

# BRIDGING THE G.A.P.S. 7

## “BUILDING BRIDGES TO GOD’S FUTURE”

**G**.enerations **A**.ppreciating **P**.erspectives and **S**.imilarities

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” Hebrews 13: 8

*“But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you! They would say, ‘There’s the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!’*

Luke 14: 28-30

**“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
\_\_\_\_\_ THE NEXT GENERATION TO \_\_\_\_\_.”**

1. WE NEED TO \_\_\_\_\_ OUR \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. REACHING THE \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. MATURING THE \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. GROWING THE \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. WE NEED TO \_\_\_\_\_ A FIRM \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. GODLY \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. BIBLICAL \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. PRACTICAL \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. WE NEED TO \_\_\_\_\_ A STRONG \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. DEDICATED \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. COMMITTED \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. FAITHFUL \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. WE NEED TO \_\_\_\_\_ THE BRIDGE ONE \_\_\_\_\_ AT A TIME
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_ EARNESTLY
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_ TOGETHER
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_ SACRIFICIALLY

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Earlier this week I was reading the great devotional classic, My Utmost for His Highest, by Oswald Chambers. A comment he made in the August 21 article has captured my attention: “The statement we so often hear, “Make a decision for Jesus Christ,” places the emphasis on something our Lord never trusted. He never asks us to decide for Him, but to yield to Him—something very different.” Our text this morning is taken up with another incident where Jesus is challenging the crowd to become disciples, and sure enough, he doesn’t call for an easily managed decision, he calls for a radical yielding. We must love Him more than we love our husbands or wives, more than we love our children or careers, even more than we love our very own lives. That will take a radical yielding on our part.

He goes on in the passage to advise the listeners to count the cost before embarking on this discipleship adventure. That is good advice. As we consider building bridges to God’s Future it would do us well to heed Jesus’ advice. I am not an engineer, and this message will be anything but scientific. I know nothing about building bridges in the literal sense, but God has inspired me to share some thoughts about building ‘spiritual bridges’ to His preferred future for our lives, and our church. Let me remind you of our foundational principle, then let us begin:

**“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION TO CHRIST.”**

1. WE NEED TO **DISCERN** OUR **DESTINATION**

There is an old story about William Booth, the founder of the Great Salvation Army movement. It seems that with all his organizational and inspirational greatness, Mr. Booth was somewhat absent-minded. One day he was riding a train, and napping when the porter made his rounds. Awakening Mr. Booth, the porter demanded his ticket. Mr. Booth fumbled through his briefcase, his wallet, and all his pockets to no avail. The porter grew impatient and judgmental as he recited the consequences of riding the train without a ticket. After enduring enough of the law recitation, Mr. Booth finally announced: “Sir, with all due respect to your laws about having no ticket, my dilemma is much different, and in fact worse. You see without that ticket, I have no idea where I am going!”

There are many people, and many churches riding the train through life with no ticket, and no idea where they are going. Going through the motions is no goal, and aiming at nothing will insure success every time! Before we begin building our bridge to God’s future we must know where we are going.

Our destination is not something we determine based on personal preference or majority rule; it is something we discern from God’s heart. It includes at least these three things:

A. REACHING THE **LOST**                      God’s future is always about reaching the lost, those who are perishing with no ticket. Jesus was consumed with reaching the lost, and spent his life educating and inspiring his followers to carry on that mantle of ministry. We are invited to join his reconciliation team in this great endeavor. We must build a bridge to the lost, within the walls of this church, and within the confines of this community.

## B. MATURING THE **FAITHFUL**

God's future is always about becoming mature Christian Disciples. Some folks end their maturation when they retire from their career. Some folks cease their maturing when they graduate from College, High School, or confirmation class. Some folks cease their maturing the moment they are saved, and all those are wrong! A Christian is always to be learning, growing, deepening and maturing their spiritual life. Part of our destination as a church is that we keep growing, deeper, richer, fuller, more devoted, more yielded in our Christian lives. The Apostle Paul reminds us that God gifts are given *"to build up the Body of Christ until we all attain unity, and become mature persons, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Jesus Christ!"* Unless we are as mature as Jesus, then we haven't arrived yet, and must keep growing. The third destination is:

## C. GROWING THE **CHURCH**

Growing the church has become a popular subject lately. Books have been written, seminars are being offered, and classes are even taught at some seminaries to help us learn how to grow churches. The best wisdom I have ever heard about church growth came from Rick Warren, the pastor of one of the largest churches in America. He said, "Church Growth is no secret and requires no special training or program. Healthy churches grow, automatically and supernaturally." Unhealthy churches are always looking for a gimmick, a get rich quick scheme, and none of those produce long lasting mature growth, but health produces growth, and health must be one of our destinations.

## 2. WE NEED TO **LAY** A FIRM **FOUNDATION**

We learned a bit about laying foundations on our recent trip to Bolivia. Now, granted laying 9000 bricks as a sub-floor is certainly not the same as laying a foundation for building a bridge, but the principle is the same. Most bridges have these huge pillars

that rest on even larger pods or anchor points that act as their foundation. In the church and in our lives, we must have a firm foundation. Lets consider what this means.

