

Sermon Series - God Pleasers: 49 Days of Faith
Part 6 - “Stretching My Imagination”
Pastor Dale Campfield - August 7th, 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: "Stretching the Imagination"

Matthew 17:14-21

Key Verse...Matthew 17:20

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Jesus says to them if you had faith like a mustard seed or as a mustard seed you could achieve great things. I have to wonder why He used that example so let's do a little investigation of the mustard seed in scripture.

First of all how does Jesus Himself use the mustard seed as an example in His other teaching? Let's look.

Matthew 13:31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. (32) Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

What is unusual about a mustard seed? Well, it is the smallest seed known at that time. But we know from Jesus own words that a tiny mustard seed produces tremendous growth and finally produces a tree sized plant that can reach a height of 12 feet or more and provides shade and a place that birds can perch upon. A) THE MUSTARD SEED JESUS REFERS TOO IS A BLACK MUSTARD SEED B) THIS PARTICULAR SEED IS KNOWN TO GROW UP TO TWELVE FEET IN HEIGHT IN THE AREA WHERE JESUS LIVED AND WALKED

Illus: Things you put in water then they grow?

Illus: Energy Drinks

Red Bull, if you believe the advertisements, "gives you wings." I however, have never been willing to plop down \$3 for a 12 ounce can. There are a couple of hundred different energy drinks on sale. Some of the drinks on the market include:

- Jolt - \$2.50 for 24 ounces
- Rock Star - \$2.00 for 16 ounces
- Pure Energy Drink - \$2.00 for 6.8 ounces
- Cintron Sugar Free Citrus Mango Liquid Energy - \$2 for 16 ounces
- Wild Buzz – 99 cents for 12 ounces

These drinks are incredibly popular with our teenagers and young adults. I don't have recent statistics, but in 2004 alone, sales of these beverages which are packed with sugar and caffeine reached the \$1 billion mark.

The caffeine apparently is the big incentive. Folks think that they get a caffeine buzz that keeps them alert and awake. The fact of the matter, however, is that they have about as much caffeine as a weak cup of coffee. The more important ingredient, or at least the most overrated ingredient, is taurine. Taurine is a naturally occurring amino acid in our bodies which is a major

constituent in bile. It stimulates the nervous system and increases energy.

As it is found in energy drinks, its synthesized version has caused anxiety, irritability, high sensitivity to noise, and even self-mutilation in rats. As these energy drinks are marketed, the stated benefits to humans include: improved performance, improved concentration and reaction speed, improved emotional status, and stimulated metabolism. All of that is theoretically possible, I suppose. The science suggests that taurine also has the potential to lower blood pressure.

For those of us my age and older, an energy drink is the equivalent of Popeye gulping down a can of spinach when he need an extra boost. When we are tired, frazzled, worn-out, or at the end of our rope, we can run into the convenience store or gas station and grab a can of Red Bull and holler out, "Give me the juice."

Keep that in mind for a minute as we go to the Scripture lesson from Luke this morning. It comes from the long travel narrative that stretches from chapter 9 through chapter 19. Jesus and his disciples have begun to make their way down to Jerusalem for the final time. Here is just a small sampling of what they did while traveling. On the way they had to bypass hostile Samaritans, send out a seventy member advance party to the places that he was about to visit, and watch as demons gave in to his authority. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, was entertained in the home of Mary and Martha, and preached and cast out demons wherever he went. On a couple of different occasions, Jesus ate at the home of a Pharisee and had to confront arrogant, self-righteous religious scholars. He preached about greed and the storing up of treasures on earth, confronted controversy by healing on the Sabbath. He taught in parables about the lost sheep, lost coin, and the prodigal son.

My guess is that by the time we reach chapter 17, the disciples are tired. Their latest challenge from Jesus was to forgive another person who has wronged them even seven times a day. The thought of that had to wear them out. They have been challenged physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They were still walking into the unknown, unsure of what really waited for them once they reached Jerusalem. And then in verse 5 of chapter 17, they seemingly can't take it anymore and address Jesus by asking, "Give us more faith." Their faith was running low. Their energy was depleted. They didn't know if they had it in them to continue down the road. They were in the midst of an incredible spiritual fatigue. They needed a faith transplant.

Before this incident, there have been five times that faith has been mentioned in the gospel of Luke. In 5:20, after some men had let a friend down through a roof in order to get him to the place where Jesus was, the record goes like this. "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.'" Chapter 7 tells the story of a Roman centurion who came to Jesus asking him to heal his slave. When Jesus started to go off to his house, the centurion told him not to bother, but just say the word. He said that he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his house, but he knew that Jesus could heal from a distance. Jesus said in reply, "...not even in Israel have I found such faith" (7:9). Also in chapter 7, when a sinful woman washed his feet and dried them with her hair, he said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (7:50).

