

An aerial photograph of a beach. The top half of the image shows the ocean with vibrant green waves and white foam crashing onto the shore. The bottom half shows the golden-brown sand of the beach. The title 'UNCERTAIN' is printed in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the boundary between the water and the sand.

# UNCERTAIN

*Kris Sorensen*

# UNCERTAIN

*Finding Direction Amidst Chaos*

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Kris Sorensen

# R E A D O N D E V I C E

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Uncertain: Finding Direction Amidst Chaos

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# INTRODUCTION

There is nothing like being at the beach in Southern California on a warm, sunny summer afternoon. When I'm at the ocean I like to stand right on the edge of the shore where the waves meet the beach. The waves are refreshing as they lap up onto the shore and over my feet, but what I like most is what happens as the waves retreat. As they pull back into the ocean, the water takes the sand from under my feet. This has a tingling sensation as my feet resettle just in time for the next wave to hit and the entire process starts over again.

As I stand there, watching my feet sink lower and lower into the sand, I'm reminded of how life is similar to this process. Just about the time you settle in and feel comfortable, another wave hits and the shifting begins again. It seems there is no firm foundation in this world, only uncertainty as the waves of life roll in.

It is as if we swim in a sea of uncertainty; there seems to be no shortage of it. We would love for life to be predictable, offering us stability and a clear sense of direction. Perhaps you have experienced your share of earth-shaking uncertainty: your health deteriorates, your child has run from God, the doctor shares devastating news from your tests, the pink slip sits on your desk and the bank account is depleted, or perhaps your spouse bailed on you and shattered all your future hopes and dreams.

Wouldn't it be great if life were easier and burden-free? Wouldn't it be nice if the choices before us were clear and unencumbered? To be honest, we'd just like a little peace from the waves that come our way. We would love to have peace in our families, workplaces, friendships, and country.

I would imagine that there are a lot of people whose daydreams involve some sort of utopia where they exist in a safe, insulated bubble, secure from all of the pain of this world. Unfortunately, no such place exists this side of heaven. Safety and security are an illusion; a pain-free, trouble-free life is nowhere to be found. I know it isn't encouraging to read something like that, but isn't it true? I don't know of a single person who has lived a pain-free life.

The fact is, certainty and predictability are not part of God's design for our time on earth. The Bible is filled with examples of men and women gripped with the uncertainty of life, however, it is within the twists and turns of life that the thumbprint of God is seen.

The moments remembered in history are of uncertainty. They are not just recorded in our history books, they become etched in our minds. I'm sure you remember where you were on September 11, 2001, when you learned of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Or perhaps, if you are older, you can remember vivid details of your surroundings when you found out that President Kennedy had been shot.

If you think about it, it's the moments of uncertainty that have substantially defined your life. It is the times where you asked yourself, "Where should I go to college, who should I marry, should we have children, where will I work, where will I live?" It is in each of those moments that our Heavenly Father longs for us to look for Him. I believe if you look closely you will find His hands are actively involved in shaping a preferred future that brings Him the most glory.

The chances are good that you are currently facing uncertainty. Maybe it is an illness you are battling, worry over a wayward child, or maybe a relationship that has gone sour. Or it could be that you are not facing uncertainty right now. If that is the case, that is wonderful, simply file away what you learn here because one day you will face uncertainty, I'm certain of it.

Obviously, uncertainty is not exclusively a Christian problem. You may be reading these words and you are not a Christian, but you are facing uncertainty because it is a human problem that touches all of us. No matter where you are on your spiritual walk, the Bible holds wisdom that is undeniable for every person.

In this book, I will be using the Bible as well as other historical examples of people navigating uncertainty in their lives. In the appendix of this book, you will find questions for reflection on each chapter that can be used for your personal reflection or in a small group setting as you seek to dig deeper.

It is my prayer that the uncertainty you face will draw you closer to the One who is always certain. There is no doubt about it - life is unpredictable. Like the shifting sand beneath my feet at the beach, this world offers no certainty to you or me, but that doesn't mean we are without hope.

“When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil. His oath, his covenant, his blood support me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ the Solid Rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

“My Hope is Built on Nothing Less” Edward Mote<sup>1</sup>



# 1

## DANGER OF RELYING ON YOURSELF

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*Romans 8:5-8*

Moments come in our lives when we feel as though we have absolutely no control over what is going on. For some of us, the tension comes not only when we can't control our own lives but also when we can't control what is going on in the lives of those we love. Suddenly, the future begins to look different than you anticipated. Your daughter is pregnant, your spouse is saying things that make you think there might be somebody else, or it looks like you might lose your job. You begin to wonder if things will ever get better. You had goals and plans, and now everything is up in the air. Your hopes and dreams for the future seem to be crumbling and you don't know how long the uncertainty will last. Life is not turning out as you thought and you long for the days of stability and a semblance of the control you used to exert over your life. In the middle of your uncertainty something is missing: the illusion that you were in control.

The truth is, we are never actually in control. We think we are responsible for that raise, our loved one's behavior, our good health, or the material blessings, but all of that is from God. The blessings,

the peace, the breath in your lungs, all of it has come from God. Life is too unpredictable and completely unmanageable for finite people. It is beyond our ability to manage life and everyone around us; that could only be accomplished by someone as powerful as God. But, that doesn't seem to stop us from trying to control everything and everyone around us.

The Bible has a word for that thing in us that wants to control everything... "Flesh." Our flesh is the part of us that tries to operate outside of the control of God. Your attempt to manipulate your surroundings, circumstances and even people comes from your flesh. There is a battle that goes on daily in our lives; it is the battle over who will be god. The question is, will we rule and reign over our lives, or will the one true God?

In our desperate attempt to be in charge and have certainty, we look for shortcuts. We want a checklist of how to get our lives back into "control." We want the article or Bible verses that show us three quick ways to get our children to do what we want. We want the checklist of how to fix our marriage in a week. We want the verses in the Bible that show us how to get a better job this week and to live our best life now. If we were honest, we would have to admit that we just want God to do what we want Him to do for us. We want God to make things like they were, or the way we think things should be.

