

Are We There Yet?

Sept 15, 2013

How many times have you had the family in the car for about five minutes at the beginning of a vacation when someone says, "Are we there yet?" Probably most of us have heard that. Clearly the focus was on the destination, not the trip.

There was a story once of a small boy who was playing Little League Tee Ball for the first time. He lined up with the ball on the Tee, took careful aim and hit the ball through the infield and toward left field. Off he went toward first base. Then he turned the corner toward second, but began to slow down. He appeared confused at first, but then kept turning to the left until he was headed right for the middle of the infield diamond. Over the pitcher's mound he went, headed straight for the home plate. About five feet from the front of the plate, he threw himself down and slid. Then he jumped up, hands in the air, cheering over the so-called homerun he had just scored. The coach told him he had bypassed second and third base, but the boy simply said, "But I scored!"

Many years ago, I had a golf lesson in which the pro told me I was raising my head up too soon. I was too anxious to see where the ball went. He told me to focus on the position of the ball, placement of my feet, angle of the club head, and so forth. He teed up another ball, told me to take the right stance and then pointing at the ball, he said, "If you've got everything right down there, you'll be right out there on the fairway."

The little boy and I both had the same problem. We were focused on the outcome, the results. But we were neglecting the process. The Christian journey is a process. We need to be focused on the process and let God take care of the results. We live in a fast moving society that focuses on results. Our NT scripture today is about the direction in which our faith should be pointed. So much of our lives are pre-packaged, microwavable, automatic push-button, plug it in, flip the switch, and hit the send button. So, what's wrong with that? Nothing really, but we need to realize that God is not pre-packaged, microwavable, automatic push-button, plug it in, flip the switch, and hit the send button.

Being a tool of God requires one thing: Faith. Faith in God, something Paul had to point out to the Corinthians.

We make decisions, large and small, every day that hinge on an act of faith. Almost everything we decide is based on prior experience, prior observations, or things you have heard. But it takes faith to put them into action. Very few things are absolutely straight forward in this life. Just turning on a light switch requires a small leap of faith that the light will come on.

Picture a little boy sitting on the side of a pool. He knows by personal observation that the human body can float. And if you move the arms and legs in a certain manner, he knows the body can be made to move through the water. Now, he sits there and wonders if he has faith to attempt what he has come to believe.

I once took a course in statistics. The prof asked me to go to the board and show how I had worked out an assigned problem. I did it and I knew I was right, until he asked me to explain what I had actually done; what did the exercise actually accomplish. I started to say, "In this example I have proven – " and he stopped me abruptly and said, "You haven't proven anything. Try again." So I tried different wording. "I have shown that – " and he stopped me again. After the third try which he also interrupted, I said, "Okay, I don't know. Please tell me what this does."

He cleared his throat and said, "This exercise and any other like it gives us sufficient evidence to behave as though we believe a certain thing to be true."

Sufficient evidence to behave as though we believe a certain thing to be true. But not proof. Without proof, what else was required? Faith. Does the bible give us proof that there is a God? Any theologian will tell you that it can't. But it does give us sufficient evidence to behave as though we believe a certain thing to be true.

So we believe in God because of our faith. It's part of the process.

To focus on the process means having faith that God will do His part. To focus on results only means you think God can't do it. What if the result you want is not what God wants? Process focuses on action, things we can do now. It focuses on the reality that we can't change others, only God can. It focuses on the present, results focus on the future.

Process allows you to focus on the needs of others. Let God work through you to produce results.

Jesus was process oriented. How many times did his followers ask him to just give them the results they wanted? Instead, he showed them the process; he didn't just hand out results. Remember the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. He asked only that God's will be done.

For many of the unchurched, there is a pathway of seemingly reliable logic that they believe discredits the very existence of God. They see no evidence of Him and they go about their daily lives with no thought of Him. They rise in the morning, carry out their daily tasks and feel they have no higher power to answer to. Everything seems to fall into place and when it doesn't, well, stuff happens, you know. Ask any non-believer why he or she doesn't believe in God. Chances are they will give you an example of some disappointing results in the past. Somehow, they have decided what God should be and should do and they have made their judgment when their so-called "results" don't materialize.

