

The Rock: 08-30-2020**Series: By Faith**

First reading: Hebrews 11:1-3

Title: How can we know that we know?

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2

Theme:

Our journey back to The Rock, and how did we know. How do we know that this is where we are supposed to be?

Introduction:

We are back again in Hebrews 12, picking up where we left off last week. Learning that there is a way to know that we know.

And here we are -learning once again to:

#1- Set aside

#2- Run with endurance

#3- Look to Jesus

All of these we tackled last week and it ought to do us good to try and remember this every day. Maybe even putting a slip of paper with these things on it in the front of your Bible.

What else did we tackle? Well, we looked at Henry Blackaby's four principles from, Experiencing God. How can we be sure it's God leading us and talking to us.

And not have the concern of Ebenezer Scrooge -that it's perhaps a bit of underdone potato, or a bad bit of beef - that there is more gravy than of grave to it all.

God is not a cosmic trickster, remember, nor is He a bit of bad stew you ate before bed. We can know, as Blackaby states by these four principles:

- #1- The Bible
- #2- Prayer
- #3- Circumstances
- #4- Other people

All of these we studied last Sunday, and if you missed it, I would strongly encourage you to visit our website or YouTube page and watch the study: "Therefore".

The Story:

I must admit that the older I get -now 52- the more reflective I am on my own life thus far, and the less I like to re-visit and talk about "the past". Unless it is helpful in my growing forward and

understanding God's purposes and plan for me.

What is and was the journey of faith which got me here today. I think it is sufficient to say that I was a glorious train-wreck before I came to Vermont.

Drank too much, smoked too much, was very proficient in being unsuccessful in school for various reasons, and as a result won the: "Please do not come back here", award from Foxboro High school.

As a result, I came to Vermont at 17, yes that's right, all this fun before the ripe old age of 18, and moved in with my aunt and uncle.

Jesus found me, I wasn't looking for Him or the deal He had to offer, but when God has your number, He will find you and you will be caught by Him.

But that's a doctrine for another time. Lisa found me, and we've been on a journey ever since. Thirty-three years on the 12th of September.

So, in a nutshell -I was an awful human-being. Probably why I care very little about the bad things people say about me. They don't know the half of it, I am far worse than they think.

I met Jesus-I met Lisa- and through the work of progressive sanctification, I am a new man, and continue to become a new man every day I get up and put my feet on the ground.

I have my bad days, even though they are fewer, but they still exist, sadly. It seems that I still cling to the weight and sin that likes to stick to me.

How did we get here? And how do Lisa and I know that we know God has us to be here? It started, I believe, when we left here in 2014. We just didn't know it at the time.

As Charlie Starr from Blackberry Smoke puts it in the song, No way back to Eden:

"They say that you gotta go to know that you want to come home."

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. When we left six years ago or so, we knew that it was the right thing. I needed to lead.

All the things that I could learn, I had learned here, and a church cannot have two lead pastors.

So, Lisa and I prayed about only two churches -I also asked the district to not send out my resume, because that causes confusion.

I disagree entirely with the principle that you send it everywhere you "feel led", and the Holy Spirit will sort it out. Frankly, it's wrong, and really doesn't line up with God's Biblical pattern of placement, and actually brings much angst and confusion to a process which should not be that difficult.

Lisa and I felt led to pray around only two places: Here and AGCC in Vergennes. So, we started praying at the beginning of 2013.

Neither place needed a lead pastor, as both had one. So, I stayed doing what I was doing. Very faithfully carrying out what God has assigned to me here at The Rock.

Why? Because we had two places we were led to pray over, and they weren't open. Could I have gone elsewhere? Yes, but it would have been wrong and in disobedience.

God had confirmed His assignment to each of us, and then to both of us. We knew it had to be one of these two churches.

So, we prepared, we trusted, and we waited.

A year and two months later in March of 2014, the pastor at AGCC announced his retirement and the district

Superintendent texted and asked if he could please send my resume there.

Without hesitation or even asking Lisa, I said yes! Why? Because that was one of the two churches we were praying around, the other being here. So, there was no confusion or questioning.

Dennis and I talked the next day, as Lisa and I had told no one about which two churches we were praying about.

Dennis told me that the year before, he and a friend of his from PA had begun to pray for us and Vergennes -as they felt it would be a good place for us.

Blackaby: Prayer - Circumstances - Other people

All came together to confirm what God was doing. But that would take us from here, our home for the past 25 or so years.

In God's goodness, He knew what I needed in order to become who He had called me to be. That meant a move. And we thought that was it. We would move to Vergennes and finish out there.

We gave everything we had, we loved the people, we learned so very much. I learned what it really meant to lead, to develop the skills I had, learned more

which I didn't have and found my voice and preaching style.

There is nothing at all wrong with being like those who mentored and taught you. But God didn't call me to be Roland, He called me to be me. And that can only happen when you sit in the first chair, and preach every Sunday.

All of these things validated God's will and design for us. We were where we belonged -YET, our house never sold. Log that in the back of your mind.

A dear friend of mine and mentor here told me the day I announced I was leaving for Vergennes, came to me after service and said: "Don't sell your house, you'll be back.

Again, log that in your mind. I didn't think anything of it at the time. This is why I said last week, journal! Pay attention to your life circumstances. You'll discover that God is speaking much louder than you think.

Anyway, I drove every day from Swanton to Vergennes, and simply kept doing the next right thing in front of me.

Then in Sept 2018, we took our first sabbatical. Four glorious weeks on the Cape, and you're lucky I came back at all.