The Bible is a great reminder of Who is ultimately in control and Who we can place our trust in. We are not in control and never will be, and it is dangerous to presume we hold the power. As Paul warned us, "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Romans 8:6

As we explore this idea of uncertainty and how to navigate it in our lives, I want to begin by warning you about the danger of relying on yourself. You are not the one who will get you through this storm; it will not be because of your brilliance, your good looks, or your abilities. You are not the answer in the middle of your uncertainty -

God is. The Bible reveals that you have a loving Heavenly Father who longs to have you take His hand as you face uncertainty - together.

# 2

## PRAY

*“Faith is a process of leaping into the abyss not on the basis of any certainty about - ‘where’ - we shall land, but rather on the belief that we ‘shall’ land.”*

*Carter Heyward*

In the early seventies, my parents were just getting started in ministry. My father was pastoring his first church and was not paid much money to support his little family. It would not be a stretch to say that we were poor. I was just a small child at the time, but my parents have shared with me what it was like for them to struggle financially during that time. They told me as a growing toddler I had just three pairs of clothes to wear, there was no extra money; there wasn't even enough money for food many times. There were times where they were not certain if we would have food to eat. Faced with this uncertainty, and being Christians, naturally they prayed; specifically, they prayed for food. Numerous times when the last bit of food left the cupboard a bag of groceries would show up on the doorstep anonymously and my parents would be motivated to continue to pray for their needs to be met. My mother enjoys sharing how she kept a container of flour in the kitchen cabinet, miraculously, that flour in the container did not run out for many months of daily use. Every time she would go back to the cabinet to dip out more flour there would always be more. I often think of that time in our lives and am reminded of how our Heavenly Father hears His children's prayers and it brings me peace.

You can't open the pages of the Bible without finding account after account of uncertainty. There are no stories about humdrum, boring,

routine lives. What you find are reports of stress, death, famine, and pain; the whole Bible is filled with uncertain times. So, the wonderful thing is, as we deal with uncertainty, we have God's Word to turn to and discover how to navigate through it.

Within the pages of scripture, we find men and women who had their faith stretched, yet they put their faith in God and survived some very difficult times. Those individuals came out on the other end with peace and a deeper appreciation for the God of the universe who is ultimately in control of every single thing.

Because we have a loving Heavenly Father, He has supplied us with the scriptures. We can turn to His Word and find ageless wisdom and principles to apply in every circumstance of life. So, what is revealed within the pages of scripture to help us navigate uncertainty? The first principle we discover is prayer.

Maybe you are thinking, "Pray? Been there; done that, bought the T-shirt. I've prayed about this situation and absolutely nothing has changed." Hang with me here, perhaps there is more to this than you had previously thought.

As believers, the truth that God is in control should dictate how we respond to every situation we find ourselves in. What is odd is how easily we tend to drift from praying, while at the same time it is amazing how instinctive prayer can be. You may have heard about the US Airways flight 1549 that had to emergency land in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. The Pilot, captain Sullenberger or "Sully" as they called him, did an amazing job bringing the plane down on the Hudson River without any loss of life. After the rescue, they were interviewing the crew about the incident and they asked one of the flight attendants, "So what was everyone doing as the plane went down?" She said, "Everyone was praying."

How do you think that happened? Do you think Captain Sully had to get on the intercom and say, "This is the captain speaking..."

in preparation for a crash landing into the Hudson River, we'd encourage all of you to break into groups of two or three and pray that God will intervene in this catastrophe. Have a good day and thank you for flying US Air." Are you kidding me? No one told them they should pray. They just did it. In times of uncertainty we do some things instinctively; because, in our hearts, we know that God is in control.

## ***PAUL'S ADVENTURE IN UNCERTAINTY***

If ever there were a person in history who has faced uncertainty it would have to be the Apostle Paul. If you recall before Paul was known as "Paul," his name was Saul and he had started a new hobby, he was dedicated to persecuting Christians. One day, while on his way to cause havoc for Christians in Damascus Saul had an enlightening encounter with the risen Lord. Long story short, he heard and saw Jesus while on that road and as a result Paul became a committed believer. It was a miracle, Paul was converted, he believed in Jesus and was obedient to His command to spread the Gospel all over the world. Paul went from persecutor to preacher overnight. Paul set out on this mission to spread the Good News and eventually he was arrested and sent to Rome to stand trial. The persecutor turned preacher is now persecuted. On the way to Rome Paul was involved in a terrible shipwreck. Fortunately, Paul and everyone on the ship survived and eventually Paul arrived in Rome, was put in prison and awaited trial. So this is a guy who is writing from prison. He isn't writing this while hanging out at Starbucks, he isn't writing this while sitting on the beach while on vacation, or from the comfort of his leather chair in his study.

Paul is about to face the Roman emperor. This emperor was a notorious killer; you may have heard of him before, his name was Nero. Ironically enough, Paul finds himself before a man who was on a campaign to eradicate Christians, the very thing Paul had been doing earlier in his life. I'm sure the irony was not wasted on Paul. Nero was so bloodthirsty he built coliseums to entertain Romans

with the death of Christians. This is the man who would light his courtyard with burning Christians impaled on stakes. Now, imagine you are Paul awaiting trial in Rome while Nero is emperor. With that in mind, Paul writes these choice words, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

## *REJOICING*

Say what Paul? Did I just read the words ‘rejoice,’ ‘thanksgiving,’ and ‘peace?’ Paul, haven’t you noticed you are in jail and could be killed for your faith? These are not the kind of words one would expect to hear from someone who has been falsely imprisoned and awaiting to stand before a murderous emperor. That is why I think that these words are not just simply the words of Paul but of the Holy Spirit. In this passage is a truth that if we can wrap our mind around and apply to our lives, will bring us peace in the middle of our crisis and uncertainty.

Paul begins by saying, “Rejoice;” and we think, “You have got to be kidding me.” To drive home the point Paul says, “Again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” Allow me to paraphrase what Paul is saying here, “Celebrate, throw a party, because you know that God is close - real close!”

When you are in the middle of your dilemma you might feel like God has abandoned you. God hasn’t gone anywhere, you might think that He has, you might feel like He has, but God is close to you now in the moment of your uncertainty. You can have joy amid the chaos that is your life because God is near. The sovereign God is ever-present; He is with you in this very moment.

