

I. Intro

- A. "We don't go to church... we are the church" or "Following Jesus is more than sitting and listening to a sermon once a week."
 - 1. Maybe heard that a few times?
 - 2. We say it but do we believe it?

- B. Leader talking about what they've experienced during the last 6 months of their services not being in person... not judging... "There's been family issues, substance abuse issues, suicide concerns, it's affected our fellowship like it has the entire community, it's been devastating since the shutdown started."

- C. The connotation is that the only thing that keeps JF's different is going to a building once a week to hear someone talk about Jesus.
 - 1. But if what we say we believe is true... Jesus was God in a body who died and rose again to give us new life and now the Holy Spirit of God lives in us... wouldn't we expect a large group of JF's to react differently in difficult times?
 - 2. **If what Jesus Followers say is true is true there should be proof.**

- D. Seeing interesting thing going on in the last 6 months (social media)...
 - 1. Some Jf followers seem to be having a very difficult time... fear, anxiety, anger! Faith seems to be cracking.
 - 2. Others calm, peaceful, looking how to help... GROWING... stronger faith than ever!

- E. Faith- one of those things you either have or don't, right? Like curly hair or a cool boat.
 - 1. People just seem to have it... or not.
 - 2. Those that do it seems so personal... meaningful... life giving.
 - 3. "I wish I could be like that?" "I wish I could find the right church, or be zapped, to have that faith."

- F. Secret: Nothing different between them and anyone else... how did they get this way?
 - 1. They chose it. **Faith is a choice.** - Like sitting in a chair
 - 2. But they went further... they chose to **do** the things that would grow and strengthen their faith.
 - 3. They did the **work** to strengthen their faith... Just like a muscle...

- G. **Philippians 3:12-15** - *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you.*

1. Oh I've been a Xain for 20 years.. I've got this... Nope not even Paul.
2. **We can choose to grow and mature our faith.**

H. **This series...** 5 Things that we can allow God to use to grow/mature our faith... one each week.

1. Improve/focus/work on these and your life will be different... it changes everything.
2. Change how the world around you affects you and how you affect the world around you.

I. Not a JF?... It's hard to trust someone we don't know...

1. Available to everyone... It's a choice
2. Not asking you to make the choice to believe... asking you to explore what that would look like.
3. Give yourself the chance to make a clear, fully-informed, personal choice.
4. What you've been told, experienced might not actually be God

II. WE

A. 1st one -Not easy. Anything worth doing is not easy.

1. Practical actions we can do today that will strengthen and grow our faith.
2. Completely up to us... either we do it or we don't. Choose to work on it or not.

3. Discover... **The faith we possess is the direct result of the actions we choose to take**

B. **3 actions/choices** that are the hallmark of a vibrant, reliable, personal, mature faith that we can call our own... **Praying on our own. Reading scripture on our own. Giving away what we own.**

C. Want to change the channel? I understand the uncomfortability; I've felt it, too. Why? Explore that tension... that thing that makes you not want to do these things...

D. These three choices, made consistently, tune our hearts to God's and show us we can trust him.

1. Doesn't always happen over night... it's a process.

E. Developing a personal, mature faith is a process

III. GOD

A. Faith matures through dialogue

1. How do we learn to trust Parents/Spouses/close friends?

- a. Communicate our needs, listen to what they are saying, share thoughts and feelings.

2. That's why prayer is such an important part of growing our faith.

3. Prayer is not to get some magic genie in the sky to give us all the things we think we want.

4. It is our opportunity to share our thoughts, feelings with the God of the universe and allows us to listen and let him change our view of our circumstances.

5. **Philippians 4:6-7** *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

6. Doesn't say we will get whatever we want... but as we tell him what we are feeling/need and thank him for everything he has done... he changes our view... **the size of our problems shrink as our view of God grows.**

7. Prayer allows us to acknowledge there is a God who listens, cares, and does what is best for us.

B. Faith grows with understanding

1. Parents/Spouses- understand why they make the choices they do.
 - a. Kids ask "WHY?"
 - b. Liz and critiques
2. Best way to understand God? Discover his heart through the biblical writings.
3. The biblical writings reveal who God really is... not a list of rules... not life instruction book...
4. Writings that span 3 continents, 1500 years written by over 40 authors.
5. With a single consistent message and theme... revealing the heart of God
6. God loves us and cares for us.
7. Read how he came through for others.
8. Understand why things are the way they are and what he is doing to bring us into a perfect, freeing, empowering relationship with him.

