

Core: Guiding Principles that Make Us Distinct!
Week 4: Fueled by Faith (Ephesians 3:20-21)

I. We continue with our examination of the Core Values of Tabernacle.

II. I have been assigned the important task of exploring the core value, “Fueled by Faith.” This core value must be examined from 2 different perspectives. The place of Faith in our daily life and the place of faith in the life of the community of believers God placed here at Tab. The phrase “fueled by faith” is an intriguing one. It suggests that we are to live our lives in a different way from that of the world. So, what is this thing called faith? How do we get it? What happens to us if our lives do not contain faith?

We are fueled by faith.

Ephesians 3:20-21 (ESV) – 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We believe it is God’s desire to do exceedingly more. We go boldly before a gracious God who eagerly responds to the faith of His people. Knowing that without faith it is impossible to please God, we seek to be a people marked by bold faith. Our corporate and personal stories will give witness to our great God who defies natural limits and human ability.

A. There are two ways in which faith is spoken of in the scripture.

1. It is described as THE FAITH (with an emphasis on The). The Faith speaks to the doctrine of what we believe. It describes who the triune God is and what he has done and what he has done through Christ.

2. The other faith of the Scripture is how we live that doctrine out. The best definition of this kind of faith is that provide by the author of Hebrews (11:1):

(ESV) Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

(NLT) Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

(MSG) The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.

(HCSB) Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. 2For our ancestors won God’s approval by it.

B. This is the faith that fuels us. It is a “walking around faith.” It should be the common currency of every follower of Christ. It is what drives us. It is the spiritual energy, fuel if you will, that drives our relationship with God. It is what most makes us different from those who do not follow Christ. You see if you are to follow Christ you must believe Him. You must believe what he says. Faith requires confidence in divine power and might. And out of that confidence you are obedient to Him. The author of Hebrews also says:

Hebrews 11:6 (ESV) - And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

1. To put it another way, without faith you cannot have a relationship with God. You will not hear Him, and He will not hear you. So faith is absolutely indispensable to the Christian life. So, it is entirely correct that our elders would identify faith as a core value of Tab. This must be the core value of every congregation.

2. If then this faith is so important to our Christian life, we must know how to cultivate and grow it. Jesus placed a high premium on faith. He commended those who had faith and rebuked those who had no faith or little faith. Jesus displayed a holy exasperation, a righteous frustration with those who did not trust Him. Notice that those who Jesus elevated, because of their faith, were typically people on the margins of Judaism. They were gentiles, women, children, and the lame. Those whom we would least expect to have “walking around faith.” They exhibited this trust even before they fully understood The Faith. On the other hand, His own disciples often failed miserably to demonstrate faith. They certainly had abundant evidence of who Jesus was and what he could do.

C. The story of Gideon is found in Judges 6. It is a narrative about the “walk around faith” you and I must have if we are to please God. This story, which is historically true, follows a pattern of life the Israelites established after Moses and Joshua passed from the scene. Judges 2:16-19 describes it this way:

(ESV) 16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. 18 Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. 19 But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

Context:

1. This cycle begins with rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, and reform. This cycle occurred over and over again during this history of the nation. And by the way this is a pattern that we are all familiar with because most at some point in our walk with the Lord have succumbed to a similar vicious cycle. The people would sin by following after other Gods. God would bring judgement upon them. They would cry out to the Lord and He in His mercy and faithfulness to his covenant would raise a deliverer to free them from the oppression of their enemy. Gideon was such a deliverer of his people.

2. We are told in the Book of Judges that the people “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord gave them over into the hands of their enemy.” This evil that they did is not specified but we have no doubt that they continued in their worship of idols and false Gods. Their enemy in this case was the Midianites, nomadic herdsmen who were from east of the Red Sea. The Midianites were also accompanied by the Amalekites, a nomadic people who made an unprovoked attack upon the Israelites in their journey in the wilderness on their way to the promised land.

3. These tribes would come in mass upon the land of Israel as the crops which the Israelites planted were ready to be harvested. The Israelites would flee to the mountains to dens and caves for protection while the Midianites would devour all the crops, all their produce, and all their livestock, leaving the people of God’s chosen nation destitute.