Paul writes something else worth noting. He writes, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.” Other versions translate “reasonableness” this way, “gentleness, unselfishness, considerateness, forbearance;” basically Paul is saying watch your character. In the middle of your trial and pain don’t lose who you are; don’t start doing the wrong thing because you are in pain. This happens often, people who are hurt frequently hurt others. Hurting others is often a response that comes out of our bent toward selfishness. I’ve seen it time and time again as I sit down with someone to offer spiritual advice. I will hear stories of abuse and dysfunction suffered at the hands of someone who themselves were the recipients of abuse. The pain and dysfunction is a vicious cycle. The Holy Spirit’s admonition to us through the current difficult circumstances of the Apostle Paul is this, “Maintain your character, let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”

### ***DOWN WITH ANXIETY***

Paul goes on, “Do not be anxious about anything,” at this point we are thinking “You just don’t get it do you, Paul, what planet are you from? You don’t know what is going on in my world.” To be anxious means that you are worried about the future, you have all this stuff going on around you and you are so afraid that the outcome will be bad that you are frightened; you are stewing and fretting about what might happen. Your hopes and dreams of an ideal future are now in jeopardy. As the fear and anxiousness build in your life, there is the very real potential that your relationships begin to suffer. Your friends and family walk on eggshells around you because you are constantly on edge. You become unreasonable and inconsiderate because your world is closing in around you and you are no longer in control. You fight with your spouse, you are short with your co-workers, you blow-up at your friends; you are anxious about something and the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Paul, says, “Don’t be anxious about anything.”

“Don’t be anxious!” You are thinking, “How can I face this kind of



uncertainty and not be anxious?” And the Apostle Paul says, “I will tell you what you have to do. Are you ready for it? Here it is... Pray.” Paul writes, “... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.” I know it sounds simplistic, I know you were hoping for something far more profound. When our circumstances seem so complicated and insurmountable we think that the solution should be much more difficult. We think that complicated circumstances require complicated solutions, but what is revealed in this small sentence is a huge truth about how to deal with your anxiety that is associated with uncertainty. It is interesting that Paul does not say, “Just tell God what is going on.” He goes a bit deeper than that and he uses a word that means to unveil the mysteries of your heart to God. The Greek word is “gnorizetho”, which literally means, “to gain knowledge of.” Often this word is used in conjunction with the idea of making known a deep mystery. Paul says, “Slow down, take some time, and through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let God know those things that are deep down in your heart.”

Maybe you are thinking, “Doesn’t God know everything? Why should I tell Him what I’m feeling, He already knows right?” Yes, God knows; but you are missing the point of prayer. God is interested in the communication found in this relationship. In my marriage I know when my wife is feeling down, I might even know why she is feeling down but I want her to know she can come to me and we can talk about it. When I’m feeling stressed or worried I need to be able to verbalize these things to my wife or friend because in that process of verbalizing my thoughts and feelings I begin to discover something about myself.

### ***UNCERTAINTY = FEAR***

Get alone with God, and in that moment unveil what you long for and truly desire. Lurking just beneath uncertainty is worry and fear. Pull back the cover of uncertainty and you will expose your fears. You

might push back on that thought and try to deny that you are afraid in your uncertainty. But isn't it true that behind your indecision or hesitancy is a fear of making the wrong decision or taking the wrong path in life?

Think about your most recent uncertainty. If you were to get to the core of that uncertainty you would be able to say, "The reason I'm anxious about \_\_\_\_\_ is because I'm afraid that \_\_\_\_\_." Wherever there is uncertainty there is a fear.

Let's dig a little deeper: behind the uncertainty is fear, and behind the fear, there is a desire. The flip side of your fear reveals a desire or a longing that you have. When you are fearful you are anticipating unhappiness or pain and if you are honest, what you desire is a future filled with happiness and joy. So, let me ask you, "What are you afraid of"? God wants you to take that fear to Him and to release it; I would then encourage you to take some time and dig down to the real desire that you have.

Once you peek behind the curtain of uncertainty, you discover your fear. You then need to peel back the layers of fear and discover the desire. Now here is God's plan, He wants you to turn all of that over to Him. He wants you to give Him all of your fears, worries, and desires. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."<sup>2</sup> And He longs to be the source and fulfiller of all your righteous desires. "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."<sup>3</sup>

Amid your uncertainty, you have to get past the simple quick prayer, "Oh God help me, bless me, and protect me. I pray I don't lose my job. God, I pray I won't fail. God, I pray I don't have cancer." You have to get beyond that and unwrap the thing that you truly desire. You have to identify what it is you are really afraid of because somewhere, hidden away in that fear, is a desire and a longing.

## *THE HAND-OFF*

If you can get to that fear and core-desire and hand it off to God, your Heavenly Father will say to you, “I’ll take care of that.” There are burdens that you were never meant to carry. You were created finite and your hands are too small to carry heavy burdens. Place into an infinite God’s hands that which only God’s hands can hold. He is willing to exchange the weight of your burden and replace it with something much better. He says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”<sup>24</sup>

If you would take time to unwrap the desire beneath the fear and then give that to God, you will walk away with the reassurance that God will take care of you. It’s not simply, “God, I’m afraid that I will lose my job.” There is a deeper longing beneath that. Perhaps the fear is if you lose your job you won’t be able to take care of your family. So you begin to reveal the depths of your heart to God and you pray, “God, I want to know my family will be taken care of.” And our loving God says, “I can take care of your family.” And perhaps you begin to dig even deeper and God says, “What else you got?” And you say, “Well, I’m afraid if I don’t have a job people will think I’m lazy and some kind of loser... so I guess I desire that people think I’ve got it together; I think I just want to be accepted by others around me.” God says, “I can take care of that too.”

Have you really prayed about the uncertain circumstances you find yourself in? God asks you to get alone with Him and do the soul searching necessary to get to the root of the issue and then to place that in the hands of the only One who is capable of carrying your fears and desires. When you do that, the Bible promises that you will be given a peace that passes human understanding and you will not be anxious or controlled by your fears of the unknown.

Reveal not just your request but uncover what is at the very core of

the request. There is a wrestling that needs to go on in prayer while you are in the middle of your uncertainty. It becomes a deeper quest for the motives behind the request. Prayer is not simply a list of requests, but why you want what those things offer.

