Big Idea: A faith you choose will carry you further.
Primary Scripture: Joshua 24:15; 2 Timothy 1:5-7
Supporting Scripture: Philippians 2:12-13

- We've all borrowed clothes from someone else before, right?
    - Maybe you grabbed an older sibling's hoodie on your way out the door, or you borrowed a jacket from a parent because yours was in the wash.
    - And it works. It keeps you warm. But it doesn't quite fit. The sleeves hang past your hands. The shoulders are too wide.
    - You can pull it off for a day, but anyone paying attention can tell it's not actually yours.
- That borrowed feeling is something that we can also feel when it comes to our faith.
- For some of us, faith is something we grew up with.
    - We were in church before we could walk. We knew Bible stories before we could read. We prayed before meals because that's just what our family did.
- And for others of us, faith came from somewhere else.
    - A friend who invited us to youth group, a coach or teacher who talked about Jesus in a way that made us curious, a season in life when we started asking questions nobody around us was asking.
- Either way, most of us are walking around in a faith that was shared with us by someone else.
- Every single person who follows Jesus started by receiving something from someone.
- But there's a difference between *receiving* your faith and *owning* it.
- Over the past three weeks, we've been wrestling with some big questions together.
    - We asked, "Is God even real?" and saw how creation itself points to a Creator who wants to be known.
    - We asked, "Why does God feel far away?" and discovered that distance from God is a feeling, not a fact.
    - Last week, we asked, "Why do bad things happen?" and were reminded that pain doesn't mean God has left the room.
    - But underneath every one of those questions is an even bigger one… and it's the one we're landing on today: *Do I actually believe this for myself?*

- Not because your parents told you that you should. Not because your youth pastor and small group leader believe it. Not because it's what's expected on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night. But because you've looked at the evidence, sat with the doubts, wrestled with the difficult parts, and decided that this is what **you** believe.
- So here's where we're going today: ***How can I make my faith mine?***

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- We're going to look at two passages today, one from the Old Testament, one from the New, that both speak directly to this question.
- Our first passage comes from the book of Joshua.
- Joshua had been Moses' right-hand man for decades. He'd seen God do extraordinary things.
- The Red Sea parting… Manna falling from the sky… The walls of Jericho collapsing.
- Now, near the end of his life, he gathered every tribe and every family of Israel together to give them a final challenge.

15 *But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.* ***(Joshua 24:15 – NLT)***

- Joshua is speaking to a generation whose parents and grandparents had followed God through the wilderness for 40 years.
    - They grew up hearing these miraculous stories. Their families had lived through miracles.
- Joshua could have said, "Look, your ancestors figured this out. Just keep doing what they did."
    - But he didn't. He said, "Choose." He put the decision right in their hands.
    - Because Joshua knew you can grow up around faith and still never actually *have* faith of your own.
- Proximity isn't the same as ownership.
- Now let's jump ahead more than a thousand years to the New Testament.

- The Apostle Paul is writing to a young leader named Timothy, who happens to have grown up in a home full of faith.

5** I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues to grow in you. **6** This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. **7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.* ***(2 Timothy 1:5-7 – NLT)

- A flame doesn't stay alive on its own. You have to tend to it. Add wood. Give it air. Pay attention to it.
- Walk away and stop feeding it, and eventually the fire goes out. The flame wasn't broken. It just had nobody keeping it alive.
- Faith works the same way. You might have received a spark from someone else… but the fire is yours to tend.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Your faith only becomes real when you choose it.

- A faith you've never chosen isn't really faith. It's a habit. It's a culture. It's an inheritance sitting in a box somewhere, but it's not yet yours.
- If you grew up with people pointing you toward Jesus, that's a gift worth being grateful for.
  - Timothy got that gift. His grandma Lois and his mom Eunice poured their faith into him for years before Paul ever showed up.
  - Even Timothy, with all that spiritual inheritance, still had to make it his.
  - Paul said, "Fan it into flames." There's a step Timothy had to take that no one could take for him.
- If you *didn't* grow up around people who followed Jesus, this passage is just as much for you.
- The invitation is wide open, and it doesn't matter whether your starting point was a church nursery or a conversation with a friend last month.
- What matters is that the choice is in front of you, and it's yours to make.

2. Ownership takes intention… not perfection.

- It might be easy to convince yourself that owning your faith means finally having it all figured out.
- Like one day you'll reach the point where all your doubts go away, you understand every difficult passage, and your prayer life is a 60-minute daily quiet time.
- Thankfully, that's not what Paul describes.

12 Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. ***(Philippians 2:12-13 – NLT)***

- There's a big difference between *going through the motions* and *moving with intention*.
- One is passive… the other is personal. One is reacting to whatever is in front of you… the other is actively *choosing*, again and again, to take the next step.
- The same God who's asking us to work hard is also the One giving us what we need to accomplish it.
- Ownership isn't about doing everything perfectly. It's about showing up with intention and trusting God to meet us there.

3. Asking questions leads to a stronger faith.

- When we sit with the question, "Is God even real?" and come to a place of saying, "Yes, I believe God is," that belief is sturdier than it would have been if we'd never asked.
- When we wrestled with, "Why does God feel far away?" and learned to trust that God is close even when our feelings say otherwise, that trust is more resilient.
- When we stared down the question, "Why do bad things happen?" and decided that pain doesn't mean God has left us, that conviction is more durable than a faith that's never been tested.
- Paul told Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.
- That means faith isn't supposed to be fragile. It's designed to be resilient. And resilience gets built through testing, not avoidance.

- If this series has stirred up more questions than it's answered, that's not a sign that something is wrong, that's a sign that something is growing.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Notice where your faith is right now.

- This week, take 10 minutes, somewhere quiet, no phone, no distractions, and ask yourself a few questions like these:
  - Where am I with God right now?
  - Am I following Jesus because I've chosen to, or because it's what I've always done?
  - What are the parts of my faith that feel genuinely mine?
  - What are the parts that still feel like they belong to someone else?
- You don't need to fix anything right now. You don't need to have answers. You just need to be honest.
- You can't take a step forward if you don't know where you are.
- Write your answers down. Put them in a note on your phone, in a journal, or even just on a scrap of paper. Keep them somewhere you can come back to.
- The point of this step isn't to judge yourself. It's to get a clear picture of where you're at.

2. Reflect on what you actually believe.

- Spend some time this week putting your own beliefs into words. What do *you* actually believe about God right now?
- Start with, "I believe…" and see where it goes.
  - It might sound something like, "I believe God is real because of what I've seen in creation and what I've experienced in my own life. I believe Jesus loves me, even when I don't fully understand Him. I'm still working through a lot, but I'm choosing to keep following."
- The point isn't to produce a theological essay. The point is to move from, "This is what I've been told," to "This is what I'm choosing."
- Once you've written it, read it back to yourself. You can always revise it later. You can always add to it.

3. Act on one thing that makes your faith your own.

- Pick one concrete step to take this week that makes your faith feel a little more like yours and a little less like someone else's.
    - That might look like starting a spiritual habit that nobody asked you to start, reading one chapter of the Bible each morning, going on a walk with no headphones so you can just talk to God, or journaling one prayer before bed.
    - It might even look like telling one person, a friend, a family member, someone in this group, what you wrote in step two.
    - It might look like bringing one of your most difficult questions to a leader you trust instead of sitting with it alone.
- What the specific action is matters less than the fact that *you* chose it.
- That's how a faith moves from inherited to owned, not in one dramatic moment, but in a bunch of small, intentional choices that add up over time.