One day, as recorded in the eighth chapter, Jesus was out on the Sea of Galilee with his disciples. He was sleeping in the back of the boat when a fierce storm arose out of nowhere. The disciples woke him up, telling him that they were going to sink and drown. As he spoke a calming word to the water and the wind, he said to the disciples, "Where is your faith? (8:25). Toward the end of that chapter, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for many years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his robe. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (8:48).

It is clear in these instances that faith requires trusting in Jesus enough to know that he is able to powerfully act to address problems or crises. A new name and condition has entered the Christian lexicon. We used to call it "burnout", but now it's called "compassion fatigue." I have witnessed it in some people in every church I have ever served. It happens when a person is always in the giving mode. These people always see one more person to visit, one more prayer shawl to make, one more Bible study to teach, one more teenager to reach, one more meeting to chair, one more witness to make, one more potluck to cook for, one more fundraiser to attend, one more community event to volunteer for, one more church cleanup day to work at, or one more children's program to plan.

I know that some of you have felt this. Even the most dedicated among us can come to the place where we don't know how in the world we are going to be able to continue giving. There is always something to be done. There is always a lack of people to do it. That's when we search for a shot of energy. That's when we need a little help.

I wasn't there with the disciples, but I am guessing that as they were approaching the end of their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, they were bone weary and dead tired. They probably felt like they had been ridden hard and hung up wet. They didn't know how they could possibly continue. So they went to Jesus and said, "Give us more faith." Jesus told them that they didn't need "more" faith. They simply had to be able to tap into the faith that they already had. They need to embrace the faith that was already present in them, even though it may have been just a small amount. Then he talked to them about the mustard seed. The mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds. Yet, when it is planted and nurtured by the soil and the rain and the sunlight, it slowly grows and matures and blossoms. It starts small, but grows steadily into a large tree.

There is no magic pill for burnout. There is no secret formula for spiritual exhaustion. There is no twelve step program for compassion fatigue. There is no energy drink that can add fuel to your ministry. There is only your faith. Even though it may be as small as a mustard seed, it is enough. It is more than enough. God can use even the smallest amount of faith to do the impossible. I want you to notice something about the response of Jesus to the disciples demand for more faith. If you have faith

the size of the mustard seed he said, you could cause a mulberry tree to be uprooted and thrown into the sea. I want you to notice that he doesn't say that will happen instantly, or tomorrow, or next week, or next year. He doesn't say a word about how long that will take. It could be accomplished in a minute or it might take an entire lifetime. But faith is the key; even the tiniest amount of faith.

The more difficult or daunting a task we face, the more we may feel inadequate, and the more God can work through us and our faith. I read a wonderful sentence this week that I wish I could claim credit for. It came from a preaching magazine to which I subscribe. The author said, "Faith is not about our ability to do the job, but God's ability to do the job through us." The only requirement on our part is to make ourselves available. Because faith is more about God's ability than it is about ours; then it is God who gets the credit. How's your faith today? You don't have to feel like you have to be a league with Billy Graham or the Pope. Even simply faith is enough. Even if you have just a little faith – it is enough. Give it to God and allow God to work through you. Even with little faith, the impossible becomes possible. Even with little faith, great things can happen. How is your faith today?

Luke 17:5-6

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Now... let's look at what happens after this.

There is found in the 17th chapter of Luke a story of the healing of 10 lepers. In just a few minutes I will ask you to read the story with me beginning with verse 11 and continuing through verse 19. First, I want to make a few remarks that will provide a setting or introduction to this story.

Many sermons have been preached using this text in Luke 17. Most often the central focus is upon the man who, after discovering he was healed, returned to give thanks for his healing. This is certainly a fitting application. We learn that a proper response to God's goodness and blessings is for us to offer Him our grateful thanks in praise.

I know that I do not have to encourage anyone in this audience to give thanks unto the Lord. We have already done that in this service. If time permitted – which it doesn't – I would like to read ten verses beginning with 1 Chronicles 16 and continuing with another nine verses in the Psalms that begin by saying, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good." (1 Chronicles 16:34, Psalms 105:1, Psalms 106:1, Psalms 107:1, Psalms 118:1, Psalms 118:29, Psalms 136:1, Psalms 136:2, Psalms 136:3, Psalms 136:26)

But something else equally as important as giving thanks— perhaps even more important – is found in this passage of Scripture. I believe that this story is told—actually is intended to illustrate--a response to the earlier request made by the disciples. Their request is found in verse 5 and the Lord's answer to them is found in verse 6. All these incidents and events are tied together. In other words, taking into consideration the context that surrounds the healing of these lepers we get a complete picture of what the Lord is ready and willing to do today. There is something here that every one of us can identify with, that we can relate to. The disciples had said, "Lord increase our faith." And Jesus had said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you."