A. **GODLY VISION**           The cornerstone of any effective life, personal or in the church, is a godly vision. The OT contains a verse so appropriate: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Do you remember my paraphrase of that verse from a former series a few years ago? “Where there is no vision, the people find a new parish.” We need a vision from God. Our vision does not come from what’s working in California, or across the street. Our vision does not come from our collective best wisdom, it comes from God. Our vision does not come from me, though I am called to uphold and remind us of the vision. Our vision comes from god. The second pillar in our firm foundation is a:

B. **BIBLICAL MANDATE**    The Bible is actually quite clear and as mentioned above includes the mandate to reach the lost and mature the faithful. Many people today disregard and dismiss the Bible as an ancient book full of mistakes and discrepancies. They do so at their own peril. This Book is the primary source of all things Christian, giving us comfort, encouragement, direction, conviction, challenge, and the mandate for our lives, and for our church! The third pillar of our firm foundation is:

C. **PRACTICAL MISSION**       I read with interest the article in Thursdays Tribune about the guy espousing the answer to a fulfilling life lies deep within each of us, and involves only emptying our minds. I don’t mean to be critical, but frankly, in my opinion, an empty mind can be a dangerous thing! I am so thankful that the Christian life is a practical one, full of real life experiences and challenges.

We must lay a foundation that contains a practical mission, to make the world different.

3. WE NEED TO **ESTABLISH A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Every bridge is supported by some infrastructure. Some of them are suspension cables, some with just good old concrete. Likewise all godly lives, and God filled churches have a certain infrastructure that holds things together. We need at least three.

A. DEDICATED **STAFF** We are blessed at First Church to have a very dedicated staff. We are not perfect, and not without our personal quirks, but as a group we work hard to follow God, and try honestly to do the best each of our jobs require. I am thankful for the staff at FUMC. That staff is not limited to just those who draw a paycheck here though. Our support system includes much:

B. COMMITTED **LEADERSHIP** Leadership is key in any organization. I think the key to our leadership development and deployment is the continual effort I observe by many of you to discover your gifts, and become engaged in your special ministry. There is no way the staff here at FUMC can do all the ministry that God holds us accountable to accomplish. If you are new here, please join us as we pray that each of us might be fully engaged in the ministry for which have been gifted, and to which each of us have been called. The third element of our support system is:

C. FAITHFUL **FOLLOWERS** On every bridge I have seen there are also some seemingly insignificant parts that were one or two missing, no one would know the difference. The recent discussion about Memorial Bridge has brought this to light for me. Over time the bridge has grown older. Some paint has worn off, exposing the girders to the harsh ND elements. Rust has ensued; a few bolts have been shaken out from the constant traffic vibration, and in general, over time, the bridge needs some attention.

What a metaphor for the church. We might think that what we do is not all that important to the operation of the church. We might think they'll never miss me if I choose to skip church for a few weeks or months, or years, but that choice begins

immediately to weaken the structure. We might think it of little consequence if we withhold some of our tithe, but soon the bridge will need major attention. Staff is important, leaders are important, but so are seemingly insignificant 'followers' who are not all that insignificant after all. Remember Paul's metaphor, "the weaker parts of the body are the most important?"

#### 4. WE NEED TO **BUILD** THE BRIDGE ONE **BRICK** AT A TIME

Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg UMC has shared a most interesting metaphor for the growing church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He says that growing a church today is like building a bridge, one brick at a time, while you are on it! Now that is not how bridges are built, but is he correct, that is how churches are built? I believe so. We build as we go. We can't wait till it's completed, and tested, and retested. We must build as we grow, and here are a few of the bricks we continually need to be laying:

A. **PRAYING** EARNESTLY            There is no greater need or blessing for a church than to be praying earnestly. Prayer is the primary source for discerning God's destination. Prayer is the primary source for revealing how and when and where we lay our firm foundation. Prayer is the primary source that weds our support system together and empowers each of us to play our unique roles.

B. **WORKING** DILEGENTLY            The second brick we must continually be laying is our working together. I love the way Nehemiah records the working of the Israelites on the rebuilding the wall project in Jerusalem following the destruction by the Babylonians. He specifically mentions that so and so worked alongside so and so. So and so worked along side so and so. You see it? Working alongside one another make the work less difficult and more enjoyable.

Sometimes larger churches produce the mentality, 'well someone else will do it', and that is dangerous. Sometimes larger churches produce a consumerist mentality that says: 'well, I'm only here for what I can get out of this,' instead of what I can give to this.

That's not the vision God has for this or any of His churches. Remember Acts 2 where Luke describes the early church: *"they joined together, shared together, met together constantly, praising God together, constantly."* We can't all do everything, but we must all do something!!! The third brick is:

C. **GIVING** SACRIFICIALLY            Sometimes large churches produce another mentality: "with all those people and all that money, they surely don't need my 2 cents." Do you know that God doesn't ask us to give to Him or the church because He or the church needs our money? God asks, expects, and even commands us to give, because He knows we need to give for US! Christian people are defined by their willingness to give. Listen to Paul describe the Christians in Macedonia: *"though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have overflowed in rich generosity. For they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will."* Our bridge to God's Future will not be built only with the brick of money, but it certainly will not be completed without it either. Our bridge will require the giving of money, time, prayer, hard work, dedication, and a willing spirit of sacrifice and generosity.

Whether your particular future looks long or not so long, God's future is always the longest view, eternity. Building a bridge that will support and sustain our passage to that eternity will require these four pillars all summarized into this one bridge:

**"EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION TO CHRIST."**

**Let us pray.**