

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
Mountains Move: Enough is Enough
Mark Batterson

Welcome to all eight of our campuses. We were supposed to end the Mountains Move series last week but I wanted to wear this shirt one more time! Actually I want to share a testimony with you, a testimony that I believe has been in the making for 40 years. It would be a sin of omission for me not to share it. So I'm excited about this weekend but I want to tell you what's happened in my life. I am a little bit at a loss for words, which is saying something for a preacher.

Let me ask you a question. What is your earliest memory? That is the question that the famed psychologist Alfred Adler would ask every patient he counseled at their very first counseling session. Adler would listen as they shared their earliest memory and his response would be the same with every client every time. After they shared their earliest memory, Alfred Adler would say, 'And so life is.' Adler believed that our earliest memories leave a unique and powerful imprint on the soul that create a baseline in our lives. For better or for worse, those early memories become emotional and mental default settings, if you will.

So let me share three of my earliest memories. I was five years old. I was at my grandparents' home in Minnesota. I always had a blast at their house. They only had one rule and the rule was this. My grandfather was a professor of the University of Minnesota and one of his prized possessions was a fossil collection. So the rule was do not play with Grandpa's fossils. Those fossils were the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! You can call me Adam because I remember picking it up with my five year old hands and I remember the fossil falling out of my hands and I remember it cracking on the ground and as it did, my heart cracked in two. My grandfather walked into the room and he assessed the situation. He didn't scold me. He didn't spank me. What he did I will remember for the rest of my life. He picked me up and held me close and gave me a bear hug. It was my first taste of grace. It was the first time I experienced an incarnation of grace. I was scared. I knew what I did was wrong but in that moment, that is my first definition of grace.

We have a core value as a church, love people when they least expect it and least deserve it. It traces back to that one incident. And so life is.

Let me go back a little further. When I was four years old, a neighbor friend rode his bike over to my house and made a little pronouncement. I had a habit of borrowing his bike whenever I wanted to and so evidently he got tired of it and he came down and told me I couldn't ride his bike any longer because his dad took off the training wheels. And then he biked back to his house five doors down. Well I marched down to his house and I got on his bike and I rode his bike back to my house without training wheels. And I kicked the kickstand down in our driveway. Because I want to tell you something, if you want to get me to do something, tell me it can't be done. I need a challenge. I have needed a challenge since I was four years old. And so life is.

But neither of those are my earliest memory. My earliest memory would be this. I was three years old and I woke up in the middle of the night and I couldn't breathe. And that sensation for a three old, scary experience. I walked into my parents' room and woke them up and my Dad picked me up and carried me out to the car and drove me to the hospital where I got a shot of epinephrine and as that adrenaline began to flood my bloodstream, my lungs began to open back up and I could breathe again. We went back home and I went back to sleep. That routine was repeated night after night after night, week after week until finally we went and saw the doctor and the doctor diagnosed me with asthma and gave me an inhaler. And that inhaler became my best friend for the next 40 years. Every single day, I would take a puff of that inhaler multiple times. I never went anywhere without it. I was an athlete. I played basketball in high school and college. Everywhere I played, there would be an inhaler in my sock. I would exercise with it. I would sleep with it right next to my bedside. Hardly any nights that I wouldn't wake up and have to take a puff. I would swim with it. You name it. I never go anywhere without my inhaler. Never. That is my earliest memory. And so life is.

So let me ask you a question. What is your earliest memory? I want you to hold that thought and I want you to turn to Deuteronomy 1:6. Let's stand as I read God's Word. I think this is a good ending note for the Mountains Move series.

⁶ "The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. ⁷ Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites.

You have stayed at this mountain long enough. Turn to your neighbor and say enough is enough. Enough is enough.

If you are taking notes, jot this down. I think it is a framing thought. It is hard to imagine what you cannot remember. It is hard to imagine what you cannot remember. Let me explain what I mean. If you grew up without a father, or if you grew up with an abusive father, it is very hard for you to imagine a loving heavenly father because you don't have a memory of a moment with an earthly father to give you a benchmark, a baseline in your life. Because you don't have a memory, it is a little bit harder to imagine.

