

## THE THREE 3G'S

**WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY CALLED LENT. HOW HAVE YOUR "TRAVELS" BEEN? HAVE YOU HAD ANY DETOURS? MEET ANYBODY? DO ANYTHING "NEW" OR DIFFERENT? HAS YOUR PURPOSE CHANGED FROM WHEN YOU BEGAN TO WHERE YOU ARE TODAY OR EXPECT TO BE TOMORROW OR THE NEXT DAY OR THE NEXT?**

WE MIGHT ASK THE QUESTION "WHY ARE WE TAKING THIS JOURNEY?" AFTER ALL DEPENDING ON OUR AGE, HAVEN'T WE BEEN ON THIS ROAD BEFORE? MAYBE IN ALL HONESTY THOUGH WE HAVEN'T EVEN PULLED OUT OF THE DRIVEWAY!! DO WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NOTHING NEW OUT THERE THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO OUR GROWTH IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST OR A SPOUSE OR A CHILD OF OURS?

I AM FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT IF WE ATTENDED LAST WEEK'S SERVICE CONDUCTED BY THE YOUTH, WE ALL GREW IN SONG AND IN WORDS SPOKEN TO US. IF YOU CAME WITH THE IDEA IN MIND THAT THESE WERE "JUST" YOUTH AND, I HOPE THERE WERE NO SUCH ATTITUDES, THEN YOU MAY HAVE MISSED THE HONEST EXPRESSION OF THEIR HEART THROUGH THE WORDS THEY SPOKE TO US. WISDOM CAN BE FOUND IN MANY PLACES AND PRESENTED TO US IN VARIOUS WAYS.

THERE ARE SOMETHING I CALL "**FOCUS TIMES**" IN THE CHURCH. TIMES WHEN WE LOOK AND SEE EXACTLY WHERE WE ARE AND WHY. THEN HOW WE ARE GOING AND AS A RESULT GROWING BECAUSE OF THE JOURNEY WE TAKE. **ADVENT AND LENT ARE SUCH "FOCUS TIMES"**

**I AM GOING TO BEGIN A CONFIRMATION CLASS WEDNESDAY. THIS WILL BE A FOCUS TIME FOR YOUR YOUTH, A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND BUILDING ON THEIR FOUNDATION, IN ORDER TO GROW.** WE ARE ALL ON THIS JOURNEY OF FAITH AND FIRING UP OUR FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR ENTIRE LIFE. THIS JOURNEY IS A TIME WITH **GOD**, NOT A TIME TO **GRUMBLE**, WITH A RESULT OF **GROWING MORE CHRIST-LIKE**.

**REMEMBER THE ISRAELITES?** THEIR JOURNEY TOOK LONGER THAN EXPECTED. THEY HAD A FEW DETOURS AND STOPS AND THEY CERTAINLY LEARNED NEW THINGS ALONG THE WAY! **NO TWO JOURNEYS ARE THE SAME.** WE CAN HELP EACH OTHER BY SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES. JUST AS WE MUST MAKE OUR OWN DECISION TO BELIEVE WHETHER JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD AND HE IS OUR LORD, WE MUST TAKE THE STEPS ON THIS JOURNEY OURSELVES. NO ONE CAN DO IT FOR US.

THE QUESTION, HOWEVER, BEING ASKED TODAY IS "**WHAT THINGS CAN PREVENT ME, OR DETOUR ME OR STOP ME ON THIS JOURNEY?**" SEVERAL OF THE PASSAGES FROM TODAY'S READINGS GIVE WARNINGS OF THE DANGERS AHEAD, NOT UNLIKE THE FLASHING ROAD BARRIERS WHEN A BRIDGE HAS BEEN WASHED OUT. FUNNY HOW THE BIBLE, IF YOU TAKE TIME TO LOOK INTO IT HAS A WAY OF BEING SO TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE FOR A SITUATION WE GOT OURSELVES INTO.

TAKE FOR EXAMPLE THE PASSAGES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT READING. THE ISRAELITES ON THEIR WILDERNESS JOURNEY HAD EXPERIENCED MANY WONDERS, BUT DESPITE IT ALL THEY CHOSE TO SET UP IDOLS AND WORSHIP THEM. LISTEN TO THE VERSION OF THE STORY IN THESE WORDS... *But just experiencing God's wonder and grace didn't seem to mean much—most of them were defeated by temptation during the hard times in the desert, and God was not pleased.* **6-10** *The same thing could happen to us. We must be on guard so that we never get caught up in wanting our own way as they did. And we must not turn*

*our religion into a circus as they did—“First the people partied, then they threw a dance.” We must not be sexually promiscuous—they paid for that, remember, with 23,000 deaths in one day! We must never try to get Christ to serve us instead of us serving Him; they tried it, and God launched an epidemic of poisonous snakes.*

**ON OUR JOURNEY WHAT “IDOLS” DO WE WORSHIP? JUST BECAUSE IT'S NOT A GOLDEN CALF IT DOES NOT MEAN IT CAN'T BE AN IDOL. ANYTHING GOOD TAKEN TO AN EXTREME AND REPLACES GOD IS AN IDOL!**

