

Sermon Series - God Pleasers: 49 Days of Faith

Part 5 - "Taking the Initiative"

Pastor Dale Campfield - July 31st, 2011

Intro:

Matt 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations..."

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Current Sermon Series: "God Pleasers" – 49 Days of Faith

Theme Verses: Hebrews 11:6 "Without faith, it is impossible to please God."

Sermon Topics

Expecting the Best, Taking Risks in Faith, Following God's Directions
How to Keep on Believing, Taking the Initiative. Stretching My Imagination
Persisting in Faith

How do you get God's approval? By being more good than bad? No. By keeping the Ten Commandments? No. By promising to be perfect? No. By being religious and going to church? No. The Bible says there's only one way to get God's approval. There's only one way to get God's smile on your life. In Hebrews 11:6 it says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." The only way you can get God's approval is by faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. You may be a great person but without faith it's impossible to please God. You may do all kinds of great things in your life but without faith it's impossible to please God.

Would you say that faith is a pretty important issue? Yes, it is. It is vital that you learn how to live by faith. That you strengthen your faith. If you want to make an IMPACT in life; being a God pleaser – you've got to have faith!

For forty-nine days, between July 3 and August 14 2011, we'll be in a seven week or 49-day series called "God Pleasers – 49 Days of Faith." In this series we're going to stretch your faith, we're going to challenge your faith, we're going to deepen your faith, we're going to strengthen your faith and you're going to see all kinds of amazing things happen in your life as your faith grows.

How do you get more faith? You say, "I'd like to get more faith. How do I get it?" The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing the word of God. Faith comes from this book – this is faith-food – and the more you get into this book, God's word, the Bible – the more your faith will develop. So we've figured out a way in the next forty-nine days to deepen your faith and get you into the Word.

Matthew 9:29

"According to your faith it will be done to you."

Jesus is talking. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible because God says it's your choice. You get to choose. "According to your faith it will be done to you." You get to choose how much God blesses your life. You get to choose how many answers you have to prayer. You get to choose how much God gets to use you in His plan for the world to make an IMPACT. How? "According to your faith it will be done to you." God says, "If you've got a lot of faith, we'll get a lot done in your life. If you've got a little faith, we'll get a little done in your life. If you've got no faith, you get nothing done in your life. 'According to your faith it will be done.'" Faith is the key that unlocks the door to heaven. If you want to be a God Pleaser – You've got to have FAITH! It is very important that you grow, develop, you strengthen your faith.

Today's Sermon Title: "Taking the Initiative"

James 2:26

"Faith without works is dead."

WISE PEOPLE TAKE INITIATIVE. They just don't sit and watch, they take action to accomplish what they believe God wants. Yes, they live by FAITH but they put action to that faith.

Illus: Indiana Jones

Even as the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark, when Indiana had to step out by faith. He saw the canyon, new he had to cross it, had faith he could do it, but then he had to actually step out and do it. He had to take the initiative to make it happen!

Three Types of People in the World

- Those who do not know what is happening.
- Those who watch what is happening.
- Those who make things happen.

Wise people make things happen. Wise people take initiative. They see a problem and act on it. They don't just sit passively and wait for opportunities to come. They prayerfully take actions. When faced with a problem, or a need, the wise person goes to God, seeks for wisdom, and then takes a piece of paper, and begin to consider her/his options. What should I do Lord? What do you want me to do? Yes, you have faith; but then take action.

It makes sense doesn't it? If you have a problem, you take action. What else is there to do? Unfortunately, not many people, followers of Christ, included, do it. This perverted human tendency causes the writer of Proverbs to warn us of laziness. Instead of taking action, the lazy person does nothing. Instead he or she sits passively, watching, waiting for something to happen.

The Book of Proverbs call people who live by this philosophy as sluggards.

Proverbs 13:4

"The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied."

Let's look at the...

Comparisons between Sluggards and The Diligent

Illus: Picture of a SLUG

A slug is a slimy snail like creature that has no shell. It walks so slowly and without direction.

Comparison #1

Sluggards – Starve to Death

The Diligent – Reap a Harvest

Proverbs 6:6-8

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”

Comparison #2

Sluggards – Live in Poverty

The Diligent – Live in Prosperity

Proverbs 6:9-11 (The Message)

“So how long are you (you slug) going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy – do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty your permanent houseguest!”

Dirt-poor life! Poverty your permanent houseguest! While the OT may have viewed this warning as referring primarily to material poverty, we are safe to apply this to every area of our lives: mental poverty; physical; social; emotional; spiritual; potential resulting in unfulfilled lives and unrealized potential.

Comparison #3

Sluggards – Blame Others for their Problems

The Diligent – Take Responsibility In Solving their Own Problems

Hosea 4:4

“Don't point your finger at someone else and try to pass the blame!”

But why would people not take action? The lazy person says why not! Why take action when you can blame someone for your problems. It is much easier to sit and complain about the unfairness of life or the overwhelming frustrations of the modern world. Why take initiative in solving your problems when we have the fashionable option of blaming our parents, our spouse, our friends, our employer, our teachers, our pastors, our government or our God for our problems.