I had a dad who had to take me to the hospital night after night after night and he would do it patiently and lovingly and willingly and I hadn't really thought about it before this weekend but I think that memory of my dad taking me to the hospital helps me imagine a heavenly Father who is an ever-present help in time of need.

It is hard to imagine what you cannot remember. What does that have to do with Deuteronomy 1:6? Everything. What was the earliest memory of the Israelites? Their earliest memory, their only memory was slavery. This is all they had known their entire lives. It was all they had known for 10 generations. It was their baseline. It was their default setting. And so life is. It was hard for them to imagine freedom. What is that? It was hard for them to imagine a promised land, a destiny beyond slavery. It was hard for them to imagine victory. When you have a 400 year losing streak, it tends to create a defeatist mentality. Slavery was their status quo. Their memory was their mountain. And I think that's true for many of us. Painful memories. Shameful memory. A memory of a mistake made. And the enemy starts playing games with us. God has forgiven it

and God doesn't just forgive, God forgets. But the enemy reminds us over and over and over. So my earliest memory is an asthma attack. It is all I can remember so it is very hard for me to imagine anything else. But something happened seven weeks ago. I've been waiting to tell you. We kicked off this series with a challenge. The challenge was this. What is the bravest prayer you can pray? Instead of me re-hashing it, let me go back and show you two minutes from that message and I will come back and show you what happened.

[video clip]

So what is the hardest thing that you can believe God for during this series? What is the bravest prayer that you could pray over the next seven weeks? All I know is that Joshua asked the sun to stand still and then Elijah asked an iron axe head to float. Oh and then Jesus asked his Father to raise a man who had been dead for four days. You can ask God to move that mountain.

Let me be very transparent. Alright Pastor Mark, what is it for you? What is your mighty mountain? I've had asthma since I was three years old. I've been hospitalized more weeks than you can imagine. I've taken more puffs of inhalers than anyone could possibly count. It is frustrating. I have prayed every prayer and I've tried everything but I want you to know that I'm going to keep speaking to that mountain because I believe in a God who is able to heal. In the meantime, I'm able to tell you that I wouldn't be who I am or where I am without that thorn in the flesh. God has used it and redeemed it in my life. There are certain things about my personality or about my character that I don't think I could have learned any other way. So it is crazy, in one regard I am grateful. And I know that someday I'm going to go jogging on streets of gold and I will not grow weary and it won't be my lungs that hold me back from what it is I'm trying to do. So two weeks ago at our prayer night, I issued that challenge. What is the bravest prayer that you could pray? So I asked some people to pray for me that the Lord would touch my lungs and heal my asthma. I want you to know that in the last couple of weeks, I've had to take my inhaler. You need to know that. But I also want you to know that I went four days without taking my inhaler. It has been years and years that I went four days. Then I hiked Cadillac Mountain without a single puff of my inhaler. So I'm not going to wait for 100 percent healing. I'm going to celebrate the improvement. I'm going to celebrate when I discern that God is moving. I'm not going to despise the day of small beginnings. I'm going to celebrate the little thing and I'm going to believe God for complete healing because I know that He is able. That may seem unreasonable to some people. So be it. [end video clip]

And this is where a sermon becomes a testimony. Something happened that weekend that was unique. After I had preached that message at a few different campuses, one person came up to me and said it was their first time at NCC and they said the night before, they had had a dream and in that dream they were praying for someone who couldn't breathe and in their dream, it was crazy, but they were laying hands on that person and praying in tongues and they said they just came to this church this morning and it may not be a coincidence. What would you think about me praying for you? I thought, well I've never tried that before, let's give it a go! So we did what that person had dreamed. And then someone else came up to me and said that God had given them a picture and that in that picture, there was a snake wrapped around my neck. I almost hesitate sharing that because that sounds strange and scary but I can't think of a better description of what I felt like my entire life. Something has constricted my breathing my entire

life. They just issued a challenge and said you need to take an axe to the root of whatever it is. So long story short, I think as I preached that weekend, I think I actually believed what I preached. And I think I came to a point where I said enough is enough, I've stayed at this mountain long enough. Here's the thing, you don't get to tell God when and where and how the miracle happens, but there are moments when you can step out in faith and believe God. I don't know why, so many times it seems like that prayer for healing has gone unanswered but a switch flipped 50 days ago. I want you to know I haven't taken my inhaler between then and now. That is 50 days!

