

May 17, 2020

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**Faith to Face: Gratitude**

**Scripture: Daniel 6: 19-22; 1 Cor 11:23-24**

In thinking about gratefulness, there are probably a few camps of people out there:

- 1) Those who are **really excited about this message** (and all of the messages we offer!) and really look forward to diving into these ideas and have a heart that's ready, open, willing - happy  
-> *let's be honest, you may not get much out of this message/may be able to teach me something*
- 2) Those who are maybe **hurting and broken and worried that this doesn't seem culturally significant, spiritually relevant**  
-> I challenge you to hang in there, I think you may be surprised at how the Holy Spirit can work in you and I invite you to listen along -  
I don't think brokenness and gratefulness are mutually exclusive and that is what I hope to explore.
- 3) Those who don't think you can put people in simple categories, **may not fit in any of my above mentioned categories**, questioning my methods  
-> *you are absolutely right. I'm with you, friends.*

But let me also say that any point in time, if you think 'this message seems **oddly nuanced and strangely specific** ....' It is.

This message *IS* for me. I do hope it is and that you get something out of it too.

Let's begin by : (acknowledging the present situation)

Not discount where we are - the challenges of life, what we are going through.

- If you are *grieving because of the a tangible, actual loss of someone* that you have loved either because of COVID-19, or a complication connected due to this, or because of any other illness or life situation =>  
**we see you and know that we are with you and praying for you**
- If you are *grieving the loss of a collective culture or the loss of specific event* you anticipated celebrating such as prom, graduation, a wedding, maybe even a funeral =>  
**we see you and know that we are with you and praying for you**
- If you are *struggling to make ends meet* - if your job has changed or been eliminated, or maybe your job has been expanded beyond your ability to complete it and you are overwhelmed =>  
**we see you and know that we are with you and praying for you too**

WE:

And by “we” - I mean ....

Staff, pastors, prayer ministry, the prayer email chain, the crisis care ministry -

Our **vast network of connection that does not have anything to do with this physical building** but is built on the foundation of faith in Jesus that has evolved in many ways over many years - and will continue to through this and other events - as we are still the church and we always will be.

We have always lived in a broken world - and we may always - but God is ALWAYS at work in this world.

And so today, Soon ... I'd like to take a break from the heartache, the brokenness, the pain, the grief. But first, let's *acknowledge* it ... let's be real with ourselves, open, authentic, share our burdens with each other and our God who can bear them.

There needs to be a **space** for it. And we need to be real and authentic and not discount that. We need to be kind to ourselves and allow ourselves to have these emotions.

Do you sometimes judge your emotions before you sit in the space of understanding them?

**Instead of thinking ‘why do I feel sad today?’ you think, ‘you have no reason to be sad, get over it.’ ...**

I know I do.

So, allow yourself space. Give yourself time to think about what you are feeling.

To **pray** about what you are thinking.

To **talk** about what's on your mind with a close friend (over the phone!)

These are all Good and Holy things - these are parts of **Christian community**. They are part of cultivating an attitude of gratitude, I believe.

Maybe you're joining us today and you may not be comfortable with the word 'Christian'.

It may not define you - or you may have had negative experiences with it before.

Maybe you consider yourself a **Jesus follower** but not a **Christian**.

Maybe you don't consider yourself either a Jesus follower or a Christian - for some of this, you'll get a 'pass' (as Andy Stanley would say) but, regardless of who you see yourself as ...

**I invite you to give yourself TIME/space to live to your very real, very human feelings.**

Because folks - this *may* be our LION'S DEN.

What does that mean?

Daniel got through this tough time giving all praise for his ability to make it through to God.

And because of this, the king of land said:

For he is the living God,  
and he will endure forever.  
His kingdom will never be destroyed,  
and his rule will never end.

**27**

He rescues and saves his people;  
he performs miraculous signs and wonders  
in the heavens and on earth.  
He has rescued Daniel  
from the power of the lions.”

They got through - and we will too

It may be different, it may be hard - *that* we can't control.

But what we *can* control is how we *respond* : if we **seek** God in the Lion's Den and **praise** God after the Lion's Den. ... Trust God. **Daniel trusted God**

*Do you trust God?*

*Do I seek God, praise God in the midst of my lion's dens?*

**Working Out -**

- I don't love it but I do it.

