



40 Days of  
FAITH  
devotional journal

# A Message from Dave

Faith.

The word conjures up lots of different images in our minds. Maybe the image of Indiana Jones stepping out across a wide chasm and landing on an invisible bridge comes to mind. Maybe the image of a missionary going to a far-off land with only the shirt on his back and a Bible comes to mind. Maybe the image of a person being baptized or a little child holding her mother's hand crossing the street or a TV evangelist asking for money comes to mind.

Whatever image comes to mind when you hear the word "faith," you can't escape that in order to be a Christian, you have to have it. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

The Christian life is one of partnership with God. He supplies the grace, and we supply the faith. He saves us from our sins by His death and resurrection (grace), and we take hold of that, believe, and follow Him wherever He may lead us (faith). Christianity makes no sense without both grace and faith.

The next 40 days will be an in-depth study of faith. You will study the people of the Bible who led lives of faith. You will be challenged to increase your faith. You will see the adventure that God has laid out for all people who call Him Lord and Savior.

I am looking forward to taking on this challenge with you. My prayer is that God will do two things: 1) that He will build you up and grow you in your own faith, and 2) that as the people of this church are grow and increase their faith, this church will be built up in faith.

May God bless you as you take on this challenge.

Dave



# Week 1

## Faith When You Have a Past

Sermon Notes:



# Day 1

I Have a Past

## Exodus 2:11-15

One of the greatest leaders in the Bible is a man named Moses. Moses was responsible for leading God's chosen people, the Israelites, out of slavery and establishing them for the first time as an independent nation. Moses talked face to face with God Himself and will go down as one of the greatest heroes in biblical history.

However, Moses didn't have such a great start to life. He was born into slavery and almost lost his life as an infant by the decree of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:22). He was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and grew up in the Egyptian royal family. As you see in the passage, he was forced to flee the land of Egypt when he killed a man and went to live as a nomadic shepherd in a faraway land named Midian.

Many times, our past faults and failures cause us to run and hide. Fear is the exact opposite of faith—one or the other will determine your future course. Many of us right now are letting the fact that we have a “past” dictate the extent to which we are willing to step out in faith. The line of thinking goes like this: “I am known as a \_\_\_\_\_. God could never use me.” This actually runs contrary to what most of the Bible says. God has rarely ever chosen to do His best work through extremely talented or gifted people. He typically uses people like Moses to accomplish His will on this earth.

Faith never looks backwards. It always, always focuses forward. If you want to develop the faith that God wants you to have, you need to look forward as well.

- Read Philippians 3:13-14.

# Day 2

## Exodus 3:1-11

I get daily updates from an organization called “Voice of the Martyrs” which tracks the global persecution of Christians. On the day I am writing this, the prayer request of the day was to pray for the church in Indonesia, where systematic governmental shutdown of churches has failed to stop the growth of Christianity there. As I was praying, I began to wonder at the courage of the Indonesian Christians, going against governmental forces to share their faith with their Muslim neighbors, gaining converts at an astounding rate.

I wondered if any Indonesian Christians had “burning bush” experiences like Moses did in this passage. I wondered if any of them had asked the question that Moses asked in verse 11—“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Right now, I can hear similar questions being asked. “Who am I, that you would call me to risk life and limb to share Jesus with my neighbors?” “Who am I, that you would call me to go to a foreign country as a missionary?” “Who am I, that you would call me to sell my possessions and give them to the poor?” “Who AM I, God?”

Faith begins with a clear understanding of who you are. Moses didn't know the answer. Most of us don't either, and that is why our personal faith stagnates and dies. This is so very prevalent in those of us who have a “past.” We answer the question, “Who am I?” with our failures. For those of you that answer this way, God has a clear message for you—You are NOT your failures. If every Christian was to understand him or herself to be a soldier on a huge battlefield, taking orders from our beloved Commander-in-Chief, we might have different results in our lives. If every Christian understood himself or herself to be a uniquely gifted person that is part of the amazing story of God, our churches and our families might look very different. Unfortunately, most of us never look at ourselves that way.

Faith can only move forward when we have a clear, Biblical understanding of who we are—and more importantly—WHOSE we are.

- Spend a quiet moment and ask God the same question Moses asked: God, who AM I?

# Day 3

Who Are You?

Exodus 3:13-15

When my oldest daughter was about two years old, she enjoyed climbing up two or three stairs, turning around, and jumping to me. She would jump. I would catch her, and she would laugh, saying, "Let's do it again!" We would do this over and over again.

One day, a friend of mine was over, and as my daughter got ready to jump, he said, "Jump to me!" My daughter hesitated, shook her head, and pointed to me, indicating she would only jump to me. Now, my friend was as big as me, as strong as me. He had kids of his own and was fully capable of catching her as she jumped, but that wasn't good enough for my daughter. In order for her to take that risk, she had to know the one who would catch her. Not just know ABOUT him—she had to know him.

I believe one of the reasons why many Christians have so little faith is that we simply do not know God enough to trust Him. When God approached Moses with this amazing calling, Moses answered with "Who are You? I have no idea who You are. Why would I answer the calling of someone I don't know?"

God knows this about Moses, and He knows this about us. He has cleared the pathway for us to know Him deeper and more intimately than we ever dreamed. To know God is to have more faith in Him. One of the reasons that your faith is not growing could be the fact that you simply don't know this God you purport in which to believe. Faith will only increase when we are intimate with God. Through careful and persistent prayer, disciplined study of the Bible, worship, fellowship with other believers, and regular cleansing of sins through a reliance of the cross of Christ, we can develop trust in Him. Faith cannot grow without trust in God.

- Read Romans 8:28. Do you think you would see a tremendous growth in your faith if you actually believe this and practice it?
- Why do you think it is difficult for you to trust God?

# Day 4

## They Won't Believe Me

Exodus 4:1-9

In this passage, we see Moses listening to the voices of the past. God Himself is speaking to Him in a burning bush, calling Him to greatness, and Moses is wringing his hands trying to find a way out. He never says it, but the fact that he is a wanted murderer in the land of Egypt is weighing on his mind greatly here. He is afraid of what will happen to him if he goes back.

So, he does what all of us do—deflects his fear into reasons why he won't be successful. He tells God, in verse 1, that they simply won't believe him—"God did not appear to you." Notice how gently God deals with Moses. He gives several demonstrations of His power in the next 9 verses.

This is an essential part of faith—that we understand that we serve a God of power. The God that did these miraculous feats is the same God we serve today. When Moses told God that the people wouldn't believe him, God gave him demonstrations of His power. He does the same for us.

Where have you seen the power of God? I have personally experienced the power of God in my life—He has changed me drastically since I became a follower of His. He has probably changed you as well. Who would you be without Christ? Who would you be without the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit who is within you? Who would you be without the amazing cleansing and forgiveness of sins that God offers us? If you have experienced God's power in worship, in nature, in life, anywhere—these are things God has given you to answer your doubts and fears.

Understanding the power of God is essential to having faith. The great heroes of the Bible and the untold millions of Christians whose lives have made a difference for the Kingdom all believed in the absolute power of God. Without this belief, faith can't exist. We have to decide that God is more powerful than our past.

- Have you ever thought about God being a God of power? Why or why not?
- Is God powerful enough to overcome the voices in your head reminding you of past failures and telling you to be afraid?

