

“HOLY GUMPTION”**Pastor Becky Stephens****Text: Hebrews 11:1-40**

Being in God’s “top 40” requires faith that takes action and makes a commitment. Contrary to my child’s belief I was not a child of the 30s, 40s, 50s, or even 60’s. I was a child of the 70’s and all those things that came with it. Bell bottoms and polyester pants, pet rocks, the Brady Bunch, gas wars and shortages, disco, Davy Jones, Watergate and feathered hair. AM radio was still in its heyday. In fact one of my favorite things to do on the weekends wasn’t to watch TV but to listen to the radio and Kasey Kasom with America’s Top 40. It was the original “countdown to number one” show. Kasey Kasom would amuse us with entertaining trivia as he played through each weeks’ top 40 songs. Hits like “You Light Up My life”, “Alone Again Naturally”, “My Sharona” and “Le Freak.”

Today everywhere you look on TV, magazines, and radio there are copy cats of Kasey Kasom’s Top Forty like People Magazine’s 50 Best, Worst and Least Dressed, Top 40 Pokemon Cards, 50 Best Commercials, Top 50 Beanie Babies, The Top Fortune 500 Companies, America’s 50 Most Beautiful People, The Top 40 Most eligible Bachelors, the Top 40 Radio Stations Online, AND The Top Forty Bald Men in America - well alright maybe not the top forty bald men but you get the picture. Everybody wants to be in the top 40 or 50 something list. It is prestigious and desirable. It means you have arrived- you made it. Today’s media holds up these lists to us as examples of what we should be.

Even The Bible has a top 40+ list found here in Hebrews Chapter 11. It is a list of THE people of faith. God’s list of the most righteous. People like Abraham, Moses, Enoch, Noah, Joseph, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Samuel, David and Elisha. An impressive list of the who’s who of faith.

An interesting list. At first glance we are stirred by the grandeur of the people listed and then, we begins to look more closely at the list, to look below the surface.

Abraham? - Wasn't he the one who lied about Sarah being his wife, the one who so doubted God's Word about a future heir that God shut his mouth? And Moses...didn't he kill a man and then run like a chicken to hide? Didn't he stutter and argue with God about God's plan and will for his life? Gideon was hesitant and timid, Barak had to be shamed into action. Samson while he was a physical giant he had a weak mind and conscience. David was a murderer and adulterer. The Hebrew people, having seen the strength of God as He led them out of bondage and across the red sea, then dabbled in idolatry worship.

This is a list of God's best? But it is a list of people who were imperfect, who questioned, doubted and argued with God. People who at one point or another didn't do God's will. People who when they tried to follow had become discouraged, down trodden, disappointed. People who had felt all alone, like they were the only ones really trying--who must have felt like giving up. How could God possibly have put these people on his top forty list?

I propose that it wasn't their character, their perfection, or their amazing feats that got them on the list...but the fact that they had gumption. Yes that's what I said GUMPTION! Now we don't hear much about gumption any more. Charles Swindoll in his devotional *The Finishing Touch* says, It seems a shame that such a grand old word has dropped through the cracks. Gumption is a characteristic trait that is so subtly woven into the fabric of life that few of us ever stop and identify it. Gumption enables us to save money rather than spend every dime they make. It keeps us at the task at hand even when it might not be the most enjoyable task, like practicing piano or losing weight and keeping it off, working at a job you don't like, or working on a project when it doesn't seem to be making any difference.

Most folks get a little gumption in their initial toolbox for life at birth. It is a tool, when neglected, rusts quickly but when it's used it grows and helps us endure even the greatest of disappointments, discouragement, and hard ships.

So do we have Gumption? Do we have what it takes to be on God's Top 40 with Gumption list? Let's examine Gumption a more closely.

Gumption first and foremost begins with a firm commitment

Daniel made up his mind long before he was dumped in Babylonia. Gumption got him through the lions' den and the fiery furnace.

Moses was committed to follow God no matter what when 40 years he wandered in the desert with a group of ungrateful, fickle Hebrews. Most of which had formed the "Back to Egypt" Committee. It is what helped him endure life even when he knew he wouldn't see the rewards of his labors in the Promised Land.

Joshua didn't hesitate to declare his commitment in his famous "as for me and my house we will serve the lord" speech.

Gideon demonstrated he was committed when he followed God's command and conquered the unconquerable with only 300 men armed with trumpets and jars.

Gumption is a firm commitment that follows through with God's will no matter what!

Gumption requires planning ahead

Our adversary has a plan...Our adversary is a master strategist, forever fogging up our minds and senses with smoke screens, and distractions. He wants to get us off base. He makes us believe we are the only one working at God's plan. That the world has a much better life to offer us.

But Gumption stabs us awake and gives us the courage and strength to stay focused on God...To keeps us on the path of God's will. Gumption keeps us moving, working the plan of God's will for our life and the life of this church

Gumption means being disciplined one day at a time

Life can be rather overwhelming. Being a Christian can be rather overwhelming But rather than focusing on the whole enchilada, Gumption reminds us to take it in bite sized pieces...One step at the time (One day at a time Sweet Jesus That's all I'm asking of you Help me today Show me the way One day at a time. Having the discipline of Faith is what enabled the Hebrews to walk one foot in front of the other 7 times around the city of Jericho until the walls fell. It is what led Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to stay true to God's direction even in the face of death.

The discipline of taking one day at a time is what helped Paul to endure his thorns in the flesh...beatings, whippings, stoning and shipwrecks he faced in his life.

Gumption requires friendly encouragement

People, especially close friends or those with the gift of encouragement, keep our tanks pumped full of enthusiasm. They communicate to us “You can do it. You can make it. You really make a difference” in a dozen different ways. When David was at his low water mark in his life, his friend, Jonathan, stepped in to lift him up. When Elijah was ready to cash in everything, along came Elisha. With Paul it was Timothy or Silas or Barnabas or Dr. Luke. People need people to encourage them to continue to do God’s will even when it isn’t the popular thing to do, when it seems useless, when it seems to go on unappreciated. Gumption through friendly encouragement is what keeps the faith going and going and going.

Gumption comes easier when we remember that finishing the tasks of this life has its own unique rewards.

Those who only start projects never know the surge of satisfaction that comes from slapping our hands together, wiping away those beads of perspiration and saying that beautiful four letter word “DONE!” Paul on more than one occasion referred to finishing the race. Jesus told the Father he had accomplished His assignment--It is finished! No one has promised us that this life will be easy. That being a Christian would be easy. That being a member of a church would be easy, but God does promise us that there is something better yet to come if we just hang in there.

GAL 6:9 says “Let us not get tired of doing what is right, for after a while we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t get discouraged and quit. Yes, it is easier to face the race, to face life when we remember the reward of eternal life promised to us by God. That’s what I think it takes to get on God’s list - a firm commitment, a plan, disciplined to take life one day a time, encouragement from friends and the promise of what is yet to come – GUMPTION!