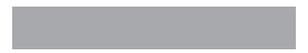


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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

What Should I Do With Fear?

Monday, May 8, 2017

It was many years ago that I was introduced to a horror I now wish I could forget. My sister and I were at home with my aunt and uncle, who decided to rent some movies. One of the movies was something we were not allowed to watch, the other was a documentary based on the findings of the prolific novelist, Stephen King. My sister and I went into our basement and began to watch a film that would eventually change my life. Who knew that a simple investigative film into the world of a particular ~~elown~~ (I can't say, or write the word) would radically alter my perception of so much. Stephen King exposed the true nature of this creature, popularly known as a *lown, as a monster of horrific proportions. Since my viewing of this eye-opening masterpiece of investigative journalism, I have found myself deathly afraid of *lowns. Even as a husband and father of two children, I cannot bring myself to even say the word let alone watch or be in the same room as one of them.

While you may, like me, have a wholly rational fear (or awareness) of something, many people harbor irrational fears that they carry throughout their adult life. Fear is a part of life that we cannot escape. While there are certainly fears of spiders, heights, dark, etc., all of which tend to be surface-level, there are also fears that are deep-seated -- ones that cause more problems than we might be willing to admit. A problem we typically won't recognize is one in which we allow our fears to prevent us from living the life that God wants for us.

At the 2016 Global Leadership Summit, Danielle Strickland, the Western Territory Social Justice Secretary of the Salvation Army, spoke about these fears. She explained that these fears manifest themselves in a tape of sorts. We place the shortcomings we think we have on this proverbial tape, and anytime God might be calling us to do something, we replay the tape, thus denying ourselves the opportunity to serve God.

What do we do with these fears?

This past weekend, Ben Snyder talked about a passage from the book of Judges about a man named Gideon. God called Gideon to something big. Gideon, however, responded with his fears about this call. When we look at God's answer to Gideon and apply this answer to our own fears, we can begin to make steps to move past the fears and into a deeper faith with God.

At this point in Gideon's story, which we'll be reading throughout the week, a few things have happened.

The Israelites had turned away from God and toward the false gods of the Amorites (Judges 6:10), so God turned them over to be oppressed by the Midianites (Judges 6:1). After the Israelites cried out to God in response to the oppression, God sent a prophet to essentially tell them that because they chose the false gods, God turned them over to be protected by those false gods, which clearly hasn't worked. Now, God calls Gideon to lead the people, but Gideon expresses his fears. He asks how God could be with them if all this bad was happening (Judges 6:13); says he can't be the one God wants to lead because he is the weakest man in the smallest clan (Judges 6:15); and finally, just to make sure that it was God, he asks for a sign (Judges 6:17).

While this is happening, Gideon is unsure whether he was receiving this message from God. This is where we find ourselves in the story today. Right after God (or the angel of the Lord) departs, Gideon realizes that he was in his presence.

Judges 6:22-23

²²When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Oh, Sovereign Lord, I'm doomed! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

²³"It is all right," the Lord replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." ²⁴And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means "the Lord is peace"). The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.

Now, Gideon was afraid that since he had been in the Lord's presence, he was going to die. God's response to him is simple:

Do not be afraid.

The Lord was with Gideon and told him to not be afraid.

So often, like Gideon, we let our fears take over and we miss out on what God wants to do in our lives. Whether we fear something related to our relationships, job, money, security, safety, etc., we cannot let this fear consume us and hinder our trust in God and his calling.

As Ben said, fear is allowing uncertainty to redefine reality. The reality is that God is calling us to faith in him and thus action for him. Unfortunately, like Gideon, we allow our uncertainty - about many things - to redefine reality. For the past couple weeks, we have been talking about bringing certain villains into the light. With fear, though, it's different. Fear doesn't need to be brought into the light because it's already there. Fear is obvious; we know what we're afraid of. Instead, what we need to bring into the light is our uncertainty, and then we can ask the question, "who does God say I am?"

This is what Ben called “true humility,” mainly, “agreeing with God about who we really are.”

You may not have the same fear as Gideon; however, your fears can get in the way of realizing and accepting the way in which God views you: as his son or his daughter. Like the song we listened to this past weekend says, you are no longer a slave to fear, you are a child of God.

We need to take these uncertainties and place them on the altar of Yahweh-Shalom. Not a physical altar, but a metaphorical one. We need to offer these uncertainties up to God and ask that he give us peace and patience as we define and navigate our reality.