# Day 5

I Am Inadequate

Exodus 4:10-12

One of the things that makes faith difficult is that it runs contrary to the lessons we learn all our lives. Life has taught us to walk the safe road, to go down the roads most travelled, to see what worked in the past and do it again, etc. In this passage, Moses enlightens God (as most of us do in these situations) on his inability to speak well.

Now, Moses has a good point. In order to be able to lead millions of people, you have to be able to speak well. He has to make a good impression on the people, and no one is going to follow a stuttering, mumbling imbecile.

Here, though, we have to ask the question: what is Moses putting his faith in? God redirects Moses' objection by pointing to the fact that it is He, not Moses, who created speech and who gave people their mouths. He reminds Moses that it is He, not Moses, issuing the calling and that He will provide everything needed to accomplish the task.

One of the scary things about faith is that it destroys the very things that we have always trusted in previously. When God calls us to faith, we still immediately look at what God wants us to do in light of our own abilities and talents. Consequently, most of us will only achieve human-sized results because of our human-oriented trust.

Faith takes our eyes off our own natural abilities and causes us to focus on God's supernatural abilities.

- Do the Christians you know demonstrate a great deal of faith? Why or why not?
- Do you think that God has a calling for everyone, and not just isolated cases like Moses?



# Day 6

Please Send  
Someone Else!

Exodus 4:13-17

This entire week we have been looking at Moses and his struggle with his calling to faith. We have seen an entire slew of excuses, reasons, fears and doubts all boiling down to the fact that he believed, because of his past failures, he was inadequate for the job. This time, he just simply begs God to send someone else.

This is the first time we see God getting angry. Why? What was so different about this? The 2nd century Christian theologian Irenaus said, "The glory of God is a man fully alive." Moses was destined for greatness. He was destined to be a Biblical hero, leading people from slavery to freedom. He was created in the image of God to fulfill this huge part in the story of God . . . and here he was tending sheep. Fully alive? Nope. Not when a calling is being ignored. God's eternal purposes were at stake, and they rested on one man's fears and doubts.

Now, in the church, we say things like, "God's will is done with or without me. God doesn't need me to accomplish His stuff in the world. If I don't do it, God will call someone else." I honestly don't believe this is true. In the church, we don't like to think that God's eternal purposes depend on us and our willingness to walk in faith. We simply assume that if we don't rise to the calling, God will find someone else better and more willing. I used to believe this. Now I don't.

I truly think that there are thousands of things in God's eternal will for this world that don't happen because we don't act. There are unreached people in this world, not because God didn't call someone to bring them the gospel, but because that person refused. There are starving people in the world, not because we lack the resources to care for them, but because people didn't give. There are untold plans for you and your life, uniquely suited to you, that will not be accomplished if you pull the Moses card. This is why I believe God was angry when Moses said " Please send someone else."

We don't like to think this way because it makes us uncomfortable. Well, not much IS comfortable when it comes to faith. Moses found that out first-hand.

- Is there anything about your faith that makes you uncomfortable?
- What part of God's plan for the world is not being done because, like Moses, you are waiting for God to send someone else?
- How is your past keeping you from fulfilling God's perfect plan for you?

# Week 2

Faith in the Face of a Huge Cost

Sermon Notes:



# Day 8

Acts 9:1-12

The Bible is full of stories of ordinary people and their encounters with God. I fully believe the story of Ananias and Saul was a pivotal moment in the life of the Church. When this story happens, the Church is a tiny movement, facing persecution from all sides. The believers were in hiding from the chief persecutor, a man named Saul. He was on his way to the city of Damascus, in modern day Syria, to arrest and kill Christians when he had this amazing encounter with Jesus.

Saul eventually accepted Christ and became a missionary, spending the rest of his life planting churches, preaching the Word and building the Kingdom. He faced angry mobs, beatings, imprisonment, death threats, shipwrecks, starvation and sleeplessness. Bible scholars have labelled him, “The most thoroughly converted man—EVER.” He would eventually write a series of letters to different cities and people that would become the majority of the New Testament in our Bible today.

However, all of that might not have happened. After Saul was knocked to the ground and blinded on the road to Damascus, he was taken to the home of a man named Judas where he spent time in prayer. He didn't know his future—he had never preached the gospel, never planted a church, never written a book of the Bible. All of that hinged on a unknown man named Ananias.

When God approached Ananias, He knew there was a great deal at stake. Who would commission the greatest missionary and teacher in the history of the world, second only to Jesus Himself? If Ananias failed, all the plans God had for the expansion of the Church and countless billions of future Christians would be ruined. When God called Ananias to go to Saul, the future of His Church was on the line.

- Do you think Ananias knew the extent of what he was being called to do?
- Do Christians today ever truly know the extent of what they are called to do?

# Day 9

Acts 9:13-16

Don't you love it when people try to explain things to God? Maybe try to help Him see things He might have missed? Give Him some information He perhaps didn't already have?

Right before tremendous acts of faith, there is always doubt. There is always a question—do you really want me to do this? This makes no sense. There is a huge cost involved. I don't want to do it! Moses begged God to send someone else. Gideon laid out the fleece to see if this was really what God wanted him to do. Now, Ananias tries to explain to God the danger in what He was telling Ananias to do.

How did Ananias expect God to respond? "Well, Ananias, I didn't know all of that. Hmm, this guy DOES sound dangerous. We might want to re-think this one."

How many times do we, as people, try to help God "see the light?" How many times have we told God why we CAN'T do what He has called us to do? How many of us, like Ananias, have tried to educate God in what was really going on?

The truth is that nothing surprises God. God knew very well what kind of man Saul was—in fact, that was exactly why God called Saul to be His number one missionary. God knew very well what Saul had done to believers, and He knew very well that in order for His church to move forward, it would take someone with Saul's zeal, work ethic and faith to do it. However, He also knew that in order for Saul to be effective, he would need the support of the Church. He would need other believers to accept him and mentor him and believe in him.

God knew that Saul needed Ananias. Saul needed someone from the church to accept him. He needed the fellowship of other believers. He also needed his sight back, and Ananias was the chosen man to bring all that about. God's perspective is usually quite different from ours. It was certainly different from Ananias's, who only saw in Saul a vicious persecutor of the Church.

- How does having God's perspective change our willingness to obey?
- What, currently, are you trying to educate God on? What plans does He have for you that you are trying to persuade Him out of?

# Day 10

Acts 9:17-19

In 1934, an evangelist named Mordecai Ham held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was used to preaching to large crowds, and was very discouraged when only a handful of people showed up. He questioned whether or not to even go through with the meeting. However, against his staff's wishes, he stood up to preach the gospel. After the sermon, he was even more discouraged when the only person to come forward to accept Christ was a gangly 16-year-old kid.

Was the revival a failure? Most, at the time, thought it was. A small crowd. One convert. All the work and planning and preaching for that? I'm sure Mordecai Ham was discouraged.

What Mordecai Ham didn't know was that this 16-year-old kid's name was Billy Graham. Billy Graham would go on to preach the gospel to more people than any other human being in the history of the world. He would personally counsel 12 presidents, bring more than 2.5 million people to Christ, and gain worldwide respect for his sincerity, humility and tireless toil for the gospel.

Ananias was in a similar situation—risk my life to go visit one person? However, against all common sense, he went over to the house Saul was staying in. He addresses Saul as “brother Saul.” He prays for him, and Saul receives his sight. Saul got up, ate and was baptized.

