

11-10-24

## Thoughts from the Long Trail

First, a thanks to everyone who held down the fort while we were in Texas. During the trip, we tallied nearly 3000 miles in the van. It was well worth it. We had a great time at our Niece's wedding. I officiated and my brother Tom and his two sons provided some of the music. I guess you could say that my sister called in some of our debts! As I mentioned earlier, those Texans do like their poker!

But the King's are road warriors when it comes to road trips, and a trip to Houston is child's play compared to the trip the seven of us took ten years ago. I drove over 6,000 miles from Anaconda, MT to Chincoteague Island off the coast of Virginia and then all the way back without a breakdown or even a flat tire!

God was certainly watching out for us. And not only did he take care of us by granting us traveling mercies, He taught me some interesting lessons which I have never forgotten and was reminded of them again recently. I want to share a couple of them with you this morning

But before I do, here's a riddle I made up:

What was the mechanic's diagnosis of the tow-truck's problem when it couldn't pull the car through the tunnel?

"Car-pull" tunnel syndrome!

The first thing God taught me on one particular road trip has to do with background noise and how it affects the way we live.

As I recall, the further east we drove, the louder the hum and buzz of the Cycadas became. I'm guessing y'all know what a cycada is.

Those bug-eyed creatures that look like giant flies that come out during the summer months and buzz so loudly you can hardly hear yourself think. They were the loudest in Memphis Tn.

But here's my thought: At first, the sound of the cycadas were deafening to us, but the more we were around them, the less we noticed them.

In the scientific world, this is called accommodation. So, at first their sound is upfront and, in your face, and you can't for a second forget about them, but then after a while, you grow used to them.

The question is, what is your background noise that you have become used to?

And is it healthy for you?

We all have a background noise that we have grown accustomed to, perhaps on a completely subconscious level and this determines how we operate in life.

In the New Testament, Jesus says an interesting line on different occasions that makes me think he's talking about background noise. He says, "*He who has ears, let him ear.*"

When I first thought about this phrase, I thought he was just trying to be inclusive, after all, most people have a pair of ears with which we listen. But now I realize it's more than that.

I think what Jesus is trying to tell us is to listen with faith. In other words, let faith be our background noise. Let our faith in God be the prism through which we view and operate our lives.

If we do this, then serving and loving our Lord becomes so much easier.

But if our background noise is something other than faith, let's say for example worldliness or materialism or selfishness or some other sound that drowns out the still small voice of God, then how in the world can we ever begin to understand and live how God wants us to live?

It is important for each of us to assess the background noise of our lives that can subtly take over our thoughts, our psyche, our attitudes, and ultimately our actions.

If it is destructive and worldly, then we are in a world of hurt. I am reminded the apostle Paul's admonition to each of us in Romans 12 when he writes, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

In other words, change your background noise from the world's to God's.

But how and why?

Briefly, Paul speaks about it in verse 1: He says, *"in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices"*

In other words, it begins by understanding and embracing by faith the amazing grace of God's Son Jesus and his work on the cross.

It means seeing our entire life as a gift from God and grasping the idea that our lives are to be lived out for his glory. Doing so is our *spiritual act of worship. Then we will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

What background noise are you listening to?

Does it criticize and condemn others who are different than you?

Does it continually criticize and condemn you?

Does it whisper in your ear to go for the gusto and go for all that your eyes and heart lust after so you can have all your desires fulfilled no matter who it hurts or who it might impact?

Does it feed you the line that faith in God is not real and that the community of faith is nothing more than a bunch of people who have lost sight of reality?

Does it say to you that life is nothing more than punching a clock M – F so that you have some money in order to be entertained on the weekends?

Does it urge you to demand your rights even if it means stepping on people who happen to get in your way?

Does the background noise tempt you to enter unhealthy relationships by telling you don't deserve better?

God wants us to tune into his background noise.

And At first it might seem overwhelming and so new to us we might be tempted to cover our ears to muffle the sound.

For example accepting the truth that we are like sheep who have gone astray and sinners who deserve everlasting separation from God are hard truths to swallow.

To hear Jesus say that *“out of men's hearts come evil thoughts and makes him unclean* is not pleasant, but it is true and it's the beginning of our salvation if we accept the truth.

Our background noise must sound something like this:

Bill, [enter your name here] In my wisdom and love, I've made you. I've known you even before you were in your mother's womb. I know you better than you know yourself. I know what's best for you and know your thoughts before you've even thought them. I have such great things I want to share with you. I have things in store for you that you cannot even begin to imagine.

Some things in your life will be extremely difficult, others will be overwhelmingly happy, but they're all part of my plan to make you into the person I want you to be.

Just have faith in my wisdom, love, power, and righteousness.

Most importantly, have faith in my Son, Jesus who is the exact representation of me and died for you to take away your sins, and so that we can be together forever.

Second thought: Circumstances can be easily misjudged when we're in the bubble.

And what I mean by the bubble is our own little world. On the road, our bubble was the minivan and at night, sometimes it was our tent.

Most of the time, we were fortunate that it didn't rain on us, but have you ever been in a tent when the wind starts picking up and the rain begins to fall?

It almost sounds like the world is coming to an end, but outside, nothing could be further from the truth. It's just that when you're in your little tent, you hear every little rain drop and feel every gust of wind that shakes your humble abode.

But when you step outside, what sounded like a torrential downpour turns out to be only a gentle shower.

Here's my point: Get out of your bubble so your molehills don't start looking like mountains!

