

Lessons From The Journey

Intro: Life is the greatest teacher there is. As we go through life, we are supposed to learn from all the experiences we have whether they are good or bad. Life is constantly teaching us! Sometimes you only have to have an experience one time to learn never to do it again.

- Story of helping a kid with his car looking down the carburetor – share
- As a church, we have just about finalized another leg of our journey completing this expansion project. I believe it is imperative that we take a few moments and reflect on some lessons God has taught us along the way. Lessons we need in the future. God expects us to learn these principals. An example of this is the nation of Israel.
- **Illustrate / Summarize:** Israel's 2 years after Egypt, God led them to the promised land. During that 2 year stretch, God was teaching them lessons they needed to learn. God purposely let them go through difficulties to teach them. (Explain)

Num. 14:21-23 “Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.” (NLT) God expected them to learn something from the journey. God gave them 10 pop-quiz's and when the final came...they flunked! Not learning what we're supposed to can be costly! Not learning can cause us to miss out on God's blessing.

- I believe there are 6 lessons God wants us as a church to embrace. These corporate lessons can be applied to your personal life as well.

I. Jesus Will Always Lead His Church In The Direction He Wants

John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (NLT)

1. Our two responsibilities from this verse are to listen and follow. Not to figure it out...not to understand it all...not to be great planners or strategists. Our primary responsibility as a church is to make sure we hear His voice and follow it!
2. This is the key to success as a church. (Listen and follow) I have never heard any church growth expert say this yet in anything I have ever read or seminar I've attended! (It would be a short book!) It's all about strategy and tactics. (All those things have their place...) BUT, the focus should be on Jesus!
3. Jesus is the leader of Foothills. The reason we entered into this expansion project / purchased a building / spent \$100Ks in a recession / is we heard His voice and simply followed.
4. Jesus leads Foothills and as long as we keep listening to Him and following Him we will continue to see amazing things! This is the ONLY way the church is successful.
5. This is why learning to pray and developing the skill of listening to God is so important for us as a church. (Worship and prayer events / Prayer conference / Seek God books)

6. We really don't have to be that smart. We simply embrace listening and following. We must never forget this is a relational journey with Jesus. If we focus on the relationship, we will NEVER get lost!

II. The Path Jesus Leads Us On Will Not Always Make Sense in the Natural

Is. 55:8-9 "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (NLT)

1. Since God's ways will be beyond anything we can imagine, why do we think that following Him is always going to make sense? Here in His word He plainly states that it will not make sense to us.
2. This is the problem of so many churches. They start navigating life by what makes sense to their natural understanding. "Let's only do what makes sense to us." They stop asking...stop following...start living by natural means instead of the spiritual.
3. In a time when churches are struggling financially because of recession / laying off paid employees / shutting down ministries / in a state with one of the highest levels of unemployment / Did it make sense in the natural to do what we just did?
4. The natural thinking would be to play it safe / try to conserve resources / be conservative / wait for a time when it makes more sense to expand and take risks.
5. How does God get the glory in this type of thinking? He doesn't! BUT, in light of all that's going on, God allows us to buy a building / complete an expansion project / hire additional staff / and add new ministries / WHO gets the glory now?
- I want to be part of a church that cannot be explained...except God!
6. We must NEVER forget this lesson. God will ask this of us again in the future.

III. The Path Jesus Calls Us To Requires Us To Embrace Discomfort

I Peter 4:12 "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." (NLT)

1. The path Jesus calls us to travel together is a glorious one, but it is not easy. There are times when we must embrace hardship. This doesn't mean the entire journey is painful, BUT there will be uncomfortable seasons.
- Elk Hunting story: Hells Canyon – Without embracing the hardship, we wouldn't have experienced the reward! We must remember this as a church!
2. This is where we remember that the church is more like a Pioneer wagon train than a bunch of settlers. We are on a journey. We haven't arrived yet. We are a battleship not a cruise ship. We are on a mission for our Commander and Chief.
3. Churches that embrace comfort over the mission die! They never see the power and transformation of God. The typical pattern of most churches is to get to a certain level and then pursue comfort. NOT here!
4. We have embraced discomfort for the past 7-8 months (buildings tore up trying to do ministry / offices moved to temporary setting / worship team on the floor / the chaos of expansion / many of you sacrificed time and money / It hasn't been easy!

5. I am looking forward to some more comfort for awhile. Embracing it temporarily is appropriate after a long climb. BUT, it's never a place to stay. After awhile, God will move us once again and ask us to embrace another new part of the journey.
6. My job as your pastor is to never let you get too comfortable for too long! To never allow us to embrace comfort over the mission God is calling us to. Once we see Jesus moving forward, our job is to keep following.