Ananias probably went home and didn't think about it again. We never hear of him mentioned in the Bible again. Little did he know the impact that moment had on this world—the preaching of the gospel to a non-Jewish audience, the foundation for missionary work, the New Testament, etc. I wonder how many seemingly unimportant moments we have let slip by because we didn't realize the magnitude of what God was calling us to do. I wonder how many “Mordecai Ham” moments we have missed because we couldn't see through God's eyes.

One thing I know—God can and will do more than we could ever ask or imagine. Look to the example of Ananias and go and do likewise.

- If Ananias had not gone to Saul, what do you think would have happened to Saul? If Mordecai Ham hadn't preached that night, would Billy Graham still have done what he has done?

# Day 11

## Facing the Cost

2 Corinthians 11:23-29

After converting to Christianity, Saul (who later became Paul) set off to make Christ known among the people of the world. However, everywhere he went he was met with opposition. Many times, this opposition was violent. In this passage, you see what he went through to bring people to Christ—beatings, stonings, lashings, shipwrecks, etc.

What would make someone pay such an enormous cost? Why would he go to such lengths and endure such hardship? What would motivate someone to face beating after beating, imprisonment after imprisonment, ridicule and possible death?

There is only one thing: truth. Paul faced the cost of knowing and preaching the truth, and he decided that the truth of Jesus Christ was more important than comfort and ease. He saw the need in the world and saw the answer was only found in Jesus.

What about us? Have the needs in the world changed? No. Here are some sobering statistics about the world we live in today:

1. More than half of the world, approximately 3 billion people, live on less than \$2 per day.
2. Approximately 2.2 billion people claim Christianity as their religion, but in a world of 6.9 billion people, that leaves 4.7 billion people who do not know Jesus.
3. 6 countries (China, India, United States, Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan) contain half the world's population. Only 2 of those countries (U.S. and Brazil) claim Christianity as the religion of the majority.
4. 171,000 Christians worldwide are martyred for their faith each year.
5. Less than 1 percent of Christian missionaries minister to Muslims, that's 1 missionary for every 1 million Muslims worldwide.
6. 11 million children die each year from preventable diseases, mostly caused by poor sanitation and unclean water.

Some will look at these stats and decide that the cost of doing anything is too great. Others, like Paul, will look at the world, count the cost, and dedicate their lives to bringing the truth and love of Jesus Christ to remedy that picture. What about you? Are you willing to step out in faith and take hold of the Great Commission, even in the face of a huge cost?

- Look up Matthew 28:18-20 and memorize it. How would your life change if you followed this command Jesus gave?

# Day 12

## God's Encouragement

Acts 18:1-17

Paul's life was filled with hardship—everywhere he went people rioted and opposed him. However, he also brought people to Christ. He experienced the joy of watching God change people's lives. He watched as churches sprung up and began ministering to people, teaching them about forgiveness and the love of Jesus.

This passage shows a time in Paul's life when he is in the city of Corinth (the books 1 and 2 Corinthians are written to these Christians). He was facing particularly tough opposition to his ministry, and I imagine that he was feeling discouraged.

When we decide to have faith in the face of a huge cost, God doesn't leave us. Some of the most wonderful words any Christian could hear are spoken by God to Paul in verses 9-10, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

We never face the cost of faith alone. When we step out in faith, God's presence and comfort become exponentially more intense. People who continue in faith under extreme opposition or danger report literally feeling the hand of God touching them. They hear the voice of God clearly. They are inspired and encouraged like never before.

God knows how difficult it is to do His will, to continue in the face of opposition, to step out of the comfort zone and accomplish His will. His encouraging voice and peace-giving presence will be with you.

- Memorize Acts 18:9-10. Write down one time when you have felt the encouragement of God in a difficult situation.

# Day 13

## Finishing the Race

Acts 20:24

What is easier—to start a race or to finish a race? To get married or to stay married? To start a job or to finish a job? Most of us would say that starting is much easier than finishing. All around us are people who have started something—a job, school, a task, a home improvement project—and faltered along the way. Maybe the passion ran out. Maybe the resources ran out. Maybe they got in way over their heads and couldn't handle it. Whatever the reason, many people start things they don't finish.

The same is true with faith. There are many people that commit their lives to Jesus, and then several years later find themselves right back where they were: not a part of the church, not leading a life that's any different than a non-believer, no real sign of that commitment anywhere. Unfortunately, not everyone who starts with faith finishes with faith.

Paul was different. In the face of a huge cost, Paul continued. He persevered and died proclaiming the same faith he had accepted so many years ago. This statement in Acts 20:24 sums up his entire life.

How about you? Are you going to finish strong? Or are you going to be like countless other people in America claiming to, at one point, "accepted Christ"—but living as though you hadn't?

Paul shows us the key to finishing the race in the face of the a huge cost—a singular focus. He had one aim—to complete the task Jesus gave him. He wasn't too concerned with having a nice house or a nice boat. He wasn't too concerned with having a nice smile, nice hair or the latest clothes. He wasn't too concerned with being popular, cool, liked, accepted or knowing the latest celebrity gossip. He concerned himself with one thing and did it with excellence—the task of testifying to the grace of Jesus.

If we are to finish strong—if we are to finish the journey of faith that we have started—we are going to have to have that kind of focus. Focus eliminates less important things until only one thing is seen. My prayer is that the Church will simply be filled with people who are focused enough to finish strong, following the example of Paul and so many others who have run the race with courage and brought honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

- Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (thought to be Paul's last words before he was executed in Rome for his faith). Are you going to finish strong? At the end of your life, will you be able to say what Paul said here?
- Memorize 2 Timothy 4:7-8.



# Week 3

Faith in the Face of Rejection

Sermon Notes:



# Day 15

## Rejection from Friends

Acts 9:19-25

When I became a Christian I lost every friend I had.

Well, I take that back. They still talked to me in the halls at school, but everything changed. Conversation became surface-level. The phone stopped ringing. When I asked the question, “What are you guys doing this weekend?” I received a vague, “I don’t know,” only to find out about parties and outings that I wasn’t included in. For a senior in high school, this was pretty difficult.

In this passage of scripture, we see the apostle Paul going through the same thing. He was a Pharisee—a high-ranking member of the Jewish community before his conversion to Christianity. He had friends in high places and enjoyed the backing of the Jewish leaders. I guess you could say he was part of the “in” crowd.

All of that changed when He met Jesus. He experienced something much more intense than most American converts to Christianity experience today. American Christians experience what I went through—losing friends, missing out on activities; maybe even being called a name or two. First-century converts to Christianity from Judaism experienced all that and more. Paul’s former friends not only rejected him—they set out to kill him.

I wonder what it was like for Paul to go through this. Was following Jesus worth the rejection of friends? His very best friends—the people he ate with, the people he hung out with, the people that he laughed with and shared jokes with—not only hated him now, but wanted to kill him. I think every Christian asks this question at some point—is following Jesus worth losing my friends?

- How would you answer this question?
- Read Philippians 3:7-8. These words of Paul show how he was able to deal with this rejection from friends. What does this passage say to you?

# Day 16

## Rejection from Both Sides

Acts 9:26

Have you ever felt totally alone? Not just lonely. Totally alone.

So many times we hear, "Accept Jesus and life will be great. Your stocks will improve, your health will be better, you will become better-looking overnight, etc." For most of us, however, that simply isn't the case. It certainly wasn't for the apostle Paul. This point in his life was a mixture of extreme highs and extreme lows. It was a very high point in his life because he had met Jesus and dedicated his life to Him.

That is a definite high point in life. It certainly was in mine. However, I believe that at this point in his life he was the loneliest he had ever been. He was in the middle between two groups of people that didn't want anything to do with him.