Nothing can cure a personal pity party faster than getting to know and serving others.

When we get to know others and learn their stories, we begin to understand some of the struggles others are facing and how they've been able to overcome them.

This gives us inspiration and helps us put our trials into better perspective. On one road trip we were able to learn about the Lost colony of Roanoke Island and the trials they endured trying to establish a viable community in the new world.

It allowed us to view our camping situation in a whole new light. When we get out of our bubble and read the Bible and take in some of the dangerous and life-threatening accounts of Paul and others as they sought to spread the Good News, we quickly come to realize that we have in no stretch of the human imagination suffered as they did for the Gospel.

We quickly shrink back at the slightest hint of hostility. But this is completely contrary to God's call for our lives. Paul writes in 2 Tim. 1:7 *"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline."*

Third, don't scoff at small beginnngs.

On our 6,000-mile road trip ten years ago, we had the privilege of camping on the outer banks of North Carolina and visiting Kitty Hawk, the place where two bicycle repairmen, Orville and Wilbur Wright were the first ones to design and fly an engine powered aircraft.

Their runway that day was only 60 feet long, made of 4 15-foot 2x4's laid end to end on their edge.

They did four test flights that day.

The distance of their first flight was just over 100 feet.

The next one about 125 feet.

The third one, 175 feet.

Guess how far their plane flew on the fourth flight? Over 800 feet!

The year was 1903.

66 years later, one of the Wright brothers was still alive and witnessed Chuck Yeager break the sound barrier.

When we think about the Gospel, it's easy to think about the millions of people it has impacted over the generations and continues to do so to this day.

But let us never forget its humble beginnings.

From God calling one man Abram to follow him to a land unknown, to Joseph being sold into slavery in order to rescue Israel from famine, to Moses rescued from the Nile to lead people out of Egypt, to the Baby Jesus in the manger and the 12 disciples who huddled in the upper room with the door locked for fear of their own lives.

Sometimes we're tempted to think that we're just one little church in one little town in the middle of one state out of 50.

What can we do to ever make a difference in this great big world or ours?

And then we remember, if we can by God's wisdom, strength and love, be a difference in one person's life, then we've done something marvelous and miraculous and great in the Lord's eyes.

What fruit our testimonies will bear in the future is yet to be determined, but God knows, and it will be all for His glory.

So let us not scoff at the little things because Jesus said that if we are faithful in the little things, we will be given even greater responsibility in the future.

One interesting side note about one of our trips is that the fuel gauge in one of our vehicles stopped working.

As a matter of fact, every time I filled up the needle would stubbornly stay on E and I would even get the low fuel alarm bell to go off soon after I filled up.

It was only after I had travelled several miles did the gauge finally begin to register what I had already knew to be true:

My fuel tank was completely full!

I called this faulty fuel gauge a new name: I called it, the preacher's fuel gage for a couple of reasons:

First, because it is a perfect reminder to me that I must be a man of faith. Even though the fuel gage reads E, I know better.

Even though the low fuel alarm bell would ring, I could ignore it because I knew the truth. I paid my money. I took off the gas cap and inserted the nozzle. I selected the grade and pulled back the handle. I could feel and smell the fuel flowing through the hose and into my tank.



When I pulled out of the gas station, I had every confidence that my vehicle was full of gas even though the gas gauge said otherwise.

It's the same way with our faith.

Let us be discipline in the things God has called us to do, and though others around us will proclaim at the top of their lungs that Christianity is dead in any sort of relevant way, and others will live their lives believing that they will never be held accountable for their actions, we know the truth.

God became man and though this man, Jesus Christ, he paid for our sins. He died a horrible death so that we who believe in him might live. He was placed in a tomb with soldiers there to guard it and three days later he rose again to life to show that his victory over death can be ours.

Many things we see and read will deny this truth over and over again, but we know the truth.

The second reason I call it the preacher's fuel gage is that only as I travelled down the road, would the needle make a correct reading.

This is also how faith works

Our faith fuel gauge is tied to our actions.

Our faith kicks in when we finally choose to act.

Faith, for all intents and purposes is action.

Remember what James said? "*Do not merely listen to word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*"

*“And the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.”*

Do want to know how you can tell if this church or any church for that matter believes that God can do miracles in and through us?

Just look at their actions.

Do want to know if people believe it when God says, do not be afraid, for I am with you always?

Take notice of their actions.

Do want to know if people believe God’s promise that he will give you the words to speak at the right time when you are questioned about your faith?

Actions will speak volumes.

God want his church to be a church of faith and so to be a church of action. Anything less is not church at all.

Your faith gauge may read empty and you may look at that and say, I have no faith and therefore I chose to do nothing.

This is one way you could look at life.

That’s a horrible way because it amounts to a wasted life.

But there is a second option. You see that your faith gauge is empty. What do you do?

You call out to the One whose promises are never broken and resources never fail and you ask him for faith – for faith is a gift of God the Bible says and our God loves to give.

Then after you call out, you move out believing that God has heard your prayer and is already answering it.

Don't wait for your faith gauge to move.

It won't move until you do.

Well, there are other things I pondered on my roadtrips like If you go swimming with jelly fish, be prepared to be stung.

But remember:

What background noises are you choosing to listen to and how is it affecting your walk with God?

Get outside your bubble and be inspired by others

Don't scoff at the small things

And finally ... is your faith gauge reading empty?

Call out to God, then move out in action.

Why all this? Because God wants to shine his light and glory through his church. Amen.