

ROAD TRIP: WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

#3 FAITH

Philippians 3:12-14 & John 14:1-6

One day, a few years ago, I told my wife Debbie that we were going on a road trip. "Where to?" she asked. "I have no idea", I responded. She laughed. "Mr. Organizes Everything. We've been married too long for me to fall for that. You have a plan. Where are we going?" The funny thing is. That day, I didn't have a plan. But I had just read the words of Hebrews 11:8 (Msg) that talked about the faith of Abraham, and I wanted to experience what he experienced. Do you know that verse? **"By an act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left he had no idea where he was going."**

But the more Debbie pressed me to tell her my non-existent plan, the more I realized that there are some big disadvantages in not having a plan. Isn't it true that when you've no idea where you are going, any direction will do? And when you have no idea where you are going, how will you ever know when you arrive at your destination? And when you have no idea where you are going, you're never going to know when you are lost?

In the first message in this series, "Where are you Headed?" I asked you to think about how you have prepared yourself for the journey of discipleship. Last week, I asked you to think about your direction. Are you moving forward, backwards or are you standing still? Today, I want us to think about the importance of faith. Listen to First Timothy 4:15-16 (NIV). **"Be diligent in these matters (of faith): give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."**

Look at the key words in those verses:

"Be diligent." That means, be thorough and attentive.

"Give yourselves wholly." That's talking about commitment.

Why are those necessary? **"So that everyone may see your progress."** The apostle Paul described what this progress looks like in Ephesians 3:13-15:

13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. 14

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."

Our goal as Christians should always be to become "***mature in the Lord.***" Mature implies fully developed, advanced, and complete. Now understand something, maturity in the Christian faith is not about how old you are! It's about how spiritually developed you are. It is quite possible for someone to have been a Christian for 50 years but to still be immature in terms of their spiritual development because they have never really taken it seriously. And it is quite possible for someone to be very spiritually mature after being a Christian for only a few years because they study Scripture every day, have developed a daily prayer life, and have found ways to serve God according to the gifts God has given them.

Think of the Christian life a long distance race. In a long distance race, the runners aren't all at the same place on the track, but they all begin in one place and they all know where the finishing line is. So listen to Paul in Philippians 3:12-14 (Msg), "***I'm not saying that I have it all together, that I have made it. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward – to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us.***"

Being a disciple of Jesus isn't about getting everything right, but it is about keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus and making progress. Listen to First Corinthians 9:26-27 (Msg), "***I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else about it and then missing out myself.***"

OK. Let me take all those Bible passages and turn them into questions that you can apply in your own personal life.

- Are you being "diligent" – thorough and attentive – in your walk with Christ?

- Have you given yourself “wholly” to being a disciple of Jesus, or are you holding something back?
- Are you watching your “life and doctrine” carefully?
- Can other people see your progress – your development, growth, and forward movement – as a Christian?
- Would you describe yourself as a mere infant in the faith, or as a mature believer in Jesus Christ?
- Are you really in the race, running hard for the finish line, or are you sitting in the stands because you have taken yourself out of the race by compromising with the world?

One of my favourite Christian authors is Max Lucado. In one of his books he tells a story about a journey he made to visit his grandparents when he was a seven year old.

“Mom and dad bought a ticket, gave me some spending money, put me on a Greyhound Bus, and told me not to talk to strangers or to get off the bus until I saw my grandma out of the window. They made it very clear to me that my destination was Ralls, Texas.

God has done the same for you. He has placed you on a journey. He has a destiny for your life. First Thessalonians 5:9 (Msg), “God did not set us up for angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ,”

According to the Bible, God’s destiny for your life is salvation. God has done exactly what my parents did. He has purchased your passage. He has equipped us for the journey. God loves you so much that he wants you to be with him forever.

The choice is up to you...

When my parents gave me the ticket and told me what bus to board, I believed them and did what they said. I trusted them. I knew they loved me and I knew they knew more than I did.... so I got on board.

Becoming a Christian is getting on board with Jesus.

There are many buses, each of them promising to take you to happiness. There are the buses of pleasure, power and passion. I saw a bus called party and got on board. It was full of people laughing and carousing....It was quite some time before I learned they had to be loud to cover up all the pain inside.

The word for getting on the wrong bus is sin. Sin is when we say, "I'll go my way instead of God's way." Right in the middle of the word sin is the letter "I". Sin is when we say, "I'll do what I want", no matter what God says"

So discipleship, as Lucado rightly points out, is not just about having faith, it is about having faith in the right thing, in the right Person. Hebrews 11:1 (NLT) describes faith this way, **"Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see."** Jesus described that reality for us in John 3:16 (Msg), *"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life."*

Now every one of us here today doesn't have the same faith story. And that's OK. People come to know Jesus in different ways, and through different circumstances, and at different times in their lives. The important thing is, that we simply understand the importance of our faith in Jesus, and that we stay focused on Him as the goal of our faith. The important thing is, that we understand that we are in a race and we haven't arrived at the finish line yet, so we need to be diligent, committed and passionate disciples of Jesus. The important thing is, that we understand making progress in the faith is expected of us, but that it is also part of our witness as Christian. Every day, we are to live out the meaning of our baptism. Every day, we are to show others that we are marked with the sign of the cross as followers of Jesus.

Now it's possible you've heard all this and thought to yourself. *"I'm on the wrong bus, and I need to get on Jesus bus."* Or you realize that somewhere on the race track you dropped out, or got lazy, and now you're just taking a leisurely stroll, or even going around in circles, without any destination in mind. Or that you're not giving the race of faith the attention and effort it needs. OK. Take a deep breath and remember this. Today is the first day of the rest of your life and every journey, even those journey's we have begun, and not finished, all begin with a first step. So keep the faith. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. He is the goal and the prize. Thanks be to God.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God of every journey:

By faith, Abraham left his home for the land you promised him.

By faith, the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea even although the waters raged around them.

By faith, James and John left their fishing nets to follow Jesus.

By faith, Christians down through many centuries have faced persecution and death rather than deny their Saviour.

By faith, we gather to worship and to serve you, with our eyes always fixed on Jesus.

God, may our faith gives us eyes to see the reality of what we hope for.

May our faith, give us the courage to run the race and not to count the cost.

And may our faith, always be in motion until we reach the fullness of Christ, our Lord.

Be with those today who have no faith, or little faith, or faith in the wrong things or people. Nudge them by your Spirit on to that path which is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Be with those who are questioning their faith, or struggling with it, or going through a dark night of the soul. Let them find renewed faith and an abiding sense, O God, of your presence.

Be with those whose faith is being tested by an illness, a family situation, by the stress life places upon us, by the death of a loved one, or by feelings of loneliness or worthlessness. Healer of our every ill, bless and uphold each person, and hold them tight in the arms of Jesus until they know your peace.

We continue to remember our fellow Presbyterians who are members of our Cariboo Ministry in Northern British Columbia, and who continue to minister as best they can to those whose lives have been affected by the devastating forest fires. Bless them, and all those impacted by those fires, and grant your protection to the firefighters.

All these things we pray in Jesus Name. Amen.