On the one side were his old Jewish friends that wanted to kill him. On the other side were the Christians, which you read about in this verse, who were afraid of him and didn't believe his story of conversion. Paul had no friends anywhere.

He goes to the church in Jerusalem where he expects to be welcomed. They shut the door in his face, as you would have done if a person who had arrested and killed your fellow believers came to your door. I'm sure that Paul was re-thinking his decision to follow Christ at this point.

I believe this happens to every believer soon after conversion (or dedication to doing God's will). There comes a point when you re-think your decision, almost like buyer's remorse. You say to yourself, "I'm not sure this was the best decision. I've had nothing but trouble since I decided to follow Christ."

It is at this point, in your life and in Paul's life, that faith kicks in. You don't need faith when things are going smoothly and you are firing on all cylinders. You don't need faith when you have food in the fridge, money in the bank, friends all around, and your life's theme is Hakuna Matata (it means "no worries"). You need faith when friends leave you. You need faith when you look around and life falls apart. You need faith when the path is unclear and you are experiencing discomfort and outright persecution for what you believe.

- Is your faith strong enough to get you past the sting of rejection?
- Have you ever had a moment when you had to re-think your decision to follow Christ? What happened? (Write about it here)

# Day 17

## The Importance of the Body of Christ

Acts 9:27

So many times I hear of people leaving churches. Sometimes it is because of a conflict with someone (usually over something unbelievably stupid and trivial that has nothing to do with any sort of belief), but more often I hear the words, “I just didn’t get anything out of going there.”

Did you ever think you were part of a church for a different reason? Maybe the purpose of being a part of the body of Christ has absolutely nothing to do with what you get out of being there. It is very possible that your purpose for being in the church has everything to do with someone else being there.

Paul is at a critical stage in his life. This future missionary and writer of more than half of the New Testament is in desperate need of Christian fellowship. I don’t know for sure, but I would guess that had Paul not been accepted by other Christians, he would have walked away from his faith at some point.

In this verse we are introduced to a Christian named Barnabus. His very name means “Son of Encouragement.” I wonder what kind of day Barnabus was having. I wonder if he was tempted to sleep in on that Sunday. Maybe the worship service was boring and he wasn’t getting much out of it—after all, there was a chariot race that morning and he had front-row tickets. However, Barnabus drags himself out of bed and goes to meet with the other believers that Sunday morning.

He learns of Paul and his conversion. He learns of his attempt to meet with the believers and his subsequent rejection. So, instead of waiting around, he takes Paul by the hand and leads him into the church, bringing him in front of the leaders and telling the church his story. I doubt Barnabus got much out of church that morning. He probably didn’t hear “5 Steps to a Healthy Marriage” or see any funny videos. He wasn’t there to get something out of it. He was there to encourage someone else—a bold convert named Paul.

In the same way, you might be part of the church because someone else needs you. Someone else might need to see you worshiping God and follow your example. Someone else might be going through a difficult time and need your encouragement. Someone else might need what you can teach them from the Bible. Someone else might need to see your example of courage in stepping out in missions and evangelism. You never know. All I know is that in this verse we see the beauty of the body of Christ. We see the church at its best. We see the importance of being a part of the church, and it really has nothing to do with us. Amazing.

- Why do you go to church? Are those good reasons?

# Day 18

## When Friends Reject You for Your Own Good

Acts 9:28-30

We live in a society that prizes individualism. We prize individualism so much that we don't like anyone telling us what to do. Accountability is a four-letter word to a lot of us. Our society has been able to twist our thinking to the point that any type of admonishment or correction is seen as judgment.

One of the best things friends can do for us is to sit us down and straighten us out when we are doing something that is wrong. Many times we don't see the fault in our lives, but others do. When someone cares enough about us to call us out, we feel judged and many times walk away from that person.

We see this happening in the life of Paul. He had been accepted into the church in Jerusalem, but something was wrong. He was hacking off everyone he talked to. His zeal, coupled with his immaturity in the faith, was turning the city of Jerusalem against him and the other believers. Just like before in Damascus, a group of Jews were so annoyed by him that they set out to kill him.

So, the church steps in and says, "Paul, we love you, but we are asking you to leave. We are buying you a one-way ticket back to your hometown of Tarsus where you won't cause any more trouble."

How would you take this? Would you have the faith, like Paul did, to see this as a big part of your spiritual growth? Or would you get angry, call them judgmental, and go find some new friends? Would you go immediately to facebook and twitter and call your new church a bunch of hypocrites?

Unfortunately, I rarely see the first response. I see the second response much more often. It takes faith to press on when someone calls you out on something wrong in your life. It takes maturity and wisdom to see it as love, because honestly, it hurts. It doesn't feel good. That's when faith kicks in—the faith to believe that God wants something better for you than what you are currently doing, and that other Christians might actually be speaking the truth. We need that kind of faith in the church today.

Paul spent three years in Tarsus, studying the Scriptures and forming the first Christian theological beliefs. The writings in his letters, most of our New Testament, came from his study during these years. Had he not listened to the other Christians and rejected their accountability, we probably would not have the guidance and direction his letters provide for us.

- Has someone ever called you out for something you were doing that was wrong? How did you react?
- Do you surround yourself with people that will love you enough to call you out on things?

# Day 19

## When Following Christ Causes Rejection

2 Timothy 1:6-15

The second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy (hence named 2 Timothy—the guys that put the Bible together are a pretty sharp bunch) is thought to be the last time Paul wrote anything before his execution in Rome. The first four days of this week, we studied the beginning of Paul's ministry. Today we are looking at the end of Paul's ministry.

Paul's faith cost him everything. It cost him status in the Jewish community. It cost him friends. It cost him comfort. It cost him time. It even cost him his life. Believe me, the apostle Paul understood rejection and suffering. This letter was written by him from a Roman jail, where he was about to face the death penalty for his preaching of the gospel.

My question today is simple—do you have enough faith to face rejection? The reason God gave us the story of Paul isn't so that we can have something to read for pleasure. God gave us the story of the apostle Paul, the example of his life, because he is our example to FOLLOW.

I wonder how many Christians would continue to call themselves Christians if they had to live Paul's life.

If we intend to follow Paul's example in faith, we have to know what he knew. Verse 12 is one of most powerful verses I have ever read—it was even made into an old hymn. "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."

He didn't say, "I know WHAT I have believed." Many people ask the question, "What do you believe?" Paul didn't say WHAT he believed. He said, "I know WHOM I have believed."

If we are going to have enough faith to withstand rejection, we are going to have to know WHO, not WHAT, we believe. Paul was able to have faith in the face of rejection because he knew Jesus. He was in constant communication through prayer with Him, and Jesus directed his very footsteps. He had entrusted his entire life to Jesus, and as a result, could face anything and everything, because he knew whom he had believed.

- Memorize verse 12.

# Day 20

## The Reward of Facing Rejection

Matthew 5:10-12

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."—Jim Elliot, missionary killed in Ecuador in the 1950s.

The passage of Scripture you just read is taken from Jesus's sermon on the mount—the most famous sermon in the history of the world. Jesus begins this sermon with a list of things that bring blessings, and He finishes this list with these two statements.

One of the things I struggle with is the concept of "great rewards in heaven." I really have no idea what that means. I do, however, know what rewards THIS world gives.