What are some uncertainties you’ve allowed to redefine your reality? It could be uncertainties about your finances, relationships, jobs, etc.

How can you offer these up? (Who can you talk to?)

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercies and your grace. Thank you for loving me enough to point out the areas in my life where I am operating in fear rather than trusting in you. Help me to bring my uncertainties into the light so that I can live in freedom. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

When It's Hard to Trust God.

Tuesday, May 9, 2017

Have you ever had a habit that you just couldn't seem to quit? You would vow once more to never do "that" again. For a few days, maybe weeks, or even a month or more, you do fine. You think, "I've got this! This is never going to trip me up again." Then, who knows why, Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (HALT) – you give in – again! Well, you have lots of company. In fact, the Bible gives us many stories that chronicle the same sad history of God's chosen people.

Starting with the prophet Moses - who led the Jews out of Egypt to the Promised Land with so many miracles of God's provision and mercy, through all the other prophets of the Old Testament - God's people have been quick to turn their backs on God. Why? We read these Old Testament stories and wonder how these people could continuously forget about God. We would never do that, well, right up until the time when God asks us to trust him with... whatever!

Can you trust God with your problem? "Sure!" is the quick answer; but do we really believe this? Even though you have trusted Jesus with your eternity, are you really sure he cares about your 'today'? As you pray, or even think to ask, for the things that concern you today, are you confident that God hears and is ready to answer your prayers? What if an angel showed up and sat under your oak tree while you were hiding from the thing you feared would take away your livelihood? What would you say then?

Take a minute and put yourself in Gideon's place. The Midianites have been stealing everything the Israelites have produced for the past seven years. Why? Because God's people did not trust in his provision. They worshiped other gods. Over and over in the book of Judges, the sentence is given: The people of Israel went back to doing what was evil in God's sight.

Judges 2:18-19 (MSG) reads,

When GOD was setting up judges for them, he would be right there with the judge: He would save them from their enemies' oppression as long as the judge was alive, for GOD was moved to compassion when he heard their groaning because of those who afflicted and beat them. But when the judge died, the people went right back to their old ways—but even worse than their parents!—running after other gods, serving and worshiping them. Stubborn as mules, they didn't drop a single evil practice.

So, we find Gideon threshing his grain in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. When God's messenger comes to him, does he believe that God cares

about him and his people? Well, not really! Look at what has happened in the past seven years! Nothing good, that's for sure! Not what you'd expect from the God Who Provides. Well, truth be told, the Israelites haven't exactly held up their end of the bargain. *But come on! They are the chosen people! Shouldn't that be enough?* Yet God still calls Gideon, as he calls us. He says, "Go in the strength you have." "Wait, Lord..." (you say with Gideon...) "do you really know me? I cannot be trusted to tend to my own business, let alone yours!"

Have you ever asked the question, "God, how can I trust that you are who you say you are? I know you say you are good, but right now I see no evidence of that in my life." Certainly, there are circumstances that are hard, not what you expected, not what you ever would have wanted: broken relationships, hard diagnoses, loss of loved ones, job struggles, financial difficulties, and the list goes on. How does God answer? He calls us to action.

In his song, "Do Something," Matthew West says that God created us to do what we can do:

*Woke up this morning, saw a world full of trouble now, thought,
How'd we ever get so far down, and how's it ever gonna turn around?
So I turned my eyes to Heaven.
I thought, "God, why don't You do something?"
Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of people living in poverty, children
sold into slavery.
The thought disgusted me.
So, I shook my fist at Heaven, said, "God, why don't You do something?"
He said, "I did, I created you"
If not us, then who? If not me and you?
Right now, it's time for us to do something.
If not now, then when, will we see an end to all this pain?
Oh, it's not enough to do nothing, it's time for us to do something.*

What has God asked you to do? Sometimes I think we get lost in the immensity of the problem. Who has the resources to meet the needs of the millions who are starving in East Africa? How can we possibly provide clean water to all of those who don't have it? As individuals, none of us possess those resources. But God doesn't ask us to do those things on our own. He gives us each other, and more than that, he gives us himself. He promises to meet our needs, and not just ours, but the needs of those whom we care about. He gives us the desire and the heart to meet the needs of others, and in that, he provides assets, connections, resources, concepts, ideas, material, personnel, etc. to get the job done. Just as he did for Gideon, meeting not just his needs, but providing assurances, guarantees as it were, of his faithfulness, he promises us of his provision when we step out in faith.