I dare say that this four-word petition – Lord increase our faith – has been and IS the cry of most Christians. For me—and I believe for you--the answer to that prayer would go a long way

toward helping me – all of us – to be a better Christian of true IMPACT.

We think, if I had more faith! What great things could be done? Just think of the blessing I could be. Just think of what greater things I could be doing for the Lord and for myself! Think of how stronger, happier, more useful my life would be. Think of the greater IMPACT I would have. Why, if I had more faith I wouldn't be struggling with my problems as I am today. I would have answers. I would be the victorious Christian I long to beIf the Lord would increase my faith!

Jesus answered the disciples. In answering them he answers us. However, when Jesus answered their request for more faith He said some things that we don't understand to this day. He said, If you have faith as a mustard seed you could pull up trees by the roots and cast them into the sea! I must say to you – and you don't have to share my feeling about this – but I don't have a need to uproot mulberry trees and throw them into the sea. I have more pressing needs in my life than transplanting trees!

But wait! Don't leave me yet. What I hear Jesus saying is something I can relate to and you can relate to. Jesus is saying, if you have faith as a mustard seed you can accomplish the impossible. You can do what appears to be impossible. You can receive what appears is impossible to receive. The question is, How much faith is enough faith to accomplish the impossible task? And, do I have that faith? Do I have mustard seed faith? The answers to these questions is simple and is found in the scripture we are going to read.

There's nothing better than a good story to provide an answer. The Holy Spirit has provided us such a story with the healing of the 10 lepers. Let's read in from Luke 17:11-19

11. Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee 12. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14. So when He saw them, he said to them, "**Go**, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that **as they went**, they were cleansed. 15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16. And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18. "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? 19. And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

This healing is in many ways unlike any of the other healing events in the life and ministry of Jesus. Yes, Jesus had healed other lepers. One came to Jesus and begged for healing and Jesus touched him and sent him to the priest in Jerusalem for his healing to be certified according to the commandment of the Law of Moses and detailed in Leviticus 14. Let's take a closer look at what happened here.

1. These ten lepers did not get close to Jesus. We understand why. The nature of their disease and their law prevented it.
2. They stood far off as was customary.
3. This is interesting: they did not ask for healing. They simply said, "Have mercy upon us."
4. Jesus did not go to them and touch them and heal them.

5. He did not sprinkle dirt on them; or water. He did not breathe on them. He did not touch them in any way.
6. Jesus did not speak a word of healing to them. He did not say, Be healed!
7. He simply said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests in Jerusalem." This was for the purpose of certifying their healing according to the commandment given by Moses.

All these ten had to do was, Go, show yourselves to the priests in Jerusalem. What is hard about that? How difficult can that be? Walk from here to Jerusalem, present yourself to the priests at the Temple, let them examine you and let them certify that you are indeed as free from leprosy as you claim. It's a slam dunk. A done deal. The only energy expended will be in what is required to walk from this spot to Jerusalem. It's a piece of cake! Anyone could do it. Could you do it? For nine of the ten leper guys, it would be a piece of cake. A walk in the park. No sweat. No problem. It would be an opportunity for them to visit the big city and walk among the crowds they had not walked among possibly for years. Nine of these Jewish lepers could do this.

Wait! Don't forget there is a Samaritan among them. This fact adds a new dimension to this story. It complicates things. Seriously complicates things.

Jesus said to them all: Go, show yourselves to the priest! Nine of them could have heard that and instantly turned and began the walk to Jerusalem. But what about the Samaritan? He could have stood rooted in his tracks, unable to believe what he has just heard from Jesus. He could have been dumbfounded when he hears Jesus say, "Go, show yourself to the priest." He could have answered back saying, Who? Me? Show myself to the priest? Me? A Samaritan outcast? Go to Jerusalem and walk into the Temple court? You've got to be kidding! That's ok for my Jewish buddies but not for me. I know what is written on the front gate. If I go to Jerusalem and walk inside the Temple Courtyard I'll die on the spot.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that in Jerusalem at the entry into the Temple Court – the very place where Jesus has just said they were to show up -- was a very prominent sign that read: Any foreigner who goes beyond this wall will have only himself to blame for his ensuing death." Recall verse 18 of our Scripture reading. "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

The warning at the Temple Courtyard gate fits this Samaritan, this foreigner, to a tee. It was designed to keep him away. Do you see what I see happening here? This man who is already an outcast from society because of his leprosy is now a double outcast. He is an outcast because he is a leper. He is an outcast because he is a Samaritan. It's a double whammy! Unlike his nine Jewish friends he has no access to the priest in Jerusalem. But that's where Jesus tells them to go.

