

The Next Best Step
Confirmation Celebration Weekend
Philippians 6:3-6
October 24, 2021
Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer - Help us God to understand your word, hear your truth, and live our lives one step at a time with you.

Message

It is 4 steps from my bed to my bathroom. It is 12 steps from my bedroom to the living room, and another 10 steps into the kitchen. It is 34 steps from where I usually park my truck, to the lobby doors of the church. It is 9 steps from my desk to the coffee pot. It is 97 steps down the hall to the C2 doors and just under 1,000 steps around the church when I take Titus for a potty break. On a busy day, I can walk some 15,000+ steps and on a slow day, about 3,000 steps.

We all take a lot of steps in our lifetime but not all of them are the same. Not all of them are physical, or involve lifting and placing our feet one in front of the other. Some of our most important steps have nothing to do with our feet and everything to do with our head and heart. Those are the steps we are talking about today.

Throughout life, we take steps to accomplish various goals and achieve various milestones. We take steps in our education, relationships, and careers. We take steps that bring us closer to our dreams. We sometimes take steps to move away from things or people that are harmful or situations that are not stable or healthy for us. The decisions and

choices we make at any one moment, age, or stage impacts the steps we take and the strides we make.

It is no different with our faith walk. Even before we say “yes” to Jesus, God is pursuing us - walking alongside us in hopes that we would turn and see God’s face - God’s presence, looking back at us. Our steps take us closer to or farther away from God.

The challenge is, how do we decide what those steps should be? What or who influences the steps we take? How do we know the steps we take are the right ones? When are we walking by faith and when are we walking in circles? When are we walking by faith and when are we walking in fear?

Today, I ask you people of God, do you walk by faith, trusting God in the process or do you perhaps walk in bitterness, anger, confusion, trepidation, and uncertainty because things didn’t turn out like you thought? Do you walk in judgement, cynicism, blame, intolerance, or criticism because of how you or others are treated?

I think the apostle Paul can give us some perspective. Paul knew what it was like to have power and success by the world’s standards. He knew what it was to stand on top of the world and live a relative life of ease. He also came to know what it was like to have nothing and to fail by the world’s standards. He knew what it was to be at the bottom; to struggle physically and mentally; to feel heartache and suffering, and live a life of challenge, discomfort, and pain.

When Paul wrote his letter to the believers in Philippi, he was being held prisoner by Roman authorities. He was in prison because of his faith in Christ, and because he was teaching, preaching, and leading people in the ways of Jesus. As you can imagine, Roman authorities didn't like what he was doing because it went against their rule and power. It undermined their system and authority. Yet, through all, every step of the way, Paul lifted up his faith in God, held on to the strength found in Jesus, and his trust of the Holy Spirit to bring him through. I don't doubt that Paul had his moments of frustration, question, and feeling overwhelmed by it all, and at the same time, he never lost sight of the bigger picture. He held on to his faith rather than letting go when it got tough, or the way wasn't clear, or things didn't go as he thought they would.

In Philippians 1:3-6 we read Paul's words of encouragement given to the church, who perhaps wondered what their next step was; how were they to keep on in the face of struggle or confusion, persecution and fear of what the Romans would do? What steps were needed to carry on the work of Christ where they were, with what they had, and with all that going on around them?

May his words continue to speak to us today and may we find hope, direction, and encouragement in them.

READ TEXT: Phil. 1:3-6

Life in the church is about planting seeds, nurturing those seeds, and providing ways for growth and maturity to thrive. One way we do that here

is through confirmation. Confirmation is a time in a young person's life to intentionally learn some basic biblical truths and basic Methodist doctrines. It is a time to explore their faith and what it means to follow Jesus, how we express our faith in the world we live in, and what it means to be a part of a larger church.

Youth are invited to participate in confirmation starting the summer after their 7th-grade year. We spend 6 months learning the basics of the bible, the church, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, (trinity), the history of Methodism, and what it means to live out your faith, use your gifts, and actively follow Jesus. I know a lot of adults that could benefit from such a course.

For our confirmation students, it is about their next steps of faith and recognizing their role in the relationship with God and with Jesus. All of us can learn from that. All of us need to hear the words of Paul and remember faith is a process. Faith is not a one and one deal with God. From our first step to our last, it is a journey with a lot of steps in between; a walk that takes a lifetime to fully and completely understand.

There isn't a person in this room or online that has not struggled with what the next step in their life should or should not be. Sometimes the answer comes easily and other times it does not.

We ask questions like:

What is the next step in my relationship?

What is the next step in my education?

What is the next step in paying off my car, (house, credit cards)

What is the next step in finishing this project? That paper for school?

What is the next step in the assignment?

What is the next step in talking to my family or friends?

What is the next step to ensure everything will be o.k.?

What is the next step in talking to my kids about a difficult topic?

What is the next step in planning for the future?

What is the next step in my training?

What is the next step to a better life, a safer, healthier life?

What is the next step my parents, my friends, my teachers, my significant other expects of me? What do I expect of myself?

What step does God want me to take?

What is the next step??????

Life is full of questions. It is said that on average a toddler will ask 75-100 questions in a single day. From our first question of “what’s that” and “how does it work,” to the never-ending “why” question.

We face all kinds of obstacles and challenges in life. We find ourselves stuck between a rock and hard place whether we are 14, 45, or 70. We get caught in the “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” moments and we wrestle with knowing who is right, what to believe, and who to trust.

AND I believe that is all a part of the faith and transformation process - our journey of learning and growing and trusting Jesus in the midst.

In those moments church - adults, children, confirmands; in those moments the next step may not always be clear. We may be afraid, uncertain, or fearful. The next step may be emotionally, mentally, or physically difficult. Regardless, and the thing I try to tell myself - the thing I try to hold onto is this: God knows our hearts, God knows our needs, and God knows what we are capable of. Therefore the thing to do is ask NOT what is the next step, but what is the next best step?

Or as the Disney character Anna sings, in the movie Frozen, “do the next right thing.”

Take a step, step again

It is all that I can do

The next right thing

I won't look too far ahead

It's too much for me to take

But break it down to this next breath, this next step

This next choice is one that I can make.

This weekend is about the next right thing; the next best step for 10 of our young people as they take another step in their faith walk. But if I had to guess, there are those here today and those hearing this message who are facing a “next step” kind of situation or circumstance, and are searching for the courage, strength, and wisdom to take the next best step- to do the next right thing in their own lives.

If that is you, I invite you to hear something. Listen again to these words of Paul, “there has never been the slightest doubt that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish.” Church, people of God, confirmands, the kind of work started in you and in me was good work, great work! Paul didn’t say, “the bad work started in you will continue” or “the useless work.” He didn’t say “the careless, sloppy, unimportant, shotty, or ugly work began in you.” He said, “the great work.”

People of God, we need to trust Jesus is at work in us and together we are taking steps to grow ever closer; taking steps to bring about the kingdom of God in this place called Franklin, In. We need to trust, like Paul, that Jesus through the Holy Spirit continually equips, sustains, and works in our lives no matter the moment, situation, or messiness of them. Jesus works through us individually and as a whole.

What is your next best step in your faith journey? I pray all of us would seek to answer that question today and every day we walk this earth.

Amen