

Lent

WEEK THREE: STEADY ON

THURSDAY, MARCH 4 – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

One of the main obstacles to faithfulness is fear and anxiety. There are times that fear is a very helpful companion. If, for example, we are walking on the edge of a cliff, a surge of fear could save us from injury or death. In the midst of daily life though, fear and anxiety have the ability to shrink our perspective, turn us inward, and blind us to others and the larger work of God around us. This week's theme in our journey towards Jerusalem is the way that God's grace in Jesus Christ can lead us to faithfulness even in the midst of the fear and anxiety inducing storms of our lives.

READ

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

As we continue through our Lenten journey our scriptures this week speak about the invitation to faithfulness in the midst of fearful situations. Before you read the following verses pray for the Holy Spirit to befriend you in your reading and teach you from these passages. And as you read these passages, notice the ways that our gracious God seeks to meet us in the midst of our fears and lead us to greater faith, hope, and resilience.

Mark up the passages below as you read them:

- **UNDERLINE** any words or actions related to anxiety or fear
- **BOX** any phrase or descriptions that relate to faithfulness in the midst of fear
- ★ After you've read the passages once, read them again slowly – maybe out loud – then **STAR** one word or phrase that really seems to capture your attention at the heart

LUKE 8:22-25

(Our focus passage for this week – Jesus and the Disciples in the Midst of the Storm)

²² One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. ²³ As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.

²⁵ "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

ISAIAH 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you;

do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

MATTHEW 6:31-34

³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

These questions are meant to help you reflect on the texts and apply them to your life. As you read through the texts know that the Holy Spirit is working within you. The Bible is not just a collection of pages but a living book since the Holy Spirit is working in and through it. So as you reflect seek to discern what the Holy Spirit might be teaching you through these passages.

1. If you were the disciples, would Jesus' response feel like a rebuke or encouragement to you?

Why do you think Jesus gave such a response to his disciples? What was Jesus teaching the disciples by sleeping through the storm? By rebuking them?

2. What storms seem too much for you to handle right now? How does this passage relate to those storms and what may God be leading you to?
3. In our passage from Isaiah, God was speaking to the exiles of the people of God in Babylon. In what ways do you think God's word would have encouraged them in the midst of a foreign and dangerous land?

PRAY

FRIDAY, MARCH 5

Praying when we are anxious and afraid is hard! Often, we do not pray during those times or our prayers come out as frenzied petitions or garbled cries. And there are many examples of those kinds of prayers in the scriptures. Yet also God in the scriptures invites us to another response: “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Being still and even silent with God in the midst of our fears may seem impossible, yet this is a constant exhortation throughout the scriptures because being still before God puts us in the posture of someone waiting. Being still slows us down and leads us to step out of our fears and receive the invitation to trust again. Being still feels helpless because we are not doing anything to relieve our fears, yet stillness reminds that God is the source of our help and strength. Jesus rested in the midst of fearful circumstances and we can enter that rest with Him as well.

So, today and through the week I encourage you to take 3-5 minutes (or more) in stillness. You could even set a timer so that you will not be anxious about the time. Here are some guidelines for taking a time of silence and stillness.

1. Sit down and take a few deep breaths to settle into the silence.
2. Choose a very simple word or prayer to express your openness and desire for God. (example: “Abba, Father, Holy Spirit, Jesus, Here I am Lord.”)
3. Close your eyes and offer this prayer to Jesus, allowing His will and love full access in your life. Say this prayer repeatedly throughout your time. You could even say it as you breathe out.
4. When you become distracted, offer again your simple prayer back to God. Take a few more deep breaths. Just focus on this time as a time of grace. You don’t need to manufacture something that is not there: if you are distracted you are distracted. Don’t judge yourself, just give your distractions and your feelings to God and wait.
5. See this time as a moment where God is embracing you and just being present with you. In any good friendship you do not have to always speak and being still is just a time of being with you. As you are still, trust that God is with you.

During your time of silence and stillness: Receive the love of God in your life, let go, surrender your will to God’s will, and open yourself to hear God speak. When distracted, just bring yourself back to God. Know that your distractions are just a sign that you are human and know that God is working to teach you grace and to wait in Him.

(Taken from Pete Scazzaro, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. For Further Reading: Sanctuary of the Soul by Richard Foster, The Spirit of the Disciples by Dallas Willard, Habits of Grace by David Mathis).

FAMILIES

A youth group activity that can work well with families is called Box of Anxieties. Set up a box in the house with blank pieces of paper by it. During the week family members can write down anxieties or fears they have anonymously on the paper and put them into the box. Once a week after dinner (or another appropriate time) take out the box, speak out the anxieties (without any commentary), and then pray for the anxieties together. A variation that would work with a larger family (or youth group) is for each family member to write an anxiety or fear anonymously, put it in the box, shake up the box, then one by one family members will read one of the cards, add their own thoughts about what the person might be feeling or going through, and then pray for them. This is a way for family members to empathize and pray for each other.

REST

SATURDAY, MARCH 6

In the midst of anxiety and burdens, our Lord Jesus invites us to receive His refreshment. On this day of rest our encouragement is to learn from Christ, cast our burdens on the Lord, and receive Christ's refreshment and peace.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

—Matthew 11:28-30, the Message

WORSHIP [GATHER]

SUNDAY, MARCH 7

If your group gathers on Sunday then use the "Gather" section (Wednesday) for your group time together.

