

"Refocus on God's Promises"

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Intro.

"Beware of spending too much time looking back at what you once were when God wants you to become something you have never been." Oswald Chambers

You probably haven't heard much about him, but Howard G. Hendricks was a Christian educator at Dallas seminary. The Dallas Morning News published a sparkling profile of his significant influence and notable accomplishments a decade before his passing.

In his commentary on the gospel of Mark, Charles Swindoll, a worldwide Christian author, wrote, "When I was in seminary, I took courses from many great men. One of them was Dr. Howard Hendricks. Hendricks taught students, but even more, he helped students see what they could become. Every once in a while, he would write an affirming note at the top of my paper. One time he wrote, "This is great, Chuck. Someday you will write." Years later, as I put together my first book, those words fueled my drive to complete the manuscript. The words, "Someday you will write," freed me to write.

And yes, Chuck did write, with millions of copies of books now in print. "Professor Howard Hendrick planted that idea of what Chuck could become.

I hope this introduction can help us imagine the power of refocusing on what something or someone could become. Many of the most remarkable women and men in world history have similar stories. Many great leaders and successful personalities have

someone in their lives that helped them to see the future with a different set of eyes.

Today is the day when we need to remember God's promises and understand that God always wants us to look to the future with hope.

Context Matters

Let's remember now the words of Jesus. John 14 is often called the Farewell Discourse. This part of the gospel is characterized by a complex intertwining of themes: assurance of Jesus' abiding presence, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the future of the community, and the centrality of love. Jesus also promises that his departure will enable believers to "dwell" with God, meaning sharing in a close relationship with the divine. Jesus is announcing his departure from this world. He is leaving and knows that his followers will face great fear, distress, and anxiety, but he also knows that his friends need to put their faith in God's promises. In this portion of the gospel, Jesus wanted to bring a new perspective and a powerful vision. He is assuring his disciples that he is by no means abandoning them. (SALT commentary mentioned) *Jesus is saying, in effect: Don't worry; the best is yet to come. I'm leaving, but I'm not abandoning you. We'll still be together - and what's more, God will send you another Advocate as well, the Spirit of truth.* In other words, what's coming is much better than what you have now!

Theological Reflection.

Dear church, Jesus' words in John 14 invite us to see God's promises so we can believe in a better and brighter future for us and this world. Yes, we can learn from the past lessons of hope, but then we need to raise our heads to see what God has in store for us, not just in eternity but here on earth, now, during this time of our lives!

Jesus invited his disciples to look ahead to see the company of God, to imagine a powerful reality in their lives.

Speaking about all of this and refocusing on the future, Author Ray Johnston invites us to reflect on a simple but meaningful question. He states that "This question is so important it should be asked by anyone currently feeling discouraged about themselves.

This question is so important it should be the first question asked by people who want to change their lives, lose weight, get out of debt, or have a better future. This question has the power to lift a person out of discouragement. It has the power to transform somebody's mood. It has the power to turn around a company or a church or a family.

The question is: **What can this become?**

We learn this from Jesus' invitation to the young, inexperienced men who were to become his disciples. He invited them to look to the future when he made an astounding statement: "Follow me, and I will make you become... fishers of men." Jesus sees what we can become.

Conclusion

Do you remember Howard Hendricks, the Christian educator in my intro? He would not have become an influential Christian educator without his teacher, Miss Noe. His parents split up right after his birth, and his grandmother raised him. He described himself as "a troublemaker, a hell-raiser." His fifth-grade teacher, Miss Simon, once tied him to his chair with a rope, taping his mouth shut. She predicted that Howard, whom she called "the worst behaved child in this school," would end up in prison with four of his classmates. Three of them proved her right. When the next school year began, his

sixth-grade teacher, Miss Noe, went down the roll and called out his name, then looked up, only to see him sitting with his arms folded, "just waiting to go into action." She studied him for a moment and said, "I've heard a lot about you." Howard said he immediately thought, here we go again. She smiled and added, "but I don't believe a word of it!" The words stunned him. Hendricks said that Miss Noe made him realize, for the first time, that someone cared. Hendricks called that moment "a fundamental turning point, not only in my education but in my life. Suddenly, unexpectedly, someone believed in me. For the first time in my life, someone saw potential in me." In previous years, he had skipped assignments, but now he stayed up until one in the morning to do special assignments for Miss Noe. Fifth grade had been the worst year of his life. Sixth grade became the best. Miss Noe called out what Howard could become. In future years, Professor Hendrick did the same with thousands of his own students. When a teacher focuses on what a student can become, rather than on what he or she is, the future is liberated from the past. New and exciting opportunities can be pursued when a business focuses on what it can become rather than on what it has been.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we as a church focus on what we can become rather than on what we are, a fresh vision can lead to a better future. In other words, when we finally start focusing on what something or someone can become, rather than on what or who it is, everything changes. Dear Church, let us set our sight on the promises of God, focus our energies on what we can become and look to the future with hope!

Amen!