If you add up all the days over 40 years that I haven't taken a puff of my inhaler, it wouldn't add up to 50. I want to be very careful this weekend because I don't have the emotional capacity or the verbal ability to put into words because it is so unbelievable and so unexplainable to me. But that's what a miracle is.

So I want to try to carefully share this testimony and I want to share a biblical thought at the end and just believe that somehow God will get us where He wants us to go.

Oswald Chambers said let God be as original with others as He was with you. When I read the gospels, I don't see miracles happening the same way every time. They happen in different ways and crazy ways and I think the reason is because God knew that we would try to reduce it down to a formula. It is not a formula that results in healing and it is certainly now any combination of words formulated into the right prayer that becomes some kind of abracadabra. It is about our heart and about being in a posture of humility. It is about consecrating ourselves to God. It is not about telling God how to do, what to do and when to do what He does. It is just about letting God do something in your life. But I think there is a moment where enough is enough. So I share that because I want to be very careful in the way that I share this testimony.

A couple of weeks ago, I took a trip up to New York City with our campus pastors for a conference and I didn't take an inhaler with me. You have to understand, I've never in 40 plus years gone anywhere without my inhaler ever. Anywhere. Ever. I have one everywhere. It was scary but I felt like it was a step of faith that I needed to take. This is where I want to be careful. I believe that medicine is a miracle. I'm so grateful for doctors. My life has been saved so many times from emergency surgery for ruptured intestines to a code blue in the hospital when I was 13 to all those times when I have an asthma attack and I wouldn't have survived without an inhaler or a shot of epinephrine. So I'm not suggesting that you go off your med! Do you hear me? But I felt like God said you've stayed at this mountain long enough, it is time to step out in faith. So here's what I did. I think you have to pray like it depends on God and work like it depends on you. So when God healed my asthma, I didn't immediately start smoking! I just think that would be at odds with God's game plan for my lungs! So what I did was I set up an appointment with my doctor. Jesus said go and show yourself to the priest. So I went and saw my doctor and I asked him if we could do a pulmonary function test. I got my results on day 23 and I just want to be absolutely as transparent as I can be. I was a little discouraged when I got those results because it said a low level of bronchial spasm, or in other words, an underlying tendency towards asthma. At first I was discouraged for a couple minutes and then I thought to myself, wait, that is not asthma! That is just an underlying tendency toward asthma! Are you kidding me! That is a long way from where I was. It also was only 2.2 percentage points away from no

tendency! It said no restrictive lung disease based on lung volumes and the diffusion capacity within my lungs is within a normal range. So I said to the doctor, can we schedule another pulmonary function test in three months? And I can't wait!

I think that only God can deliver you from certain things, but deliverance has to be coupled with due diligence. Deliverance has to be coupled with disciplines. God can do a miracle in your life. Like in the gospels where the man cleans out the house. But then if you don't put it in order, the way you break a bad habit is you establish a good habit. You have to replace something in your life. So I felt like, let's go to work on this thing. So I started reading books on breathing and I realized that I had breathed the wrong way my entire life. There is a wrong way to breath! How many of you know you ought to be breathing through your nose? And how many of you don't know that? I didn't know that. By the way, Genesis 2:7 is no coincidence, that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. I won't get into nitrate oxide or the over breathing part of breathing through your mouth but I realized I had been doing this wrong my entire life. So I've been doing breathing exercises. If you pass me on the street as I am walking to the office, you might see me gasping for breath because I'm doing breathing exercises everywhere I go. I'm seeing how many paces I can hold my breath. I do breathing exercises in the morning and all day. I see how long I can hold my breath. Then you and me are going to have a contest! I started researching different diets and supplements because what I realized is that because this memory was so old, it had become an assumption in my life. And I felt like there was nothing I could do about it. I began to realize that honestly, I don't really watch what I eat like I could or should. I think much of what I eat causes some chronic inflammation which is part of the undercurrent of what causes asthma. So I decided to do some diet stuff and some supplement stuff. No supplement can compensate for bad diet, ok. But creation is pretty amazing and there are some things with some amazing properties, some of which I don't think you should take, or smoke! But some of them have amazing healing properties and some of them anti-inflammatories.

