

The Ultimate Choice: Fear or Faith?

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Responding to God's Extravagant Grace Series

Numbers 13-14

Most of you, by now, know that we are in the middle of a building campaign—a campaign that will culminate on November 1st when we cancel our five weekend services, our four main services and Joshua House (our young adult service) in the evening. We will meet together down in the Columbus Convention Center, which I think will be an extraordinary blowout, a great celebration service, where the church will have an opportunity to meet the church. You know, there are going to be about 150 adults that won't be able to fully participate in that morning service. They are the people who are, right now, caring for the children in children's ministry classes around this building. We plan to have a full blown children's program that morning. And while there will be some family participation together, there is also going to be a children's program. And we have an enormous amount of debt to those who are teaching and ministering to the kids every week, but especially on November 1st. Indeed, last week I talked about expressing thanks. It would be a very good idea, parents, for you to both meet the person who is teaching your kids every week, if you haven't met them yet, and in addition to say "thank you" or drop a card of thanksgiving in the mail as people are ministering to you and your family. Take time to say thank you. And on behalf of the church, I want to say thank you to those of you who work with our kids. Marlene and I deeply appreciate the dozens of people who have ministered to our children over the years.

Well, we are in the middle of a building campaign. And we are proposing to engage in the most costly endeavor that has ever faced this church. We are proposing to add on a \$9 million dollar structure to the back of this building—a brand new auditorium that will seat 3000 people, a new children's ministry wing, new lobby and some other rooms including a full-service bookstore. We are proposing to build a \$9 million dollar structure. That is a lot of money. But, of course, expenses are always a relative thing. \$9 million dollars sounds like a lot of money. But you know, when we built this church building 7-8 years ago for \$2.5 million dollars, we were at that time only about 900 people and our income for the year was about \$600,000. In other words, the building cost 4x our annual income and, yet, God enabled us to build this building.

Right now our income is more than \$3 million dollars a year and the church has grown 4x over. It actually was more of a stretch in the past for us to put up our present facility than it is for our current membership to put up the facility that we are doing now, which is so much larger. Our past members decided to do something really bold. Our members 7 years ago made a decision in faith to build a building to accommodate people they trusted God to bring later. They could have said, "Hey 900 people is more successful than most churches, why risk it?"

You know, audacious faith, bold, radical faith that causes people to do what they otherwise wouldn't do because it is inconvenient, it costs, audacious faith or, to use a different word – courage – is one of those virtues that we almost never hear about anymore.

I try to keep my finger pretty close to the pulse of our culture. I try to pick up those things which the opinion makers, the educators, the writers, the therapists, the philosophers and artists are saying and singing about. Friends, truth be told, I am unaware of almost anyone in the larger culture that is holding up audacious faith, boldness, courage as virtues in our present day. I'll tell you what our contemporary virtues are. We hear a lot about self-esteem, tolerance, non-judgmentalism, self-expression, creativity, play, spontaneity, getting in touch with the child within us. But faith, faith that stands up to our personal fears and our corporate fears – faith that stands up and conquers our fears, you don't hear a lot about that.

The fact is we live in a fear-based culture right now. What corporate America is selling by and large is fear. What is it that drives the multi-billion dollar nutritional supplement industry? Is it not fear? Fear that if you don't take this vitamin, if you don't have this kind of fiber in your diet, if you don't take this exotic supplement, you are going to end up with all these free radicals floating in your blood that will almost certainly give you cancer.

Have you ever sat down with an aggressive insurance salesman? What are they selling? Fear.

"Oh, Rich, you need at least 10x your annual income in life insurance – at the very least. Your children need to be provided for at least till they are 40 and are on their feet."

America is a country dominated by fear. In the 1950's what were people doing? Digging bomb shelters in their backyards. Hundreds of thousands of bomb shelters. In the 70's, people were moving out to the country and learning survival skills to prepare for the coming depression. In the late 80's Christians were urged to get rid of all their stocks and bonds because the stock market was surely going to crash, to accept nothing but gold. And right now, the Christian publishers are churning up apocalyptic vision after apocalyptic vision as we move toward the millennium. I am telling you it is going to be absolutely wild out there. It is going to be quite a fight as everywhere in both the secular and Christian worlds you are going to encounter fear-based thinking.