HERE IS A CHALLENGE, AND I VENTURE TO SAY MANY PEOPLE TODAY SPEND MORE TIME WITH AND ON THEIR PHONES THEN WITH GOD OR EVEN OTHERS AROUND THEM. WATCH IN ANY RESTAURANT OR ANY YOUNG KID'S SPORTING EVENT. MORE PEOPLE ARE ON THEIR PHONES THEN PAYING ATTENTION TO THE GAME. I READ AN ARTICLE THE OTHER DAY ABOUT PEOPLE, YOUNG AND OLD, GIVING UP THEIR SMART PHONES BECAUSE THEY ARE “DIGITALLY WEARY” AND GOING TO “DUMB” PHONES THAT ONLY MAKE AND TAKE CALLS. **I AM NOT RAILING ON THE PHONE BUT WHEN WE CHOSE TO BE SO OCCUPIED WITH A DEVICE, THEN WE HAVE MADE AN “IDOL” OUT IT.**

YES, THERE ARE NUMEROUS BENEFITS, LIKE TEXTING IN AN EMERGENCY, BUT WHEN THAT PHONE SUBSTITUTES FOR REAL CONVERSATION WITH REAL PEOPLE SOMETHING IS WRONG. WE DON'T TALK WE TWEET, WE TEXT AND HOW MANY TIMES HAVE INTELLIGENT PEOPLE TWEETED AND HAD TO “BACK TRACK” THEIR REMARKS MADE IN HASTE. WE LITERALLY HIDE BEHIND THESE DEVICES. WE IDOLIZE, CAN'T DO WITHOUT THESE THINGS. **A QUESTION I WOULD ASK IS “HOW MANY FRIENDS DO YOU REALLY HAVE, NOT “FOLLOWERS”?**

I HAVE SAID MANY TIMES RELIGION IS NOT ABOUT RULES AND REGULATIONS, BUT **RELATIONSHIPS. IT IS VITAL THAT AS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST THAT WE HAVE GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS WITH REAL PEOPLE.** THAT TAKES TIME, FACE TIME WITH THAT PERSON. ANYTHING THAT LESSENS THAT TIME WITH PEOPLE OR WITH GOD HAS BECOME A DISTRACTION AND IS A CANDIDATE TO BECOME AN IDOL.

COMPARING, MY DAY AND FROM WHAT I HAVE SEEN EVEN TODAY, TV OR VIDEO GAMES CAN DO THE SAME THING. IF SOMEONE HAS MADE A COMMENT TO YOU ABOUT YOUR TIME SPENT ON IT THEN MAYBE YOU BETTER ASK YOURSELF THE QUESTION, **“WHAT MEANS MORE TO ME?” I ONLY USE A FEW EXAMPLES HERE TO SHOW THAT WE ARE NO DIFFERENT THAN THE PEOPLE WHO WANDERED THAT DESERT SO MANY YEARS AGO.** OH, THE OBJECTS OF THEIR AFFECTION SEEM SO OBVIOUS, A GOLDEN CALF, AN IDOL, BUT A PHONE A TV A SPORT, THE PRINCIPAL REMAINS THE SAME IT BECOMES AN OBJECT OF OUR AFFECTION AND ATTENTION.

**AT THE END OF A DAY, LOOKING BACK HOW MUCH MORE TIME, IF WE BOTHERED TO TAKE THE TIME, COULD WE HAVE SPENT WITH GOD INSTEAD OF MINDLESSLY SITTING IN FRONT OF A TV OR TAPPING OUR FINGERS ON A PHONE OR KEYBOARD?**

NOW DON'T GET ME WRONG, I DON'T WANT US TO BECOME A MONK CLOSED IN A ROOM, BUT WHAT I AM SAYING IS WE MUST REMAIN DISCIPLINED. **WE MUST KEEP OUR LIVES IN BALANCE.** TO MAINTAIN OUR WAY, OUR DIRECTION ON THE JOURNEY WE ARE TAKING IN LIFE. STAY CLOSE TO **GOD,** DON'T BE **GRUMBLING** ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING THAT COMES UP AND **GROW** IN THE LORD.

I NOTICED ANOTHER INTERESTING POINT, NO, A WARNING BROUGHT UP IN THESE PASSAGES. LOOK AT VERSE 10 “ *We must be careful not to stir up discontent; discontent destroyed them. AND FROM GALATIANS 5:15 “But if you criticize and attack each other, be careful that you don't destroy each other.”*

WANT TO SEE A PRESENT DAY EXAMPLE, JUST LOOK AT THE PRESIDENTIAL RACES. BACK AND FORTH AND BACK AND FORTH. YOU WONDER IF ANY OF THESE PEOPLE ARE FIT TO SERVE AS PRESIDENT AS THEY CRITICIZE EACH OTHER?

