

Faith Trek

Ephesians 4:1-16

Rev. Brint Hilliard, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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Have you ever gone backpacking before? The last time I went backpacking with some friends, I took several things with me: a compass, a map of the area, a bottle of water, and some food. We started at one place on the trail and had a basic idea where our hike was going to end. We had a general idea about the distance but none of us knew much about the actual trail that we were taking. Ultimately, my friends and I stepped out in faith and began our trek through the unknown hills and woods.

For me, a “Faith Trek” isn’t much different than a walk in the woods. We have a general idea that we are headed to God and heaven. We have a compass known as the Holy Spirit that points us “true north.” We have a map called the Bible that gives us general directions. We are also sustained by the testimonies and traditions of those believers who have taken this trek before us. Finally, we normally travel with others who make up our faith community.

Even though we have these things to help us, a “Faith Trek” is anything but easy. Because faith necessitates our believing in something not fully known or seen, we often hesitate. More than that, so many paths regarding faith or the lack thereof are all around us and so figuring out the right “true north” trek can be confusing. **So what does an authentic “Faith Trek” look like?**

Our “Faith Trek” with God often has few certainties associated with it. Rather it is an invitation to journey with God similar to the invitation given to Abraham in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12, God told Abraham to “*leave your country, your family, and your father’s home for a land that I will show you.*” God did not give Abraham the specifics of the journey and so it should not be a surprise when we have few details and many questions. When we look at Ephesians 4, Paul shares with us a similar message when he says “*get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you...[called us]...to travel.*” If we journey with God on this “Faith Trek,” we will find truths and certainties along the way but not necessarily before we begin. More to the point, our “Faith Trek” with God is a wandering throughout the wilderness of our lives in which we work out how to ***move from brokenness to wholeness.***

In Romans 3:23, Paul reminds us that all of us are broken because each of us has “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” **Each of us** has brokenness within our lives that separate us from having right relationships with first God and then others. The only way to remedy our dilemma is to acknowledge our brokenness and pursue a path with Christ in which we are spiritually mended and made whole. **But what does it mean to be whole?**

I believe there are three “biggies” that are critical to each of us being whole. We must choose to first **LOVE** God and then others unconditionally, **GROW** up in our faith, and, in turn, we must **SERVE** God.

When we love God first and learn to love as He loves, we will not forget about the brokenness in our lives or in the world. We will see the beauty of our lives in light of our brokenness and choose to participate with Him in mending the brokenness of others. Before we can be “menders,” we must choose to grow into *“fully mature adults, fully developed within and without.”*

Jesus makes it very clear in John 15 that we are to grow in our faith. In John 15, Jesus states He has put us *“in the world to bear fruit.”* We are not merely to collect “merit badges for Jesus” but are to bear life-giving fruit that never perishes and is rooted in His love. When we read the New Testament, this becomes painfully clear because the Pharisees and Sadducees, you know those real smart religious folk, liked to collect “merit badges for God” but were not so good at “bearing the right fruit.” Because of the state of their brokenness, they refused to grow and only wanted to serve God on their terms.

Unfortunately, wholeness can only be found based on God’s terms and these terms are nonnegotiable. God has clearly stated that the mending of our lives can only happen when we choose to participate with Him in mending the brokenness of others. We cannot stay in the safety of our First Baptist Church “faith fort.” We must actively engage in the messy lives that are around us and that are a part of our “Faith Trek.” We must carry on Christ’s mission as described in Luke 4. We must take the road God has given us and share:

“good news to the poor...announce pardon to prisoners...recovery of sight to the blind... set the burdened and battered free, to announce ‘This is God’s year to act!’”

When we accept this mission and embrace our “Faith Trek”, our lives are changed and the world is changed. The closer we draw to being mended to wholeness with God, the more different we become. As we are permeated by His Oneness, we enter into a deeper relationship with Him that is transformative and makes us into totally new creations. This transforming of our lives by God is intentional and each person experiences it in ways that are unique to them personally. Abraham had conversations with angels. Moses talked to God via a burning bush. Paul met Jesus in a blinding flash of light on a road to Damascus. I met Jesus when I was nine in a quiet, small town of 1,500 in the Great Plains of Oklahoma. Like those that came before me, I am on a “Faith Trek” that has been filled with all kinds of twist and turns. How about you?

When it comes to our “Faith Trek, there is a general process of moving from brokenness to wholeness. This process begins with us exploring a relationship with God in a safe and nonthreatening environment like Lifetree Café or worship. This exploring eventually shifts to a time of decision where we either say “NO” to God or we choose to “KNOW” God. When we choose to “know” God, we enter into a stage of equipping in which we learn more about God

and His mending ways. We are best equipped when we study God's word with others in small groups like our Bible Teaching units on Sunday mornings or that meet throughout the week.

As our "Faith Trek" continues, we are called to be more than "*babes in the woods*" and are meant to be people who engage with God in the "mending of lives" business. We engage in the "mending of lives" when we see the needs before us and work out ways to meet those needs. Even now, we are busy engaging the brokenness of our world by choosing to be Mentors at South School, by going on mission trips to Africa or New Orleans, by conducting Mission JC, and so much more. Because we engage the brokenness of our world, we get to experience being "*fully alive like Christ.*"

As this fullness of life changes us, we are empowered by His presence. When we receive God's power, we are generously given by Christ a spiritual gift or gifts. These diverse gifts are then to be used in such ways that we are "*moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son.*" As we do this "mending of lives" as the Body of Christ, we and others are made whole. We reach a point in our "Faith Trek" where we "*know the whole truth and tell it in love.*" More to the point, as we are empowered to move from brokenness to wholeness Jesus becomes:

"the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love."