Do you want to get a quick measure of the fear index of America? Just look at people's choices of dogs. In 1975 little cuddly poodles with their little bows were the most popular purebred dogs in the US. There were 140,000 registered poodles in America. In 1975 there were only 952 registered rottweilers. In 1975, there were 140,000 poodles and fewer than 1000 rottweilers. By 1995, 20 years later, the poodle population went down to 60,000 and the rottweilers had increased over 100x to 102,000. I don't think that is because the rottweilers ate the poodles. I think it says something about fear.

I am going to make a very simple point today. My point today is going to be that we are continually faced with a choice of moving backward in fear or moving forward in faith. Day after day and choice after choice, you and I are faced with a

decision whether we are going to capitulate to fear or whether we are going to overcome in faith. But I am going to demonstrate in dozens of different ways that the fork in the road is, will I give into my fear or will I rise above that in faith?

Too many people in too many churches move backward in fear. I think of wonderful Christian single women I have known who were afraid to face the future as single and alone. So in fear, they compromised their standards and married someone who didn't share their Christian convictions, someone who was not a spiritual leader. Why did they make that decision? Ultimately, it was a fear-based decision. Because they wouldn't trust in God and say, "I think God could satisfy me. I think God could meet my needs even if I remain single the rest of my life. I think with God I could be thankful." Or, "God could bring along someone better, someone different in the future."

Is it not the case that we find ourselves regularly choosing the path of fear? How many people simply refuse to speak publicly? To give a teaching in a Bible study or a women's group or kinship group? Or to share their testimony? Because it was just too scary to think about having to speak, even though they really have something to say, and even though what they would have to say would be an encouragement to others and the kingdom of God would go forward. No, they capitulate to fear.

How many times, as a result of fear, have we lied our way out of difficult situations? We are caught. We are cornered. A boss or teacher, supervisor, professor challenges some failure on our part. He or she holds up an area of shortfall and what do we do? In fear, we lie. "Oh no, no, no. I really did perform. That is not a shortfall or failure. It wasn't my fault. It was someone else's fault." How many times have you lied your way out of a difficult or uncomfortable situation? Lying is always an act of fear. You can't lie in faith. You can't tell lies while you are trusting in God to provide for your future.

We move back in fear every time we blend in with the crowd because we found it too difficult to stand up and bear witness to Jesus Christ. To let it be known boldly that we are Christians when Christian opinions and Christian people and Christian viewpoints are being attacked, being mocked and made fun of. How many times have we just put our heads down in fear? I don't want to be embarrassed. I don't want to be different. Every time I am on an airplane – for years I was flying every month; I have slowed that traveling schedule down this last six months – but every time I sit on a plane next to a stranger, there is this thing that is going on in my heart. Will I talk with them? Will I engage this person in a discussion about spiritual things? I may be the only Christian they ever get to meet. I may be the only person who ever tells them the good news regarding Christ's death for their sins. No one else might be able to explain it or be willing to explain it. I think that every single time I am on a plane. Then, it is fear or faith.

But they may not like me.

But they might have had a bad experience with church.

But they might not be interested.

Fear or faith. Friends, this is the choice all the time. Every time a person is faced with a major decision regarding spiritual change, it is either fear or faith.

The decision to come to Christ and embrace him so that he changes your life. I don't think anyone ever faces a decision of bowing to Jesus Christ without struggling with that tug-o-war: fear or faith. People get right up to the edge. I see that it's true. I see that Christ really did exist. I see that he really did die for sin. I believe that he did rise from the dead. I believe that Jesus is who he said he is. And then they walk away in fear.

What will my friends think?

What will my family think?

Will I be able to pull this off?

Can I live without my sins?

Will I move forward in faith or backward in fear?

I know that is what I faced as a Jew coming to that decision point. Man, if I move forward here what are my parents going to say? What are my Jewish friends going to say? What are the kids back in the dorm going to say? What are my sisters going to say? What will my aunt and uncle say? My Jewish grandmother? Fear or faith.