The ancient patriarch Jacob, after a series of what he considered to be unbearable setbacks and disappointments, cried, "ALL these things are against me!" This Samaritan could have said, "I don't stand a chance! All these things are against me!" Some of you may be dealing with problems within yourself or your circumstances that makes you feel that way. "All these things are against me. I don't stand a chance."

The command of Jesus has two parts. (1) Go. (2) Show yourselves to the priests. This Samaritan did something remarkable. He had "mustard seed" faith. When I say "mustard seed" unless you

are thinking "little" as in size, you are not thinking what I'm thinking. His faith is the size of a mustard seed meaning it was not much, not a great thing – little. Small.

Here's what I want you to see. It doesn't take huge faith—great faith—giant faith—Mt Everest size faith to see a miracle in your life. It only takes one step. Rather than dwell on the one thing he could not do – show himself to the priest in Jerusalem – this outcast Samaritan concentrated upon the one thing he could do. He could go. Jesus had said, go. He could go. When he went it made the rest unimportant. He didn't have to show himself to the priest. He was cleansed of his leprosy. He was healed. But he had to take that first step.

Do you recall the cliché, "the longest journey begins with the first step."

Put yourself in the Samaritan's sandals. Picture yourself standing downcast and feeling totally unworthy. You do not have the dreaded disease of leprosy but for all intents and purposes the way you feel about yourself and your present situation--your circumstances--are the same as his. You have dreams, hopes and ambitions. But nothing has worked out so far. You are discouraged. What to do? Where to turn. You think, If only I had more faith I could change things in my life. This or that would work out. This or that would change.

What I am going to say to you may astound you. You don't need your faith to increase! You don't need more faith, greater faith. You need to hear the words of Jesus. Go, show. If there is a problem it is because you have chosen to dwell on what you can't do instead of the part you can do. You can go.

It isn't increased faith you need. It isn't more faith you need. Everyone within the sound of my voice has faith as a mustard seed and Jesus says, Faith as a mustard seed can make the impossible possible.

This is what the Samaritan did. Jesus said, go. The Samaritan said, I can do that.

To Increase Your Faith...

A. --Don't let your "leprosy" stop you.

B. --Don't let what appears to be closed doors stop you.

C. --Don't let what other people think about you or your plans stop you.

Stop saying, I don't know how it will turn out. You can't know how it will turn out until you take the first step toward making something turn out. The Samaritan knew he could never set foot inside the Temple at Jerusalem but he knew he could set foot on the dirt that was right in front of him that would be his first step in obedience to the words of Jesus. Sometimes the hardest thing for us to do is take the first step. Turn. Go. Turning and going releases the power of healing.

Let's make it as practical as we can. Turning to go may mean something like this:

--Send in that job your application. Don't say, "what if?" Go!

--Submit your resume. Don't say, "Yes, but . . ." Go!

- Sign up for that college class. Don't say, I can't because . . .Go!
- Sign up for that adult education class. Don't say, "I don't think...maybe..." Go!
- Take that trip. Take time off. Do something that will refresh your spirit, mind and body. No more excuses . . . Go!
- Take the first step to mend the broken relationship if that's what you want.
- Sign up as a volunteer.
- Begin writing that book.
- Submit your writing to a publisher.

Don't just stand there – GO! It will surprise you—delight you—at the outcome that awaits your first step. That's mustard seed faith. And you have it. Use it.

REMEMBER EASTGATE...

So Jesus replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

What in the world does Jesus mean by that?

A mustard seed is just about one of the smallest seeds in existence. If you held it in your hand; you might not even be able to even see it. And sometimes we have trouble seeing the faith that we do have, do we not? It's half the size of a grain of rice, yet it grows into a bush so large that birds come and build nests in it.

When the going gets rough or we are convicted to tell someone about Jesus, we may have a hard time finding the faith to do it... ..but Jesus is telling us it is already inside of us!!!

All we have to do is tap into it!!!

Question: Is your faith Increasing or Decreasing?

Faith is essential to living a Christian life! For some of us, faith is increasing; while, for others, faith is decreasing! We need to ask Almighty God, as the Disciples/Apostles did, to increase our faith!

It is absolutely overwhelming to see all of the material and insights that one can find in the Holy Bible - the written Word of Almighty God - as it pertains to faith! Tell me, "Would you like to have greater faith in Almighty God?" If so, you can do like the Disciples/Apostles did in our Holy Scripture text, for today, and simply ask Almighty God to increase your faith!

So, how about you? Is your faith increasing or decreasing - is it growing or is it shrinking? Is your faith producing fruit such as joy, service; and, sacrifice; or, is it fruitless, producing despair, disappointment; and, depression? Are you aware that faith can actually be a shield to protect us from discouragement, despair; and, the disappointments of life?

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