



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Sunday May 3, 2020 - "Fear of Failure"

[The LORD said to Moses,] "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ... But [Moses] said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."
Exodus 3:10, 4:13

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you... Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:1, 5b, 9b

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

MONDAY 05-04-2020 Moses: lots of frightened excuses, world-changing success

Exodus 3:2-4, 9-11, 13, 4:1, 10, 13

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."



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Deuteronomy 34:10-12

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Moses had a safe, steady (if fairly boring) job tending sheep for his father-in-law. He'd long ago left his upbringing in Egypt's royal palace behind. But God had other plans. God came to Moses as he did his steady, boring job (with little need to trust in himself or God), and kept calling as Moses offered excuse after excuse. In the end, Moses left his safe life to answer God's call, and marched into history trusting God to guide him in leading Israel out of slavery.

- As you read all of Moses' reasons for not doing what God was calling him to do, consider which of them most resonate with any fears you face. Ask God to day-by-day help you grow, as Moses did, into a person God can use to serve where you are—your home, workplace or neighborhood—or in a special mission you sense God calling you to.
- Moses seemed to think only a strong, important person could carry out God's call. Was he really supposed to go as one man, with no army, and demand that Pharaoh let most of his slave labor force go just because God told him to? Do you ever fear that you are not strong or important enough to live as God calls you to live? God can help you shift your focus from your limitations to your strengths, the greatest strength being the fact that God will be with you.

Prayer: O God, you don't call all of us to huge, historic missions like the one you gave Moses. But at times your call looks big enough that I get scared. Give me your strength to live for you beyond any of my fears. Amen.

TUESDAY 05-05-2020 God-given success when facing a scary giant 1 Samuel 17:4-11, 32-37, 41-45

And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. He stood



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and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” And the Philistine said, “Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together.” When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!” The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.” But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

This is the first story about Israel’s King David most children learn in Sunday School. Even in sports or business, we often talk about a “David and Goliath” story when a “little guy” takes on an established power. The Philistine giant, whatever his exact size (ancient manuscripts differ), was big enough to terrify King Saul and the whole Israelite army. But he didn’t scare



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David. For him, the size of the God he served mattered much more than the size of his enemy. (And, of course, the story goes on in verse 46 ff. to say the giant lost—badly.)

- When have you had to face a “giant” problem or person? Were your inner feelings (whether you showed them externally or not) more like those of Saul and the army, or like David’s? What role, if any, did your trust in God play in the way you faced the intimidating situation? Did you learn anything that helps you with giant problems or persons you face today, or may face in the future?
- Goliath was no doubt a veteran fighter, but he seemed to count as much or more on insults and intimidation as on his physical skill. As the Philistine poured out scornful insults toward David, the Hebrew young man wasn’t cowed or distracted. To what extent are you able to be “inner directed,” rather than overly sensitive to what others (especially any giants you face) may think of you? What makes that ability important when you’re tempted to feel afraid of failing?

Prayer: Lord God, giants don’t always have to be nine feet tall to feel that way to me. Teach me that you are bigger than any human “giant,” and help me “cut them down to size” by trusting in you. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 05-06-2020 A failure of nerve rooted in a failure of faith Numbers 13:27-33; 14:1-3

And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.” But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.” So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation



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said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?”

As Israel neared the Promised Land, Moses sent 12 men to scout the land (Numbers 13:1-3). When the scouts returned to give their report, ten of them focused on obstacles and problems, and were terrified. Long before David faced Goliath, they were frightened of the “huge men” they saw in the Promised Land. Only Caleb (along with Joshua—Numbers 14:6) focused on God’s promise and power, and pleaded with people to keep moving forward.

- This story shows two things about fear. First, it’s contagious—the 10 scouts’ fear spread to most of the people. Second, it clouds the ability to think clearly—once afraid, the people thought irrationally, “Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?” Can you think of times when fear has magnified a challenge you faced, or led you to a damaging response? How can you avoid being a source of contagious fear for others?
- Camped right on the borders of the Promised Land, Israel turned away because fear got the better of them. Are there any “frontiers,” spiritual or emotional as well as physical, you sense God might be calling you to cross? What fears arise in your heart as you think about where God may be calling you? How can you develop the kind of faith Caleb and Joshua showed?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, had you been governed by fear, you’d no doubt have stayed safely away from this broken, sometimes hostile planet. Please keep infusing your holy fearlessness into my heart and life. Amen.

THURSDAY 05-07-2020 A puzzle: the apparent success of the wicked Psalm 73:1-13

Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth. Therefore the people turn



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and praise them, and find no fault in them. And they say, “How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?” Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

Daniel 8:12-25

Because of wickedness, the host was given over to it together with the regular burnt offering; it cast truth to the ground, and kept prospering in what it did. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, “For how long is this vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled?” And he answered him, “For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.” When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, “Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.” So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, “Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end.” As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet. He said, “Listen, and I will tell you what will take place later in the period of wrath; for it refers to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. The male goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn between its eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. At the end of their rule, when the transgressions have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance shall arise, skilled in intrigue. He shall grow strong in power, shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does. He shall destroy the powerful and the people of the holy ones. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he shall destroy many and shall even rise up against the Prince of princes. But he shall be broken, and not by human



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hands.

