

“Confident under Scrutiny”

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

Graphics: rock climbing, climbing gear, mountain, ropes, carabiner

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to be confident in God’s provision, love, grace, and mercy. Often, when physical affliction, scrutiny, lies, unmet needs, and weakness are present in our lives, we tend to take our eyes off Jesus and focus on the immediate problems. The Apostle Paul gives us encouragement to be confident in God no matter what. Like a rock climber who faces all kinds of adversity, God has given us the tools to win the race for eternity with Him.

Focus Phrase: Faith in God covers the gap between who I am and who God wants me to be.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY!**
- B. I’m reading a book on discipleship right now from an author by the name of Peter Scazzero. In his book, I came across this question which stopped in my tracks. The question is: **would the people around you describe you, as a follower of Jesus, in the same way you do?** (pause) A follow-up question would be: **would you describe yourself, as a follower of Jesus, in the same way that God knows is true about you?**
- C. Now, you can answer that question for yourself, but I had to be honest and say that there are areas of my life where there’s a gap between my actions or words and the person God wants me to be - the kind of person Jesus died for me to be.
- D. And, I’m pretty sure there are parts of my life that are not accurately evaluated by those around me, in positive and negative ways. Or by myself.
- E. In one word, there’s a **GAP**. There’s a gap between who I am and who God wants me to be. **AND**, there are **GAPS** between who I am and who others **THINK** I am...and who I think I am and who I really am.
- F. **The gap is a problem.** The problem is more than simply that the gap exists. I know I’m a sinner saved by grace. God knows all about the gap between who I am and the life He wants me to have in Christ.
- G. But, the other problem with the gap is that sometimes other people see our gaps and also evaluate or **scrutinize** the gap between who we appear to be, and who we are...or who we appear to be and where God wants us to be.
- H. And, many times, the person that scrutinizes me the most is in fact **ME**.
- I. The Apostle Paul was a living testimony to **THE GAP** (we’ll call it). In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul in fact wrote this, “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.”

- J. Paul knew he had a gap. Paul also experienced both the scrutiny of God, the scrutiny of others, and, most profoundly maybe, as express in that verse, self-scrutiny. Yet, The Gap in Paul's life, as we'll see today, was not something that deflated him or defeated him. Paul's honest assessment of his gap gave him confidence - not in his own ability to overcome the gap by trying harder, but to faithfully allow God's grace and mercy to spur him on in the mission.
- K. Our sermon series is called **CONFIDENT**. Last week, we were called to be confident in God's provision and power, especially in those times when we have physical affliction - when our bodies (our clay jars) fail us. I pray there was HEALING in this place last Sunday!
- L. The second part of our series is God's call for us to be confident even while under scrutiny - from God, from others, and from ourselves. There's a world watching us. There's always a gap between who we are and who God wants us to be...who we appear to be and who we are, or who others think we are.
- M. But, there's a tool that God gives us to bridge the gap and secure us to the life of Christ.
- N. In the rock climbing world, we use carabiners to secure ourselves to the rope that's holding all our weight to the solid rock. This little tool is critical to bridging the gap between the climber's harness and the rope. We'll see how this little device is a metaphor for our faith in Jesus...to hold us fast to Him, bridging the gap which is under scrutiny all the time.
- O. Let's start the climb...open your bible to 2 Corinthians 5, starting in verse 6.
- P. If you're ready say, "Let's go!"

2. Scripture

A. READ 2 Cor. 5:6-10

- i. We. Are. Confident. Paul and his companions...the church in Corinth... called to be confident. Why?
- ii. Well, if you back up one verse to verse 5, we read this, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." The 'very thing' Paul talked about was everlasting life with God because of Jesus. And because He sent the Holy Spirit to be IN US, we have assurance of salvation and everlasting life. And, with that settled in our hearts and minds, by faith, **we are confident!**
- iii. They were confident, even though they were trapped in their frail bodies, not yet experiencing the life God promises us with Him when their bodies die. And, even though they couldn't yet see it all, they were living by FAITH and not by SIGHT. They were believing in what God promised and that was giving them confidence NOW.

