

## COUNTERINTUITIVE

We emphasize and remember the huge, climactic moments – the championships, the gold medal efforts and the big events.

Monumental accomplishments are usually challenging and difficult, ... YET... it is living in the day to day that demands most of our energy and discipline. Using sports as an example, success depends on intentional, well honed repetition – day, after day, after day.

The same, generally, applies to life, too.

How we live each day is what is truly important.

Jesus had his “mountain top experience”–which was the topic two weeks ago. Jesus also had his time in the wilderness–last Sunday’s focus. Both events were notable and profound ordeals, yet they were the exception in his life,..... and the “extreme” / the monumental is the exception in our lives, too.

The biggest and the most basic challenge we face is surviving the day to the day..... and trying to thrive in the nitty gritty.

For example, it is far easier to declare a bold intention / to have a New Year’s Eve resolution or to plan to turn over a new leaf.

The decision feels big to decide to go to university or choose a new career or start a new business.

HOWEVER, doing the demands, the obligations, the routine, the homework, the tests, the book-work, the 1460 days..... is the tough part!

Likewise in church work, coming up with a great idea or a new program is simple..... compared to the work of implementation. Our Education Comm. is keenly aware of this; they’ve been working hard sustaining a new system, which includes writing curriculum. [ ]

Even though mass media highlights the “extreme” moment, we each know, from personal experience, that reaching our dreams and visions is a lot harder than forming them, and it may demand a lot of patience, too.

We know this, and we also know this is true with God in the picture.

In Genesis 15, we sense Abram’s anguish and frustration of reaching for a vision.

Abram followed God’s call and promise to travel to a new land and be the father of a great people,....

YET in the text, Abram states his frustration of living in the day to day, day after day wondering about THAT promise and hope.

Abram yells out to God, “Hey God, you’re leading me to a strange place–“this promised land”–and aside from a few ups and downs things are progressing okay...BUT... this being the father thing....

WELL... NOTHING is happening, and .... my wife and I are getting a Little Old.... I don’t see a resolution, .... unless I take some practical initiative.”

God responded, “My promise still holds; be patient. It will happen.”

When we don't see the solution laid out, when things don't make sense, when there is no light at the end of the tunnel..... it is hard to keep going on Faith. It is hard to be patient..... because it is irrational to continue to do what seems to be failing.

In the Luke passage, some Pharisees warn Jesus to be careful and stay away from Jerusalem. They'd heard that King Herod wants to kill him.

We don't know the motivation of those powerful Pharisees. My guess is that they'd rather have Jesus under their wing– indebted to them, than have Jesus out on his own.... free to say what he wishes.

At the time, Jesus was travelling from town to town, slowly working his way to Jerusalem. His vision, his mission was to present his message, eventually, to Jerusalem, .... but word was spreading that it would be dangerous for him to go there. Which is really NOT that surprising. Jerusalem had a reputation for chewing up non-conformists and prophets.

Even so, Jesus kept going, just as Abram did, defying rational thinking and common sense. AND, he even alienated those in power, who could have protected him.  
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What kept them going, when the normal warning signs said stop and change directions?

Why did they keep on doing what they were doing?

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..... Well..... to experience the glory of God's will in fruition, it of course takes faith,.....

BUT.... breaking that down farther..... IT takes COUNTER INTUITION.

To continue on the journey of faith, one must be counterintuitive.

What does that mean?

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It may mean defying common sense and the temptation to yield to a gut reflex.

It likely means going against the norm, the flow and not following the “assumed” rules.

I'm told that submerged upside down in a Kayak, the technique to flip right side up.... is counterintuitive, but necessary for survival.

Another good example, and finding inspiration from the Olympics, is downhill skiing.

{any skier here?}

To begin, skiing is NOT natural. It requires extensions on our feet, and it means falling off a mountain in a fun way. .. That is very abnormal.

A ski instructor, teaching first-time skiers, said to them, “There are four basic things you need to learn:

- 1) Be prepared for the unexpected;
- 2)you must go reasonably fast;
- 3)you must face and fall forward;
- 4)keep your weight on the downhill ski.