So here's what I decided. I'm going to do anything and everything that is legal and biblical because I'm not tolerating anymore. I'm not going to submit to it and if I go down, I'm going to go down swinging. I'm not going to take it sitting down. Again, this came out of that message because I believed what I preached.

What are you tolerating that is robbing God of his glory? What are you tolerating that is short-changing the price that Jesus paid on the cross? What are you tolerating that is less than God's good, perfect pleasing will? What are you tolerating that is acceptable but it is not beneficial and you know it? We have to stop tolerating those things.

Then the last thing I did was go out and get a trainer. I have found the better cardio vascular shape I am in, the happy my lungs are. So I'm going to pray like it depends on God. I believe God healed me. God delivered me. And I'm going to back it up with some discipline. I'm going to work like it depends on me.

So here we are. I went back and looked at my journal. I keep a gratitude journal and I number them. About every day, it really upped my total over the last fifty days! Every day, day six, no inhaler, day 12, no inhaler. To me it is 365 gratitudes a year.

You have stayed at this mountain long enough. And this is says, let's get back into the text here, you've stayed at this mountain long enough, then it is the next two words that are critical, break camp. It seems like a simple command but it is easier said than done and this is where I want to get in your business. Let me come at it from a different angle. How many of you have ever lost your salvation on your way to church? Let me see your hands? C'mon. How many of you have put your marriage in jeopardy and almost got divorced on the way to church? And then how many of you almost put your kids up for adoption on the way to church? I don't know what it is, it seems like the enemy's number one tactic is people going to church. He gets in our business. I have found that it is hard to get our family of five anywhere, anytime for anything. And I remember when we had babies! Good luck! You will never be on time for anything. When you go to the bathroom, there is a high chance they will be swimming in the toilet. It is ridiculous trying to get myself from here to there. It is harder with my wife and I. And with a family of five. Here's my point. Try millions of people camped at Mount Sinai and God says break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites. They had babies. They had flocks and herds and animals. They rode donkeys. There was no air conditioning. How was anybody in a decent mood? Oh and then there was the tabernacle. The Levites were responsible for moving the tabernacle. There were three clans, 8,580 tabernacle movers must to move the tabernacle. What I'm saying is, I bet they were saying can't we just stay here. Breaking camp is a big deal. But if you keep doing what you've always done, you are going to keep getting what you've always gotten. If you want God to do something new, you cannot stay camped out at that mountain. You can't keep tolerating it. You have to stop tolerating and start dominating. That is God's original commission to you.

Genesis 1:28

God blessed them and said be fruitful and multiply and increase in number and subdue the earth.

I like that word 'subdue.' The Greek word is kibosh. It's a Batman fight word. Bam! Wham! Kibosh! It is a submission move in martial arts. It means to conquer, to thoroughly conquer. You have to take dominion over your attitude. You have to quit complaining. You have to quit making excuses. Quit playing the victim. You've stayed at this mountain long enough!

You have to take dominion over your thoughts. Take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. It is not easy. Is there another option? No, not biblically. You have to take dominion over your body. Paul was not exactly an Olympic athlete. He was probably a 100 pound weakling. That's my guess. But I love his description in I Corinthians 9:27

I train my body like an athlete.

The King James says I bring it into subjection. Don't tolerate it. Take dominion over it. Some of you need to take dominion over your marriage. It starts with taking some action. I think a lot of people think that going to see a counselor is a sign of weakness, but no, it is a sign of strength. Very few people are strong enough and have enough courage to actually say I have an issue that I need help with. You have stayed at the mountain long enough. How is it working for you? If it is not working, then it may be time to break camp.

