

## I. Intro

- A. Faith- not mysterious, illusive thing like the FORCE (Luke trying to use the force in the swamp)
- B. A choice... and a choice to grow it.
- C. We can do things to make it grow, and keep it strong and healthy
- D. Series- what if we chose to do the things that allowed God to grow our faith... especially in such a crazy, difficult time?

## II. WE

- A. One of the hardest parts of what we're going through is all the division
  - 1. Politics
  - 2. Racial/Cultural friction
  - 3. Opinions about the very real widespread illness the world is dealing with
    - a. Let me prove it to you right now- Some of you are upset b/c widespread illness is too light of a term and some of you are upset that I'm saying its real... on purpose... see what I mean?
  - 4. Makes you miss the days where the largest debate in our country was is this dress blue or gold?
- B. But one of the worst results of all of this division is something I think we've all experienced in one way or another... Isolation.
  - 1. **Division creates isolation.**
  - 2. Some of you have lost friends and had distance grow between family members over the division that's been thrown at us. At least physically we are more distant from friends/classmates/colleagues/extended family members right now.
  - 3. Often we don't know who we can trust with our opinions and thoughts.
    - a. Are we going to offend, get into an argument?
    - b. What if I say something wrong to the wrong person.
  - 4. Makes it feel like it's not safe to really be honest about who we are.
  - 5. Have to hide parts of ourselves.
  - 6. No one really knows you
  - 7. Leads to feeling isolated, Lonely.
  - 8. **Loneliness isn't about being alone. It's about not being known.**
- C. And if we are isolated/lonely long enough it starts affecting the quality of our lives.
  - 1. Creates anxiety, fear, feel lost, anger, and it can dramatically chip away at our faith.
  - 2. **Faith withers in isolation.**
  - 3. Am I hanging on to something real?
  - 4. How do I know this is right, how do I know this is going to work out, what if God doesn't come through?
- D. But, and especially now, what if we had someone(s) who said, "We might not 100% agree, but I'm still 100% FOR you." I still have your back.
  - 1. Hard times come... Someone who could say, "I've been through this too, I've felt that too, YOU'RE NOT ALONE. What can I do to help?"

- E. The people that I've seen grow their faith through this crazy time have chosen to take the steps to grow their faith with others.
  - 1. They've discovered an important aspect of faith... **Faith is not meant to be lived out alone.**
- F. As we have gone through the series the first three things God uses to grow our faith... have been things we can either choose to do or not for ourselves. We've had control over whether they happen or not. Simple.
  - 1. The next two (this episode and the next) we don't necessarily have control over but we can put ourselves in the right places and mindsets for God to make them happen.
  - 2. What we will see this time... **Faith grows in community.**
- G. Going to look at a biblical passage that I've seen a lot lately. Unfortunately this passage is often misunderstood, misused, and even abused.
  - 1. But if we look at what the writer is actually saying it gives us an insight into faith and how it grows that we often overlook.

### III. **GOD (Hebrews 10:23-25)**

- A. **V. 23** Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope [faith] we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.
- B. The hope/faith we are talking about...
  - 1. **Faith- Choosing to trust that Jesus is who he says he is**
    - a. Son of God, Savior,
  - 2. **And will do what he says he will do**
    - a. Take away our sin, make us perfectly right with God, will never leave us, give us new life now and forever, life after death.
- C. Writer says to hold tightly to this faith... Ok great thanks. Easy. Just try harder, don't stop believin' (Pic of Journey?)
  - 1. Doesn't seem very helpful
  - 2. "That's what we're trying to do"
  - 3. Know it's what we should do
  - 4. Want a faith that can withstand anything.
  - 5. Those of us who choose to have faith, JF's, KNOW God can be trusted, but it's not always easy to feel it in the middle of the chaos, when it seems we are completely on our own.
  - 6. And no matter how hard we try our faith starts to weaken and crack.
- D. In our minds we think this is what we have to do... just try to believe harder... but that's not what the writer is saying... let them finish.
- E. How do we hold tightly to our hope/faith?
- F. Next part is the part that's been misunderstood, misused, and in some cases abused... experienced it if you grew up in certain churches.

### **V. 24-25b** Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another

- G. How it's often been used... If we want to have true faith... we need to go to church every week (sometimes more).

1. And so people who say they are Xians that don't go to church regularly are really just fooling themselves.
2. People who accept jobs, do sports, etc. on Sundays are sinning.
3. Wasn't put on me from my family but always felt guilt when I'd miss church.
  - a. Also discovered cartoons I didn't know existed. Like a whole new world.
  - b. This is what the other side gets to experience.
4. Take this thinking further... the government saying churches need to be closed for now is asking us to disobey the clear words of God.
  - a. Any church that closes/is closed (can't close the Church) is not holding tightly to their faith... they've given in to fear.
5. But is that what the writer is really meaning?
  - a. Not really.
  - b. God doesn't want us to be committed to simply going to a religious service. He wants us to be committed to each other.**
  - c. The idea of church as we have it, three songs, guy in front teaching while everyone sits in quiet rows, one more song, then snacks... didn't exist when this was written.
  - d. Does that mean what we do now is bad? NO. Not at all.
  - e. Just b/c it's not how the original Jf's did it doesn't mean it's wrong.
  - f. Our message never changes but our methods need to change depending on the culture and time... can talk about methods another time.

