

**“Stand Firm with Faith”**

Hebrews 11:1-10, 39-40; 12:1-3

*Series: Strengthening Your Grip Week 1. Faith*

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November 7 2021

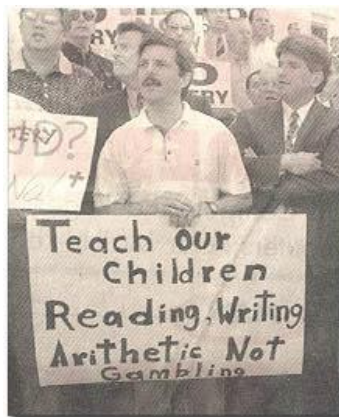
All our talk about GPS these past weeks reminds me of some of the silly stuff you might see on the road.



Looks like UPS wins!



Must have been the Fed Ex Driver



Better start with spelling



Probably went to the school where they teach ‘arithmetic.’



Make up your mind.

This is the guy I *didn't* hire to change the Woodside sign

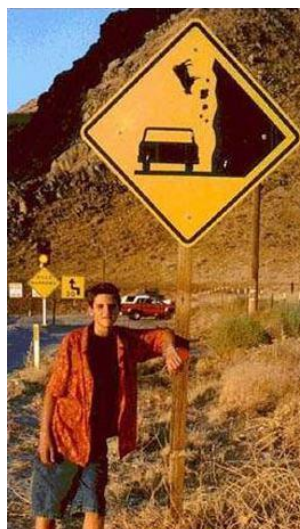




Everything You Need for Your Shotgun Wedding  
After the wedding you can stop by this place...



...and pick up a litter of kids  
And my favorite one. You've heard of Mad Cow?:



Beware of Kamikaze Cows!

From the moment we leave the hospital, we are on the road. It starts with car seats and strollers. First steps lead to trikes, bikes, school buses and a driver's license. Going off to college, commuting to work, endless trips in the minivan – we are a people on the move. And sometimes, the signs along the way are confusing.



There are a lot of ways you can turn. You soon discover multiple choice is not just on the SATs. Should I play trumpet or go out for soccer? Get a job, go to community college or apply out of state? Get married now or wait for someone else? Is this the time to start a family? Should I hang in at this job or update my resume? Stay here or move to another part of the country? Keep working or retire early?

For each of us there also comes the moment when the storms arise on the horizon. It's not IF but WHEN. You were cut from the team. You didn't get in the college of your choice. The career of your dreams turns out to be a nightmare. You aren't able to have children. The one you love broke up with you, left you, divorced you. The job is overwhelming or they simply let you go. The diagnosis is not what you want to hear.

What's on the road ahead of you? Are there potholes of pain which threaten to swallow you whole? Are you on a detour you did not want? Do backups and tie-ups keep you waiting and crawling forward? Are you caught in a circle - forced to face the same problem again and again? Is someone else driving your life and driving you crazy? Are you racing toward a fork in the road and you can't decide which path to take? Even if your ride is smooth and clear, none of us can see what twists, turns, and tragedies lie ahead. You can take all the facts and make a reasonable forecast. Then the storm comes and you feel like you're losing your grip.

That's when Faith steps in. What is Faith? Some say it's blind, a delusion or wishful thinking. None of those are true. Faith doesn't deny the facts, it goes beyond them. Faith is not blind – it sees farther than all our senses. Faith is not a wish and it's more than just thinking. Faith is trusting in someone or something reliable. We cannot live without faith. A marriage and family can't be close and strong without trust. A business deal falls apart without trust. When people no longer trust their nation it's

headed for collapse. Don't let anyone tell you they don't have faith. Even agnostic and atheist people have faith. We all put our faith in someone or something.

The real question is: In what or who do you put your faith? Here's where the Bible takes faith to the next level. Hebrews says: "Now faith is being *sure* of what we hope for and *certain* of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is not a wish, a dream or a delusion. It is sure, certain, solid. It is a conviction, confidence, assurance that what we hope for will come to pass and what we cannot see will appear. How is this possible? How can we muster up enough faith to believe that what is promised will be delivered and what is invisible will be revealed?

Strong faith is built on a strong foundation. The stronger the foundation, the stronger the faith. The first people who read the book of Hebrews were Jewish Christians who were standing on shaky ground. They were tempted to give up Jesus and turn back to their former way of life. The author of Hebrews encourages his congregation to keep moving forward by reminding them how far they've come.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. Hebrews 10:32-35

Suffering, insults, persecutions, prison, confiscation of property – that's pretty shaky ground. It's enough to cause anyone to doubt. You've been on shaky ground the last twenty-one months. Prices skyrocketing. Supply chain and economy collapsing. Businesses closing. Culture shifting. Political parties warring. Maybe your friendships, your marriage, your family are fracturing. Maybe your body is falling apart. Then there are the arguments and insults in emails, in social media, in your face. It's hard to have faith when the ground beneath your feet is rumbling, rocking, rolling.

Brothers and sisters – those are not your foundation. Our doubts are due to building on the wrong foundation. The economy is not your foundation. Your political party is not your foundation. Your company is not your foundation. The culture of the good old days or the new progressive era are not your foundation. This nation is not your foundation. How people feel about you, what they say about you is not your foundation. Your friends, family, spouse, and life are not your foundation. If you try to build your faith on those foundations you'll soon find they all fracture, fragment and fall apart. Most anxiety we experience today is the result of building on weak, foundations.