Why?

We have to train for gratitude

We have to work for gratitude

We have to **SHIFT** our thinking for gratitude

We have to allow space for hurt, but we have to allow space to **move beyond** that.

That is when we live into being the people that God intended us to be.

Self pity is natural, gratitude is not

I am not sure when and where we adopted this philosophy that if it's hard it's simply not meant to be. That God didn't intend it.

That is absolutely not true - **God needs warriors on this earth** - that fight for what's right!

And I don't mean a *political* right - or a *human* right.

I mean a **Jesus-right - the greatest commandment Jesus gives us is to love God, love your neighbor.** That is hard!

But we got to train so we can do this well.

So that we can come out of our Lion's Den **praising God and loving others.**

(we don't have blog posts or tweets, or Instagram pics from Daniel's time in the Lion's den but I have to think he was praising God IN the Lion's Den too.)

The **Bible is full of warriors** that had the world stacked against them - and they were the ones that overcame for God - with God. They fought through the battles of life - they came out of their lion's den. They were not alone - they were not lone warriors. And they did **TWO things** ...

-They sought God. And they praised God.  
They trusted God was with them (that's a given).

October 24, 1918 - The Christian Advocate mentions the Spanish Flu - "Influenza epidemic" 61 times. Churches closed. It was hard. It will be hard now and will be again.

See "we've" - I don't mean you and me, I mean the collective "we" - our culture as human beings. (Not dismissing this ...but recognizing)

The situation is different but **there will always be a Lion's Dens** -

They may just be **more lions** in them sometimes than others.

And it doesn't make that you're alone or that God has forgotten you.

**It means you're in training.** And you are a warrior.

We are warriors- fighters? .

And we are training the greatest commandment we are given.

Love God. Love others. So simple yet so hard.

I want to share some scripture (with hesitancy) - re-look at it. May know it, so don't skim. I want you to hear it and relook it. We say this every month, so you'll hear it and just think 'I know and not listen' so I'm going to unpack it differently  
Visit the communion liturgy in a new way

We hear from Paul this explanation of what happened on Jesus's final night ...

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 New Living Translation (NLT)

23 For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread 24 and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you.[a] Do this in remembrance of me."

Why does this matter? ...

**because in the midst of Jesus's Lion's Den - after he had been betrayed and knew we death - he gave thanks for the bread and share it with this friends**

Jesus gave thanks in the midst of the hardest time of his life, thus far.

"Not often do you see the words **betrayed** and **thanks** in the same sentence, much less in the same heart." - Max Lucado

Hardship and gratefulness are **not** mutually exclusive. How do we be/have both?

We have to train, we have to seek God in the hard times, praise God - we have to *cultivate* a culture of gratitude. It does not come naturally, easily. We have to teach ourselves to be grateful in challenging times, the idea of "training" to be grateful or to have a grateful heart ...

**"Gratitude doesn't come naturally. Self-pity does."**

We have to train our hearts. We have to shift our minds. We have to seek God, and praise God. We have to trust God.

Why is a much tougher question .

- Why do I feel this way
- Why is this relationship falling apart
- Why do I keep hurting people around me
- Why didn't I get my haircut when I was supposed to in the beginning of March
- Why am I stuck in this job

- Why do I take my anger out on others
- Why am I pushing God away

Sit with it. Ask the tough questions. Have tough conversations. Live into these thoughts, feelings. Be vulnerable. Seek God.

And remember - we have God of the tough times, of the tough questions.

Christians, Jesus followers, whatever you may be - we aren't immune to sitting in the tough spaces in life. We are good at it. We can be authentic, vulnerable, real.

So start training - training your heart so that in the midst of tough times, in the midst of betrayal - you can give thanks.

Now that's what we can learn from Daniel and from Jesus - that NO matter what happens, seek God. God IS with you. Praise God *when* you get through this. Not if, **when**.

We have been in the Lion's Den, and this may not be our last one - but we have a God that's bigger than all that. And a God that's with us in all of this. So praise God, we are not alone and we will get through.

Amen.