Our hope and life are not found in the elimination of fear or the fulfillment of our desires, it is found only in God Himself. In times of crisis, I have found myself trusting in the answer that I'm seeking rather than in the One who is the answer. I begin to trust in the new job, in the increased finances, in the mended relationship, in the opportunity, rather than trusting in God. When I do that I'm falling into the trap of trusting in myself. I begin playing the role of god in my life and there is only room for one God. Whenever I have relied on myself the result has not been peace, but anxiety.

### ***PEACEFUL CERTAINTY***

Look what Paul goes on to say is available, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup> Paul says, "The peace of God," not the peace of circumstances, "The peace of God," not the peace of safety or the peace in knowing your future. The peace of God surpasses all understanding. In other words, the peace of God doesn't make any rational human sense. When others around you see you experiencing peace in the middle of your trials they say, "That does not make any sense. He should be stressed out. She should be crumbling under the pressure. Why aren't they freaking out?" The peace of God transcends, surpasses, exceeds what the world thinks makes sense.

We used to sing a song in church when I was young; I called it the "Joy, Joy Song," the title is actually, "I've got the Joy". It went like this

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy  
Down in my heart  
Down in my heart  
Down in my heart

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy  
Down in my heart  
Down in my heart to stay...  
I've got the peace that passes understanding down in my heart  
Down in my heart...<sup>6</sup>

That lyric is from this passage that Paul has written in the book of Philippians. It is the peace of God that goes beyond human understanding. The peace of God is tied into who He is, His character, and His ability to handle all of your uncertainty and anxiety.

It is the kind of peace that guards your heart and emotions. If you will truly get down to business with God, unveiling what is deep down in your heart, He will give you a peace that will protect your heart. He will protect your emotions; He will go to battle against your fears.

You know why I believe that? It's because I've experienced it. Numerous times I have gone to God with a heavy heart, filled with fear and worry and I walk away from an encounter with the living God experiencing a peace that cannot be described.

I remember one evening sitting in a business meeting at church. This business meeting started out just like the numerous other meetings I have been in: routine, dry, some would say boring. But that all changed when the local police officer interrupted the meeting. When someone with a badge and a gun steps into the meeting, you have gone from humdrum to exciting in no time. But exciting turned into fearful when he said, "Pastor Kris your wife and daughter have been in an accident." I can tell you when you hear those words your mind begins to go a little foggy. I remember hearing him say, "Your daughter needs you. Will you follow me?" He didn't explain anymore so I said, "Sure." I grabbed my keys hopped in my car and followed the officer with his lights flashing. I remember feeling afraid as we sped down the highway to the accident. My mind was racing: was Tammy dead and that is why Shelby needs me? Is my daughter badly

injured and I need to be with her? What am I going to do if I've lost my family? I began to pray; my prayer wasn't just simply, "God I pray my family is okay," I got right to the core of what was in my heart and my prayer went like this, "God, please let Tammy and Shelby be okay. Lord, I'm afraid they are hurt badly. I'm afraid... I don't want to lose my family and be alone. I need your help to be brave. I ask that I would be a good witness no matter the outcome, use this for your glory, I will love you no matter what has happened, please give me peace." In that moment of uncertainty, with tears streaming down my face, there was a peace that filled my car and then seeped into my heart. I can't adequately describe it, but the atmosphere in my car changed; I felt God was with me and I felt that God was with Tammy and Shelby. I was at peace. Within a couple of minutes, we arrived at the place of the accident. It was our local gas station. I briefly looked at the car and there wasn't any major damage, just a little dent. I entered the store and saw Tammy, alert, but lying on the ground being attended to. Tammy had bumped her head in the minor accident, she felt light-headed, and briefly passed out. Nothing major, not a scratch on either of them, but traumatic for a five-year-old and that's why she needed her daddy. As I thought about that evening it turned out we both needed our Daddy to just simply be there. My presence was the only thing necessary to comfort Shelby.

Maybe that is what is ultimately needed in your circumstance, just the comfort of your Daddy. Simply to know that He is there, that He is closer than you can imagine, is enough to bring peace. So, I must choose to pray. Not until the answer comes, not until the circumstances change, not until things go my way; but I pray until my faith is in God and not my request. Peace comes when your trust changes. As you continue to persevere in prayer, one day you wake up to discover that you are not okay because the world changed, you are okay because you changed. Peace comes not from the absence of problems, but the presence of God.

There is a peace that is available to you if you are willing to slow down long enough to pray and unveil the deepest mysteries of your

heart to your Heavenly Father. And once you come to the place that you can identify your fears and your desires, you place that into the hand of God who says, “I will take care of that.” And in His other outstretched hand, He offers you peace. You can walk away with a peace that passes understanding even though the circumstances around you have not changed.

My desire for you when you face uncertainty is that you would get past the simple prayer of “Bless me, protect me, help me, give me, etc.” and that you would move to a deeper level of intimacy with your Heavenly Father. Would you be willing to get alone with God long enough to reveal what is in your heart and then place that fear and desire in the hands of a God that will gladly exchange your fears for His peace?

## **PRAY : DARLENE DEIBLER ROSE**

I heard Darlene Deibler Rose’s story over twenty years ago and I will never forget it.<sup>7</sup> In my mind, she stands as a shining example of someone who has an inspiring intimate prayer life with the Lord.

### ***RESPONDING TO THE CALL***

At the age of ten, Darlene attended a church meeting in her hometown of Boone, Iowa where the topic was the task of taking the gospel of Jesus to other nations. The speaker asked, “Who will go?” Darlene watched as several people stood and walked toward the front to dedicate their lives to the work of foreign missions. As she looked on, she felt a gentle hand grasp her shoulder. She looked around and saw no one. She knew that God was asking her to carry His message to faraway places.

On August 18, 1938, Darlene's first wedding anniversary, she and her husband, C. Russell Deibler, set foot in Batavia, Java. They soon traveled on to a newly discovered people, the Kapauku, in the Wissel Lakes area in western New Guinea. While Russell made the first trek to Wissel Lakes, Darlene remained behind and translated Sunday school lessons from English to Indonesian and taught church history.