Let's look at those Four axioms:

One– Be prepared for the unexpected. “Duh?” .. Is that an oxymoron?

Doesn't the mere fact that when something unexpected comes out of nowhere, while having fun falling off a mountain, incline itself to surprise?

*Nevertheless, it is possible to be ready for surprise,... in a limited sort of way.???*

Most of us appreciate durable rules and the predictable; life is safer that way..... not as much fun, but safer.

Yet,... living God's will can be full of surprises.

2) Ski fast – This seems unsafe and not rational; however, it takes a reasonable amount of speed for the skis to cut into the snow to allow turns, when necessary. Without a degree of speed, one would slide into things, fall down or loose control and then end up going down the hill Way to fast.

The safest way is to keep moving with speed, and that feels unnatural for a beginner. That is one reason why timid skiers fall more.

3) A skier must fall forward.

Again, this feels wrong and demands counter intuition, but it is correct.

If a skier falls backwards or to the side, there is a greater chance of not stopping and of getting twisted up.... and breaking ...something.

This discipline is hard to learn; it is against natural intuition. But, don't forget, skiing is not natural..... which explains the fourth axiom.

4) Keep your weight on the downhill ski.

The neophyte tendency is to lean into, against the hill. It FEELS safer that way, yet if one does that, one will lose hold of the snow and fall. The skier must lean on the downhill ski and put gravity to beneficially constructive work – in order to survive the “Fun fall off of a mountain.”

Skiing is unnatural. It defies normal rules, and therefore requires “abnormal” procedures to succeed and survive – Counter intuition.

Likewise, the same is true for being a Christian/ for being a follower of Christ.

Being in a right relationship with God defies “human rules” because it is a special and extra ordinary relationship. It is beyond what we normally experience in our human domain.

Throw God into the mix and everything changes, and we must then learn the way, the cadence of the divine. – a new way of living.

In Philippians 3, Paul tries to explain this unusual state .....as being a “Citizen of heaven” – meaning, it feels like we are aliens, non-citizens in the world around us.

*If you have ever travelled to a foreign country and needed legal assistance, then you have an idea of what Paul is talking about.*

Living life with God.... can make us feel like an alien.... because “things” work so differently, when God is in the picture.

Paul presented this citizenship concept after, he encouraged his readers to Keep Pressing On.... to keep moving on... to keep going.

The essence of this message is felt in the situation with Abram and Jesus: they kept pressing on, even when it felt weird, unnatural and irrational.

Faith living is just that: it is continuing the journey with God, even when filled with questions and doubt.

Sometimes our journey may include more patience, but I think it is rare that God calls us to do nothing.

I've heard tragic stories of people being idle as they waited for God to rescue them. I don't believe God calls us to be stupid.

Faith living / being in a relationship with God is learning to live with new ways of interacting with the world, each other and with God.

It can seem counterintuitive, and it is dynamic, and not static.

This Christian life/ the life in a right relationship with God is a progressive journey of faith. And,....this journey is NOT marked with old rules and regulations. I envision it as more like holding someone's hand while blindfolded.

Faith is not accepting certain dogma or merely abiding by church expectations or obeying religious rules.

Yet, too often the meaning of “faith” is altered, twisted in church circles to mean ***conforming to religious standards*** – being more pious.

Thus, the plea “If I only had more faith” is understood as the need to be more obedient to the religious rules and expectations.

Let me try to explain this a different way, and I know that in reality we can't pigeon hole people so easily.

But,..... for the sake of argument, let's put people in three groups.

The first group contains the vast majority of people. They try to ignore God and spirituality and follow the base rules for living. The crudest form of these rules are known as the law of the jungle. This life style is self preservation. It includes the concepts of *you get what you deserve*, and *the end justifies the means*. Love is reflexive, and .... those in this group tend to wonder why life is not meaningful and feels so empty.

This group is the secular category.

