

Sunday February 22, 2026
Galatians 1:11-24
Freedom in Between Series
@ FGBC
30 Minutes

Learning to Grow

- There are all sorts of ways that we learn right?
 - o There are the professional learners...the people who get an undergrad degree, then a master's degree, then another master's degree, then a doctorate, and then just keep learning throughout life (or even just people who go to university to get a single degree would be considered a professional learner)
 - o There are the practical learners...the people who learn by trying...car part needs to be changed, so you Google it and figure out how to fix what needs to be fixed.
 - o There are the street smart learners...the people who know how to survive in the wild of the "big city" by doing or not doing certain things.
 - o There is learning that comes from curiosity...looking things up and researching, learning that comes from observing and watching others, and learning that comes from just figuring it out on your own.

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Introduce yourself
- Can you think of a recent time that you learned something new?
 - o What did you learn?
 - o How did you learn it?
 - o How has that learning impacted your life since?

- Each of us learn things on a daily basis.
 - o Some of those learnings are of crucial importance to life from here on out.
 - Education.
 - Important skills, like driving or cooking.
 - Learning about what you believe and how that impacts how you live.
 - o Other times those things that we learn are not really that important.
 - The random sports or geography facts that will help me answer a few questions at a trivia night, but don't provide much to me beyond that.

- Hotdogs are banned in North Korea...having them is an act of treason.
- Today, as we continue to look at the letter of Paul to the Galatians, we see of a time when Paul learned something that impacted the entirety of his life, allowing him to grow in faithfulness and maturity as a follower of Jesus.
- Paul's story shows us what it looks like when God completely reorients someone's life through their willingness to move forward.
 - Acts 9 gives some context to Galatians 1, so we are going to start in Acts 9.
 - Do you remember the story in Acts where Paul (aka Saul) meets Jesus?

READ Acts 9:3-9

- I want you to imagine that you are in Paul's shoes here.
 - You have spent your whole life with one belief system that you have poured all of your time and energy into.
 - You have learned more and more about what it meant to be a Jew and how to follow the law.
 - Now, you have had a unique experience that very few other people have had and you can no longer see...not a medical condition but a supernatural experience.
 - What would you do next?
 - How many of you would sit and wait it out for a while...maybe pouting a little bit about the fact that you are now blind?
 - How many of you would dig your heels in and focus in on the beliefs that you already held?
 - I mean, it is those beliefs that would be most comfortable to you.
 - How many of you would try to talk to people...as many people as you could to figure out what the voice from heaven actually meant?
 - How many of you would go to a religious institution, like a church (or temple), and try to talk to someone like a pastor?
 - How many of you would embrace your newfound spiritual fervor and just start sharing it?
 - How many of you would head into the bush and just be in your own head for a while?
 - How do you think Paul responded?

- Back to Galatians 1 starting at verse 11 is where we find out what Paul did after meeting Jesus.

READ Galatians 1:11-24

- Paul embraces his new found faith whole-heartedly.
 - He doesn't stop and wait.
 - He realizes that God has showed up in his life and he has heard the voice of Jesus, so he runs with it, realizing that God has entrusted him with something important.
 - But in embracing this gospel...this good news of Jesus, Paul does something very different than what we may often think Paul did.
 - Most people view Paul as the person who persecuted Christians, met Jesus, then started preaching and going on missionary journeys sharing the message of Jesus.
 - But, Paul essentially runs away into the bush.
 - This is where Acts 9 fills in some of the gaps.
 - At this point in time, Paul is still known by his original name Saul.
 - After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul meets Ananias (Acts 9:11-19)
 - Ananias isn't there to teach Saul but to be a witness of the transformation that is going on in Saul's life...everyone knows who Saul is by name, so Ananias is the guinea pig who is tasked by God to see what's happening.
 - Upon Ananias showing up, Saul regains his sight, eats a little bit to regain his strength (Acts 9:18-19) and then spends a few days in Damascus, where he teaches and preaches the message that he had just learned a few days before (Acts 9:20-25)
 - He gets himself in trouble for his preaching, is lowered from a window, and runs away for 3 years (Acts 9:23-25/Galatians 1:17)
 - The events in Acts 9:25 end, and then there is a 3 year gap where Paul goes to Arabia, and then the events in Acts 9:26 pick up again.
 - This just goes to show that there is so much of the biblical story that goes untold.
 - We can read the story of scripture and understand the characters and know who Paul is and understand who Jesus is and

what Jesus did in dying on the cross, but we have no clue what Paul did in Arabia for three years.

- Arabia is not Saudi Arabia, but is speculated to be the ancient Kingdom of Nabatea, a kingdom which includes the western part of modern day Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Gaza, Jordan, and parts of Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia...there were towns, cities, and communities throughout this area, so it wasn't just hot sand.
 - The most prominent city in the area would have been Petra.