Russell was anxious to have the Kapauku meet his wife, and Darlene was equally excited to meet the Kapauku. When the day finally came and Darlene stood looking down into a valley dotted with huts and saw the men, women, and children scurrying up the hill to meet her, she was overcome with emotion and began singing, "I'm home! I'm home!" as she ran down the mountain to meet them and was greeted warmly by the Kapauku people.

Darlene and Russell loved being with the Kapauku and quickly learned more of the language so they could share the stories of Jesus with them. As the villagers started giving their lives to the Lord a small church was started. While Darlene and Russell and their small team were ministering to the Kapauku, world events would soon change the course of their ministry.

## **W A R**

In September 1939 England and France had declared war on Germany. Word came to Darlene and Russell late in 1940 that their missionary outpost must be abandoned; they had to return to Celebes. Their hearts were heavy with grief as they left the people they loved.

Soon Japan would extend its grasp throughout the Pacific region. Russell, Darlene, and all their fellow missionaries prayed for God to give them direction. The missionaries were uncertain of whether they should stay or go. After praying fervently, all of them felt they were to stay on the island. The ship that would have taken them off the island set sail leaving the missionaries behind. Three days later they heard the ship they would have been on was torpedoed and sunk leaving no



known survivors.

During their sweep through the Netherlands East Indies, the Japanese Imperial Army had invaded the island of Celebes and put Darlene, Russell and all the missionary team under house arrest. Then on March 13, 1942, the Japanese came to take Russell and the rest of the men to a prison camp. Darlene grabbed a pillowcase and filled it with clothes, Russell's Bible, and other things she thought he would need. When she stepped outside Russell was already in the truck with the other men. Darlene handed Russell the pillowcase and looked into his face. For all she knew this would be the last time that she ever saw her husband. She was frightened for him and she was filled with uncertainty. The driver started the truck and Russell leaned over the tailgate and said very quietly, "Remember one thing, dear: God said that He would never leave us nor forsake us."

### ***IMPRISONED***

In May 1943 the Japanese took Darlene and all of her companions to a prison camp in Kampili. Those who were not Dutch were assigned to Barracks Eight, dubbed the "Heinz Barracks" for the variety of nationalities represented. Because Darlene was fluent in English, Dutch, and Indonesian she was chosen as the barracks leader. She started a practice of reading scripture and having a time of prayer each night, which maintained a strong sense of community and compassion among the barracks residents.

The commander of the camp was Commander Yamaji. He had a terrible temper and would strike out at the women for the smallest of infractions. Conditions in the camp were poor, the amount of work was back-breaking, and sickness was rampant. About a year after Darlene last set eyes on Russell she got word he had died of dysentery in the prison camp; she was a widow at the age of twenty-six. It was a moment that she thought God had forsaken her and she said, "But God, why?" He answered her, "Child did I not tell you that when you pass through the waters that I would be with you, that the rivers

would not overflow you; that when you walk through the fire I will be with you.” It was in that moment of her deepest pain that she knew first hand the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

As the news of Russell’s death spread through the camp Darlene was summoned to Mr. Yamaji’s office. He was standing behind his desk. “Njonja Deibler, I want to talk with you,” he began. “This is war.” “Yes, Mr. Yamaji, I understand that.” “What you heard today, women in Japan have heard.” “Yes, sir, I understand that, too.” “You are very young. Someday the war will be over and you can go back to America. You can go dancing, go to the theater, marry again, and forget these awful days. You have been a great help to the other women in the camp. I ask of you, don’t lose your smile.” “Mr. Yamaji, may I have permission to talk to you?” He nodded, sat down, then motioned for her to take the other chair. “Mr. Yamaji, I don’t sorrow like people who have no hope. I want to tell you about someone of whom you may never have heard. I learned about Him when I was a little girl in Sunday School back in Boone, Iowa, in America. His name is Jesus. He’s the Son of Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth.” God opened the most wonderful opportunity to lay the plan of salvation before the Japanese camp commander. Tears started to course down his cheeks. “He died for you, Mr. Yamaji, and He puts love in our hearts, even for those who are our enemies. That’s why I don’t hate you, Mr. Yamaji. Maybe God brought me to this place and time to tell you He loves you.” Mr. Yamaji quickly rose from his chair and left the room, tears streaming down his cheeks. Prisoners were not supposed to leave the presence of a Japanese officer without permission, but when it became obvious he was not coming out of his room Darlene slipped out of the office. From that moment Darlene knew Mr. Yamaji trusted her and understood why she had come to the region.

On May 12, 1944, the Japanese secret police came for Darlene. She was accused of being a spy. They took her out of the camp and she was taken to a prison where she was to be kept in solitary confinement. Over the door of her cell were the words, “This person must die.” After the guard unlocked the door and shoved her inside

she knew she was on death row, imprisoned to face trial and the sentence of death.

As the slam of the cell door echoed and the key was placed in the lock, Darlene felt the Lord wrap His arms of quietness and calm around her. She knew they could lock her in, but they couldn't lock the Lord out. While in confinement there was a constant communication of prayer between her and the Lord.

She was kept for six weeks in a cell about six feet square and had only small amounts of rice to eat each day. On the first day, she was given a small tin plate of rice porridge; she saw in the dim light of the cell something white on top of the porridge and she immediately thought, "Someone knows I like coconut and has sprinkled raw coconut on top of my porridge." She pulled it close to her and discovered that it was not coconut but worms. She pushed the worms to the side and the flies swarmed and ate the worms. Over time she figured if the worms were good enough for the flies then she could eat them too and eventually she ate the worms along with the porridge.

Frequently she would be taken to an interrogation room where two Japanese officers would accuse her of spying and getting messages to the Americans; they said they had proof of her treachery. They would strike her at the base of her neck or on her forehead above her nose. She never wept in front of them, but when she was back in her cell she would weep and pour her heart out to the Lord.

They did not believe anything Darlene said. They informed her they had proof of her involvement in espionage; she knew she was condemned, without formal trial, and was to be beheaded as an American spy.