Obviously, these folks are not in a wholesome relationship with God. They don't know Jesus, either. They keep searching for more in life.

A second Group attempts to be religious...AND... follow the secular way. They sort of have a "dual citizenship", if that is possible – in touch with God and the practical way. The word faith is reduced to mean what I just explained – following the religious expectations.

This group tend to feel a lot of tension because they appreciate spiritual things, yet want to hold on to rational rules. Faith is reduced to understandable and obtainable expectations. Often the tension is released by creating more rules—rules that are easy to follow/ that bring comfort, such as: Christians must be happy. So, people in this group sing praise songs and smile a lot.

*Years ago, couple of the rules I grew up with were: playing cards were bad, as was dancing. As an eight year old, I felt pretty holy because I didn't own playing cards and didn't go out dancing, either..... there may have been other factors for my pious living beyond my self-discipline; however, you get the point.*

Using the analogy of skiing, for this second group, it would be like "don't move forward too quickly because if you hit something, and you likely will, then it won't hurt as much. The problem is that it is harder to avoid hitting trees going slowly, a new rule is added, ... which is... carry an anchor and a big pillow, and so on, and so on—rules are added.

This sounds crazy, yet some of our "tacit" church rules intended to limit risk... and thus faith, are just as crazy.

One more example, and this one may hurt.

The dual citizenship attitude will declare, "We feel God is leading us to do a certain ministry, YET... when it comes budget setting time. The church determines it can not afford it, so the ministry is cancelled."

Too often, the first question we as a church have asked is, "Can we afford this." Common sense/ the practical wins out, and faith living takes a back seat. Ah, but we must be prudent and rational.

Who's rules are those?

This brings us to the third alternative – Faith living.

Faith living: comparing it to skiing means, "Expect surprise."  
God does that sort of thing – surprise.

And, if you fall, then fall forward..... Mistakes will happen. Confront them; learn from them, and don't try to cushion the fall by falling backwards and hiding. It just doesn't work that way.

It is counterintuitive to think that gravity is your friend on the ski slope. It can feel counterintuitive to openly fail before God and your friends.

There is grace in faith living, and grace is counterintuitive, too.... somewhat like catching the snow on your down slope ski.

Grace will sustain us,..... but it may feel strange at first.

Speaking out against politicians is not the prudent thing to do.  
Refusing to accept the protection from the powerful seems like slapping the hands that Could feed you and it is burning bridges, and conventional wisdom tells us not to do such things.  
Yet, that is what Jesus did.

It is counterintuitive to turn the other cheek.  
It is counterintuitive to love our enemies.  
It is counterintuitive to pray for those who hurt and offend us.  
It is counterintuitive to share more than just our left overs.  
It is counterintuitive to help the poor, they may end up being our competitors.  
It is counterintuitive to protect the environment when money can be made by exploiting nature.  
It is counterintuitive to get up every Sunday morning and go to church.  
It is counterintuitive to prepare for Sunday worship, instead of watching the Olympics.  
It is counterintuitive to be embarrassed about how our brazen our nation's lust of pride has become.

It is counterintuitive to serve on a committee, to be church treasurer, to write curriculum, to teach Sunday School, ..... to give so much to the church.  
It is counterintuitive to write letters to our MP or the Prime Minister; what difference is it going to make?

It is counterintuitive to be honest, to trust our neighbour, ..... to love our neighbour.  
Actually, It is counterintuitive to pray and worship a God who we..... well.....we don't own or control.  
Because, It is counterintuitive to let go of control as we hold onto.... faith living.

*Letting go..... holding on – our Lent theme.*

It is counterintuitive to invest in others,.... having the first last, and being the least.  
Love is counterintuitive, as is following Jesus, as is Jesus.

So,..... why do we do this.  
Why do we strive to be in a right relationship with God?  
Why do we try to follow Jesus?  
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I think it is like skiing.....people ski because it is fun.  
And, we do this journey thing with God because deep down inside it makes our soul smile.  
And,...the counterintuitive gets easier the more we do it, just like skiing.