IV. God Uses Discomfort To Change Our Character

Rom. 5:3-4 "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation." (NLT)

1. When we are uncomfortable, there is great opportunity for God to transform our character. Since there will be times when the journey itself is uncomfortable as we follow Jesus, we might as well embrace His work in our lives. He wants to change us!
2. Heat and pressure is what brings our character issues into the open so we can see them. It's like a crucible. The heat causes the dross to rise to the surface so it can be skimmed off and the metal is more pure.
3. The heat and pressure of the discomfort brings the dross of our lives to the surface so WE can see it. God already knows it's there, but He wants us to acknowledge it. Unless things heat up, we don't see where we need to grow.
4. We must acknowledge God's purpose for the discomfort. He's not necessarily creating it. Pain is part of life. What we do with it is up to us. Instead of blaming others for how you feel / becoming a victim / making excuses for your character flaws / living in denial / remember God wants to use the discomfort. Will you let Him?
5. Unless you allow God to change your character, you will eventually get left behind. WHY? Because the farther we travel with Jesus on this journey, it requires more maturity in our character. Those who refuse to grow, don't make the journey.
6. I don't say this to sound unloving, but this is just a reality. People who continue to make excuses for their character issues eventually leave. AND EVERYBODY has character issues!
7. During the difficulties of this last year, God has shown me plenty of things He wants to change in my life. Just because I am the founder and lead pastor of Foothills, doesn't exclude me from character development. NO...it means I'm first in line!
 - There is thinking / attitudes / priorities / things in my marriage / I'm still in process asking God to show me everything He wants me to see. Some of it is painful. I don't want to see it...but I have to. Even I don't want to be left behind.
 - God uses the discomfort as the crucible for our character. The fact is we either allow God to change us or we stay in the crucible. No thanks!

V. The Difficulties Of The Journey Requires Us To Intensify Personal Relationships

- Here is a snapshot of Jesus before His crucifixion.

Matt. 26:37-38 “He took Peter, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” (NLT)

1. Here Jesus is at the most stressful moments of His life...hours before His crucifixion...and instead of isolating Himself, He asked His closest friends to be with Him. What a great lesson. If Jesus recognized the need for close relationships, who are we to ignore them?
2. The longer we travel this journey as a church, the more important our relationships with each other will become. The more we need to realize that we simply can't successfully travel this path without each other...without intensifying our relationships.
3. The difficulties we will encounter along the way will require us to move closer together in authentic, supportive, accountable, truthful, loving relationships. What God is calling us to can only be accomplished together.
4. I love the model Jesus left us. Notice He was willing to say..."Peter, James and John, I need you guys. I'm dying here." Here is God in the flesh saying He needed their support! (Here is a picture of true masculinity!)
5. This is certainly one of the lessons God has driven home to me in this last year. I need other people! I can't be the person God wants me to be and I can't go where God wants me to travel without others.
6. Foothills can never become a large impersonal place. We must continue to intensify our relationships as we get larger not minimize them. The journey will require this. Those that isolate will fall apart from the weight and rigors of the journey.
7. This is why getting plugged into a home group or a class here at Foothills is going to become even more important the larger we grow. We must grow relationally! There are people here in this church that are designed by God to be your Peter, James and John. You just haven't met them yet.
8. Maybe life is a lot harder than it has to be because you're trying to live it all by yourself? As the journey gets tougher, our relationships must go deeper!

VI. Embracing The Journey With Jesus Is The Only Way To See Transformation

John 12:26 “Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.” (NLT) Don't miss the simplicity of what Jesus said!

1. The only way we will see the transformation of lives and our community is to always be where Jesus is at. As long as we keep following Him, God will always honor this. We will continue to see God do amazing things in our midst. His blessing will continue to rest upon this ministry.
2. The moment we stop embracing this journey with Jesus is the day His blessing will be removed. Foothills works because Jesus makes it work not Pastor Dale. It works because we want to be where He's at.
3. In 1983, there was a church in Molalla who had the blessing of God upon it. The

church was only 10 years old / had 2 packed out services / 3 full-time pastors / People were coming to Jesus / I was a Sr. in High School.

- There was a recession / The mills were shutting down / losing jobs
- The leaders felt like God was asking them to expand
- The expansion was voted down and the church never recovered. WHY? Because they were no longer where Jesus was at. The church declined / went through multiple pastors and multiple church splits. The blessing of God was removed!

4. I don't ever want to re-live that story. I want us to have a sold out commitment as a group of people to simply always be where Jesus is at! No matter where He leads us as a church, the best place to be is where Jesus is at!

5. Our commitment must be to Jesus and the path He is calling us to walk as a church. We've only been walking this path as a church for 12 years. Look at all God has done in 12 short years simply because we have chosen to follow Him and be where He's at.

6. Jesus showed up at Molalla Elementary School and asked us to follow Him there 12 years ago. Jesus then showed up in a nasty abandoned grocery store and asked us to follow Him. Then Jesus walked over to a bank owned café/doctors office and said...Follow Me! Jesus is here today because we've chosen to be where He's at!

7. There are so many more places the Lord is going to lead us. We've only begun to follow! If our commitment is to always be where Jesus is at, we'll continue to see transformation. Because wherever Jesus is at, transformation happens.

- All these lessons will help us in this journey with Jesus in the future. In fact, they're essential for the future.

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2. The Path Jesus Leads Us On Will Not Always Make Sense in the Natural
3. The Path Jesus Calls Us To Requires Us To Embrace Discomfort
4. God Uses Discomfort To Change Our Character
5. The Difficulties Of The Journey Requires Us To Intensify Personal Relationships
6. Embracing The Journey With Jesus Is The Only Way To See Transformation

- Are there some of these lessons God is trying to teach you personally?