

01/08/12

Why Are We Here, Where are we Going, and How Do You Fit In? – Core Strength Part #1 - Shoring Up Our Foundation

- Each January, we take one Sunday of the New Year and address the question, **Why are We Here, Where are We Going, and How do You Fit In?**
- I know if I were a member of a church...or any other group for that matter...before I was willing to invest time, energy, resources, giftedness into that organization...I'd want to know, what's the plan?... (wouldn't you?)
 - where are we heading?...what are we trying to accomplish?...
 - there's an unlimited number of activities and organizations you could be involved in...but our time and resources are very much limited...
 - so I think most of not all of us would say – I'm not going to invest in anything until I know where that entity is heading and what they are trying to accomplish...
 - that's what today is all about...Why are we here...(what's our mission)...Where are we going...(how do we intend, by God's grace, to accomplish that mission this year)...and How do you fit in...(what role does the Lord want you to play on the team and are you are willing to step up and accept that responsibility?)...
- you probably already noticed from the cover of the bulletin, and also the handout of our ministry initiatives for 2012, that the theme we're selected for 2012 is **Building Core Strength**...
 - we believe that encapsulates the path the Lord wants us to follow in these coming months together...
- there are many verses in Scripture we could use as our theme verse...honestly, it's hard to select just one...
 - **Psalm 28:7 - The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him.**
 - notice in that passage the twin emphases of strength and heart – that's core strength...strength in the inner man...strength in the fundamentals...strength in the things that matter most...
 - **Psalm 29:11 - The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.**
 - notice the strength God is willing to give His people...and the impact that has on us at the very core of our being...we're blessed with shalom...with peace...
 - here's another great verse...
 - **Psalm 73:26 - My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**
 - what's noteworthy there is that the Psalmist isn't necessarily worried that he might find himself in situations where he's come to the end of his own strength...in fact that very well could be a great position in which to find oneself...
 - of course God sovereignly controls all of that anyway...
 - and it very well could be that as he's stretched to the end of himself...it's at that very point that he experiences a place in His relationship with the Lord that is sweeter and stronger than ever before...
 - here's one that has an eschatological emphasis – the importance of looking to the future...
 - **Psalm 84:5 - How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion!**

- do you remember the old hymn – We're marching to Zion...beautiful, beautiful Zion?...
- there it is...

- here's another important emphasis if we want to see how this strength is gained...
- **Psalm 105:4 - Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually.**
 - that's something that happens at ones core...
 - one more from the Psalms –
- **Psalm 138:3 - On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.**
 - the last part of that verse encapsulates much of what we're talking about here...
 - generally, when we think about someone being strong – we think – her legs are strong, his arms are strong...
 - this is emphasizing core strength...you have made me bold with strength in my soul...exactly...

- now, when I announced this theme...many of you may have thought of this great passage...
 - Isaiah 40:28-31 - Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.**
 - if you're looking for a passage of Scripture to memorize to begin this new year well – that would be a great candidate for sure...

- that explains the cover of both our bulletin and ministry initiatives handout you received when you came in this morning...
- I really appreciate all the thought that Arvid Olson and Brian Nicholson put into this design because it's very powerful for sure...
 - you recognize the eagle as being the statue behind the community center that was designed and provided by one of our church members...it's a gorgeous picture of strength...with a portion of Isaiah 40 inscribed at the bottom...
 - **Pic #1 – the eagle statue without the pics over it...**
 - what's unique about this design is that what's overlaid on the eagle is 5000 pictures of different members of our church serving together in various ways...
 - **Pic #2 – the eagle statue with the pics over it**
 - you can actually go on our website and magnify the pictures if you want to...
 - but the point is – the strength of Faith Church is the power of God working in and through His people...
 - strength without an appropriate instrument is either wasteful or dangerous or both...
 - but when you have God's power working through His people at the very core of their being...that's a combination that is incredibly effective...

- with that in mind, let me invite you to open you Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 9...page 134 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- while you're turning there – let me answer the important question of why would we choose this particular theme for this particular year?...
- the best way I know to answer that is to use an illustration that me and athletics...