And it doesn't stop when you make a decision for Christ. Every time you are called to a spiritual change it is fear or faith. Are you going to stay committed to certain theological perspectives? Are you going to open yourself up to the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Fear or faith?

If I really open up to the gifts of the Spirit, what are my good conservative church friends going to say?

What are my parents going to say?

What is my spouse going to say?

If I change churches, if I go forward and quit my job and go after ministry – it's always the same: fear or faith.

I have a dear friend in England, John Mumford, who was raised in a fairly privileged situation in London. His father was a physician. He was sent to one of the elite boys' schools that met right next to Westminster Cathedral. He was educated at Cambridge University, became quite prominent in conservative Christian circles, John did. He then went on to be ordained in the Anglican Church in a very prominent parish, right in the center of London where governmental officials used to attend, where he was pastoring. It was a very, very wealthy Anglican parish. Everyone said about John that he was on the fast track to becoming a Bishop in the Anglican Church. All the right connections. All the right gifts. All the right background and training.

And then John met the Vineyard. This laid back, American movement filled with people who didn't dress well, or do church properly. Through the Vineyard, John met the Holy Spirit in a profound and deep way. And he was faced with a choice: backward in fear or forward in faith. Do I just stay in my comfortable parish having experienced what I have experienced, and seen what I have seen? Do I stay put and hang onto security, or do I go for it? John went for it. He quit his position in that posh Anglican parish to start with just he and his wife, the first Vineyard in London. He scandalized all of his friends. Most of the people in his conservative circle thought that he had had a mental breakdown. He gave up this great salary and great future. Fear or faith.

Listen to this story – a very different note, same issue - fear or faith. I just got this testimony this week. I have received lots of them. I will not be able to share all of them with you. But we will give them out on November 1st in a testimony booklet. Listen to this one.

“My hope in writing this testimony is that others would glorify God for his leading of the Vineyard church and that other couples would trust him to overcome what might appear to them to be a hopeless situation.

3½ years ago I committed adultery with another woman. 10 years prior to that I had also been unfaithful to my wife. Looking back I could see that adultery was in my heart years before the actual relationships took place. Pride was at the root of my unfaithfulness to God and to my family. The level of my self-centeredness is shocking to me now. Basically I spent the first 42 years of my life thinking about myself and what I felt I needed from this life. I spent very little time considering the needs of my family and friends. My pride was fueled by athletic, academic and professional successes. This drew a lot of people to me and, yet, they never saw the sexual brokenness that was tormenting me.

I truly wanted release from this sin. Yet the harder I tried to overcome my flesh through my own strength, the worse I felt when I would inevitably fail. I began to think that Satan was more powerful than God, or at least that he had power equal to God's. I was a master of keeping the dark side of my character hidden from others, yet my wife suspected I was having an affair on both occasions and she was devastated twice.

For the most part, our 20-year marriage was full of anger and mistrust. There was little physical or emotional intimacy. I probably can't count the number of times that my wife prayed herself to sleep at night asking God to restore our marriage. But I vowed that I would never tell anyone about the secret things that I had done and the secret thoughts that I had. My heart was so hard and my wife's mind was so confused that we felt we were beyond recovery. Physically and emotionally drained, my wife contacted an attorney to discuss divorce procedures.”

Fear or faith. That is what it always boils down to friends. Listen to this. Listen to this story.

“But God hates divorce. He began to heal my family and me through his power and mercy and through his work in the Vineyard. Early in 1996 toward the end of my affair, my wife and children began to attend the Vineyard at the invitation of her sister. A few weeks later, I began to come to church with them. I knew that God wanted us to go to the church even though it was 40 miles from my house. The messages spoke directly to me and my wife as God began to heal a marriage that seemed to be hopeless. First, I repented and asked God to forgive my sins, yet I was still afraid to tell her about what I had done. I was deceived into thinking that the truth would hurt her and end our marriage.

