

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

A MATTER OF PURPOSE,
PASSION & PRIDE

STEVE GILLILAND

Advantage®

that exact moment being escorted by a gentleman who held the title of “celebrity services.”

For many years, my greatest enemy was myself. Every mistake, every miscalculation, every stumble I made, I replayed in my mind again and again. Every broken promise just added to the enemy I was fighting living in my head. My dismay began to paralyze my thinking. I was failing miserably as a husband, father, brother and son. The woman I had promised everything felt like I had provided nothing, so she was satisfied to end our marriage. By the time I was 39 years old, I had no money, no hope and no purpose. As my sons grew older, I continued to doubt my beliefs and believe my doubts. My credit cards were maxed out and I was living contrary to everything I once believed was right. As I sat in a two-bedroom apartment on Christmas Eve, 1997 while my sons celebrated Christmas with their mom at her parents’ house, tears began streaming down my face and all I could think about was that maybe someday my ex-wife could find a new husband and my sons would have a new father who wouldn’t let them down.

“Why me?” were the only two words I kept repeating as I selfishly prayed and asked God to give me some course, or at least a calmness about my state of affairs. I cried myself to sleep that evening only to suddenly wake up to a dream that seemed as real as my circumstances. A person in the dream reiterated the phrase “why not you?” repeatedly. For days I couldn’t stop thinking about the dream and the faceless person who was seemingly trying to bestow me advice. I endured the holidays and was back to my standard schedule. At the suggestion of a friend, I sought out a counselor to embark on a healing process that would prove to be a life-changing decision.

“Sit down,” Herb Hayes said softly. Drawing a chair around to face me, he said, “Look here, Steve. When I begin to offer advice, it will be truth and may not be delivered with tact. I will tell you what you need to hear, not what you may want to hear. If I am going to help you, then you must do the same. You must be truthful with me and with yourself.” Crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair he said, “You mentioned on the phone you had a dream that upset you. Why did it upset you?”

Because after praying that night and asking God “why me?”, the faceless person in the dream kept saying again and again, “Why not you?” It troubles me because, for most of my life, I have been a good person who did what was right and thought I was an upright husband and father. I know I wasn’t perfect, and I made a number of bad choices, but my present situation isn’t of my making. I didn’t choose to live in a two-bedroom apartment and be struggling financially. This wasn’t my choice! “Steve, we are all in situations of our own choosing. Our thinking produces a course to success or failure. Years ago, you selected your path. You chose to get married when you were eighteen after your freshman year at college. You chose to transfer after your sophomore year and you chose to begin a family prior to your graduation. You chose to purchase a new car when you were 21 years old and you chose how many credit cards you would apply for. You chose to eat steak instead of hamburger and fast food instead of vegetables. You chose your household expenses! Years ago you began making choices that placed you in your present situation. When you say it wasn’t your choice to live in a two-bedroom apartment and struggle financially, I must steadfastly disagree.”

I may have contributed to my current situation, but she ultimately made the decision that put me here. I didn’t want a divorce and even

begged her not to leave. Herb looked at me and said, “It is your fault! She initiated the divorce because of the choices you made. She isn’t without fault but you are here today because of your choices, not hers. Every unsuccessful person I know has never said it was their fault. You messed up and, by your own choosing, you are here. You are where you are because of your thinking. Your thinking dictates your decisions. Decisions are choices. The good news is that although you controlled your past and made bad choices, you now can control your future and make good decisions. Where you end up mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and financially will not be determined by anyone but you.”

“Why me?” is a question that people have been asking themselves since time began. Steve, you are in the center of a self-absorbed pity party that rationalizes where you are and authorizes you to escape taking responsibility for your situation. I don’t know who the man in your dream represents; however, I do know that he is right. You can spend the rest of your life blaming everything on everyone but yourself (why me), or you can take responsibility for your past and start a new chapter and embrace the challenges (why not me). Instead of reading the same page over and over, it is time for you to turn the page. It is time to start a new chapter in your life and not let history dictate the rest of your life.”

So, as you can see, Vinnie, my past choices have placed me where I am today. Herb didn’t just advise me to start a new chapter in my life; he suggested that I write a whole new book. The irony of his guidance is that I did just that. Metaphorically and literally I wrote a new book. Vinnie smiled slightly and reached for the conference program and, as he opened it, said thoughtfully, “Your presentation today is entitled Making a Difference. How exactly can a person make a difference?”