One part of me goes by the "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" philosophy, saying, "I can have certain rewards here on this earth, while the rewards in heaven are uncertain." The other part of me says that this world is so temporary, and life so fleeting, that to desire anything of this world is foolish. Heaven is eternal, and the rewards there last forever, while the rewards of this world simply fade away.

It takes faith to believe that the rewards of following Jesus are greater than the rewards of staying lukewarm. It takes faith to choose a relationship with Jesus over relationships with friends here. It takes faith to give what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose. Like TobyMac says, "Faith ain't easy to understand/when a bird in the bush beats two in the hand."

I wonder how many of the people reading this devotional book today will receive the rewards Jesus is talking about here. I wonder how many of us have been persecuted because of righteousness or had awful, untrue things said about us because of our faith in Jesus. To the people that have had this happen to them, rejoice and be glad. They treated Jesus the same way. They treated all of the great people of the Bible this way. You will be no different. However, your reward in heaven will be greater than anything you could possibly imagine.

- What is the one largest thing that stuck out to you this week?
- How has this week challenged you?

# Week 4

When the Odds are Against You

Sermon Notes:





# Day 22

## Doubting God's Love and Caring

Judges 6:1-14

This week we move on to another amazing story of faith that can inspire and motivate us. The situation in Israel at the time of Gideon was pretty bad. Many generations had passed from the high point of Joshua's faithfulness and the victory at Jericho, and the Israelites had strayed away from God and were worshiping the gods of the nations around them. They were being oppressed by the nation of Midian so badly that they built the equivalent of nuclear bomb shelters (like the U.S. in the 1960s) in the mountain caves to retreat to in times of war.

Gideon was visited by an angel who states that God is with him. You can tell Gideon is not convinced. The first words out of his mouth basically say that if God was around, He didn't care about him or his countrymen. He even states in verse 14, "But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

One of the key steps to faith is knowing that God is with you. Many times as believers we feel abandoned by God. We have difficulty at work, difficulty in marriage, difficulty in family relationships, bad financial times, etc, and it seems like God simply doesn't care. You pray and get no response. You do what is right and all it does is worsen your situation. You look around and the people getting ahead in life are the ones cheating, lying, and stabbing others in the back. It is easy in those situations to believe as Gideon did—"The Lord has abandoned us."

As we see in this story, many times that feeling is strongest just before God does something amazing. When you are in those situations, instead of despairing, begin looking for the supernatural intervention and power of God.

- Read Psalm 73. What is the difference in the man's view before verse 17 compared with after verse 17?
- What happens in verse 17 to change his perspective?

# Day 23

I Don't Have  
the Resources

Judges 6:15-16

Do you ever notice that God doesn't particularly care about a person's confidence in his or her own ability? Do you ever notice that God rarely, if ever, picks the most talented, best-looking or most successful person to do great things for Him?

We serve a God who picks the youngest over the oldest (Jacob over Esau), the one over the 99 (Luke 15), the boy over the seasoned warrior (David and Goliath), and the cross over the throne. He chooses the least likely, the smallest, and the most insignificant in story after story. Like we said before, God doesn't want His work to be explained away by human talent or ability. When He shows His power, He wants His actions to be seen for what they truly are—supernatural.

So, just like in the case of Moses, we see God approaching someone of low stature and standing. In verse 16, God says something truly amazing. I don't know if you caught it or not, so read it again. It says, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

God prefers to work through partnerships. God put the words into the mouth of Moses, but Moses was the one speaking. God destroyed the walls at Jericho, but it was Joshua who walked around them. God will destroy the Midianites, but it will be Gideon who does it. Yes, it is God's power that accomplishes the feat, but without the human part, nothing would happen. There are two extremes in these circumstances; neither is good. One extreme would be to say, "It's all up to me." The other extreme would be, "It's all up to God." The first extreme leads to worry, control issues, and human-sized results. The second extreme leads to laziness and cowardice. Neither is good. God chooses people to work through, and the people He usually chooses to work through are the ones that rarely have the resources to accomplish in their own ability.

- Which of the two extremes do you tend towards? Why do you think that is?

# Day 24

## The Importance of Worship in Faith

Judges 6:17-26

What is your response when God calls you to something huge? Maybe God has called you to step out in faith and start a ministry to hurting people around you. Maybe God has called you to share your faith with a friend or family member. Maybe God has called you to step out in faith and forgive someone who doesn't deserve it. What is the first thing you do?

I wonder if the first thing that comes to mind is worship. We see the heart of Gideon in this passage here. God has called him to the monumental task of throwing off the oppressive Midianites and destroying them. Interestingly enough, he doesn't begin recruiting an army or lay battle plans. He worships.

In those days, worship was done by sacrifice. Gideon went out and offered the sacrifice as outlined in the law of Moses. He recognized that in order for him to accomplish the task set before him, he would need to be in close fellowship with God. In the same way, worship is an essential part of stepping out in faith. Gideon's actions showed that placing God first in his heart was step number one to accomplishing the will of God.

Then, something interesting happens. In verse 25, after Gideon sets his heart to worship God, God shows him something he had never noticed or had an issue with before. He tells Gideon to cut down the Asherah pole of his father's (Asherah poles were large carvings of the female sex organ that people worshiped, thinking it would give them a good harvest or fertility) and destroy the altar to the pagan god Baal. Worshiping God brings to light the other things in our lives that get our affection and attention. In other words, worship is a fantastic way to reveal who or what you are worshiping instead of God.

So, to the true Christian, the first two acts of war are worship and destruction of idolatry. Only then can we truly step out in faith.

- In what ways do you worship God? Is this a regular part of your day?

# Day 25

## The Situation Worsens

Judges 6:27-32

Many times when we launch off to do what God calls us to do, we encounter opposition. I can remember all the opposition we got when we wanted to start this church. Discouragement, insults, mockery—all from the last place I would have suspected. It came from other Christians.

In the same way, Gideon encountered opposition before he even went off to war. The people of the town sentenced him to death for destroying the altar to Baal and cutting down the Asherah pole. It truly amazes me that the nation that had seen the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the walls of Jericho, and many other works of God would not only be worshipping Baal and Asherah, but threatening to KILL anyone who destroyed their idols.

Whenever you courageously step out in faith, you will always face discouragement from people that are worshipping a different god than you. If you want to devote your life to being a missionary in a foreign culture, don't be surprised when people who worship the gods of comfort and complacency call you crazy. If you set your mind to take a stand on a social issue such as human trafficking or poverty, don't be surprised when people who worship the god of the status quo challenge you. If you answer the call of God to make honest decisions in dealing with clients or business associates, don't be surprised when people who worship the god of money call you to the carpet. People of faith have always faced threats and discouragement from people who worship something other than you do.

Part of having a radical faith is being able to fight through the threats and discouragement and continue following the call of God.

- What great thing has God placed on your heart to do in life? What opposition are you facing?

# Day 26

## Testing God

Judges 6:36-40

One of the myths about Christianity is that faith is blind. No questioning, no checking to make sure it is the right thing—just do. In this passage, this mighty warrior of God does something that we don't see very often. He wants to make sure that he is hearing God correctly, because what he is about to do is life or death. He asks God for a sign.

When God answers, Gideon doesn't charge ahead. Instead, he asks for another sign.

Many people think that asking God for a sign shows a lack of faith. It appears, however, that asking God for a sign, or two, is a precursor to faith in this instance. Gideon wasn't asking God to guarantee the outcome; he was asking God to confirm the steps to that outcome. How does God respond? No shaking His head, no anger, no condemnation for Gideon's "lack of faith"—He simply confirms by doing what Gideon asked.