- but before I do that...for anyone who is relatively new here – you need to know that I certainly don't fashion myself as some sort of athlete...I was never particularly good at sports...I played a lot of them in school...but never particularly well...
- anyway, last year Joe Blake and I got the crazy idea that we would like to participate in a triathlon...
 - now, that word can be used to describe many different lengths of races...but the key is that you're going to be doing a combination of swimming, biking, and running...
 - we selected the Muncie Ironman 70.3...which starts with a 1.2 mile open water swim with 1500 of your best friends....who actually go off in waves of 50-100 people at a time...then (assuming you survive)...you jump on your bike and ride 56 miles...and then when you're done with that...you strap on your running shoes and run a half marathon...13.1 miles....so you add that all up...you get 70.3...
 - incidentally...when we arrived the night before the race for orientation, they asked this crowd of people in a big meeting room how many were actually attempting their first triathlon of any length – Joe and I enthusiastically put up our hands and then looked around and saw very few other hands up in the entire room...accompanied by a lot of shaking heads because apparently you're supposed to start with shorter length triathlons...
 - which now means I'm not a very good athlete and I'm also not very smart...that's a bad combination...
 - so we trained for it all spring and early summer and I kept hearing people talking about the importance of developing core strength – and that didn't make a whole lot of sense to me...because you swim primarily with your arms (at least I do) and you run and bike with your legs...what's the core (whatever that is) have to do with it...(so now we have – not very good, not very smart, and not very teachable...)
- so the actual event was on Saturday, July 9th...
- and it was fascinating...neither Joe and I had done much swimming...and it's pretty intimidating to look out on a reservoir at a 1.2 mile course laid out – but it was sink or swim...literally...so when our wave of old men jumped in, we dove in with them...
- and let's just say that there is no danger of us becoming professional swimmers on the senior tour if there is such a thing...but I'm happy to announce to you that we survived...and coming out of the water is a relief for sure...
- then we jumped on our bikes...which is our strongest event...and honestly we did very well on that section of the course...and we started thinking...we could actually finish this thing, which for us would have been an accomplishment...
- and when we started looking at our composite time...at that point we were doing pretty well time-wise – we were quite a ways ahead of our goal...
- then we started running...and after the first mile Joe started getting some cramps so he told me to go ahead...which I did...
- but after the first mile or so, my lower back started hurting like it never had before...not in an injury sort of way...but like in any sporting event like that...your greatest weakness is going to be exposed by the stretch of the event...
- it was at that moment that I came to understand why everyone had spoken so much about core strength...your arms and legs are connected to your back...there's a little physiology lesson for today...and that particular weakness was being revealed by the second...
- now, since I'm often accused of not finishing my stories...at the comfort station at the end of the second mile...I saw a guy do something that seemed very strange to me...

- there are all these volunteers at the comfort stations at the end of each mile of the run ready to serve you any way they can...with ice-water sponges, energy drinks, ice, power-bars, gels...whatever you want...
 - and this guy grabbed the back of his tri-suit – which is one piece...
 - I'll spare you any pictures because the words spandex and pastor should never be used in the same sentence...but he asked the volunteer to pour ice down the back of his suit...
 - and as I ran the next mile, I realized what he had done...his tri suit created a little pouch for ice at the base of his back, and it slowly melted over the course of each mile...
 - now, that might not sound very helpful or pleasant to you in January...but on a hot day in July when my back was screaming...that's exactly what I needed...and I did it every mile until we finished the race...
- now, here's the point – I believe rather strongly that we are at a very similar place as a church...
 - on purpose – and we'll explain why in a minute – we are running at a fairly aggressive pace around here...
 - and we should be...
 - but we are attempting a lot...there's no doubt about that...
 - like the whole church family is running a corporate triathlon together...
 - but invariably that kind of a stretch will reveal areas that need to be addressed...
 - individually and as a family...
 - and please don't be frightened by that...
 - the response isn't...then let's avoid the stretch...
 - no, it's the exact opposite...embrace the stretch...welcome the stretch...
 - and let it reveal weaknesses in our core both as individuals and as a church body...
 - and then aggressively shore up those weaknesses...
- now, one more question before we read this passage...what is this document (the initiative handout) and how does it relate to our 5 year plan?...
 - every five years our church family goes through a strategic ministry planning process...and that's how we produce this document (the 5 year plan) – if you don't have one of these or you haven't reviewed it recently, I would encourage you to get one at the resource center and do so...
 - the 2012 initiatives come directly from the 5 year plan, but they are adjusted for whatever our situation is at the time...
 - they also are given careful attention all year...one of our staff members is assigned to each initiative...and they will have to give quarterly updates on how the accomplishment of that initiative is coming...and that also starts to answer the question...how do you fit in?...but I'm getting ahead of myself...
- now, if you look inside this handout – that introductory text is very important to understanding what we're trying to do...
 - We're talking about building core strength in three very important ways...
 - 1. Shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service.**
 - 2. Planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette.**

3. Preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process in 2013.

- now, I plan to do something that I've never done here before – we're actually going to take today and the next two weeks trying to flesh all of that out...it's crucial that we'll all be on the same page...so with the rest of our time this morning – we're talking about the first piece...

- **Core Strength Part #1 - Shoring Up Our Foundation**

- read **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**...

- let's use the emphases in this passage to organize the rest of our time around these 4 ideas:

- I. The Attitude of Core Strength**
- II. The Focus of Core Strength**
- III. The Actions of Core Strength**
- IV. The Result of Core Strength**

I. The Attitude of Core Strength

- what would lead us to even care about evaluating our areas that needed to be shored up?...why should we care?...
- you could summarize Paul's words with this phrase:

A. Voluntary enslavement.

- **1 Corinthians 9:19 - For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.**

- this is in a larger context by the way, of Christian liberty...that's what 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10 are all about...
- and Paul's point is – as a follower of Christ, I was saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone...
- and therefore, we all have great freedom in Christ...
- but many times it is best to voluntarily enslave those freedoms...
- and please notice the reflexive nature of all of this...I have made myself a slave...
 - it's not like – my mommy made me do this...or someone else is forcing this on me...
 - no one made Joe and me sign up for a tri...
 - no one has forced our church to have the breadth of ministries we've chosen to launch and develop...
 - but that voluntary enslavement creates a controlled and purposeful stretch that can be very healthy if we'll allow it to be...
 - another important piece of that attitude is...