There is a flip-side of that logic which begins with the recognition of the enormous size and complexity of this world and this universe. On the basis of such evidence, one cannot simply ignore the presence of a deity. The enormity of God and the foundation of things which are good makes us realize there is something better out there; that He reaches down to us out of pure goodness. So, based on the faith that brought us to that point, we look for a spiritual arena that allows us to celebrate His reaching down; a spiritual arena that shows us the process, the journey. Look around you – you are in that arena. Are you focused on the process?

We sometimes find ourselves slipping into a complacent state of mind where we have small slivers of doubt and God seems very distant. Check yourself when that happens and see where your focus is. To realize that you have lost sight of process is the first step toward regaining your faith. It is precisely those moments when we must reach back to the fundamentals of our belief and realize that we have slipped because we are focusing on the destination somewhere. Proof comes from results. Our assurance of God's love is through evidence, not earthly proof. Evidence comes from immersing ourselves in His process.

This approach is not the natural subconscious line of reasoning we find in human nature and we must constantly refresh and renew it. We must consciously stay on track.

Listening to God is not a simple reflex like breathing. It requires your conscious effort. Ask God to help you find your process again if you've misplaced it. God does listen. If we focus on the journey and let God be in charge of the destination, there will be a spiritual balance that will empower you beyond your wildest expectations.

If you do not rely on God for results, you're in trouble right away. To do this means you become self-absorbed, weighted down and doubting. Relying on God for results gives you the freedom you need, but it is not a license to be lazy. You've heard some say, "As God wills it." Then they just sit back and do nothing. A good farmer works hard, preparing the soil, planting the seed, but knows that God provides the final result.

Each of us has special gifts to contribute to the process of Christian journey. Use your gifts to the glory of God, not for the accolades of others. Are you participating for the applause of others? Is that not focusing on results? God knows what you have done. It's like the young boy who hit the hole in one and looking around, realized that no one was there to see it. No one but God.

Where is our faith? Where is the faith of those outside these walls? Is faith based on fantasy? So many of our fantasies are based on results, not process. Read a good book or watch a good movie. Have you seen Avatar? Did you see Star Wars when it was first released? Tell me, didn't you find yourself wondering how it's going to end? Nothing wrong with that. But, don't think that's the way God works. When television first came out, some were afraid it would teach our society that life's situations could be defined, addressed, and solved in 60 minutes. In this century more than ever before, there are many influences out there that make us want to cut to the chase, get the results, move on to the next thing. Faith is basic. God works at God's pace, not ours. We are looking for immediate results, but the faith we need to practice is much more basic.

The Christian journey is a process. Not a result.

Take time today to ask yourself how you would define your Christian journey. Do you have faith to leave results in the hands of God? Pause a minute and remember what we heard from Isaiah 30:21 – Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

Let me close with a story written by Mitch Albom. He wrote *Five People You Meet in Heaven*.

A man seeks employment on a farm. He hands the farmer his letter of reference and it says only, “He sleeps through storms.” The farmer is desperate, so he hires him. Several weeks pass and a terrible storm rips through the valley one night. The farmer leaps out of bed and calls for his new hired hand, but the man is sleeping soundly. So the farmer dashes off to the barn and sees that the animals are already secure with plenty of feed. He runs out into the field and notices the bales of wheat are bound and covered. He races to the silo and finds that it is locked tight and the grain is dry. Then he understands the letter that says, “He sleeps through storms.” The man had a clear view of the process.

As I was reading over the first draft of this sermon, I realized how much of it was a reflection of my own impatience with God. We must ask ourselves if we are focused on journey or destination. Do I pray every day, or only when I need something? Am I prepared, at any time, to voice my spiritual opinion and defend my beliefs? Or do I avoid any conversation about God? Do I serve because God calls me or just to get applause from others? Do I spend my time worrying about tomorrow, or do I look for opportunities to serve God today? These are process questions that test my faith. Sometimes, when I am honest with myself, I don't like the answers I hear.

How about you?

Amen