That is what I want to challenge you to do.

Let me close with this story. In 2007, JK Rowling was struggling to complete the last book in the Harry Potter series. She was feeling intense pressure and one day when she was in her home office, she said, 'I was finishing Deathly Hallows, there came a day when the window cleaner came, the kids were at home, the dogs were barking,' so she couldn't finish because she couldn't focus. So she checked into a hotel and she didn't check out until she finished the manuscript.

Georgetown professor wrote a great book, Deep Work, and he writes about this. He said Rowling's decision to check into a luxurious hotel suite is an example of a curiosity but effective strategy in the world of deep work. The grand gesture. The Bible is filled with grand gestures. I would say that building an arc was a grand gesture. Confronting Pharaoh, let my people go, a grand gesture. How about the priest stepping into the Jordan River before God parted it? What about the Israelites circling Jericho for seven days? How about Elisha burning his plowing equipment? What about Elisha lying on his left side for 390 days? What about the wise men following a star? Peter getting out of the boat in the middle of the sea? I would say that Jesus hanging on a Roman cross was a grand gesture. I think there comes a moment where enough is enough. We are going to break camp and advance into the hill country.

Let me be point blank, don't do something dumb! There is dumb faith. There is stuff you can do that is just dumb. Let's not do that! What I'm talking about is a prayerful approach. I'm talking about getting a word from God and when you get that word, you act on it. It is time to take that step. It is time to make a move.

We started this series talking about Zachariah speaking to the mountain. I wonder if that was what was going through Jesus' mind as we look at this last verse, Matthew 21:18

¹⁸ Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

Yes, He was talking to a tree! An amazing miracle, one of my favorites. He cursed a barren fig tree. Most of the miracles bring things back to life but this one does the exact opposite. One of my mantras is thou shalt curse barren fig trees. What I mean is, what is not producing fruit in your life? Where are you wasting time, talent and treasure? That is another sermon for another day but at some point, you have to curse the barren fig tree. You have to speak to that part of your life. This isn't the only instance. He spoke to wind and waves. Peace be still. And the storm went away. Remember Peter's mother-in-law, he rebuked a fever. Then He took it one step further in this passage.

²¹ Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Who speaks to inanimate objects? Maybe the One who created them? The One who has authority over them?

If you have only been here one or two or seven weeks, I'm more concerned that you don't take this message in the full context. If you have been around here, you know my heart and you know that I'm getting in your business this weekend. My faith is on fire and I have enough faith to believe that God can move the mountain in your life. I just don't want you to keep tolerating it. But I also want to be careful to say you can't just go around and rebuke this and rebuke that. Everybody can't go in Monday and rebuke their boss. That's not what we are talking about!

This is not mind over matter. It is not a Jedi mind trick. It is authority over reality. The authority of God over reality. It has to be in the will of God and for the glory of God. I can't tell you when or where or how but I do know this. God won't answer 100 percent of the prayers you don't pray. And the mountains you don't speak to are going to stay right there.

So there comes a moment, I think this is the moment I hit seven weeks ago, so ahead and talk to God about your mountain. But then at some point you have to fill the script and you have to start talking to your mountain about your God who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.

You have stayed at this mountain long enough. Break camp and advance into the destiny that God has for you.

Father, help this word take root and bear fruit in our hearts. Lord I know it is not my words, it is the Holy Spirit somewhere between my lips and people's hearts. I believe that some people, there has been a faith that has risen within them this weekend, that during this series they have believed. Maybe it is an early memory, something that is hard to imagine. But God I believe that You are able and I pray that You give us the courage to ask and to believe one more time for that miracle in our lives. Not for us but for your glory, that God your kingdom would come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God I pray would your kingdom come and invade the reality of our lives. Would we recognize by faith that reality is subject to your authority because You are the Creator. So we consecrate ourselves and offer ourselves and humble ourselves and say do it again God! In Jesus' name, Amen.

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