4. It is this destitution, this physical poverty that caused the people to “cry out for help to the Lord.” God then responds by sending a prophet. We don’t know who this prophet was, but we know he came with the Word of God. The prophet reminded them that God delivered them from slavery in the land of Egypt when they cried out to Him, and he delivered them from all who oppressed them. “But you have not obeyed my voice.” God was telling the people why this terrible turn of events was happening to them. They were not obedient to the commands of God given to them through Moses. Notice that the prophet

did not tell them that God would deliver them. He did not say that He would send a deliverer. He charges them with rebellion and explains that their oppression is retribution from God.

D. Lessons:

1. WHEN WE ENTERTAIN SIN, WE DIMINISH OUR FAITH

Sin will blind us and deceive us. It will ravish us and leave us destitute, devoid, and depressed. And sadly, you will not be able to trust God because Faith is empowered by His spirit. Our faith becomes stronger and stronger as we walk with Him. It becomes weak when we leave Him behind and go our own way. Judah went their own way when they pursued other Gods. God uses a shockingly graphic terms to describe their sin. He says that “they go whoring after their idols.” They were engaged in spiritual prostitution. Idolatry did not end with the Israelites. It is alive and well today in the world and may be in the Church of God. Sin can make spiritual prostitutes of us who are unable to follow the Lord in faith because we are following our own desires, the desires of this world, or the desires of the great deceiver Satan. You cannot walk in faith without also walking in holiness. You cannot be a man or woman of faith and dabble in sin.

2. FAITH REQUIRES HOLINESS

- a. When Jesus revealed to his disciples that he would be crucified Peter responded by rebuking him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Peter and his fellow disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they were jockeying for positions of privilege and power in the kingdom. They were at risk of prostituting themselves even as they followed the Master. Peter’s sin hindered his faith in Jesus’ call to take up his cross.
- b. How will you be able to trust the Lord if you are willfully sinning against him. You cannot trust Him in all your ways and prostitute yourself to sin. The same would apply to the church. Our church. Tab church. Should we as a congregation trust God or is this just an individual thing. We don’t often speak of trusting God for something as a church. If the assembly does not move in faith, we will simply be a corporation or institution. And if we are to move in faith we must insist - indeed demand that our members live holy lives. We must do so with great grace and loving kindness but if we are to be holy, we must call sin out when it comes to our attention. This is the “walking around faith” that the congregation must embrace. It takes faith to say to members we will not condone fornication in our midst. It takes faith for an assembly, in obedience to God, to take a large part of their revenue to fund missions and outreach to the poor and those living on the margins of life. It takes even more faith to advocate for the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, the oppressed, the homeless and those hanging out on the margins of life.
- c. A church that pursues purity will be a church who can trust the Lord. Make no mistake Christ is watching us. Go to Revelations, chapter 3, and you will see the Resurrected Jesus calling out the seven churches of Asia Minor. Notice the call for purity and obedience. What happens when a church fails to exercise this kind of faith? Christ walks away from the church, and he turns out the lights on His way out. We will be left rejoicing and praising in the dark.

3. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

So, the prophet came with “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel.” “Thus says,” this is the word of God. As our father speaks to us through his word we believe. The Christian organization, “The Gideons,” understand this nexus of the Word of God and Faith. They have distributed Bibles in over 200 nations. Our own Glenn Patton is the vice president of the Gideons Norfolk camp. Their distribution of Bibles results in people all over the world walking in faith. Our “walk around faith” is found and grounded in his word.

a. So what does this look like? Let’s look at ways we can be fueled by faith through the word in our daily living:

(1) Our Heavenly Father tells us through His Word in Proverbs that we are to consult in all that we do, and he promises to direct our path.

Proverbs 3:5-7 (ESV) - “5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”

(a) Many claim this particular proverb as their life verse. Do you believe this? Do you believe that God will direct your path in every circumstance? Are you able hold onto this promise when things go terribly wrong? This calls for walking around faith.