So, what do you need to trust him with today? How can you trust him to be who he says he is? As Andy Stanley says, “You are God’s plan A. There is no plan B.” It’s a challenge, to be sure. But what is life without challenge, without the opportunity to be ‘all that you can be’? It takes courage, relying on God’s strength when yours is not enough. But he has promised never to leave us or forsake us! We can be confident in his unfailing love and power!

Judges 6:12-14

¹²The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!”

¹³“Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

¹⁴Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

Where is God asking you to trust him today? Will you?

Is there something in your life that you need to repent of and ask God to remove in order for him to work in that place?

Prayer:

Father, I choose to trust you today. I know you desire the best for me, that your plans are good, to give me a hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11) Help me to lean into that truth today. You are my life, my hope, my love. Let me be your hands and feet! Let me be your love. Amen.

Comparison Wants to Steal from You.

Wednesday, May 10, 2017

“Comparison is the thief of joy.” Attributed to President Theodore Roosevelt, truer words have not been spoken about my life. For as long as I can remember, I have been comparing myself to others. I was the smallest kid in my class all through middle school. High school wasn’t much easier. With braces and a bad haircut, not many girls wanted to talk to me. And being cut from the junior varsity baseball team didn’t help my self-esteem. When I started following Christ around that time, I began to find some peace, although it was hard not to look around and wonder why others had and I had not.

The comparison game got even easier to play as I got older. After college, I got a job (that I didn’t like) and moved to a new city (that I wasn’t crazy about). While many of our friends were moving up in their careers, buying new cars or houses, and going on vacations, my wife and I lived in a one-bedroom, basement apartment. Everyone has their struggles - emotionally, financially, physically, spiritually - but I couldn’t stop feeling sorry for myself, so much so that it led me into depression. There were other contributing factors, but I remember being jealous of so many people in my life who were now so much more “successful” than me. My fear of not measuring up had taken over. As I was throwing myself a pity party, I felt a lot like Gideon, who referred to himself as the weakest of the weak. He doubted that even God could do anything in his life:

Judges 6:14-15

¹⁴Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

¹⁵“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!”

Just about the time God healed me and brought me out of my depression, I lost my job. Talk about embarrassing for someone who was so concerned with the perception of others and desired to have what they had. Little did I know that it was during this season that God would humble me to the point of acceptance, revealing himself to me in new ways. My wife and I prayed constantly for provision, and God used the same people I thought were so much better than me to bless us many times over. Our rent was paid anonymously, and friends pooled together to pay our bills and buy groceries. I was envious of these friends for what they had, but through their generosity, I became envious of their willingness to love us in our time of need and to serve where God called them. The Lord told me the same thing he told Gideon.

Judges 6:16

“I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”

I still encounter the green-eyed monster of jealousy from time to time. I would be lying if I said I never compare myself to others, because I do. Now, though, I am less concerned with their job title and more interested in how I can know Christ the way they do.

Comparison led me to a place I don't want to revisit. I still want to be like other people, but God's promise to Gideon is a promise to all of us - that he will be with us. He made the same promise in Deuteronomy 31:8: “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Do you find yourself stuck in the comparison game, like Gideon?

How should the fact of God's presence change the way you view yourself?

Prayer: Father, help me to understand how you see me. Help me to listen to and love you so that I am not comparing myself to others or thinking that you couldn't do anything through me. Thank you for your presence and for your mercy in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

God Knows Who You Are.

Thursday, May 11, 2017

Have you ever been afraid? If so, then you are part of a small, very selective group known as... *the entire population*.

That's right, you are not alone; everyone has been afraid at some point in their life. Fear is normal and completely legitimate. However, fear can cause us to act irrationally.

It can make us doubt ourselves, doubt our circumstances, and we can even begin to believe the lies that our fears tell us.

Sometimes, all we want is to know what to do. We would love to have a sign, a giant neon one with an arrow on it, pointing us down the path we should take. Often, we feel alone in our fears, believing that no one understands.

Gideon was just like you and me. He had seen the injustice of his people, and he was focused on his circumstances. Then an angel of the Lord showed up and told Gideon that he was a mighty warrior.

Whoa, hang on. Hold the phone. Imagine if you had an angel telling you that you are something quite the opposite of what you think you are.