God directed us to a Christian counselor. The counselor convinced me that the truth of Christ would set us free. I confessed to my wife and teenage children. No children should have to go through what mine did. It was then that I heard God's voice through my wife when she said, “No matter what you have done, I can still love you and accept you.”

Friends, it takes a great act of faith, audacious faith, to tell your spouse that you have been unfaithful. In big and little things, every single day, you are faced with a choice. Fear or faith.

Let's look at the scriptures. In Numbers 13:1-2 it says,

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.'"

The people of Israel had been freed from Egypt for over a year. And God tells them at the beginning of the story that he is going to give them the Land of Canaan. He said, "Send some men to explore the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites." God tells them the end of the story at the beginning. That you don't need to worry or capitulate to fear. I am giving the land of Canaan. Faith or fear?

I see two things in these two verses. First of all, faith is built when you decide the goal ahead of time. The goal is you are going to take the land. I am telling you right from the start, God says, I am giving you Canaan. In fact, in Deuteronomy, God makes it a command, "You go and take it." This is not a possibility. This is not one of several options God is laying out for the people to make a decision about. You can either move to Canaan or you can move to New Albany. God is saying, "I am giving you Canaan." He is telling them the goal.

Faith is always birthed by a clear goal that is in your mind from the get-go. Here is the goal. God wants married people to stay married for a lifetime. God wants single people to refrain from all sexual relations until they get married. Here is the goal. No mistaking it. It's like when I go out to run, if I don't set a goal ahead of time – well, I am going to go this far – I guarantee along the way when I get tired and my side starts hurting, I am going to quit. If I have a clear goal, no matter what, this is going to happen, I am often able to crash through the quitting point.

Now, in mercy, God allows the people to check things out before they have to meet the goal. He says, "You can go up and explore the land. You can spy it out before you actually have to take it. You can check it out a little bit." That's just the grace of God.

But friends, I'll tell you what. We have to get things absolutely in the right order. First, you have the clear goal in mind, and a decision that you are going to obey before you check things out and see how it is that the goal is going to be met. Let me say that again. You first decide that you are going to obey and then you figure out how you are going to obey. Most people, in fear, reverse the order as we are going to see with these spies. Most people in fear say, "I must figure out how I am going to obey before deciding whether I am going to obey. If I can't figure out how I am going to obey, then I won't obey."

Do you know that God tests us at this point? Let me let you in on a little spiritual secret. It finally became clear in my mind this week as I was putting together this teaching. But I can see this spiritual secret played out over and over in my life. God will not reveal to you how you are going to be able to accomplish his will until you first purpose to do it without knowing how. You will not know God's strategy, you will not have God's creative thoughts regarding

how you can accomplish his will, until you first purpose to do it. Many of you have never been let in on the enormous creativity of God. You have not experienced the excitement of seeing God go to work on your behalf because you have insisted on reversing the order and you have said to God, "Unless you show me step by step how it is that you are going to accomplish this thing, I won't do it."

You have always lived in fear. It is faith to say, "I am going to obey. I will walk out on thin ice and now that I am out here Lord, you are going to have to show me how you are going to hold me up."

Let me apply this, because it is not personal enough yet. God calls us in the Bible to be reconciled in relationship with every other Christian brother and sister that we know. To be reconciled. Now God says, "will you obey?" You don't sit down and calculate how is this going to happen and will I be received and do I have the resources? Will you obey and commit yourself to reconciliation? "Yes, Lord, I will."

"Now, I will show you how," God says. God might show you how through the counsel of a mature brother or sister, small group, women's group leader or a pastor. God might show you how through revealing something directly to you through the Holy Spirit. God might show you how by something that you read in a book or in the Bible. But I am telling you, first you decide in faith regarding what God's will is and then God in grace lets you explore the land and he shows you how it is that you are going to go about taking it.

This certainly applies to your finances. Listen to this testimony.