Our theme in worship today is Faith and Fear – take a few notes for yourself during the service that will help in the next few days.

Where did Jesus really get my attention in the worship time today?

What stood out to me in the sermon?

What did the Holy Spirit call to mind during the reflection time after the sermon?

Who do I want to remember to pray for in this coming week?

PRACTICE

MONDAY, MARCH 8

INCARNATING THE LOVE OF CHRIST

We are so easily overwhelmed when we look at the systematic 'storms' in our lives, whether it be the numbers of deaths in our country because of Covid-19, poverty and homelessness, injustice on many levels, and the list goes on and on. This week we are going to practice faithfulness in the midst of fear by seeking to incarnate the love of Christ in what we say and do. The storms that surround us seem too big for us to change, but we are always challenged in the scriptures to take a step of faith. So below are suggestions on how you could incarnate (make flesh) the love of Christ in practical ways.

1. Caring for the earth. Caring for the earth is a way of expressing God's delight in His good creation. Practices include: recycling, using energy supplies wisely, treating animals humanely, working against pollution, working to protect the earth's natural resources, not littering or cleaning up litter, riding a bike rather than a car, etc... You could also spend an hour or two individually or with family educating yourselves about current environmental issues and practical ways you could help.

2. Compassion. Compassion is a way of feeling with people and extending mercy and help out of that empathy. This week you could practice Jesus' compassion by praying for those around you who are hurting, struggling, or in pain daily, looking for opportunities to help and support them, seeking to heal wounds in your relationships, and showing mercy rather than judgment. You could also volunteer with a ministry that is showing compassion, visit those who are sick or hospitalized; help those unable to drive to church, visiting those who cannot leave their homes.

3. Controlling Your Words. This involves an intentional awareness of what you say and how your words can be both destructive and loving or healing. This week you could practice this by: intentionally and honestly encouraging those around you, resolving conflicts that have been festering with gentleness and patience, not yelling, cursing, or belittling others, addressing your critical nature as revealed in your critical tongue, not speaking in anger or irritability, and intentionally speaking life rather than death into others lives, apologizing and asking forgiveness, telling others that you forgive them and love them, refusing to gossip or slander, refusing to flatter or dissemble.

4. Justice. We incarnate the love of Christ when we seek the protection, goodness, and fair treatment of all people. You could put this into practice by: treating others fairly and respectfully around you, being a good steward of what you own, supporting just causes with time, action, and financial support, providing for the poor, needy, and oppressed through the means available to you, volunteering in ministries that provide for those in need in the community, refusing to buy products from companies who oppress the poor, doing a Bible study on God's views of justice and the poor, become more aware of the justice issues in your area, support groups who work for justice such as The International Justice Mission.

6. Stewardship. Stewardship is the generous and voluntary care of your time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of God and others. Practices could include: setting a budget which including tithing and support to ministries, living in a way that exemplifies that your time and resources are not your own, making offerings that go beyond the tithe, praying through your finances, debts, etc... and offering them to God, looking around you for those who could use financial or other assistance and help them, give a deserving person in your life a 'bonus' or a free and anonymous gift of grace.

7. Living in Truth. This means living in a way that is truthful and seeking to live an authentically truthful life. Practices could include: refusing to spin events and experiences to impress others, not exaggerating, not cheating on tests, taxes, insurance forms, etc..., keeping promises and following through, repenting and asking for forgiveness when you have lied. Refusing to flatter or dissemble, saying what you mean and meaning what you say, refusing to slander or cut down another, refusing to gossip, pass on gossip, or rumors, being aware of lies you tell yourself and confronting them with the truth, reflecting on God's promise that 'the truth will set you free.'

REFLECT

TUESDAY, MARCH 9

Read Luke 8:22-25 one more time.

1. What do we learn about Jesus in this story? How does this relate to the times you face storms?

2. How do you respond when you are anxious or afraid?

3. What words of hope do you feel God gives to you in the midst of your storms?

4. Where has Jesus met you with grace in your journey this past week?

5. What ongoing prayers do you carry into the next week of Lent?

If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer - His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable.

- John Newton

GATHER [RECONNECT]

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

If your group met on Sunday take the opportunity on Wednesday to check in with your prayer partner(s) midweek, supporting each other in this journey.

Reconnecting

What is one fear that you used to have that you don't have anymore? Or one fear that you didn't have that you have now? (for example, I used to be afraid of heights and now I am not, or vice versa).

How did your Lenten practices or prayers go this past week? Did anyone choose a special practice for Lent?

Each week we will come back to the question of what it means to live as people of faith in Jesus. This week, how would you answer that question? Make a note so you can follow your progression of thought and practice over this Lenten journey.

Read Luke 8:22-25

What struck you in your own reading and prayer this past week on this passage? What struck you from Chris's sermon on Sunday?

The disciples encountered a storm that made them afraid. What kinds of storms in your life or around you have led you to fear and anxiety recently? How has God met you in those storms, or how can God meet you?

What questions or convictions surface from this story as we continue through this Lent journey?

Faith and Practice

Faith is the willingness to submit ourselves to God's call and God's purpose for us. What is one place in your life that we can pray for humility and willingness this week?

Close out your time as a group in prayer for one another.