



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Sunday May 17, 2020 “Sickness, Growing Old, Death”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11:25-26

When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” I Corinthians 15:54

The fear of the LORD leads to life. Proverbs 19:23

MONDAY 05-18-2020 God—our support and strength at all ages

Isaiah 40:27-31

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 46:3-4

“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Today’s readings likely came from a time when the Israelites were returning to their ruined land after decades in exile. There were no “Babylon to Jerusalem” flights—Isaiah 40’s references to “stumbling” and “walking” reflected the only way most exiles got home. So the Israelites were weary, and feared maybe God was too. But these prophetic texts said God never forgets his own. Israel (and we) could always hope and trust in God, because God has pledged to support us all our lives—and our God never grows tired like we do.

- Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites in Isaiah 40:27: “My way is hidden from the LORD, my God ignores my predicament”? Are there areas of your life that feel that way to you right now? In what ways can you reconnect with the



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Creator who “doesn’t grow tired or weary” of caring for you? What helps you trust God’s promise that “until you turn gray I will support you”?

- Isaiah wrote, “His understanding is beyond human reach” (40:28). Our need to control, our challenge with “letting go,” inexorably runs into our inability to control time. Even the best health and fitness programs cannot (honestly) promise to fully halt the aging process. How can really trusting in a God who’s vastly wiser than you are renew your strength by setting you free from the need to try to control life’s uncontrollable realities?

Prayer: Lord God, when I’m worn out, you are still full of eternal energy. As I age, you remain the same creative, caring God you’ve always been. Help me learn more and more to trust your timeless love. Amen.

TUESDAY 05-19-2020 Our ageless love story with God

Psalm 71:17-19

O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

Psalm 92:12-14

The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap,

We live in a culture that idolizes youth, that spends vast sums to hide signs of advancing age and that uses phrases like “out to pasture” to describe the elderly. Psalm 71:18 showed that long before today’s hair coloring or anti-wrinkle creams, people could fear that God would abandon us as we grow older. But, the psalmists said, God doesn’t despise age. God calls us to serve at all ages, and always welcomes our willing hearts.

- Whether you’re 16 or 86, to what extent can you say, like the psalmist, “You’ve taught me since my youth, God, and I’m still proclaiming your wondrous deeds!”? What people, from younger siblings or neighbors to grandchildren (or even great-grandchildren), do you have a chance to influence by your example and verbal sharing? Whatever your age, join the psalmist in resolving, “Lord, I will help others remember nothing but your righteous deeds.”



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

- In what ways have our culture's constant messages about the awfulness of growing older influenced your spending and behavior? In what ways, even subtly, do signs of age lead you to think less of yourself or other people? Do today's readings challenge any of your attitudes or actions? What is one way you want to revise your thinking about older people in the light of these Bible texts?

Prayer: O God, I'm so used to hearing (and saying) things like "too old" or "too green" that it's a joy to see that the Scriptures, and you, show no age bias. Free me from those biases, too. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 05-20-2020 Aged saints blessing a young mother

Luke 2:25-38

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant[e] in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon[f] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

We usually read this story at Christmas. But it also carried a generational message. Here were Mary (probably in her early teens) and Joseph, bringing an infant to the Temple to dedicate to God. Who greeted them? Simeon, so old that as soon as he'd seen Jesus he



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

said to God, “Now let your servant go in peace.” Anna, an 84-year-old widow. The young couple didn’t brush the elderly off as out-of-date annoyances, nor did Simeon and Anna scorn the young parents as clearly too young to parent the Messiah.

- Simeon hadn’t let himself become a “cranky old man.” Luke said he “eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel,” even though the mighty Roman army firmly controlled Judea, and Israel’s religious leaders often quarreled and were at times corrupt. How can you nurture a hopeful sense of “eager anticipation” about what God is doing today, through people of many ages and styles?
- We don’t know exactly, but Anna had probably been constantly in the temple for sixty or more years. It might seem a stretch to “worship night and day” (verse 37). How can your time spent worshipping God, praying and studying the Bible shape what you do with the rest of your time? How can you let your worship fill you with the same confidence and eager anticipation that it gave Simeon and Anna?

Prayer: O God, one of your names in the Bible was “Ancient of Days.” I’m thankful you are the Lord of all my days, from birth through old age. Keep me aware of your presence with me. Amen.

THURSDAY 05-21-2020 Hope in God’s unseen glory—greater than illness, age, even death.

