



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Sunday, April 26th – “Friendless and Alone?”

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it... Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” Genesis 2:15, 18

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me...

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?... If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Psalm 139:5, 8-10

I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. John 13:34

MONDAY 04-27-2020 Intentional times of being alone with God

Matthew 14:23

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

Mark 1:35

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

John 6:15

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus loved people, yet he regularly sought solitude as a way to refocus and cultivate his walk with God. For some of us, a fear of being alone can grow so strong that we nearly panic if we find ourselves alone. We may almost fixatedly seek to be with others, perhaps even in settings or situations that do not match our stated values. It’s a useful spiritual practice to learn to value solitude, intentional or unintentional, and grow stronger through it.

- “The experience of solitude varies widely from taking advantage of the little solitudes in our days to setting aside planned times of retreat to step out of our daily patterns in order to enter into the silence of God.... Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place.” * Where, both in daily routines and in more deliberate ways, are



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you able to experience solitude? Do you fear those times, live through them passively, or value the opportunity for spiritual growth they give you?

- The gospel passages often associated prayer with Jesus' times of solitude. Of course, he also prayed when around people (e.g. John 11:41-42). But we see that he often found solitude conducive to prayer. In what ways do you find prayer different when you are alone than when you are with others? What strengths can you see in each kind of prayer setting?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me not to shun times of solitude, or to waste them in wishing I were not alone. Teach me how to use those moments, whether minutes or days, into times to draw closer to you. Amen.

* Quoted from <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines>, a service of the Renovare Institute, founded by Richard Foster, the author of the classic book *Celebration of Discipline*.

TUESDAY 04-28-2020 When trying to “do it alone” is destructive

Exodus 18:14-18

When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?” Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.” Moses' father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

Task: lead a throng of ex-slaves safely through the Sinai desert. They hadn't learned to work out even minor conflicts—their slave masters had run everything. Few of them had developed even basic leadership skills, or had reason to give leadership any thought. Moses found himself trying in person to iron out every little problem the people had. But his father-in-law wisely told him, “What you are doing isn't good.... You can't do it alone.”

- It was good that Moses took his role as leader seriously. “The people come to me to inquire of God,” he said. But his father-in-law was God's instrument to remind him that he wasn't called to be a solo act, handling everything himself. What tasks do you carry alone right now? Look prayerfully at what parts of them you could share with others.



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- We often carry an emotional burden about challenges in our workplace, family or church, even though there is nothing specific we could do to fix the situation. Or we may be able to affect one part of the problem, but convince ourselves that we alone must figure out the full solution. Have you ever tried to carry “the weight of the world” on your shoulders alone? How can you recognize people God may have sent to lighten your load?

Prayer: God, I can't do your job. Deliver me from the temptation to try to be what you, and only you, can be—the ruler of the universe. Remind me not to try to “do it all alone.” Amen.

WEDNESDAY 04-29-2020 Our deep need for connectedness

Genesis 2:18

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Again, I saw vanity under the sun: the case of solitary individuals, without sons or brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil, and their eyes are never satisfied with riches. “For whom am I toiling,” they ask, “and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

John 14:18-19

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

News reports, and mission partners in various parts of Africa, have showed us the plight of more than 100 million orphans and vulnerable children due to the AIDS epidemic. Genesis 2 stated a human truth: it isn't good for us to be all alone. And Jesus, in a land where poor health and Roman violence left many children orphaned, used that image to promise his



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followers that, whatever befell their human connections, he would never leave them as orphans. Through the Holy Spirit, he would always be with them.

- Sometimes seen as bitter and cynical, the wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes warmly valued human friendship. “Two are better than one,” he wrote. They “can help each other, can keep each other warm and safe.” * Then he added that “a three-ply cord doesn’t easily snap,” which “may imply that three companions are even better than two.” * In what ways have you found value in doing things with another person or two, rather than all alone?
- In John 14, Jesus gave his followers a glimpse into the mysteries of God. He preceded the verses we read today by promising to send “another Companion” (Greek paraclete, which meant companion, helper, advocate and comforter, and referred to the Holy Spirit). Then he said, “I will come to you”—in other words, the Spirit’s presence was his presence. When have you sensed Jesus’ comfort, protection or uplift without a visible presence giving it to you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for keeping your promise not to leave me as an orphan. Teach me how to claim you as my Companion and Comforter, even when my circumstances seem the hardest. Amen.