- iv. “Now, of course, we would,” Paul said, “rather be absent from these frail bodies and present with the Lord.” (paraphrase) But, simply because we believe that we WILL someday be with God, we can endure ALL things now. We can BE in these bodies and minds assured of what’s to come. And, he said, the goal - the mission - is to please God, no matter what state we’re in.
- v. Last week, we admitted that our bodies fail us. But, even in the midst of physical affliction, the mission doesn’t change...we don’t suffer alone...and HOW we suffer well is a witness to others, which pleases God.
- vi. Why? Well, Paul answers that in verse 10.
 - a. “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.”
 - b. Recompense has the essence of a **wage or payment**. It’s what’s due to the one who does something. It’s not enough to simply believe in Jesus, Paul said, but the follower of Jesus must also let faith produce fruit... deeds of mercy and grace, forgiveness, love, serving, sharing, giving.
 - c. And even though the world doesn’t want to believe this or think about it, we will ALL (ALL!) stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day. And on that day, God will recount for you and me individually, all that you and I have done. Good. AND bad. Talk about scrutiny. I usually can’t remember what I did yesterday. God knows everything I’ve ever done! And he’ll remind us of it all...
 - d. BUT(!) by the grace of God, in His love for us, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, taking the full wrath of God for sin, to cover OUR sin and redeem US fully, the scrutiny will be complete and Jesus paid for it ALL. Jesus paid the WHOLE recompense. Jesus paid the FULL PRICE for our salvation and everlasting life!
- vii. So, because of ALL THAT, in the here and now, **we are confident**. We are confident NOW, in these bodies, because of what’s coming for eternity for those who have faith. We are connected to Jesus, secure, even in the gap, and that security spurs us on in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- viii. AND, it spurs us on to close the gap, growing closer to and more like Jesus.
- ix. Let’s see what Paul has to say about that...verse 11...

B. READ 2 Cor. 5:11-17

- i. Paul and his companions were being accused of all kinds of things from those around them in the church and outside the church. They were being scrutinized. See, they were trying to convince or persuade others of the

truth of the claims that Jesus was the Messiah...that he died for their sin and rose again for new life.

- ii. Paul was confident that God knew the intentions and goodness in his heart. That his actions, even if sometimes imperfect or misunderstood, were focused on the mission to make disciples - to persuade others.
- iii. One thing that Paul was being scrutinized for was his spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. People thought Paul and others were 'not in their right minds' when they were speaking in tongues. For most people, it's a curious and potentially concerning thing. Paul wasn't saying everyone should speak in tongues. He did say that it was for God's people. Other times, when Paul was speaking 'in his right mind' or logically using plainly understood language, then it was for others to be persuaded.
- iv. Either way, out of our minds or in our right minds, it's the love we have for Christ and His love for us that compels us. That love compels us, Paul said, to persuade and stay on mission...to be confident in God's call on our lives.
- v. Ironically, this life that God is calling each follower of Jesus to live is a life that **starts with death** - one died for all and so all have died. That death is a death to self and hidden self-assurance...death to my personal agenda. That death leads to a life lived dictated by Christ...by God's love for us and our love for God and others.
- vi. See, because, Paul finished by saying, each person is of spiritual worth to God. Because ALL will stand before the judgment seat, and receive recompense for their deeds - good or bad - then each person has, RIGHT NOW, the opportunity to die to self, live for Christ, and then persuade others to live for Christ by dying to self.
- vii. Paul ends with a famous verse 17, "Therefore (given all that), if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here."
- viii. That verse in the Greek actually reads, "If anyone is in Christ, new creation." Period. So, it's not that something external comes to rest on the person who puts their faith in Christ. When a person puts their faith in Christ, God RECREATES them from within. They are not fixed...they are COMPLETELY NEW.

3. Application

- A. (equipment) When a climber is ready to climb a mountain, he checks all his gear to make sure everything is in working order. Helmet (check). Harness (check). Shoes and chalk (check). But then the final thing, right before the climb, is to check the ropes and the carabiners. Each carabiner is the thing that will secure the climber to the ropes, which are secured to the rock wall.