Have you ever asked God for a sign? Have you ever tested God in that way? People that have committed themselves to living out a radical faith in this world often ask God for confirmation in what they are about to do. The reason is simple—whenever you commit to living by faith, there is a great deal of risk. If God was simply asking Gideon to preach a message to people who already believed, it wouldn't be that big a deal. However, Gideon was faced with war and death, and if he was to commit himself to the Lord's will, it was going to be a big risk. He could potentially lose everything, including his life. Therefore, he had to know that he was hearing God correctly.

When the odds are against you, God will provide confirmations of His path for you . . . when you ask for them as Gideon did.

- Have you ever thought that asking God for a sign shows a lack of faith?
- Have you ever asked God for a sign? What happened?

# Day 27

## The Lord Triumphs

### Judges 7

I have studied quite a bit of military history, and I can tell you one thing for sure: no general has ever complained that his army had too many soldiers. I can't think of one general who has said, "Well, the other army has about 10,000 men in it, so I'll need to decrease my army to about 300 in order to win."

However, this is exactly what God tells Gideon to do. He tells Gideon to whittle down his army time and time again until there are only 300 men left, facing an army that in verse 12 was described as "like the sand on the seashore." I'm sure this made Gideon more than a little bit nervous, but once again, God gives him more confirmation by sending him to the camp to hear what the soldiers were saying.

Whenever God puts you in a situation where the odds are against you, He continues to call you to have faith. God didn't look at the size of the army and say, "Oh, wow, Gideon, I didn't realize there would be this many. You can go home now." He also didn't say, "Well, Gideon, I brought you here, now fight, and I'll see you and all 300 of your men at the Pearly Gates shortly." God brought Gideon to the valley of battle with all the resources he would need for victory: himself, 300 soldiers, and God.

Many times it seems that the odds are against us as Christians. We see culture going in a way that runs contrary to our beliefs. We want to do something great for the body of Christ but see nothing but persecution and hardship in our way. The lesson of faith is that only the "going" is up to us. The results are up to God.

God has not called us to be successful; He has called us to to be faithful. Our job is to go, and His job is to succeed. I would imagine we would see a lot more of God's success if we had a lot more Christians being faithful to going when and where He directs us to go.

- What is the major lesson you learned this week? How does the story of Gideon relate to your life?

# Week 5

When the Path Doesn't  
Make Sense

Sermon Notes:



# Day 29

## A God-Given Objective

Joshua 6:1-2

Many of us are familiar with the story of Joshua and the city of Jericho—the Israelites were commanded to walk around the city, and the walls came tumbling down. So often we read the stories of faithful heroes in the Bible, but we simply fail to learn the lessons they teach us. In this story, God gives Joshua a specific order, a specific destination, a specific task. He is to lead the people of God into the land He promised them centuries ago.

One thing stands in their way—the people that live there. The major fortress was a city called Jericho, which was a walled city thought to be impregnable. Unless Jericho was conquered the Israelites would never be able to occupy and live in the promised land.

In Joshua 6:1-2, what does God tell Joshua? “I have already delivered Jericho into your hands.” Past tense. Delivered. Hmm. Really? Joshua probably looked at the city, the wall, the fighting men, and thought just the opposite. “God, maybe you’re GOING to deliver the city into my hands, but from the looks of things, it looks like THEY control it.”

Here we begin to see things from God’s perspective. He tells Joshua the battle is already won. He tells Joshua the guaranteed outcome before the battle. The same is true with us. Jesus has already defeated all the sin in your life. The outcome is guaranteed. This is the first step to having faith when the path doesn’t make sense—realizing God has already guaranteed the outcome. We only see the battle in front of us—God sees the big picture, and that’s why He calls us to have faith.

All of this sounds great. If this was all there was to it, I believe many, MANY people would have a strong faith. Step one? God guarantees the outcome. Step two, however, is a little bit more tricky. Joshua found this out firsthand.

- What battles are you fighting right now?



# Day 30

## Strange Orders

Joshua 6:3-5

Step two of the challenge laid before Joshua didn't make any sense. God tells him to go for a stroll around the city. Now, Joshua was a military man who had been a soldier all his life. He knew how to take a city; he knew how to fight a battle. None of those things involved walking around a city and making music with rams horns. Nonetheless, this is what God told him to do, as you read in the passage.

Why would God issue such strange orders? The reason is very simple. If the objective was accomplished by human means, it would have a human-sized result. Not only that, but if the objective was accomplished by human means, people would learn to trust in human means, not in God. God wanted the city of Jericho to be taken in such a manner that no one could explain away God's involvement, God's direction and God's direct intervention.

How about you? If you are like most people, you trust in human means more than God's means, and for good reason. All your life, you have seen people accomplishing human-sized results by using human means. That's all you know.

Could it be that God wants something bigger and greater through you than you ever dreamed? It's possible. However, the great, grand vision God has for your life will most likely take you down roads that don't make sense; roads that no logical thinking individual would ever take.

The question is: are you going to do God's will God's way? So many of us know God's will for our lives—what He wants us to be, how He wants us to live, the values He wants for us and our families—yet we try to accomplish them in ways other than how God tells us to do it. For example, maybe God wants you to have a great marriage with the person you are engaged to, but you decide to live together before marriage. Maybe God wants you to go to college, so you cheat to make your grades better. You were living God's will, but you didn't do it God's way.

In this story, we see that the two things—God's WILL and God's WAY—are inseparable. The hard truth is that God's will, when it's not done God's way, is classified as sin.

- What are some things in your life that while they may be God's will for you, are not being done God's way?

# Day 31

## God's Past Faithfulness

Joshua 3:14-17

One of the things I enjoy doing is looking back over my life and seeing the faithfulness of God through it all. I am not a wealthy man (by American standards, that is) and yet never once in my life have I ever not had food on the table, a roof over my head, etc. I look back at past prayers and see how God has answered them. These are faith-strengthening exercises. The more we see God's provision and power in our past, the more we will trust Him in the future.

The same is true for Joshua. Just before God gives Joshua this strange order to march around Jericho, He gave a demonstration of His awesome power, as you just read in Joshua 3:14-17. This is quite a bit like the miracle God performed through Moses a generation earlier when He parted the Red Sea. God knew that Joshua needed to know His power before He could follow His orders. So, when God gave Joshua his orders to march around the city, Joshua immediately remembered God's power in the past. That gave him faith for the future.

One of the tragedies in the modern church is our lack of reflection. We take virtually no time out of our day to sit and reflect in quiet prayer, remembering the past faithfulness of the Lord. In order for us to truly move forward in faith, we have to know God's power and provision in the past. Reflect on answered prayers in your life. Reflect on His provision in the tough times. Reflect on His faithfulness to other Christians in the Bible and in recent times. Doing this is like lifting weights at the gym—they build spiritual muscle to prepare you for the challenges ahead. The fact that we rarely remember the past faithfulness of God is a good reason why our faith hasn't grown any more than it has.

- How has God been faithful to you in the past? How has He shown you His power and provision?
- In the challenges that have been laid before you, how does His past provision give you courage to trust Him in these challenges?

# Day 32

## The Decision to Follow

Joshua 6:6-14

Sometimes in life, you come to moments when you have to decide. I remember going skydiving for the first time. There I was, standing by the open door of the plane, and the instructor said, "It's time! Go!" There is no such thing as "Skydiving 101." You either jump out of the plane or you stay in it. You are either "all in" or "all out," and once you jump, there is no going back.

