

Before and After

We've all seen before and after photos of people who have gone through a transition or just the normal aging process. Social media often baits us with "see what they look like now" photos of celebrities from years ago. Diet and fitness equipment advertisements do the same thing, showing what people looked like before and after their health-enhancement programs. People do change.

Biblical characters we regard as historic people of the faith had a not-so-glamorous "before" time in their life. It takes a conscious effort to realize the transformation that occurred in their lives. Before becoming a follower of Jesus they were much different. The Bible tells us about "a brash fisherman, a demon-possessed woman, a thieving tax collector*" and a persecutor of Jesus-followers. "Before they were heroes of the faith ...they were desperate sinners like us." Yet, God called them anyway. Consider this: God calls people in the "before" stage of their life to do some of His most important work. When Jesus chose Matthew to be one of his 12 disciples, Matthew was a despised tax collector.



Saul - BEFORE



Paul - AFTER

Matthew would later pen the first book of the New Testament. Peter was a lowly fisherman and later became the "rock" on which Jesus built his church. Saul persecuted Christians before Jesus confronted him on the Road to Damascus. Saul changed his name to Paul and became the disciple most active in starting new churches and author of 13 books of our Bible. At the time when God called each of them, they were in the "Before" stage of life, but God saw the potential in them. That potential would be fulfilled in the "After" stage. To make that happen God equipped them and walked alongside them to help them fulfill His Will. "Christ's love saw beyond their brokenness and transformed their lives.*"

It wasn't just people. The Bible tells us that God selected Israel to be His chosen nation. When He did that, Israel was in rebellion, not in a state of obedience. God said to Israel, *thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine" (Isaiah 43:1 NKJV).* God looks at how we will be, not at what we are right now and certainly not at the life we have lived in the past.

So, how about you? God sees the "Before" time of your life. What is important to Him is what you are going to do "After" deciding to serve Him. Forget about your feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. "Every follower of Jesus has a not-so-great "before." Just know that you will not be the same person as you once were. Mistakes made "before" strengthen you for the task ahead. "Fear not, you're not who you're going to be. ... God can redeem your choices and use them for good.*" Being a follower of Jesus allows God to work through you. He calls you by name, regardless of what your life was like before. You can make a difference in the world for Christ.

The Bible Says: *I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13).*

Prayer: Heavenly Father. We think we know our limitations, but there is no limit to what You can do through us. By allowing you to work through us we will become different people. We pray, with your help, that we can make a difference in the world for Christ. Amen.

**Points of emphasis and quotations in this devotion are based on a devotional book, The Chosen – 40 Days with Jesus. The devotional book accompanies the re-enactment of Jesus' life in a movie series entitled The Chosen, written and directed by Dallas Jenkins. Season 1 is available on DVD and YouTube. Season 2 is being filmed at this time.*