## ***B A N A N A S***

One day Darlene pulled herself up to the window of her cell and began watching some women who were in the courtyard. One

woman's actions intrigued her. The woman inched toward a fence covered with vines. When she was close enough and the guard was not looking a hand clutching a small bunch of bananas reached through the vines; the woman grabbed the bananas, folded them into her clothes and strolled back to another group of women. Darlene began to crave bananas. She got down on her knees and said, "Lord, I'm not asking you for a whole bunch like that woman has. I just want one banana... Lord, just one banana." Then she began to think, "How could God possibly get a banana to me?" There was no way it could happen. It was impossible for her to get a banana. She prayed again, "Lord, there's no one here who could get a banana to me. There's no way for you to do it. Please don't think I'm not thankful for the rice porridge. It's just that — well, those bananas looked so delicious!"

The morning after she saw the bananas she had a surprise visitor — Mr. Yamaji. When her door was opened and she saw Mr. Yamaji's smiling face, she clapped her hands and exclaimed, "Mr. Yamaji, it's just like seeing an old friend!" Tears filled his eyes and he didn't say a word but walked back into the courtyard and talked the officers for a long time. When he returned Mr. Yamaji was sympathetic. "You're very ill, aren't you?" Darlene said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Yamaji, I am." Mr. Yamaji replied, "I'm going back to the camp now. Have you any word for the women?" The Lord gave her the confidence to answer, "Yes, sir, when you go back, please tell them for me that I'm all right. I'm still trusting the Lord. They'll understand what I mean, and I believe you do." "All right," he replied, and turning on his heels he left. When Mr. Yamaji and the other officers left, Darlene realized she had not bowed to the men! "Oh Lord, they'll come back and beat me," she thought. When she heard the guard coming back she knew he was coming for her. She struggled to her feet and stood ready to go to the interrogation room. The guard opened the door, walked in and with a sweep of his hand laid at her feet — bananas! "They're yours," he said, "and they're all from Mr. Yamaji." Darlene was stunned as she counted; there were ninety-two bananas! She pushed the bananas into a corner and wept. "Lord, forgive me; I'm so ashamed. I couldn't trust you enough to get even one banana for me. Just look at them,

there are almost a hundred.” In the quiet of the shadowed cell, the Lord answered back within her heart, “My child that’s what I delight to do, the exceeding abundant, above anything you ask or think.” She knew in those moments that nothing is impossible with God.

Time and time again God showed Himself to be powerful and faithful to Darlene. She was within moments of being beheaded as a spy, only to be taken from the prison back to the camp in Kampili. The Lord protected her as allied planes bombed their camp. When the war finally ended Darlene returned safely to the States. Eventually, she met and married Rev. Gerald W. Rose; they returned as missionaries to New Guinea in 1949 and Darlene was again back home among the Kapauku and sharing the Good News of Jesus with them.<sup>8</sup>

# 3

## REMEMBER

*“God’s faithfulness in your past casts a shadow of hope in your future.”*

*Andy Stanley*

There was once an elderly gentleman who loved playing golf. But he was almost eighty, and his vision was not very good anymore. He always had partnered with him when he went out to play so they could watch his golf ball and tell him where it went. One day his buddies did not show up. It was a beautiful day for golf, and as he waited at the clubhouse he got more and more upset that he wasn’t going to be able to play his round. Another elderly man in the clubhouse saw him and asked, “What’s wrong?” The man explained his predicament, “I was really looking forward to playing golf today. But I don’t see very well anymore, so I need someone to watch the ball after I hit.” The second man was even older than he was, but he said, “That’s no problem. I’ll be glad to ride around with you. I’ve got perfect vision. I can see like a hawk. You just hit the ball, and I’ll watch it.” So, they went out on the first tee, and the blind man hit the ball; it was a great shot right down the center of the fairway. He turned to his spotter. “Did you see it?” The man replied, “I saw it all the way until it stopped rolling.” “Well, where did it go?” The older man paused for a moment and then said, “I forgot, my memory is terrible.” Here’s the moral of the story; clearly seeing into the future is great, but if you forget where you have been - you’re lost.

There may be events that you might like to put in your past and forget all about. And that may be healthy in some instances, but there are some things that you should never forget. For example, if you forget

what God has done in the past you are prone to fear the future. If we fail to factor in God's faithfulness in our past, and the past of other believers, then we will fail to add Him into the equation of our future. If you don't remember God's faithfulness, there will be increased uncertainty, which brings about more fear. That kind of uncertainty can lead to all sorts of chaos in your life. It has the potential to drive you into unhealthy relationships, unhealthy habits, and unhealthy decisions.

If you were to evaluate your life you might have to honestly say, "Fear drove me into an unhealthy relationship. I was afraid I was going to spend the rest of my life alone so I married the first person that came along." Or you might say, "Fear drove me into a poor financial decision." Your deepest regrets, and the memories you might like to suppress, may be attached to this whole issue of uncertainty and an inability to manage the fear and anxiety associated with it. If you fail to remember God's faithfulness in the past, then you will fail to realize God's faithfulness in your future.<sup>1</sup> Forgetting that God is faithful only increases your uncertainty. The reverse is also true; when you remember that God has always been faithful it increases your certainty that your future is secure in God's hands.

### ***ELIJAH - AHAB - JEZEBEL***

There is an account in the Bible about the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings that highlights this issue of remembering God's past faithfulness to help us get through times of uncertainty. Let me give you some background information to set the scene. The first king of Israel was Saul, followed by David, and David was followed by his son, Solomon. After Solomon reigned the nation of Israel for forty years his son Rehoboam took over and screwed everything up. As a result of Rehoboam's poor leadership the nation divided into two kingdoms, the southern kingdom called Judah, and the northern kingdom called Israel. These two nations had different kings and were sometimes at odds with each other.

The king of Israel during the time of Elijah was Ahab. Ahab's wife was a very sweet benevolent woman named, Jezebel. That of course, was sarcasm. Even if you have never heard of Ahab you have heard of Jezebel. A lot of negativity is associated with that name. I've noticed that no one ever names their daughter, Jezebel. If you are having a daughter and you want an uncommon name go with Jezebel. If you are looking to mess your child up, name her Jezebel. If you would like to take it to another level, name your son Jezebel.

Ahab was a terrible king; in fact, the Bible says that Ahab did more evil than all the other kings before him. He did a ridiculous thing and married Jezebel who was outside of the Jewish faith, which God had instructed His people not to do. Besides her nasty attitude and rebellious heart, Jezebel brought some unfavorable things into the marriage, her foreign pagan gods. Eventually, people in the nation of Israel began to ignore the true God and worship Jezebel's god, Baal.