Don't be too surprised, because that is what happens to us every time we read Scripture. **God tells us who we are, even when we don't believe it to be true.**

Gideon was like the runt of the litter, though. He was from the weakest clan, and he was the weakest in his family. He was much like Bilbo Baggins in "The Hobbit," an unlikely hero.

The angel tells Gideon that he will lead an army in victory. At this point, Gideon is really wondering if someone is messing with him because he is not a mighty warrior, or a leader of anything.

Gideon never tells the angel "no," but he does give excuses as to why he can't do what the angel wants him to do. He responds the same way you and I would. Who am I? I'm not capable of doing that! I'm the least of the least! If you're really with us, why has all this other stuff happened?

Then he says:

Judges 6:17-18

¹⁷Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. ¹⁸Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you." He answered, "I will stay here until you return."

Gideon needs a sign. When the angel tells him all the things that he is going to do, he needs reassurance. He needs to know that it is really God telling him what to do. Most people might be appalled by his questioning of the angel, but the reality is, we do the same thing.

God, if you would just show me a sign. God, if it's really you, can you make it very clear to me?

The angel responds gracefully, "I will stay until you return." In other words, he is saying:

"No problem Gideon, I know this is hard for you to understand, especially with everything that is going on around you, because of your past, and because everyone else is telling you something different. I will wait here, so that you know that what I say is true."

The angel of the Lord was patient with Gideon, even when Gideon challenged him.

God is patient with us in the very same way. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will always remind us of who we are, even if we don't believe it ourselves.

How have you noticed, or not noticed, the patience of God in the midst of your fears?

Prayer:

Lord, remind me of who you say I am. Help me to walk in the strength that you have provided for me today. Allow me to not give into my fears of not being adequate and to rest in the grace that you offer. Amen.

Yahweh Shalom

Thursday, May 12, 2017

One of the most fun things for me when studying the Bible is the way the Old Testament and the New Testament complement each other. Today's passage is a great example of the Old Covenant merging into the New. The difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, though important, is fairly simple. The Old Covenant was based on adherence to the law, in which the Israelites had to try to find ways to live up to being the people God had wanted them to be from before the fall. However, they just couldn't seem to keep all the laws and rules. Therefore, Jesus came to make a way for all of us to have a right relationship with God. Jesus gives us the New Covenant, in which the Holy Spirit is given freely to believers to help guide us through this life.

Throughout this week, we have looked at an Old Testament passage that has given us insight into who God really is, and how he wants to be our helper and protector. In the story of Gideon, we see all the ways that God is here for his people. Gideon shows us that even when we have fears and doubts, even when we doubt God, God is always here for us. That is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, that even though Israel turns away time and again full of doubts and fear, God is willing to forgive and wants to have a good relationship with his people.

In the New Testament, the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus make it clear that God is not willing to let *any* of us go. That fact should be enough to calm all fears and allay all doubts. But, we as humans still struggle. Even the most devout Christian has moments! That is why I love this passage from Philippians so much. I highly recommend committing it to memory, for it has helped me through more anxiety than I can say. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and worry. When I first became a Christian, I was instructed to memorize this passage, and when I would wake up at night, I would say it until I fell back to sleep. Now, on the very rare occurrence that I cannot sleep, it is my go-to sleep aid.

The similarities between these Old and New Testament passages are pure and simple. God is Peace. This is written on the altar of Gideon in Hebrew as "Yahweh Shalom."

The LORD is PEACE or YAHWEH SHALOM. The meaning behind shalom goes deeper than the usual meaning of peace, which is the absence of conflict or being calm. It also means wholeness, perfection, safety, and wellness. True shalom comes when one abides with God in a covenant relationship because he, alone, gives complete satisfaction, fulfillment, and harmony with himself and others. We, like Gideon, are broken, lost, and fearful. Only a true encounter with

Yahweh Shalom, the source of all peace, and His Son, Jesus, the Prince of Peace (SAR SHALOM), will bring peace in the deepest meaning of the word.

So, tell God what you need and don't be afraid! He wants us to come to him with all of our troubles. When we live in prayerful community with him and gratitude for all he has done, he will give us his [perfect peace](#).

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

When you are worried or anxious, what do you do? Do you tell God what you need?

List a couple of steps you could take this week to experience more of God's peace.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for sending Jesus to make a new covenant with me. Help me to come to you in gratitude and with all of my needs, trusting that you are always with me and will give me peace and guard my heart and mind through your precious Son. Amen.