B. Willingness to be flexible in non-essentials and ministry methods.

- there are some hills, that we, and certainly the apostle Paul, would have died on...
- however, one of the reasons so many churches and Christians are so weak is that they are dying on the wrong hills...
- in fact, do you know the background of that hymn, we're marching to Zion?
- there was a dispute in the church in 1707 about whether it was right to only sing Psalms from the Bible or whether it was acceptable to also sing man-made hymns...
- and in some churches...if the church family began singing a hymn....people would start marching out...
- so Isaac Watts, who was a famous hymn-writer, penned the hymn Marching to Zion...

- to help people focus on their heavenly purpose, not their earthly preferences...
- that explains the thrust of the second verse...for people who refused to sing and marched out of the church house...
 - *Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God,*
 - *But children of the heavenly King, but children of the heavenly King,*
 - *May speak their joys abroad, may speak their joys abroad.*

- see, Paul didn't do that...
- **v. 20a – To the Jews, I became a Jew**
- **v. 20b – To those who are under the law, as under the law though not being myself under the law**
- **v. 21 – To those without law, as without law though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ**
- **v. 22a – To the weak, I became weak...**
- **v. 22 b – I have become all things to all men...**

- that's personal and ministerial flexibility...but if you don't stretch yourself...you'll never find out if that's a weakness or not...
- but when you put your foot on the gas pedal...you'll find out really quickly whether you're willing to voluntarily enslave your freedom and learn to major on the majors...
- those are core competencies when it comes to the matter of faithfully serving God...

- now, what about...

II. The Focus of Core Strength.

- why would Paul be willing to live this way and why would he be encouraging the believers in Corinth to follow His example?...
- the answer is...the importance of...

A. Winning others

- I've had people tell me they were uncomfortable with that terminology...but friend, it comes directly from God's Word...
- **v. 19 – that I may win more**
- **v. 20a – so that I might win Jews**
- **v. 20b – so that I might win those who are under the law**
- **v. 21 – so that I might those who are without law**
- **v. 22 – that I might win the weak**
- **v. 24 – run in such a way that you may win**
- Paul truly believed that there was a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned...and every time the Lord used him to draw another person to Himself...Paul saw it as a win for the kingdom of God and the person who had been transferred into it from the kingdom of darkness...
 - and when a person has that as their focus...they want to be stretched...
 - and if that stretch reveals a weakness that has to be shored up...the answer isn't quit the race, the answer is address the weakness and actually be thankful for the process that revealed it

B. Faith's mission

- this is why we've worded our mission statement the way we have...

- **The mission of Faith Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples...**
- would it be fair to say that those concepts come directly from the Word?...
- and they better, if we are asking God to bless our answer to the question...why are we here?...

- so what do we do with this?...what did Paul do?...please think about...

III. The Actions of Core Strength

A. Run hard.

- **v. 24 – Run in such a way that you may win.**

- it could not be any clearer...there is nothing laudable about Christians or churches sitting around and doing nothing...
- and I understand that it is possible to try to do too much or be stretched too thin...
- but for every one Christian and every one church in that ditch – there's 100 mired down in the ditch of laziness and faithless mediocrity on the other side of the road...
- now let's start breaking this down...

1. In your personal life.

- You'll notice a number of initiatives that are targeting person growth and sanctification...
- and of course there are all sorts of other things that we do around here every day that aren't called out on this sheet that are designed to provide resources to help individuals and families grow in their relationship with Christ...
- and I would encourage you right now to think about – what areas of weakness might be present in your heart and life...
- I really need to work on this...or that area – and I intend with the help of God to make myself available to this particular resource...
 - that might mean working on something individually...it might be signing up for some counseling help, or joining a small group, or an ABF, building a friendship...it can take 1000 forms...but let the stretching nature of stewardship reveal the ways you need to grow...in your core strength...

2. In your relationships

- the same is true of every relationship you can name...
- that's why we devote so many resources around here to improving inner-personal relationships...

3. In ministry

- now, I'd like us to really think about this one...because there are a number of initiatives that are especially focused on this particular aspect of what we're trying to do...
- part of what is stretching us right now is unprecedented opportunities because of the people moving in all around us...
- so, what does core strength look like there?...
 - A+ in electronic communication
 - perhaps the Lord wants you to serve in one of those areas
 - Passionate outreach
 - Brian and Carolyn Barrett leading Project Jerusalem...(see Reaching Out #1) – perhaps you should volunteer for one of those opportunities
 - Well-maintained facilities

d. Welcoming church family

B. Box wisely

- v. 26a – I run in such a way, as not without aim

- v. 26b – I box in such a way, as not beating the air

IV. The Result of Core Strength

- did you notice the two-fold nature of winning discussed in this passage?...

A. God glorified in others being saved.

- v. 22 – that I may be all means save some

B. God glorified by you winning.

- v. 24 – Run in such a way that you may win