Comparison #4

Sluggards – Expect others to Feed Them

The Diligent – Feed Themselves

Laziness causes a lot of damage in people. Add hunger and loss of human potential to poverty. One proverb that drives this point with humor is...

Proverbs 19:24

“Some people (slugs) are so lazy that they won’t even lift a finger to feed themselves.”
(NLT)

This is a humorous exaggeration meant to make us feel the pain as we laugh, because we know this is so true with our lives. The food is right there in front of him, but the slug has neither the energy or the motivation to do it.

Comparison #5

Sluggards – Waste Their Lives Away

The Diligent – Make an IMPACT with the Lives

Proverbs 26:14

“Like a door turning back and forth on its hinges, the lazy person (a slug) turns over and over in bed.” (NCV)

The slug turns over and over, stuck up in bed – going nowhere. Wasting his life.

Comparison #6

Sluggards – Have the mentality: “It’ll just happen.”

The Diligent – Have the mentality: “Let’s make this happen!”

James 2:26

“Faith without works is dead.”

Another alternative to taking initiative is to settle into this fatalistic dream of some better future that will eventually “just happen” to us. Underlying many missed opportunities to take action is an unspoken but deeply held belief that goes something like this: “Somehow, someday, Lord willing, my life will improve. Somehow, someday what I want will come to pass. Someday, somehow I’ll drift into more satisfying circumstances. Dreaming for a better day without initiating action for a better day is nothing but a dream. This is akin to what James said as “faith without works.” It is dead!

As we pointed out this week, this is not the way God set life. The natural course of life is not up, but down. Those who choose to sit back and go with the flow normally end up going downhill. If we want God’s best, it will require an uphill climb. Without doubt that uphill walk is going to require action and initiative, and nobody who has embraced the “somehow, some day” philosophy will ever reach God’s best for their lives.

Comparison #7

Sluggards – Say: “I’ll do it later.”

The Diligent – Say: “I’ll do it now!”

Proverbs 26:14

“Like a door turning back and forth on its hinges, the lazy person (a slug) turns over and over in bed.” (NCV)

Taking initiative faces another challenge in our tendency to postpone action for a latter time or procrastination. Every time a person responds to a pressing responsibility with a careless, “I’ll do it later” he or she is acting in a lazy way.

We are so acculturated to this mindset that we need a radical change. We need to be delivered from this destructive habit.

Comparison #8

Sluggards – Makes excuses – like, “I’m scared of lions.”

The Diligent – Have solutions – like, “Let’s kill the lion!”

Proverbs 22: 13

The sluggard person is full of excuses, saying, “If I go outside, I might meet a lion in the street and be killed!”

A final challenge to taking action is making excuses. The lazy person always finds a reason to do nothing. The sluggard quoted in Proverbs 22:13 comes up with a great reason for not going to work.

“There is a lion outside!” To make sure no one questions her/his admirable reason for remaining inside, he says, “I might get murdered in the streets!” What an imagination! And what if there is a lion on the streets? The man should join the lion hunt! Only a sluggard would sit around for the rest of his or her life because there are dangerous obstacles in his or her way. The truth is there will always be “lions in the street. There will always be frightening responsibilities. There will always be overwhelming challenges. There will always be heartbreaking disappointments. But only the sluggard will make excuse after excuse in the face of life’s demands.

Conclusion:

Think about your own life. Do you make excuses for lack of performance, lack of diligence, lack of discipline, lack of good thing? Look at the fruit of your life now. Are the fruits giving you joy or do they make you sigh in sorrow?

But you might say, not me, never. I am busy as ever. I am not guilty of slothfulness. I am a go person. I don’t ever walk. I ran. This is so true in Hong Kong, known as the city of “running people.” Nobody walks there. Everyone is on the run.

You may think that you’re not a slug - you’re always on the run and ready to go. You’re busy doing this and that, etc. But are you on the run for the right reasons? You might be! But let me warn you from one Christian brother to another...

“It is possible for busy people to suffer from a hidden disease of selective sluggardliness – a disease characterized by carefully constructed compartments where slothfulness reigns. Though little, if left unattended will ultimately bring pain, and heartache, even ruin in our lives.

- It’s those who are busy building their own kingdom instead of God’s Kingdom.
- It’s those who spend more money than they have and say tomorrow they’ll go on budget – but tomorrow never comes.
- It’s men and women who fill their time with people but never tend the soil of their own interior lives. They never look deeply at the emotional and psychological realities that drive their behavior, affect their goals and shape their relationships.
- It’s the father/mother who succeeds at work; has a lot of friends, but fails miserably to respond to the emotional needs of their spouse and children.
- It’s the student who does so well in school but fails to relate well with his family.

How do you feel about this message today? Is your faith building during these 49 days? Do you sense the Holy Spirit telling you something about an area of your life – relationships, work, health, money or your spiritual life? Remember that God loves you and when He tells you

something that needs to be changed, He does it because He loves you. Do you feel you're rusting spiritually? Then come to God today and rededicate your life to the Lord.

If you truly want to please God, you must live by Faith – Following God's Directions in FAITH, and then Believing each step along the journey while you wait...Taking the Initiative...

And as you do...

You watch... you **wait**... you'll see!