C. Faith matures through experience

1. Parents- Jumping into the pool, "I won't drop you..." After the first jump you can't stop them.
2. Best practice that allows us to experience that God can be trusted... Making the jump of inviting him to be involved in our finances.
3. Choosing a percentage of your income to consistently give away creates an opportunity to see God work on a daily, personal, tangible level.
4. You can literally measure it by the numbers.
5. Don't believe me?
6. **Luke 6:38. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.**
7. Step of faith to give money... you might need later...
8. What I've discovered... I've never needed it later. B/c God keeps his promises.
9. Example: Church giving 10% even when "we might not have it for what we need"... always comes through... B/c of people trusting God and giving.
10. The people I know who have the most faith are also some of the most generous people you'll ever meet.
11. They have learned that **trusting God is much better than trusting money.**

D. Faith is trusting that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do.

1. It is through these personal choices that we learn who God says he is and what he says he will do... and are able to see him come through in tangible daily ways.

IV. YOU

- A. 3 things you can do right now that will grow and mature your faith. Pray, read the bible, give your money away.
 1. Simple- Either you do it or you don't
 2. Difficult- Nowhere to hide, no "yeah but's". Either you do it or you don't.
- B. It's up to you.
 1. Often JF's complain that they "aren't being fed" by a church or pastor.
 2. Or feel like their faith is falling apart b/c churches can't be open... **[TOO POINTED????]**
 3. Why is Xianity exploding in China and Middle East? Why did Xianity explode when Rome outlawed it?
 4. Mature, healthy adults don't expect to be fed by other people.
 - a. Imagine an adult sitting at a restaurant complaining that the waiter isn't feeding them their dinner.

- b. Or starving to death b/c the refrigerator isn't open.
- 5. Mature healthy adults feed themselves... and others
- 6. As we mature, we begin to learn to feed ourselves, even prepare our own meals, then learn how literally feed others as we have children.
- 7. . It starts with the choices we make.

C. 1 Week Plan

1. Pray every morning

- a. Not to change events or get Genie Jesus to do what we want... but to share your thoughts, feelings, and to listen.
- b. Turn off phone (5 min)
- c. Does not need to be formal or even out loud. (Jesus and loud prayers)
- d. "Thank you God for what you have given me.
- e. Here is what I'm concerned about today
- f. Please show me who you are
- g. Please show me how to love better today"
- h. Can be scary... what if he tells us something we don't like? Next week: Obedience creates trust.

2. Read every day

- a. Recommend easy to read translation... **NLT, NIV, NASB.**
- b. 3 chapters of John a day and you've read the whole thing... Mark is about 2 chapters.
- c. Read as a story... not a text book.
- d. As you read, ask yourself... What does it show you about God's heart?
- e. Need a bible... **write us and we will send you a free one.**
- f. Download Audio Bible- The Bible Experience.
- g. You Version App
- h. Biblegateway
- i. Dig in? Blue Letter Bible
- j. Don't have to believe it to read it

3. Give at the end of the week

- a. Choose to trust that Jesus knew what he was talking about.
- b. He will take care of the what if's
- c. Choose an organization that is doing good for the community
- d. Every Child, Marion-Polk Food Share, Trinity Baptist Church (in Lake Charles, LA & affected by Hurricane Laura), people in Oregon affected by wildfires, Crosscreek.
- e. Consider picking a percentage you give away every month. 1% is a percentage.
- f. Does this seem too hard to do alone? Get a friend to go in with you and check on each other's progress weekly or daily. Join a Connect Group for support and accountability.

V. WE

- A. A strong, reliable, mature faith doesn't just happen.
- B. It is grown and matured by our daily choices and actions.
- C. It's isn't dependent on someone else doing the work for us...
- D. Musicians, Athletes, Professionals, Relationships
- E. Make the choice a day at a time that your faith a year from now will be stronger, more mature than it is today.
- F. No matter what the next 12 months throw at us we will know we will be more like Jesus, more confident, and our relationships will be better for it.
- G. A mature faith nourishes your life and the lives of those around you.**