* Brent A. Strawn, study notes on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1061 OT.

THURSDAY 04-30-2020 God calls us to provide community for those who are alone

James 1:26-27

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

True devotion to God, James said, doesn’t show itself in grand words, whether they are lofty or angry. Our devotion shows most truly as we actively care for and help those who have to face the world alone. That can be as simple as extending friendship and human warmth to those whose circumstances leave them alone, or as demanding as becoming foster or adoptive parents.

- In the Roman empire, ordinary Christians suffered from social and legal persecution. But life in those conditions was even harder for orphans and widows, who had no family and no legal standing at all to protect them. Which, James asked, would help them more—a biting, angry tirade against the tyrants, or a tangible act of love and



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assistance? How can we apply the principle behind his words to situations we face today?

- “Orphans and widows in the Old Testament symbolize the most unfortunate members of society (see Exod. 22:22-24).” * If James were writing today, who might he list in his letter as among the most unfortunate members of society? As you think about those people, is your heart moved with compassion, or do you find it uncomfortable and try to put them out of your mind?

Prayer: Lord God, I’m devoted to you—after all, I read the GPS. Give me the insight and the courage to find tangible ways to live out that devotion, serving you by serving others who are alone and hurting. Amen.

* Patrick J. Hartin, study notes on James 1:27 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 456 NT.

FRIDAY 05-01-2020 God knows and loves you, inside and out Psalm 139:1-12

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Have you ever had moments when you feared God had given up on you? Or maybe had a time when you tried to run away from God? The psalmist said that, no matter where we go, God goes there with us. But this sweeping poem didn’t merely assert God’s presence—it also told believers that God’s presence is a good thing, because God will always guide, strengthen and support us.

- Suppose all of the promises in this psalm were shaped into a “commercial” for God. Would you believe them? Would you want to have a God who watched over you so



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faithfully and patiently? Which parts of your life, of yourself, do you keep the most hidden? God knows all about them—and looks on you with compassion and love anyway. Talk trustingly to God about those hidden things today—and listen inwardly for God’s response.

- Jesus began the Lord’s Prayer (which we say each week in worship) with “Our Father who is in heaven.” “Heaven” translates the Greek word ouranōs, which meant, not a place far away, but “air” or “sky.” Jesus was not saying God is far away, but around us, above us, wherever we go—the same idea as verses 7-12 in today’s reading. What helps you experience God’s presence? What spiritual difference does that make for you?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, at my worst, I feel like hiding from you. At my best, I want you to stay with me all the time—and that’s exactly what you’ve promised to do. Amen.

SATURDAY 05-02-2020 You’re never alone when God is with you Psalm 27:7-10

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!
“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

Psalm 68:3-6

But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy. Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is the Lord—be exultant before him. Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land.

John 16:32

The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.

Every time we baptize a child, the pastor tells the parents that God’s design is that they model God’s love and goodness for their child. In this broken world, in Bible times and still



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today, human parents, friends and spouses sometimes fall sadly short of living out God's design. But Scripture said that, even if our human relationships let us down, we do need to fear being alone and friendless. We can always depend, if we will, on God's loving presence with us.

- Part of our faith heritage, starting with Methodism's founder John Wesley, is a profound sense of calling and mission. We believe God calls us to be God's voice, hands and feet, in a hurting world. God's work, the psalms said, is to provide a family for orphans, a sustaining relationship for widows, and companionship for all who might be lonely. How can you join in God's work (and, in the process, build better relationships for yourself)? Do you know anyone who may not be an "orphan" or "widow" in the concrete sense of the term, but who you could uplift by extending God's love and care?

Prayer: O God, the psalmist said you are "Father of orphans and defender of widows." Thank you for always being with me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting, and use me to bless them with your love and caring. Amen.

Family Activity: At times, everyone fears feeling alone or unloved. As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to bring comfort and care to others. Discuss each person's unique gifts and abilities. How can those be used to comfort others? How can those same gifts be combined with those of other family members to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how they can be used to comfort people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family's "heart" as a reminder to comfort others this year.