2 Corinthians 4:6-10, 16-18

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after a painful time, when many Christians in Corinth, biased by a set of false teachers, had turned against him. Later in the letter, he cataloged the many challenges he had faced in carrying out God’s mission (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet Paul did not let any of that destroy him. In verse 10, he tied his struggles to Jesus’



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

death, which seemed the worst defeat of all and yet became a victory when he rose from the dead three days later.

- When did you last feel confused, harassed or knocked down? What resources helped you avoid being crushed, depressed or knocked out? Have you ever seen, in yourself or anyone you know, the truth of “even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day”?
- We often tend to feel shame about the realities of illness or aging. We see them as a sign of weakness or failure. Paul faced those realities, but saw them differently. Are there disciplines (e.g. Bible memorization, meditation, prayer) that help you access God’s strength to keep your inner self moving toward victory even when your outer self is breaking down? How has the Bible’s teaching that our eternal life starts now shaped your view of your limitations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, on the days when life feels dark, when nothing seems to go right, help me not to be crushed or destroyed. Remind me always that “the worst thing is never the last thing.” Amen.

FRIDAY 05-22-2020 Resurrection defeated death forever

Hebrews 2:14-15

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Revelation 21:3-5

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

From ancient Rome to today, the “ultimate” human threat is, “I will kill you.” Roman officials puzzled over how little that threat seemed to affect Jesus’ followers. Jesus, who died and rose again, set his followers free from even the fear of death. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul boldly proclaimed a divine victory so sweeping that death would be “swallowed up.” In John Wesley’s sermon “On the Resurrection of the Dead,” he quoted Paul and said, “Let this especially fortify us against the fear of death: It is now disarmed, and can do us no hurt.” The Bible ended with Revelation’s glorious vision of a world in which “death will be no more.”

- Jesus faced evil and death at their very worst—you can read about his arrest, trial and crucifixion in any of the four gospels. Jesus defeated evil and death at their very worst—go on to read the Easter story in any of the four gospels. Early Christians staked their lives on the truth of Jesus’ victory over death. In what ways does fear of death subtly shape your life choices? How can Jesus’ death and resurrection set you free from that fear?
- When someone we love faces death, we often use “combat” language, sadly saying things like “she lost the battle.” But Paul quoted the prophet Hosea to deny that death “wins”: “Where is your victory, Death?” (cf. Hosea 13:14) For a Christian, death is not a defeat, but a transition into a new phase of our victorious walk with Christ. Does the idea of death cause you fear and anxiety? How can internalizing the full meaning of Jesus’ resurrection lead you toward greater peace as you await God’s eternity, where death will be no more?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you went where most of us most dread going—the realm of death—and you emerged victorious! You offer me the choice to join you in that victory. I accept your offer of a life that lies beyond the power of death. Amen.



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

SATURDAY 05-23-2020 “Fear of the Lord:” the one life-giving fear
Psalm 111:7-10

The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

Proverbs 2:2-6

Making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures—then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

This sermon series has called us to live above and beyond many of our most common fears. We’ve learned human therapeutic tools that work along with our trust in God to point us toward an unafraid life. There is one kind of “fear,” however, that the Bible fully endorsed: “the fear of the Lord.” Proverbs 3:6-7 gave a concise definition of the life-giving kind of “fear” today’s readings called us to: “Know him in all your paths and he will keep your ways straight. Don’t consider yourself wise. Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”

- “While we tend to associate the word ‘fear’ with a ‘hair standing on end’ or ‘fight or flight’ feeling, ‘the fear of the LORD’ is better understood as reverent awe. Indeed, the Lord is ‘fearsome,’ but not in the sense that some want to run away from or escape from God’s presence. Rather, we are called to approach the Lord with a sense of awe while in the presence of the holy.” *Can you recall times when you have experienced this healthy, life-giving kind of fear in particularly vivid way? Why would this type of fear cause you to want to draw closer to God, rather than to shrink away?

Prayer: O God, let me never lose a sense of awe at the privilege you offer me to accept your love and to walk through my life in your presence, with you as my Lord and guide. Amen.



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

* Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, study note on Proverbs 1:7 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1007 OT.

Family Activity: Every day is a gift from God! No matter our situation or our age, we can celebrate and give thanks, even when we face challenges and fear. Encourage your family members to choose one day this week where they will be intentionally aware of the world around them. Invite them to use their senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell to soak in God's presence in the everyday ordinary-ness of life. When you gather in the evening, ask each person to share God's gifts in their day. You can draw, make a list or create a collage of what your family experienced. Seek to become more aware of God's goodness and blessings on a daily basis and thank God often. When you feel anxious, review your lists or look at your pictures and thank God for being present always.