OTHER VERSIONS OF THIS VERSE SAY THE PEOPLE WERE GRUMBLING, WE ALL DO IT TO SOME DEGREE!! MISTER WEBSTER PUTS IT LIKE THIS - *COMPLAIN OR PROTEST ABOUT SOMETHING IN A BAD-TEMPERED BUT TYPICALLY MUTED WAY: ANOTHER WAY TO SAY IT IS WHINING.* IF WE DON'T LIKE SOMETHING THEN CULTURE TELLS US **WE HAVE A RIGHT TO** AND FILL IN THE BLANK. "THE YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY, THE GOVERNMENT, MY TEACHER, OR WHATEVER, **EVEN GOD!!!**"

**IF THERE IS ONE THING THAT CAN STOP US ON OUR JOURNEY IT IS GRUMBLING AND COMPLAINING.** I ASK YOU THIS - "WHO WANTS TO BE AROUND SOMEONE OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOTHING BUT GRUMBLE AND COMPLAIN. **LISTEN TO MORE "WARNINGS" FROM THE WORD** - "*Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*" AND "*James 5:9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*" NOW IS THAT STRONG ENOUGH FOR US, CLEAR ENOUGH FOR US?

**PAUL WROTE TO THE CORINTHIANS WITH ALL THAT WAS GOING ON AND TOLD THEM TO STRIVE FOR UNITY, BECAUSE THEN AND ONLY THEN CAN PEOPLE SEE IN US CHRIST.**

**NOW LET ME MAKE THIS CLEAR UNITY DOES NOT MEAN UNIFORMITY. I'LL REPEAT THAT, UNITY DOES NOT MEAN UNIFORMITY.**

BACK IN THE CHURCH I WAS IN DURING THE RENEWAL WE HAD A GUY AND HIS WIFE WHO IF YOU PUT A LABEL ON THEM WERE "*bleeding-heart liberals*" AND WE HAD MANY VERY CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH AS THE RENEWAL WAS KIND OF ASSOCIATED WITH A MORE CONSERVATIVE OUTLOOK ON CHURCH MATTERS.

HIS FRIENDS WOULD ASK DOUG "**WHY DO YOU GO TO THAT CHURCH?" HIS ANSWER WAS NO MATTER THE DIFFERENCES HE KNEW HE AND HIS WIFE WERE LOVED.**

**UNITY BUT NOT UNIFORMITY.** I NEVER HEARD HIM GRUMBLE ABOUT ANYONE IN THAT CHURCH. YOU SEE IN I PETER 4:8 - *Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything.* IF WE LOVE, WE FORGIVE. NO **GRUMBLING**, NO COMPLAINING, NO ENVY, NO GOSSIP BUT WE WILL BE NEAR TO **GOD** AND BE **GROWING**.

NOW TODAY'S READING GOES ON TO SAY...**11-12** *These are all warning markers—danger!—in our history books, written down so that we don't repeat their mistakes. Our positions in the story are parallel—they at the beginning, we at the end—and we are just as capable of messing it up as they were. Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it's useless. Cultivate God-confidence.*

**GOD DOES NOT ENJOY SEEING OUR TRIALS AND SETBACKS, BUT HE CAN AND DOES USE THEM FOR OUR GROWTH. WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE, BUT AS GALATIANS SPOKE TO US LAST WEEK, OUR FREEDOM IS NOT THERE FOR US TO DO WHATEVER WE DESIRE, IT IS THERE TO DO WHAT WE KNOW IS RIGHT!!**

DON'T EVER THINK THOUGH, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU STUMBLE OR MESS UP THAT YOU ARE WORTHLESS IN GOD'S EYES. **NEVER, NO WAY!!!! GOD LOVES YOU AND ME SO MUCH HE SENT HIS ONLY SON, AND AS YOU HAD HEARD IN THE WORDS OF THE COMMUNION LITURGY "HEAR THE GOOD NEWS, CHRIST DIED FOR US WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS THAT PROVES GOD'S LOVE TOWARD US."**

**WE CELEBRATE TODAY, YES, CELEBRATE COMMUNION IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM.** WE ARE FORGIVEN WHEN WE COME ASKING FROM THE HEART FOR FORGIVENESS FOR THAT HARSH WORD TO SOMEONE WE CARE FOR AND LOVE, THAT JUICY BIT OF GOSSIP WE HEARD AND PASSED ON, THE IMPATIENCE WE SHOWED WHEN WE WERE IN A HURRY OR THAT THOUGHT WE MOMENTARILY HELD IN OUR MIND AND NEVER MADE IT TO OUR TONGUE. THE VERSE AT THE END OF TODAY'S READING, LOOK AT, PONDER VERSE 13 *"No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it."* AND HEBREWS 2:18 *"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*

THIS IS OUR JOURNEY WE ARE ON. IT WILL HAVE ITS DETOURS, PEOPLE WE WILL MEET, NEW OR DIFFERENT THINGS TO EXPERIENCE, BUT IF WE KEEP OUR EYES ON **GOD**, WE DON'T **GRUMBLE**, THEN SURELY WE WILL **GROW** AND KNOW HIM WHO LOVES US AND FORGIVES US. HE IS HERE THIS MORNING TO GREET US AT HIS TABLE. AMEN.