Psalms 73 reflected a spiritual puzzle. People who completely ignored God seemed to be having success—no troubles at all (verses 3-5). If that was the case, maybe serving God was futile (verses 11, 13). Daniel 8's apocalyptic vision pictured an evil power (probably, originally, the oppressive Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes). Three times it said he would "succeed," but only in the short term. In the end, "he will be broken—and not by a human hand."

- For this psalmist, it was "the prosperity of the wicked" that nearly caused him to give up faith in God. At what times in your life, if any, has the "success" of the wicked led you to ask, "Does the Most High know anything?" (v. 11) Whose position, possessions or prospects do you envy? How much does it matter to you how "success" is reached?
- If the evil power in Daniel 8:12-25 was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the "daily sacrifice" likely referred to that king sacrificing a pig on the Temple altar in Jerusalem, deliberately trying to discredit Israel's God. He was arrogant about his power— "in his own mind, he will be great." But his army and title did not dethrone God. Can you think of other evil forces (e.g. Hitler's "thousand-year Reich") that crumbled after seeming success? Can you trust, as James Russell Lowell wrote in "The Present Crisis," that "behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own"? *

Prayer: O Lord, give me more and more of your eternal perspective on success. Keep my steps from slipping at the times when I see the apparent success of the wicked. Amen.

* If you'd like to read Lowell's entire classic poem (it's long), visit <http://www.bartleby.com/42/805.html>.

FRIDAY 05-08-2020 Young minister, tough situation, and a recipe for success

1 Timothy 1:3-5, 4:8-16

I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training[a] that is known by faith. But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. For, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all



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people, especially of those who believe. These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul met a younger man named Timothy (cf. Acts 16:1-4). Timothy became one of his most trusted associates, one Paul trusted to lead some of the churches he planted, and to continue leading them after Paul was gone. Such a large responsibility must have frightened Timothy at times, especially in the light of his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). But Paul urged him to lead with confidence and trust in God.

- In God's sweeping story in the Bible, we see that God used people who might have been thought too old (e.g. Abraham, Moses) and others who might have been thought too young (e.g. Jeremiah, Timothy). If you are on the younger end of the age spectrum, do older people ever intimidate you, making you afraid to offer your gifts and insights? If you are on the older end of the spectrum, what helps you resist the urge to look down on younger Christians whose thinking or music may be different than you've been used to?
- What examples of either spiritual courage or timidity are parts of your family's spiritual legacy? In what ways have parents, grandparents and other important people given you confidence to fearlessly value and use your God-given strengths? What effect have they had on you? How can you mentor and encourage someone who is younger than you are?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as I live in this age-conscious culture, remind me that from your eternal view, age is one of the least of your concerns. Empower me to live without fear, now and in all the years of earthly life that are left for me. Amen.

SATURDAY 05-09-2020 The divine definition of true success

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:11

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form



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beyond that of mortals—so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Rabbis debated who Isaiah's fourth "servant song" was about. The first Christians had no doubt—they quoted this song more than any other verses to describe Jesus' redemptive suffering. In Jesus, the early Christians saw, God's servant succeeded by taking the world's evil and hatred onto himself and through what looked like failure to human eyes changed it into a redemptive force. No passage in the Hebrew Scriptures spoke more eloquently to those early Christians—and to every generation of Christians since—about the meaning of



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Jesus' death. As the New Dictionary of Biblical Theology said, "God's power is at its greatest not in his destruction of the wicked but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love." *

- Jesus set the stage for the way New Testament writers applied Isaiah 53 by quoting part of the passage and applying it to himself (cf. Luke 22:37). It all came true in Jesus' saving death and resurrection, they said. What does Jesus' way of succeeding in defeating evil as the Suffering Servant tell you about how God defines success? What kinds of evil have you faced? How can Jesus' example guide you toward the path of genuine success at those times?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you succeeded through self-giving love, through suffering for others and giving your life to offer me life. Reshape any flawed notions of success I may have, and help

me to truly succeed by the same divine standards that you did. Amen.

* T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, ed. *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 222.

Family Activity: Collect a backpack, some large, heavy rocks and a few thick markers. As a family, invite each person to try on the empty backpack, and feel its lightness. Next, ask everyone to take two stones and a marker. Have each person think of something they are not very good at or something they have done wrong and write it on one rock. Pass the backpack around asking each person to share what they wrote and place it in the backpack. Talk about how the backpack is feeling heavier. Now, invite each person to take their second rock and write on it something they do well but can sometimes be difficult to do. Pass around the backpack again with each person sharing what they wrote on the second rock, and placing their rock in the backpack. Have each person try on the backpack again. Discuss how at times both our failures and our successes can feel heavy or burdensome. Read I Peter 5:7 and Matthew 11:28-30. Thank God for helping us carry our burdens.