Let me give you an example – really a confession – of how I've built on the wrong foundation. Presbyterian churches judge the size and strength of a church by its membership. Our membership roll has 780 names on it. That's considered a big Presbyterian church these days. You get more representation and more respect if you are a big church. Most people buy into this. If I go to a party and someone asks, "What do

you do for a living?” and I say, “I’m a Presbyterian pastor” if they don’t change the subject, run screaming from the room or tell me about all the pastors they know who’ve gone bad, the next question they always ask is, “How big is your church?” What they want to know is how many members I have. How big is my business? How large is my club? It can make a pastor feel pretty good to be winning in the membership game.

Then Covid strikes. And we discover we don’t have 780 members, we never had 780 members. In fact all the membership numbers of all the churches in America are fake. They are a false foundation. Then we discover Jesus never wanted a club. Jesus is not impressed with numbers of members. He never said, “Go and make members.” He said, “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus doesn’t need 780 members. He started with 12 disciples. This is why we are moving away from membership in a club to disciples following Jesus. Church membership is a weak foundation. So what’s the only strong foundation for faith?

Jesus. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” I Corinthians 3:11. We are sure and certain only because we trust Jesus, the only one who is supremely trustworthy. Maybe you feel you don’t have enough faith to build on Jesus. That’s okay. It doesn’t start with you. It starts with God the Father.

The first truth Hebrews teaches is **God the Father Has Faith in You.**

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 1:1-3

How much does God the Father trust us? He could have sent more angels and prophets. He knew that would never work. So the Father sent the only One who can save us. He took the highest risk and made the greatest sacrifice. He entrusted His Son into our care.

Recently my daughter Kristin and her husband Bryan went away for a weekend and entrusted their daughter, our granddaughter, two-year-old Evelyn into our care. “You’re sure you can handle this Mom and Dad?” Kristin asked cautiously. “Sure. We’ve done all this before.” Well let me tell you, that little princess ran us ragged. We played with the toys, read books, baked treats, played with playdoh, slid down the slide, hiked in the woods, carved pumpkins – all in the first hour. We got to the second hour and said, “Fifty more hours to go. Now what do we do?” When her parents walked in Evie sat quietly playing surrounded by two collapsed grandparents. It meant a lot to know they trusted us. They had faith in us. Maybe they shouldn’t.

God the Father has faith in you. He sent His Son to be your Savior. The Father shouldn’t have faith in us – after all, when His Son came here we crucified Him. Yet the Father and Son knew that was the only way to purify us from sin.

When you feel your faith is failing, when you are losing your grip, when the storm is severe, remember: even when you don't believe in God, God the Father still believes in you. He has faith in you. He trusts you. Faith starts with the Father.

Hebrews next says **God the Son Never Gives Up on You.**

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

You can trust Jesus because He went the distance for you. Jesus lived a fully human life with all the trials and tragedies. He successfully said No to every temptation, He took every drop of suffering, every stain and shadow of sin, every horror of humanity on the Cross and defeated it.

The first lesson they give pastors about counseling is: Never say, "I know what you're going through." You don't. Even if the situations are similar, they are never the same. Yet when Jesus says, "I know what you're going through" it's True. He touched, tasted and took on everything you have endured or ever will endure. What's more, He opened the door so you have unlimited access to God's throne of grace. Go to Him with confidence. Receive mercy from Him. Find the grace you need to help you in your time of trouble. He never gives up.

Finally, Hebrews tells us **God the Spirit Will Strengthen You.**

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ... Hebrews 3:7-8

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Hebrews 10:15-16; Jeremiah 31:34

At my annual physical my doctor said those dreaded words: "You're getting to that age. You should get a baseline test of your heart." If you want to stay healthy and strong it all starts with the heart. The same is true of Faith. The Father, Son and Spirit can do all this for you but if your heart is distracted by the culture, hardened with bad habits, filled up with false idols, blocked by sin, agitated with anxiety you will not hear the Spirit's voice. You and I need open heart surgery. Open your heart and let the Spirit write God's Word there. This is why it is essential for us to pray and study God's Word individually, with your family, with your Growth Group. This is how the Spirit inscribes God's Word on your heart. Yet don't stop there. Yes Faith requires thinking with your mind, believing with your heart, speaking with your lips. Yet Faith becomes strong when it works through your hands and feet. Faith works when you work it. Hebrews says,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

On the road of your life is there a burden weighing you down? Throw it off and fix your eyes on Jesus. Is there a sin entangling your steps? Kick it off and fix your eyes on Jesus. Can't see too far ahead? Take a step and fix your eyes on Jesus. He's just ahead of you, marking out the race for you.

Want to strengthen your grip? Do some Faith Exercises. If you learned about your Gifts, Passions and Story during GPS go out and find your calling. You can do it. We can help. If you haven't made a commitment to God's work at Woodside in 2022 take a step of faith and make a commitment. Take a step of faith and join us today to pack 30,000 meals with Rise Against Hunger. Don't just talk about fighting hunger. Let's do it! Want to help people break the chains of addiction? Take a step of faith and help with the Recovery Worship Service on Nov. 21. Want to share the Good News with someone? Invite them to the Joy to the World concert with Paul Baloche and Dave Pettigrew. Want to help and house our homeless neighbors? Take a step of faith and sign up to work with Code Blue at Woodside in December and January.

Storms will come.

Build your life on the strongest foundation.

Fix your eyes on Jesus.