(b) Sharon Swink shared with me how she was touched by the life work of Dr. Helen Roseverare, a medical missionary from Ireland who went to the Congo in 1953 at the age of 23 years old. So I read a brief biography about this incredible servant of God. She went deep into the Congo and established the only medical facilities within 150 miles of her location.

She tells the story of when she was helping a mother to deliver her baby the mother died leaving her to care for a sick, two-pound newborn baby, and 2-year-old daughter. The pre-mature baby needed to be kept warm through the night or she would die. The water bottle that they needed to keep her warm burst. So Helen told a 10-year child at the settlement that she should pray with her that the nurses she trained would stay awake through the night to keep the baby near the fire so that the baby could survive. The 10-year-old prayed with great boldness that God would send another water bottle and a doll baby for the 2-year-old. The next morning a package from one of her supporters arrived from the United Kingdom that had among other things a water bottle and a doll. The package was sent 5 months earlier and had just arrived that same morning. That 10-year-old had walking around faith in abundance. She did not have enough sense to know that these things just don’t happen. She just believed. Oh the faith of a child! The doctor and the 10-year-old were fueled by faith.

In 1964 war broke out in the Congo and all the many medical facilities that Helen established were destroyed and Helen was brutally beaten and raped. She states that during this most torturous time of her life God asked this question. “Can you thank me for trusting you with this experience even though I may never tell you why?” Now think about that question. Take a pen and write this question down. It is a profound question. You may need to answer this question one day.

(c) It is the same question that God posed to Job who suffered far more. Remember he suffered the loss of all his sons and daughters, his wealth, his health, and his reputation. “Can you thank me for trusting you with this experience even though I may never tell you why?” Faith is the crux of the matter. This question is a question of faith. Job struggled and searched for answers and never found one nor are we told in the scripture why God would accept the challenge of Satan concerning Job. But even after declaring in his despair that it would have been better if he had never been born, Job believed. At his lowest point Job was fueled by faith. He shouts out in the middle of his despair:

Job 19:25-26 (ESV) – 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

(2) There will be those followers of Christ who will not overcome. There are times when our deliverer will not rescue us in this life. The Book of Hebrews tells us of the giants of faith who were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. They were fueled by faith that is indestructible. This faith that we are talking about is not something that we can just decide to have. Faith ultimately is God empowered and indestructible. Consider these Scriptures to inform our walk around faith:

Matt.6:25-26 (ESV) – 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Romans 12:19 (ESV) - Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

E. SLIDE # Faith is Cultivated in Inadequacy, Insufficiency, Weakness, and Poverty

1. God teaches us this important lesson through the life of Gideon. Many of the mighty men that God called were keenly aware of their inadequacy and insufficiency. Moses is a prime example of this. Moses considered himself a poor choice for God’s calling. Rarely does God call the best and the brightest.
2. God responded to Gideon with a promise that he would be with Him. This is God’s promise to all who follow him. We become sufficient because God is by our side. In our poverty we know we can’t get the job done. But if we think we’ve got it all together and we can handle it, we risk the temptation to leave God out of the equation. When you leave God out of the equation, no matter how talented you are, you will eventually come up with a big fat zero. When you ignore God, you insult Him, and he will work the math out so that you will never win. This is a great danger that the brilliant, talented, wealthy, and beautiful must recognize, if they wish to serve God. This is why Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (ESV) - For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low

and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

3. Weakness is the perfect condition for cultivating faith. You are forced to trust God. You either trust God or die. You don't have a lot of options here.

Gideon was far from elite: "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

F. Another curious thing about Gideon's character that we detect in the narrative is that Gideon is what we might call today a wimp. Some of you are appalled that I would call Gideon a wimp. You know Gideon as the mighty warrior.