"We never considered we were what you would call poor, but we had to watch every penny just to make ends meet. Due to our past undisciplined spending habits, car loans, and college loans we piled up major debt. After attending a Vineyard financial workshop, our eyes were opened to our spiritual obligation regarding our finances. We no longer wanted to rob God [he is quoting from Malachi regarding robbing God by not giving him our tithes]. We chose to be obedient to God and to give him a full tithe. After that, we began focusing on paying off our debts. We wanted to be good stewards of our money as the debts were paid off. We became more and more disciplined in our spending habits. We were not seeing any extra raises, much of our money was being wasted in the form of major repairs and medical bills, and we still were living on a very lean budget. We were giving God his tithe, but we were giving no offerings. We were waiting for God to bless our finances so that we could give to other ministries. But God spoke to us and showed us that he also wanted us to trust him and give to the ministries and then wait on his blessings. We decided to test him on this and we gave freely as he moved us without scrutinizing our checkbook first. We continually asked God for protection and blessing over our health and possessions. Sometimes we have to push forward in faith and trust him to new extremes. But we just keep on remembering his faithfulness. We are now really dedicated to building up treasures in heaven where they really matter."

Here is a couple who were pressed financially. Who saw in the Bible a commandment to tithe and a commandment to give over and above a tithe offering? A couple who said, "We are going to obey before we see" and step by step, inch by inch, God is showing them how, how faithful he is.

They close their testimony this way:

"We now see the blessings he is pouring out on us are everlasting ones. He is changing our character. God is turning our focus from the things of this world to the blessings that we will enjoy forever. We are now content with what we have in terms of possessions. In fact, we are trying to simplify our lives. But we absolutely desire more of God and his kingdom."

Friends, listen, this building that we are building is a big test for all of us. And the test is this for you and me: will you pray and listen to God and obey what you really feel you ought to give before saying, "How God?" Will you allow yourselves to be stretched to gain hold of the goal? Indeed, if you are not forced into the position of "how God?" like this couple was, you are probably not hearing in faith at all. I am telling you, once you decide something that goes beyond the realm of what you can produce, God will give you creativity. God will show you areas to cut. God will provide for you. He will.

Faith is a decision. A decision to obey before you decide how. And faith is more than just positive thinking. There are so many recent books out by Christian authors that are nothing more than a thin veneer of Christianity over huge helpings of positive thinking – quips, quotes and stories of people who by thinking positively and having the right mental attitude were able to overcome obstacles. Friends, I tell you I have no interest whatever in trying to build into you a positive mental attitude unless that positive mental attitude is rooted in something real, in something true, in something substantial – namely the hard facts of history. I am not interested at all in having a bunch of people running around who are thinking positively. Who have little signs up around their office like: Your attitude determines your altitude – unless the reason for your positive attitude is because of the truth that you have discovered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It says in verse 3, "At the Lord's command, Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran, all of them were leaders of the Israelites. These are their names:

From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua [sounds like a whale at sea world] son of Zaccur;

from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori;"

I am not going to read all their names – but there are twelve different men. "These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua."

Now listen, do you know why all these names are given in the Bible? Why in the middle of this story of the choice of fear or the choice of faith does the biblical author take the time to go through all of these names that are obscure to us? In fact, many of them are mentioned nowhere else in the OT. Why? Why all the names? Because the biblical author was concerned that your faith is rooted in the facts of history. That when you are making a decision to believe in the face of a bunch of obstacles, your decision to believe is not just some choice of adopting a mental attitude that inspires you to live an overcoming life. That you somehow are realizing your potential and new possibilities and escaping existential angst. That you are resurrecting hope in the midst of despair and all this baloney.

Faith in the Bible is always rooted in concrete historical evidence that you can check out. That is why the Bible authors name names. Jesus of Nazareth actually was a man who lived in the 1st Century AD. It wasn't long, long ago in a far away place...It was Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, ministering in a real place called Galilee, going to real cities like Capernium and Tyre and Sidon. Crucified under Pilate when Caiaphas was the High Priest. There was the father of Alexander and Rufus who carried his cross. This is concrete, real historical stuff.

We Christians are not Mormons. If you pick up the Book of Mormon, you will find that it is entirely based on fiction and myth. No Book of Mormon cities have ever been located. No Book of Mormon person, place, nation, or name has ever been found. No Book of Mormon artifacts, no Book of Mormon scriptures, no Book of Mormon inscriptions, nothing which demonstrates that the Book of Mormon is anything other than myth and invention. And this is according to archeologists at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC.