Following God in faith is the exact same thing. You can't "halfway" follow God in faith. You can't be wishy-washy or second guess yourself. You have to decide to follow, and you have to jump.

Joshua found himself in this same predicament, having been given a tough objective to accomplish by means that didn't make sense. It would have been bad enough if he was the only one that had to follow these orders, but the fact that he had to lead the entire Israelite nation made it even worse. He knew he would face doubters, grumblers, faultfinders; people who didn't want to walk around the city, people who thought he didn't know what he was doing, etc.

However, we see in this passage that Joshua decided to act, and he saw it through to completion. He follow God's plan to the letter of the law. As Christians, we need to learn from his example. There is far too much indecision and "paralysis by analysis" going on in the lives of Christians today. How many of us will continue to lead our lives of quiet desperation simply because we cannot decide to do what God has called us to do? Sometimes, we just simply need to decide . . . and jump. No turning back, no second-guessing, no plan B—just go.

- What big decisions are you wrestling with that you will simply just have to decide one course of action and go?
- Do you think you would have done what Joshua did if you were in his shoes?

# Day 33

Mission  
Accomplished

Joshua 6:20-21

One of the key steps to faith is the belief that God rewards faithfulness. You simply have to believe that God's will can be accomplished through you, and when God accomplishes it through you, it is a tremendous blessing. The heroes of the faith that have gone on before you have done amazing things for His kingdom because of their faith in being a part of God's will for this world.

In this passage, we see the final results of Joshua's faithfulness to God's will done God's way. He followed the path that didn't make sense, and in turn, saw God's power at work. This marked a high point in the history of the nation of Israel. Although there were good periods of faithfulness to God, never again would the Israelites be so devoted to God as they were at this time in their history. Most of the rest of the history of the nation of Israel was marked by rampant idolatry, violence, sexual immorality, unbelief and other sins.

The city of Jericho, once a formidable obstacle, was now a heap of rubble. When we follow God's will God's way, He destroys the obstacles that seem so large and foreboding in our lives. Tasks that seem impossible are supernaturally accomplished. Broken relationships are supernaturally restored. The future, which at one time looked so cloudy and uncertain, now makes sense. Financial issues all of a sudden become manageable—when God's will is done God's way.

The American church is struggling to remain faithful to God. We have lost our sense of urgency in fulfilling the Great Commission Jesus gave us in Matthew 28. When a church no longer concerns itself with accomplishing the will of God in this world, it will quickly abandon doing things God's way, and in turn, will lose all of its supernatural ability to see God's will done through it. We will see fewer and fewer instances of God's provision and power in our lives—and then most of us will conclude that God is simply not there or doesn't care. But for those whose primary concern is following God in faith, even when the path doesn't make sense, will see the awesome power and might of our Lord God.

- Write down one instance of a time when God called you to step out in faith, even when it didn't make sense. What happened?

# Day 34

## The Danger of Falling

Joshua 6:18-19, 7:20-21

Whenever we experience any kind of spiritual victory, Satan will usually go right on the offensive and try to turn it to his advantage. I can remember vividly the large amount of pride that hits me when I accomplish something for God. This is a spiritual law that we need to know—we are most vulnerable to sin after a large step of faith.

This entire week we have been studying the triumph of Joshua's faith and leadership in the taking of Jericho. This monumental achievement for the nation of Israel, however, was not without blemish. Even in great spiritual undertakings and leaps of faith, our human sin nature is right there with us. We see this in the conduct of Achan. In Joshua 6:18-19, God gives specific instructions that everything is to be destroyed. Achan saw this—he saw the wondrous work of God, His amazing power, His ultimate provision (how many times is a battle fought with no loss of life?) and yet still disobeyed God's command.

How many times are we like Achan? We see God's power, His grace, His mercy—we are astounded by His word or what He does in our lives, and yet still disobey? Our default mode is not "God-centered." Our default mode is "self-centered." Without active work and daily dying to our own desires, we will lapse back into our self-centered behavior and push God's will aside, as Achan did.

Never forget that right in the middle of a tremendous move of God, we are still capable of sin. Achan was probably no different than many of us. The big question we need to ask Achan is, "Was it worth it? Were those few possessions and worldly things you stole worth the deaths of you and your family?" Now, here's the question we need to ask ourselves—"Is it worth it? Is what I am going after worth the penalty of sin?"

- What is one thing you learned this week in studying this story?

# Week 6

Faith Unto Death

Sermon Notes:



# Day 36

Philippians 1:21

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Paul's life most likely didn't end the way he had planned it as a little kid. There was no retirement, no moving to Florida, no checking in to the senior citizen's center and playing bridge and shuffleboard for him. The book of Philippians was written while Paul was in jail. He was nearing the end of his life—the end that would not come by natural means but by execution for his beliefs and ministry.

The statement that he makes here in Philippians 1:21 shows how this mighty warrior of the faith could hold onto his faith unto death. While he was here on this earth, his life was about Christ. Because his life was about Christ, his death would be the ultimate win. When he said, "To live is Christ" means that his entire focus, his entire way of thinking, his entire desire was to serve Christ.

Would you be faithful unto death? Would you stay true to your Christian faith if you knew it would cost you your life?

If you were writing this letter, how would you word this statement? "To live is \_\_\_\_\_ and to die is \_\_\_\_\_." Knowing myself, I would probably write something like, "To live is MY FAMILY and to die is REALLY AWFUL." If my ultimate desire in this world is my family, then death would be awful because I would be separated from them.

Some of you might say, "To live is MONEY and to die is NOT MY PLAN." Whatever fills the first blank will determine your attitude towards death. Only when we can say the same thing as Paul will we ever see dying as a good thing—the fulfillment of our life's desire. This is why Paul was able to stay faithful unto death—because the answer in the first blank was the Master Himself—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was what his life was about. He had completely and totally surrendered his life to Christ. Christ was his treasure. Christ was the center of everything he did. Therefore, in Paul's eyes, to die was gain.

- Fill in the blank: For me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_ and to die is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Memorize Philippians 1:21.

# Day 37

Matthew 26:35

God has given us a precious gift by giving us the Bible. He could have set it up in many different ways. He could have sent it in “rule form”—a bunch of do’s and don’ts we have to follow. He could have sent it in “advice form”—simply some suggestions He gives us to make our lives better. However, He chose to send the majority of it in story form. The Bible is mostly stories of men and women who walked with God. It is comprised of stories of failures, successes, questions, doubts, victories and faith.

God has given us the heroes of the faith in the Bible for one reason. We are to learn from their experiences with Him. We are to look to them as example and follow what they did. Their stories have made it into the Bible because they have taken amazing steps of faith and finished strong.

Peter, one of Jesus’s 12 disciples, was also executed for His faith in Christ. Church history tells us that he was sentenced to be crucified, and as they led him out to carry out the sentence, he requested that he be crucified upside-down because he deemed himself unworthy to die the same way Jesus died.

Peter wasn’t always so strong. In Matthew 26:35, Peter makes a bold statement. Just one day after making this statement, he denied ever knowing Jesus. Not only did he deny knowing Jesus, but he did it three times in a row.

The reason this is so important is that you might not feel like your faith is strong enough to carry through unto death. You might not feel that you would finish like Paul or Peter and hold firm to your faith in the face of death. That’s okay. Just because you feel that way right now doesn’t mean your faith won’t be that strong someday. The same Peter that denied Jesus when he was a young man died for his faith as a old man. The same Peter whose faith failed as he denied his Friend was the same Peter whose faith led him to the same cross Jesus went to.