#### H. Let's look again at what it isn't saying...

1. It isn't saying... let us think of ways for JON/pastor to motivate us.
2. This part (teaching) is a very important aspect of being the Church...
3. The first JF's devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching... that's what this is. (NT writings are the apostle's teachings... that's my role...)
4. Our roles if we are JFs?
5. To do the stuff, what we've talked about... pray, read, give, apply it to our lives, by loving God and each other.
6. Hold tightly by motivating each other... meet together with the purpose of encouraging EACH OTHER... (Examples- I've been there, me too (parenting), you're doing better than you think, here's what God says about that, remember God is FOR you)
7. Best place to do all of this?
8. In a small group of people that are committed in love to each other's encouragement and good.
9. Why? Able to KNOW each other, listen, different views/experiences/gifts/strengths, modeling, Teamwork..., your COMMUNITY

#### I. Faith is grown in community

- 1. Community- Purposely being with people for the purpose of loving and encouraging each other.**
2. Movies/Cartoons... walking across a rickety rope bridge...
  - a. Start out ok, but then they always look down and freeze...
  - b. How do they get across? Someone on the other side yelling... Don't look down, you can do it, put your foot there..
3. It's exactly how life is... when things get difficult, feels like we can only focus on the drop. Things are dire... we need others to encourage us... Motivate/**SPUR** us... to take our next steps of faith... to put it into practice... to share how God has come through for them...
4. When we see how God came through in someone else's experience it's easier to trust him with our own experience.

- J. Don't know if you've thought about it this way, but it's actually Very difficult for this type of community to happen at a Sunday service.
  - 1. Deep, devoted, loving, purposeful relationships don't usually form by sitting in rows, looking at the back of someone's head, saying quick and distracted hi while you wrangle the kids and eat a cookie after the service.
  - 2. Some extroverts can start connections like this... but you have to make that first step and then make a plan to hang out... in a smaller group.
  - 3. So what do we do? Well what if we didn't leave this up to chance or extroverted courage...?

#### IV. YOU

- A. We can't force these types of connections to happen.
  - 1. But what if instead of staying home/isolated and wishing for meaningful, encouraging community... we did something to make these things more likely to happen... what if we put ourselves in the place for God to make it happen... for God to bring the right people into our lives?

#### **B. Faith is not meant to be done alone.**

- C. Find a group of people to create a community with.
  - 1. Committed to purposely loving, serving, forgiving, supporting each other.
  - 2. Bible studies are good but they are for the purpose of studying the bible... increase knowledge.
  - 3. Social clubs are good... but depth of relationship is rare, end up politics, gossips, light convo
  - 4. If you want to grow your faith you need to find a community that is designed to encourage that growth in real faith... faith that is put into action. Study the biblical writings? YES... but to apply them to our lives.
- D. Why we created Connect Groups... encouraged them to meet online and opened them as soon as it was legal and prudent.
  - 1. Not bible studies (though there is a study aspect)
  - 2. Not social clubs (though very social)... not to spread rumors, discuss politics, or complain...
  - 3. Purposely designed to create a community that encourages the exercise and growth of our faith.
- E. Joining this type of community can feel difficult, scary, even dangerous...
  - 1. It means we have to be vulnerable... have to be real.
  - 2. And it's really true that **You get out of relationships what you put into them...**
  - 3. Difference between movie date or going on adventure together.
  - 4. The more you share. the more you encourage, the more you feel the freedom to be you and to be KNOWN.
  - 5. Pray for one another. Support one another...
  - 6. Not only fights off the isolation that withers faith but it also reverses the division we are seeing and grows us together in unity, instead...
  - 7. It's hard to be against someone when you are praying for someone.
  - 8. Being in this kind of group knits your hearts/lives together
  - 9. Some of my best friendships have come out of the small groups I've been a part of. Sobering thought- if I hadn't showed up, they never would have happened at all!
    - a. Examples- Aaron and Monica, Lorie going to hospital.
- F. **What do we do?** : Invite you to **1) join a community...**
  - 1. One of your own.
  - 2. Or one we've created for you... Connect Groups.

**3. Once in a community... 2) Commit to purposely focusing on growing faith by encouraging and loving one another**

G. How the writer finishes this thought...

H. **V. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.**

1. Time is limited. Don't waste the time we have by being isolated, scared to be vulnerable, merely focusing on knowledge or socializing...
2. Things will probably get worse before this all gets better... so we need others who will support us, spur us on, and encourage us.

**V. WE**

A. It's a dangerous world. It's dangerous to go alone.

**B. Facing the real world requires real faith. And real faith requires real community in order to really grow.**

**C. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

**Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. [Assistance] Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? [Acceptance] A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. [Protection] Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. [Strength]**

D. Let's find somewhere where we can be known. People with whom we can grow a real faith for the real world.

Questions

1. Would you describe yourself as an extrovert or an introvert? How do you think that affects your view of the idea of Community?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47, a snapshot of the very early church. Considering the difference in culture, time, and place, what stands out to you as it relates to living out faith in community right now?
3. Where might you find a true community in your life right now? If you have a community, what are some ways it could become more purposeful in growing your faiths? Spend some time praying about this together.