The Bible is entirely different. One archeologist carefully examined Luke's references to 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, dozens of people, and he found that there wasn't a single error in hundreds of historical references made by the gospel writer Luke. It can all be verified. The gospel of John mentions the Pool of Bethesda. It says that Jesus healed an invalid by the Pool of Bethesda and John in chapter 5 goes into detail how the Pool had five porticos. For many years people said that was inaccurate. There was no such place. Then the Pool of Bethesda was excavated. It was forty feet below the ground, destroyed during the Roman invasion in 67 AD. And sure enough, they found five porticos, which are these colonnaded porches, exactly as John described. They found the Pool Bethesda that John mentions. They found Jacob's Well that John mentioned. They found the probable location of the stone pavement where Jesus appeared before Pilate. They found an inscription about Pontius Pilate. There is even a Greek reference from an entirely non-Christian source reporting that in the year of about 30 AD there was the greatest eclipse of the sun that the world ever knew so that it became night at noontime. The stars even appeared in the heavens. This is a reference to the darkness that the gospel writers reported occurred at the moment of the crucifixion. There are actually two references to the darkness, one in a Roman historian's writings and one in a Greek historian's writings. You can trust the Bible.

The choice of faith, friends, is a choice to believe the facts of history. It is not positive thinking.

Well, these people, let's get down to verse 26 – these people succumb to fear-based thinking. It says in verse 26, "They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: 'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the

sea and along the Jordan.’ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, ‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’ But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.’ And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, ‘The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.’”

Fear-based thinking. Despite what God said, that he is giving us the land, verse 31, “we can’t attack these people. They are stronger than us.” What is fear-based thinking like? First of all, you maximize the obstacles. Not only are these people descendants of Anak, but they come from the Nephilim. These ancient people are said to be giants. Not only are these people tall, they are now these mythological giants who inhabit the earth.

Do we not see the exaggeration, the over-emphasis, and the magnification of obstacles by Christians in America today in our fear-based thinking? Oh, the forces that are arrayed against our children are so great. No one could expect a teenager these days to refrain from sex or getting drunk or using drugs. The peer pressure is just too great.

Oh, the media is so strong. The great power of television is arrayed against Christianity. Hollywood is so powerful. The school system is biased against Christianity. The government is against us.

Oh, this sin, this addiction in my life is so huge, it is strong and powerful.

Of course, when faced with such a giant, what could you do but capitulate again and again to anxiety or to sexual sin, or an eating disorder, or to substance abuse? You can’t help it. Nobody can overcome such a big giant.

The problems in your marriage are too great.

And my goodness, the Muslim world, those people are so fierce. They are so committed and violent. Christianity can’t possibly penetrate the Muslim world. It can’t happen.

Giants are in the land.

The Gay Rights people are marching down the street. They have too strong a lobby and so do the Abortion Rights people. They are so well-financed.

Fear-based thinking always maximizes the obstacles.

Fear-based thinking always emphasizes security. “The land we explored devours those living in it. If we try to take it we will be swallowed up.”

Whenever you focus on security, on achieving security in this world, you are capitulating to fear-based thinking. Listen to me now. This world by design is an insecure place. By design, we are called into dependence and trust and every time we succumb and try to become more secure in this insecure world, we are capitulating to fear-based thinking.

The reason why some of us have such a hard time giving and giving extravagantly is because we are emphasizing our security. When you decide what you will give in a 3-year pledge, you will squarely face security issues. Will you hold on so tightly to your money because you are afraid of what will become of you or will you let go?

Fear-based thinking minimizes our potential. It says in verse 33, “We saw Nephilim there. The descendents came from the Nephilim. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, we looked the same to them.”

We are nothing, they say. In the eyes of these great people we are like grasshoppers. We are like bugs. Compared to the Abortion Rights people, our little forces are nothing. Compared to atheist professors at this great university called Ohio State, and the great law firms downtown and the big office buildings and Ted Turner and CNN – what are we?