- We can make some very well-educated guesses though as to what Paul did in Arabia:

- Paul likely did some soul searching, some praying, some reading of scrolls, and some discerning...figuring out what it meant for him to grow in his newfound faith.
 - Paul strikes me as a precursor to the desert mothers and fathers...people who met Jesus and then went into the Egyptian desert from the 3rd to 5th Centuries to practice solidarity and to intentionally seek the face of God in the desert, away from the busyness of society.
- While in Arabia, Paul also likely started the mission that God called him to...preach the gospel to Gentiles who were scattered around in the area outside Damascus.
 - Professor and theologian Ben Witherington writes in his book *Paul of Arabia? The Apostle's Early Adventures*, "The best bet is that Paul had tried out his gospel in Arabia Petrea (aka Nabatea), and the king wanted to arrest him for promulgating a non-Nabatean religion in his territory without permission" [hence the reason that Paul ended up making his way back to Damascus and Jerusalem (Galatians 1:17-18)]

- After Paul has been in Arabia for a while, he made his way back into civilization, or at least civilization that comes to the forefront throughout the Bible (Damascus, Jerusalem, Cilicia)
 - It is once he has left Arabia that Paul finally makes connections with the biblical movers and shakers, like Peter and James (Jesus' brother).
 - Prior to this, Paul kept mostly to himself as he developed his theology and understanding of who Jesus was...he says he didn't go to see the apostles.
 - I don't want to advocate that this what we should all do...there is a lot of danger in interpreting theology in the vacuum of our own minds...
 - Paul's situation is unique; most of us need the church, teachers, and accountability as we grow...we can't do it alone.
 - But we have to at least acknowledge that that is Paul's reality here.
 - He had Jewish training, but he had no Christian training.
 - Paul received his faith, his message, his gospel, the good news that he preached from God...that is an important part of Paul's argument here...it was something Father, Son, and Spirit revealed to him.
 - Paul spent his entire life in pursuit of God.
 - As a Pharisee, he knew scripture, he had memorized large portions of at least the Torah (first 5 books of the Old Testament) and he knew what to do and how to act.
 - He was taught by rabbis how to be a Pharisee and he was at the top of his class.
 - But as someone transformed by the abundant life that Jesus called him into, he pursued a life that was so radically different from where he once was (even if it was still focused around religious pursuits).
 - His every move...his every decision...his every pursuit was to be faithful to the gospel message that God had given him... "Jesus gave his life for our sins...in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live." (Galatians 1:4, NLT)
 - Whether he was alone, in a small group, amongst a large group of people, and regardless of what ethnic group he was

talking to, Paul's primary aim was faithfulness to God and the message that God had entrusted him with.

- What do we do with this information?
 - o There are probably lots of questions we can wrestle with, but there are two I want to highlight:
 - 1) What does it look like for you to be faithful to God and the gospel message that God has entrusted to you?
 - To be faithful is to be constant in belief and practice, no matter the people you are around or the things that you do...it's an obedience to what God calls you to.
 - There is no one size fits all process for how to be faithful to God and the message of the gospel.
 - o We are all called to be ready to share the good news of Jesus, yet faithfulness by those gifted as evangelists is going to look different than faithfulness by the one who is not gifted as an evangelist.
 - This is not an excuse to avoid evangelism, saying, "It's not my thing" but it's a realization that each of us have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit that allow us to be faithful to God in different ways.
 - o The same can be said of other giftings...those who teach, those who are hospitable, those who prophesy, those who discern, those who lead, those who serve
 - Each person is going to be faithful differently, simply because God has created everyone differently.
 - o Paul was faithful to the message of the Gospel by moving out of the neighborhood, into Arabia, and then as he entered into his mission trips moved into different neighborhoods, proclaiming Christ as he went.
 - You are likely not going to pursue faithfulness to the Gospel in the same way that Paul did and that is okay.

- Our goal in pursuing faithfulness to God and faithfulness to the message of the Gospel is not to compare ourselves to others, but to strive to live lives filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, (faithfulness), gentleness, and self-control.
 - This requires us to intentionally contemplate what this looks like in our lives.
 - You can't live the way you have always lived and expect to become more faithful.
- 2) What does it look like for you to grow in maturity in Christ?
 - Growth in maturity in Christ requires deliberate action.
 - You do not grow in maturity in Christ by osmosis.
 - You cannot sit on your couch and grow...growth requires action...growth requires practice.
 - The Olympics ended this morning.
 - Simona Stallone, a random lady from Toronto, took it into her own hands this year and showed the world what an average person looks like compared to an athlete who has practiced and worked hard to train day after day for their events.
 - In skeleton, the one where you go 100+ km/h down an ice track on a toboggan head first...Simona said, it was an event that she felt comfortable in and was actually good at, yet she still finished 35 seconds slower than the last place finisher at the Olympics.
 - In faith, growing in maturity in faith is similar...it takes work and practice.
 - Here are a few things that we can practice (as individuals and as a community of faith)...
 - Prayer
 - Reading scripture
 - Meditating on scripture
 - Memorizing scripture

- Studying (pull out a commentary or study Bible and go deeper than just reading the Bible)
 - Or find an online course on theology and do some study that way.
- Practice solitude or simplicity
- Spend time serving others...right now, I am looking at building a team to serve downtown at the New Life Center amongst the people who don't have a home or food to eat on a regular basis.
- Worship (not just on Sunday mornings) but by yourself or with groups of people at different times
 - Young adults worship evening here at the church at 7 if you are a young adult
- Practice confession
- Find a spiritual director or a spiritual mentor to walk through life with you.
- Fast
 - Lent began a few days ago, and it isn't too late to join in...choose something to fast from (food item, meal, social media, TV) as a way of spending the time when you are craving that thing so deeply so pursue Christ.
 - And then spend time feasting together...a number of small groups are fasting and feasting together, but there are groups being organized for those who are not a part of a small group who would like to fast and feast together.

- Paul pursued Christ with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - o We can't copy and paste what Paul did into our own lives, but that isn't an excuse to not pursue faithfulness and to not strive to grow in our faith day after day.

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Is God speaking anything to you this morning? Is there anything that you are pondering as you move on today?
- Have one person pray a blessing on your group as you pursue faithfulness to Christ.
 - o "God, be with everyone in this group. Where are you inviting us to take one deliberate step of growth this week as we seek to pursue you? Amen."