Usually in September I go into prayer for the next years sermon series. Planning Easter and Christmas out and what God wants for the community.

I got nothing! I mean I was set through Christmas 2018, but beyond that nuthin'!
Except: Do not sell your house, don't put it back on the market. Because, that was our plan at the time, as the drive was killing me.

This is strange, not the normal pattern, log that away in the back of your mind. Am I doing something I need to repent of?

Is God stretching me, or re-directing me? All questions I asked and prayed around, Lisa prayed around, we both prayed around.

March 2019 - Lisa began to feel our time was coming to an end at AGCC. Nothing we planned for, but this happens. So, we talked and discovered that because of circumstances in our life and at the church -I was feeling the same way, and we discovered that this was more than just a feeling.

Remember last week, I talked about praying friends? Well, ours were getting the same "feelings" about our time there.

But to where? Remember, the only two places I (we) have ever been released to

were here and AGCC. So, we prayed, and we stayed the course. We weren't released anywhere else, so instead of shooting our resume out and seeing what would happen, we stayed put.

But we logged every event in our minds and in our journals. I had a chance meeting with Pastor Roland at UVMMED which led to a conversation around Rob having left, among other things a pastor talks about with his presbyter.

I asked him if I could submit my resume when the process began for a new pastor. He said, yes. Send it to the district and let them handle it. Why/ Because that is the process and the right way to do things. So, we did. I asked Dennis to begin to be prayerful and when the time came for The Rock to request resumes, to please send mine.

Another piece of the puzzle. Lisa and I had more now to pray about as 2019 went on and the process started.

Now, on the other end of this equation, the elders here, as well as the search committee, had been praying since their inception, that God's will be done, and that He bring the right person to take Pastor Roland's place.

They ALL wanted to be right in the middle of His will, and they were. They didn't know who, they just knew they needed to PRAY, and do the work of listening.

Even if it wasn't going to be me, God is God and he answers all prayer in accordance with His will. So, the team here had a process, they followed it, they prayed, and they interviewed.

Active agents in the purposes and plan of God here at The Rock. Lisa and I prayed and trusted We had our good days and our bad days, if we are completely honest.

As we learned, the faith journey is full of ups and downs -How we respond to them determines our character.

After our interview, we waited almost two months -Christmas and New year being right in the middle of it all. Then a second interview and another 10 days of waiting.

You simply do not force God's hand!

And I remember when Lisa and I were on our walk and in our uneasiness of it all -we made the decision that we trusted God and the process.

We knew that this was to be our home -and in our uneasiness we would trust Him IN this process.

Now, I can't remember if it was Lisa or I who asked the question, but it was asked: "What if it's not us?"

It was then we decided we will just continue to trust, go back to the drawing board, and seek His face on where it was to be, if not here.

Because His providence is a soft pillow upon which we are to rest our heads. AND WE DID -even on the bad days of panic, fear and doubt. We knew we were doing what He had for us -BY FAITH.

Even if we didn't have the answers, or the answer came back we love you, but we are going with someone else.

So, we prayed and we waited. Then I got the call from Parks, that we had been presented to the elders as the candidate, and the Elders affirmed it with a positive vote.

We were invited to come and preach, well for me to preach, on February 23, and again on March 1. But that came with a catch. Preaching for two weeks only 62 miles away from my church with all the social media and unbelievable barking chain -I couldn't simply tell my elders we were going on vacation.

I mean, I could and they would have been fine with that and trusted us. But what

if someone found that I was here preaching? All the trust and openness that we had worked for over five and a half years would have been gone.

So, a huge step of faith had to be taken. BUT I didn't just go with it. I called Dennis and I spoke to Roland and asked if I should actually tell my elders at AGCC that I was candidating here at The Rock? Afterall, that was really letting them know we were done there, but weren't guaranteed a job here.

FAITH in ACTION. Lisa and I are no one special, we just have learned to trust Him. He had brought us that far, and there was no reason to think he wouldn't continue.

So, we told them, and they prayed with us for God's will, and said that if we weren't hired here, that we would continue there. I suspect it would have been awkward, but their hearts honored God and the process.

Here we are now, almost six months in as your pastor, navigating what has to be one of the most bizarre transitions you could ever imagine.

You see, The Bible teaches us to look to Jesus, to be conformed to His likeness.

That is after all, what God desires for us.

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

-Romans 8:29 ESV

We prayed, you prayed, and the search team and elders prayed. We kept track of our circumstances and we listened to what others in our lives were saying.

It was all consistent with us coming back here and being here. Just as when he sent us out, we knew that we knew. Coming back was exactly the same.

That did not mean it was an easy ride or journey, but it was our journey and His faith working in and through us as our faith which kept us steady and focused, even in the stormy times.

You see, you can know that you know. But it takes hard work, a dedicated heart to read God's word -IT IS OUR GUIDEBOOK FOR LIVING. My deep desire for you as disciples of Jesus is that you be in His word.

That you pray every day, and all the more when you are unsteady and wondering.

Because prayer is the channel by which you and God communicate.

That you watch your circumstances in order that you can strengthen your faith as God does move in ways which are clear. It is only the enemy of our souls, the Devil, who wants us to think that we are in the dark all the time, and confused.

Surround yourselves with others who are praying and watching too. That is why, and I will never stop saying this, it is critical that you be a member of a healthy, vibrant, Gospel centered community of believers.

There are 168 hours in every week, carving out 2 for Sunday morning to gather here is only 1.2% of your week. But it is that 1.2% which will keep you throughout the rest of your week.