You have no idea what kind of faith God wants to grow in you today. We don’t criticize infants for not walking or toddlers for not being able to drive a car. Neither does God criticize the faith of someone who someday will have the faith to finish strong. The story of Peter’s faith unto death gives encouragement to us all.

- What is harder to do—to live for Jesus or to die for Jesus? Why?



# Day 38

Acts 7:54-60

The priests and Pharisees listened as the young man scorched them with his words. “You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers didn’t persecute?” As he thundered on in front of them, they grew madder and madder.

Finally, the crowd could take it no longer. They rushed at him and grabbed him, dragging him out of the city. There they proceeded to throw rocks at him, intending to kill him. The only words the man spoke were his prayers for the people stoning him, asking God not to hold the sin of murder against them. Finally, after being struck repeatedly with rocks, he died.

This young man was named Stephen. He became the very first Christian to be killed for his faith.

How could a man pray for the mob as they hurled rocks at him to kill him? How could he have the love for his persecutors that such an act required? He didn’t pray for himself, he didn’t beg for his life; he didn’t see any need to curse the mob or tell them to stop. His last words were a simple prayer for forgiveness for the very ones trying to silence him.

Stephen died as he had lived—a faithful servant of God. In this, we see that it is possible to glorify God in the way we die. So many times we talk about glorifying God in our lives—have we ever thought about glorifying God in the way we die? Every one of us will die someday. We can choose to glorify God in the way we die.

Stephen died without fear. He died with total trust in the Lord. He held his faith unto death by using his death to proclaim the love and mercy and grace of God. He used his death to preach his final sermon—not using words of vengeance but words of grace and peace. This is a wonderful example of how a Christian can hold his or her faith unto death.

Your death will be your final sermon as well. What will you preach when you die? What actions will you undertake to show the world that you will die the way you lived—faithful unto the end? Will God be glorified in your final sermon as He was in Stephen’s?

- Reflect on the last paragraph and write any thought you may have about it below.

# Day 39

## Finishing Strong

Acts 20:22-24

I remember being in a hospital room with my friend Bob three weeks before he died. He had had open heart surgery and had lived two years longer than expected. But he knew the end was coming soon. He said, "I can just feel my body starting to shut down. It won't be long now."

"Are you scared?" I asked.

"The funny thing is . . . no," he said. "I've been thinking about this a lot. I've been a Christian my entire life. I feel like a marathon runner who is about to reach the finish line. Why would a marathon runner be scared of the finish line? Isn't that what he's been working for the entire 26.2 miles? It's the same with me. My life has been building up to this moment. You guys better throw a party at my funeral."

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you say to your loved ones?

Paul was in the city of Ephesus (the book of Ephesians was written to the church there) and was saying goodbye to his friends. He was heading to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be imprisoned and killed. This was the last time he would ever speak with them.

We see Paul's faith in the words he speaks to them. Ever the preacher, he takes his last moments with his friends to make a profound statement to them to encourage them to stay strong in the faith. He says, in verse 24, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

He could have kicked back and remembered the good times. He could have told some jokes or gone out for that last beer with his buddies. He could have done many different things. Instead, he told them that what he was about to face in Jerusalem wasn't a wrong turn. This was simply the culmination of a life spent serving God. Just like my friend Bob, Paul wasn't afraid of the finish line. His death was the finish line—the final victory, the completion of the task Jesus had given him.

Paul finished strong.

- Are you afraid of death? Do you think your attitude is the same as Paul's as shown in verse 24? Why or why not?

# Day 40

## Being an Overcomer: Eternal Destiny

Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21

The book of Revelation begins with seven letters written to seven churches. Each of these churches receive encouragement and instructions on how to follow God. It is interesting that there is one word that Jesus uses in each letter to each church. It is not the word “love” or “worship” or “repent” or any other church word you might think it would be. It is the word, “overcomes.”

Jesus says the words, “To him who overcomes” to each of the churches, and then lists the blessings that the person will experience. But why do the people in these churches—and you and I—need to overcome something? It sounds like Jesus is saying there will be obstacles, possibly large and dangerous obstacles, that will be in our path to keep us from finishing strong.

If you want to finish strong; if you want to have a faith that will endure even unto death, you are going to have to be an overcomer. An overcomer is someone who takes on challenges and defeats them, no matter what the cost. An overcomer sometimes has the deck stacked against them, would have every reason in the world to quit or to give in, and yet still prevails.

Jesus expects you to be an overcomer. He Himself was an overcomer—He had to overcome fear, rejection, the status quo, betrayal, physical pain, and ultimately, death to achieve His purpose. His earliest disciples were overcomers who had to fight temptation, rejection, hostility, and danger.

In your life, you will have to overcome many things. You may have to overcome a bad family background. You may have to overcome a pattern of sin that you have lived in for a long time. You may have to overcome the desire for comfort and ease. You may have to overcome sexual temptation, lust and pornography. You may have to overcome the pain of a divorce and the bitterness and anger it leaves behind. You may have to overcome an addiction or a habit of unforgiveness that has plagued you for years.

Whatever challenges you face, you are called to be an overcomer. God is bigger than any trial or temptation you face, and with His strength and power, you will be successful. It will take faith. It will take faith unto death.

- What things in your life are you going to have to overcome? What thing in your life is Jesus calling you to have victory over?

# Day 41

## Being an overcomer: Fighting Lukewarmness

Revelation 3:14-21

The last letter of Jesus to the churches was to the church at Laodicea. The Laodicean church represents the last period of church history—the period of history right before the return of Jesus. Scripture prophecies that the church in the end times will be neither hot nor cold. It will instead be “lukewarm.”

In his book “Crazy Love,” author Francis Chan outlines what he calls the “Profile of the Lukewarm.” Here are some of the things he lists:

1. Lukewarm people attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe “good Christians” do, so they go.
2. Lukewarm people are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. They assume such action is for “extreme” Christians, not average ones. Lukewarm people call “radical” what Jesus expected of all his followers.
3. Lukewarm people gauge their morality or “goodness” by comparing themselves to the secular world. They feel satisfied that while they aren’t as hard-core for Jesus as so-and-so, they are nowhere as horrible as the guy down the street.
4. Lukewarm people do whatever is necessary to keep themselves from feeling too guilty. They want to do the bare minimum, to be “good enough” without it requiring too much of them. They ask, “How far can I go before it’s considered a sin?” instead of “How can I keep myself pure as a temple of the Holy Spirit?”
5. Lukewarm people do not live by faith; their lives are structured so they never have to. They don’t have to trust God if something unexpected happens—they have their savings account. They don’t need God to help them—they have their retirement plan in place. They don’t genuinely seek out what life God would have them live—they have life figured and mapped out. They don’t depend on God on a daily basis—their refrigerators are full and, for the most part, they are in good health. The truth is, their lives wouldn’t look much different if they suddenly stopped believing in God.
6. Lukewarm people probably drink and swear less than average, but besides that, they really aren’t very different from your typical unbeliever. They equate their partially sanitized lives with holiness, but that couldn’t be more wrong.

As a believer in Christ, you will have to overcome. You will have to overcome the status quo of lukewarmness, which the Bible says WILL BE the hallmark of the church in the end times, for you to have the kind of faith that will endure. Be an overcomer.

- Which of the statements above describes you the closest?
- What was one thing that stood out to you in this final week?

# My Small Group

My Group Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

My Group Members:

Name:

Phone:

