or preaching the love of Christ, but showing the love of Christ. These are actions in the Spirit.

It is the positive example you try to be in school, in work, or even around the town. It is the time you take to work at a food pantry, a clothing store, or any other type of ministry. It is not just speaking truth to power, speaking justice to oppression, or speaking mercy to hate but showing truth, justice and mercy. It is living in the way of the Spirit so that others will see us and say, there is something different, something that goes against the grain of the world, against the grain of the flesh and towards the glory of the Lord. Tillich claims that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of desire and the will to power will be broken. Instead one will find a power for justice and a desire for love. This is what we show. We do not look for the next buck, but for the next opportunity to offer a hand of love. We do not look for the bigger house, but for the bigger opportunity to help someone in need. We do not look to build ourselves up, but to build up the kingdom of the Lord. Like the song says, they will know we are Christians by our Love. This is the life, and the actions of the Spirit that we show and live into.

#### *Movement 6 – Your Next Bold Move*

What will be your next bold move? Will you live in the Spirit or in the flesh?  
What will be your next bold move?

The reality is we need to ask ourselves this every moment of every day. We are constantly faced with decisions to make, decisions that can be made in the flesh or in the Spirit. We can look at the world and say it doesn't matter. We can look at the world and say it is all about the job, the house, the money and the power and base all of our

decisions on that story. Or we can live in the Spirit and follow the leading of the Spirit. You may have made the first and the most important decision to follow Christ. It was a decision that I saw a number of youth make at the conference last week. It is a powerful and moving decision to make, one that brought much celebration and joy. Yet the next night they asked for rededications. We need to rededicate our lives because we are living between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul Samply says that a key to understanding Paul is understanding this both/and of his letters and his theology. We are both in the flesh and in the Spirit, so we must constantly ask ourselves, what will be our next bold move. Each time we sit to pray, how will you pray? Each time you go to worship, will you be open to the Holy Spirit? Each time you act, anywhere and everywhere, will you follow the leading of the Spirit? What will be your next bold move? Will you trust the Spirit, and live in life. Will you trust the Spirit and live in peace? Will you trust the Spirit and live in grace? Will you trust the Spirit and live in mercy. Will you trust the Spirit and be a child of righteousness, of forgiveness, of Christ? What will be your next bold move?

AMEN