1. Gideon had a fearful character. He was a wimp. The narrative begins with Gideon "beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites." The angel of the Lord, hailed him "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." Don't be fooled about Gideon's character. This is a prophetic statement from the Lord about Gideon, because he would trust that the Lord would be with him - would become a man of valor. God knows how to turn a cowardly wimp into a courageous warrior. Gideon's ministry began when he was told by God to destroy the altar of Baal in his town and to build an altar to the Lord in its place. Even though Gideon knew that God was with him we are told in the text he was too afraid to do this during the day. After this the text tells us that the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. His ministry began as he walks in faith and accepts God's call. Then God clothed him with his Spirit. And when God clothes him with His Spirit he sounds the trumpet, accepts his call, and calls the people to action.
2. Now Gideon was well aware of God's history with the nation. He knew that God had delivered Israel from Egypt and led them thru the Red Sea. He knew that God gave Israel the promised land by making his nation victorious over 7 other nations. He knew that later in their history, even after Israel rebelled against God and were subjected to their enemies, that God raised up Judges to miraculously deliver a repentant Israel. At the very time he was called to be an instrument of salvation for His people, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him personally and performed the miracle of consuming his present by fire.
3. Yet knowing all of this Gideon's walk around faith was so weak that he needed extra assurance. He asks God to give him assurance of his intention to be with him as he goes to battle. Shirley has in our kitchen a plaque with the inscription "Let Your Faith Be Bigger Than Your Fears." We are presented with this dilemma often. Do we succumb to our fears or reach for our faith? Gideon was overcome by fear and put God to the test by proposing the sign of the fleece. Gideon laid a fleece of wool and asked God to make the fleece wet with dew and the ground around it dry. God accepted the challenge and, in the morning, there was enough water on the fleece to fill a bowl with water and the ground around it was dry. God was faithful but Gideon was not. Gideon put God to the test a second time and asked God to reverse the miracle and cause, on the next morning, the fleece to be dry and the ground wet. Gideon knew this was a sinful request because when making this second bargain, he said "Let not your anger burn against me." The grace and patience God has with Gideon tells us about the character of our God. God deals patiently with us in our weak faith as he dealt with his disciples.

Mark 8:16-21 (ESV) – 16 And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. 17 And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." 20 "And the seven for the four

thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." 21 And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

4. Jesus is expressing holy exasperation, divine frustration with his disciples. Gideon was failing to remember what God had done in the past. We are not immune to this type of hardness of heart. We fail to remember therefore we don't believe. God has performed miracles in every one of our lives. As the monsters rise do you run away. Do you remember that coyote God taught you to kill, and then face down that wolf, slay the lion, and spit in the eye of the bear? So why are you running away from that giant, that uncircumcised Philistine? God tells his people Israel repeatedly to remember what he has done for them in the past. He required them to have feast days in remembrance of His might deeds. These things were to be rehearsed with their children, so God expects us to remember and grow in faith. Our faith is cultivated in our remembrance. And we remember by thanking God for his miracles in our lives.

F. Our Faith Points to God and brings Glory to Him.

1. Now Gideon is prepared, accepted his calling and goes to battle for God. But he and the people are still not ready. God declared that the forces of Israel were too large. The great temptation, upon winning the battle against the Midianites, was to think that they had prevailed in victory because they amassed a large and impressive strike force. Following God's guidance, Gideon whittled his forces down to a mere 300 and sent the rest of the armed forces home. They were to face an enemy that was described as numerous as the sands of the sea. Gideon's fear remained still, so in one last concession to Gideon's fear, God told Gideon that he should sneak into the camp and overhear a discussion between Midianite warriors over the interpretation of one of their dreams. The interpretation was that Gideon would defeat them.
2. Everyone now knows that the victory that Gideon wrought against the Midianites was a miracle from the Lord almighty. Gideon and his men came to the outskirts of the enemy camp in the dead of night and blew their three hundred trumpets, cracked their pitchers displaying their torches, and shouted the war cry "A sword for the Lord and Gideon." The enemy awoke, startled and thinking they were being attacked by legions of men, turned and fled. In the confusion, they turned on one another as they fled. Gideon's battle was against a broken army that was fleeing. Everyone knows that it was not Gideon but God who won the victory that day. When we allow God to fuel us with faith, He is not only pleased but glorified. We bring glory to his great name when we are FUELED BY FAITH.