- B. If your helmet falls off, you lose your shoes, and your chalk bag falls to the ground, you still want the harness you're wearing to be connected to the ropes that are connected to the anchors in the wall. The connection point is the simple and unobtrusive carabiner. The climber trusts his carabiners with his life...literally.
- C. **This carabiner is a metaphor our faith in action.** The rope is the life of Christ that we are called to live.
- D. The carabiner closes the gap between who you are now and the life that God calls you to live in Christ.
- E. Without the carabiner, you're either not connected to the rope at ALL, or the gap between where you are and the rope is great. You're just hanging out there without a connection to Jesus or you haven't started climbing at all!
- F. Without faith, the gap between our human lives and the life of Christ is great... and you can't reach far enough on your own to close the gap.
- G. And it's in the gap that you are I are subject to scrutiny.
 - i. **God** sees the gap between your thoughts and actions and the thoughts and actions of Jesus. How's the gap?
 - ii. **You** see the gap between the things you do and say and the things Jesus did and said. There's a gap.
 - iii. **Others** see the gap, too. They see what you say and what you do and then evaluate that against what you say you say, and what you say you do, when you claim to be a follower of Jesus.
- H. This isn't meant to deflate us or discourage growth. Paul maintained that we CAN be confident, even when scrutinized.
- I. What you're called to do is **mind the gap**. That's a phrase that you hear over and over again if you ever travel to London and stand on the platform of The Tube, which is the subway system. If you look down at your feet while waiting for your train car, it's printed in big yellow letters, "Mind The Gap".
- J. As a follower of Jesus, the gap is where we need to grow closer to Jesus. The gap is what God sees, you see, and others see that reveals where you are still growing. Mind your gap.
- K. The gap causes pain for you and others - words that are not holy, actions that deny Christ, ways you're trying to blaze your own trail.
- L. It would be easy to simply say the gap a given, "I'm a sinner and always will be and that's just the way I am." Yet, God paid the ultimate price for you to live the life of Jesus apart from your sin. To live God's best for YOU.
- M. Faith in Jesus' gift of salvation closes the gap between your life and the life of Christ. **Faith secures you to Christ.** The smaller the gap the more secure

you are and the more confidence you have, not in yourself and your abilities, but in Jesus and HIS life.

N. Confidence increases when you mind the gap. Confidence comes more and more into your life of faith when you **see** what's going on in your gap and know what Jesus is asking you to **change**. And, listen, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US needs to adjust, and to die to ourselves in order to close the gap.

O. Start with being honest about your gap.

- i. Each of us shies away from being honest about our gaps between who God know us to be, what we think we are, and what others see. First, admit that you have a gap and need to grow.
- ii. Spend time asking the Holy Spirit to identify your gap areas - maybe it's money. Maybe you've fallen away from prayer or worship. Maybe you aren't learning anything new about God right now. Or you've seen an increase in profanity or excessive alcohol or drug use.
- iii. God knows what it is. Ask Him. You have a sense of it. Look at it. Others might be aware...ask a trusted friend. Be honest about your gap. Be confident in God's wisdom and grace.

P. When you see it, **grab a carabiner and close the gap by faith.**

- i. The change will lead to deeper levels of holiness and connection to Jesus. Remember that the goal of the Christian life is to glorify God.
- ii. Change is hard. Change requires humility and willingness to give up things or start doing other things to close the gap God knows is there.
- iii. Be confident in God's provision and goodness as you grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Q. Finally, **help someone else find the gaps and close the distance.**

- i. This isn't me walking up to a person who's not following Jesus and telling them what they should do. We can't be writing out a list of things we see non-believers doing and shout them into faith.
- ii. This is coming along side a brother or sister to help them be a better disciple. Love them, learn with them, and share your life with them.
- iii. This is about being accountable to each other, mentoring others, doing life together, and TOGETHER, holding the ropes, helping with the gear, and serving in ministry together.
- iv. Maybe it's coming on board with the Nursery Team to care for our youngest disciples. Join a ministry team and start serving the body in addition to coming to worship. Be part of or start a small group with other disciples to help close the gap, scrutinize life together, and then grow together.

- R. Even if you find yourself lacking as a follower of Jesus; even if others see you as lacking love, compassion, grace, mercy, kindness and any of the other fruits of the Spirit; even though God KNOWS you and I are lacking, **we can confidently keep growing** by staying connected more and more to the life and salvation of Jesus.
- S. That life - that Jesus-life lived in the midst of scrutiny from within and without - leads to newness, mission, and able to stand on Judgment Day to say, "I'm attached to Jesus, my rock and my redeemer."
- T. And because of HIM, we stand now in confidence, as we take a hard look at the gap in our life, and then change to close it.

4. Conclusion

- A. The carabiner is simple. Yet, it's strong and dependable.
- B. Our faith in Jesus is the most dependable thing in our lives...in the universe.
- C. Imagine a church that's growing together, being more holy together, climbing with Jesus to a bigger kingdom and more disciples growing together.
- D. Mind the gap. Close the gap. Learn and grow. Change and climb.
- E. If anyone is in Christ, NEW CREATION!
- F. Be confident in THAT...in HIM!
- G. Let's pray...