Listen. It’s never been about us. About how big we are. Whether we are bug size or elephant size. The issue is not how large we are, how wise we are, how strong we are. The issue of the forward movement of Christianity and the kingdom of God has always been about will God be with us and be pleased with us.

Listen to what Caleb says in 14:8, “If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey and he will give it to us.”

I love John Wimber’s description of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The story where Jesus is riding on a donkey into Jerusalem and they are throwing flowers down in the street and they are throwing palm branches and clothing. John told the story from the perspective of the donkey saying, “Look at all these people showering all this praise on me. I must be really great.” The donkey is feeling really good about himself. “Wow, I didn’t know they even recognized me. I didn’t know my reputation had spread this far.” It wasn’t the donkey. It was who was on the donkey’s back.

It’s not who we are, whether we are grasshoppers, donkeys or great people. It is who is riding us. It’s whose hand is on us. The Vineyard will achieve great things if God is here.

And of course, like all people who are fear-based in their thinking, they glamorize their pasts. It says, “That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt. Or in this desert. Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to each other, ‘We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’”

Over and over again, as people shrink back from taking what God has for them, they glamorize their pasts. Seeing this, you say, “Is your memory so short?” Don’t you remember what it was like when you lived in disobedience to God? Don’t you remember what it was like before you came to Christ? And yet, in fear people pull away and they begin to imagine that their lives were actually better off without God than with God. Because the obstacles now are so great and the trials are so intense.

Let me finish with a few ways we build faith. We don’t have to move backward in fear; we can move forward in faith. Our choice is to press forward. Our choice is to build. Let’s flip back to chapter 13:21. It says:

“So they went up from there and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. They went up through the Negev and came

to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Telmai, the descendents of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt)."

The first way that we build faith is faith pays attention to God's deeds in the past. It says they went to Hebron. But you know, these spies who were so filled with fear, forgot what God had done in Hebron. They saw the city. They saw the giants. They saw the big buildings. They saw the walls. But they forgot that it was in Hebron where their ancestors were buried. That's where Abraham and Sarah were buried. That's where Isaac and Rebekah were buried. That's where Jacob and Leah were buried. What they should have gotten from Hebron was a boost of faith that it was here in Hebron that God made promises to our ancestors to give us the land.

Do you want to build your faith? You take a little time to jot your testimony down. God where have you met me in the past? Faith is built by God's deeds in history – God's deeds in the church's history and God's deeds in your history.

I can look back time after time where God has met us. I was talking with one of our pastors this week. They were lamenting over some problems in their ministry. Someone recently quit on them. There were some trials and some needs. I said, "Listen, has God not been faithful to you throughout the history of your ministry? Isn't it the case that every time you have asked God to open his hand, he has done it?"

They said, "Yes, he has been faithful."

I said, "So why can't we trust him now? Let's pray."

We prayed. I kid you not. It wasn't ten minutes later that someone called on the phone in answer to the prayer that we had just prayed.

Someone came up to me a week ago and said, "Rich, you seem like you are nervous about this campaign. You seem anxious."

I said, "I don't think I am anxious."

They said, "Well, it just seems to be coming out. Has God not been faithful? Won't God provide?"

I said, "Yes, he will."

Do you want to build your faith? Remember God's deeds in the history of the scripture, in the history of this church, in your life. Write out your testimony. Store in your mind God's faithfulness in the past.

And then pay attention to God's provision in the present. "They reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs."

How is God being good in the present? They are carrying God's provision and they still can't believe that God will be good. Two men have to carry this cluster. God is saying, "I am here with you. I am providing. The land is good and you are going to have it."

Sometimes we are so afraid of all the obstacles around us, we can't see God's present blessing. The reason I spoke to you last week about thankfulness was to stir up in your heart a sense of present blessing. Do you see the presence of God? Are you aware of his goodness at this moment in your life? Are you in touch with his present extravagant grace to you?

Friends, as we move forward in this campaign and you make a decision regarding what you are going to give, we in this church will be faced with a choice, backward or forward, fear or faith. Let's move forward in faith together. Let's pray.