You can imagine God's displeasure with King Ahab. Ahab was a wimpy puppet and Jezebel was behind the scenes pulling the strings. God had enough and He sent Elijah, the prophet, to Ahab to tell him, "Because of your sin and worship of Baal in the nation of Israel I am going to stop the rain from falling."

Here is how the Bible describes it, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.' And the word of the Lord came to him: 'Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.'"<sup>2</sup>

Elijah is basically directed by God to camp out in the wilderness for a time. God informed Elijah that He is going to miraculously provide for His needs by sending birds to serve him his meals. The ravens generously brought bread and meat in the morning and evening.



In time, the brook where Elijah was camping dried up because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”<sup>3</sup>

Again God instructs Elijah that He will be providing for all of his needs. This time a widow in Zarephath will meet his needs. An interesting side note is that this widow lived in the hometown of Jezebel. She had been strategically placed by God in this place and at this time to care for Elijah’s needs. Time after time God is providing for Elijah.

Meanwhile, back in the palace, Ahab is furious with Elijah. Which is odd, because Elijah was just the messenger of the bad news, he didn’t cause the drought. Elijah wasn’t doing anything except stating what God already said. (This is why I often become amused at people who have a problem with Christians sharing what the Bible says about immorality; the culture gets upset with Christians when their real beef is with God.)

Ahab is honked off at Elijah because there has been no rain on the land for three years. He sends scouts out all over the region to look for Elijah, but they can’t find him. Meanwhile, Elijah is in Jezebel’s hometown at the home of a widow getting three square meals a day because God has been providing for Elijah and protecting him all this time.

“After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth. So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab.”<sup>4</sup>

For three years there has been no rain and God has taken care of Elijah. Elijah obediently sets off to go see Ahab. While on his way to meet Ahab, Elijah bumps into his old friend Obadiah who loves God and happens to still be employed by the king. Elijah says to Obadiah, “I’m on my way to meet with Ahab, why don’t you go tell him I’m

coming.” Obadiah says, “You don’t want to do that, Ahab wants to kill you. And there is no way that I’m going to say you want to meet with him because if I tell him I saw you and then we can’t find you, he will kill me!” Elijah says, “Don’t worry about it “homie” (they go way back) I’m not going anywhere, I’ve got a message for Ahab from God.”

“So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him Elijah was on his way. Ahab went to meet Elijah and when he saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”<sup>5</sup>

### ***SHOWDOWN AT HIGH NOON***

This is one of those moments in the Bible that reminds me of a Western movie. I picture Elijah as this leather-faced cowboy getting up in Ahab’s face and saying in a Dirty Hairy kind of voice, “You go get your posse and you tell them to meet me in the street at high noon. We are going to settle once and for all who truly is the real God.” Elijah grabs his white cowboy hat and makes his way to the main street where there will be a showdown.

Elijah is squaring off against 850 false prophets. Up on Mount Carmel he throws out this challenge, “I know, let’s have a little contest. Let’s build two altars out of wood and put our animal sacrifices upon the altar, but let’s not light the fire, let’s ask our gods to light the fire. The God that answers by fire is the true God. I will let you go first.”

So the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah, wearing their black cowboy hats, build their altar and hundreds of prophets start praying early in the morning. There’s no answer; they start dancing

and chanting and carrying on, it looks a little bit like a rave, but still no answer from their god. Meanwhile, Elijah is just kicked back on the western sidewalk with his boots on the wooden railing, cowboy hat pulled down to shield his eyes, chewing on a piece of straw, and absolutely amused with what is going on.

“And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”<sup>6</sup>

Wow! Smack talking at its best! “Maybe your god is going potty,” Elijah says. In other words, “Your god must not be paying any attention to you. Besides that, he’s not a real god because real gods don’t go potty!” So, the prophets shouted louder.

“And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.”<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, King Ahab is watching the events unfold and the perspiration is dripping from his forehead, he must be filled with anxiety at this point. He thinks to himself, “Why aren’t the gods answering? I need to buy some better prophets.”

Now it is Elijah’s turn. Elijah moseys on over to an old altar that was previously used in the worship of the true God of Israel, but it is broken down and needs repair because no one had been worshiping God. Elijah quickly repairs the altar and has a trench dug around it. He then instructs the people to pour water on the altar and over the sacrifice. They poured so much water on it that the water filled the trench. Then Elijah began to pray, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that

you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.”<sup>8</sup>

Of course, they fell on their faces and proclaimed the Lord as God; what else would you do if you saw something as powerful and convincing as that? There is a clear winner in this showdown.

“And Elijah said to them, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.”<sup>9</sup>

At this point, no one is applying for the position of prophet of Baal, and the whole nation of Israel has turned back to God. I can just picture the scene, black cowboy hats are blowing down the dusty main street like tumbleweeds; cue the rain cloud in the distance, cue the rolling thunder. In the distance a small cloud forms in the sky, rain is on the way; a real gully washer is about to roll in. Our hero Elijah gives a nod and a tip of his white cowboy hat to God in heaven.

Ahab can’t believe his “posse” lost. Elijah whipped up on 850 bad guys and he is the man! Defeated, Ahab heads back home and guess who greets him at the door? A very perturbed Jezebel; she is not happy at all, and when Jezebel ‘ain’t’ happy, ‘ain’t’ no one happy. Jezebel says, “Just wait until I get my hands on Elijah!”

“Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”<sup>10</sup>

If you were Elijah, what would you do? You have just experienced God’s miraculous provision for three years, birds have brought you food, the brook brought you water, the widow cared for your every

need. Now you have defeated 850 false prophets in a single day, and you are the conquering hero who, through the help of God, brought rain to a thirsty nation. What would you do when you hear that one woman threatens you?

### ***TUCK TAIL & RUN***

The next verse boggles my mind, but it reminds me that Elijah was very much as human as you or me. The Bible tells us that Elijah was afraid; he was so afraid that he tucked his tail and ran one hundred miles away to Beersheba.

“Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” And he lay down and slept under a broom tree.”<sup>11</sup>

While at the broom tree he gets a little food from an angel, which at my last check is miraculous provision. Elijah then got up and continued to travel even further away from all the action. “And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. There he came to a cave and lodged in it.”<sup>12</sup>

God now asks Elijah a question; it is the same question God would pose to us in the middle of our trials and uncertainty. It is the question that reminds us of just how quickly we can forget what God has done for us in the past. It is the question He poses after we have panicked and reacted in fear and tried to handle the situation on our own. It is the question that snaps us back to reality after we have run and gotten ourselves in places we have no business being in.

God asked Elijah, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” In other words, “Elijah, what are you doing hundreds of miles away from all the

action? What are you doing... here... in a cave... hiding? Didn't I provide for you? Didn't I care for you? Didn't I see you through all of the drama of the past? What are you doing here?"

Elijah answers, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."<sup>13</sup>

Is this the same guy? Has Elijah forgotten who he is, where he has been, and what God has done for him? Did he get bumped on the head or something? Where is the faith-filled chutzpa shown at the showdown?

God is about to bring Elijah back to reality, "And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper."<sup>14</sup>

I'm not sure what God said in that whisper, maybe God said in a hushed tone, "Elijah, come here, I want you to see something." Elijah puts his cloak over his face and moves to the entrance of the cave. God says to him again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"<sup>15</sup> God is pushing Elijah to answer why he has been running, what he is so afraid of, why he has forgotten what God has done for him.

### ***FACTORING GOD INTO THE EQUATION***

God is trying to lead Elijah to the place where he will realize that he has forgotten to factor God into the equation. But Elijah doesn't get it and he responds the same way as he did before; "He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed

your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”<sup>16</sup>

Elijah assumed that since he couldn't see God doing anything that He must not be there. Haven't you done that before? Haven't there been times in your life where you thought, "God's not there, He doesn't care about me, He's not answering my prayers, God has abandoned me." That's where Elijah was; he assumed that since God had been silent that God wasn't actively involved; out of sight, out of mind.

So God in His mercy has a little chat with Elijah and fills him in on all the details of what has been going on while Elijah has been hundreds of miles away with his tail between his legs. While Elijah has been gone, God has been busy behind the scenes where Elijah could not see. So God lets Elijah in on the plan.

“And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.”<sup>17</sup>

God says, “So I will ask you again, what are you doing here Elijah? There are things that need to be done. I've been intimately involved, even if you could not see what I was doing. I have not forgotten you. What are you doing here?”

“And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”<sup>18</sup>

So maybe at this point, Elijah begins to think, “What am I doing here? Why did I run? Why did I panic?” Elijah had forgotten to remember God's past faithfulness. Not once had God ever failed to

provide and care for Elijah. As a result of not looking back at the faithfulness of God, Elijah's future looked bleak and he became frightened. Can you identify with that? I can.

Whenever we forget to factor in God's faithfulness in the past, we set ourselves up to run to places that we have no business being; our lives become filled with uncertainty. We head for that drink, that substance, that person, that addiction.

Perhaps you have a story or two in your life where you found yourself sulking under the broom tree, and in a place that you should not have been. Maybe you could sit down and tell me about the place that you currently find yourself; a place you know you shouldn't be. And God would look at you and say, "What are you doing here?" And you would have to say, "I looked at my present circumstances and I forgot to factor you in, so I was afraid."

When you forget God's faithfulness in the past you will not factor Him into your future. In times of uncertainty, we need to look back and remember God's faithfulness because it gives us hope for our future. As long as we know that God has been with us it gives us the ability to face our future confidently, even in the face of uncertainty. If you forget God's past faithfulness, then the anxiety of the future has the potential to overwhelm you.

For some reason, our natural tendency is to forget what God has done for us in the past and we begin to assume we are on our own. When this happens, we run to places we shouldn't be. When you find yourself in a place that you should not be, I encourage you to stop and listen. In the silence, I believe you will hear God's voice whisper in your soul, "What are you doing here?" The wisest thing that you can do in that moment is to say, "God, I forgot to factor you in, and I'm sorry. I may be uncertain about the future, but I remember your past faithfulness and I'm positive you are with me now. I'm coming back."

"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your



wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?" *Psalms 77:11-13*

## REMEMBER : SAINT PATRICK

In March of 2009, I had the privilege to be in Northern Ireland. My good friend, James Pinkerton, and I were there scouting out potential mission trips for the teens in our church. On Saint Patrick's Day, we attended a service at what is believed to be the site of Patrick's first church located in Saul, County Down. The brief service was followed by a parade from the church in Saul down the hill to the cathedral in Downpatrick where Saint Patrick is buried. While on this pilgrimage into the cathedral James and I had the honor of carrying one of the flags in the parade. I have video proof if you would like to see it.<sup>19</sup>

While in Ireland I was impressed by the lasting effects that Patrick had left on the land. Patrick's influence has lasted for centuries. It was Patrick's memory of God's faithfulness in the past that shaped his future and affected an entire country.

Many people know virtually nothing about Saint Patrick other than green beer, parades, shamrocks, leprechauns, and drunken Red Sox fans that celebrate in his honor every March 17. Technically, Saint Patrick is not even a saint, as the Roman Catholic Church never canonized him. Patrick was not even Irish. He was a Roman-Britain born to a wealthy family.

Patrick lived in the fifth century, a time of rapid change and transition. In many ways, we might say that those times of turbulence and uncertainty were not unlike our own. The Roman Empire was beginning to break up, and Europe was about to enter the Dark Ages. Rome fell to barbarian invaders in 410. Within ten years of

that time, the Roman forces began to leave Britain to defend positions back home. Life, once so orderly and predictable under Roman domination, now became chaotic and uncertain. When Patrick was roughly 16 years old he was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland on a ship where he was sold into slavery. He spent the next six years in forced labor as a shepherd for cattle and sheep.

Patrick had been a rebellious teenager who came from a Christian family. His grandfather was a pastor, and his father was a deacon. However, during his extended periods of isolation in captivity watching his master's flocks and without any human contact, Patrick began praying and was eventually born again and began a relationship with Jesus Christ. In his early twenties, God spoke to Patrick in a dream, telling him to flee from his master for a ship that was waiting for him. Amazingly, Patrick made the 200-mile journey on foot without being caught to find a ship setting sail for his home, just as God had promised.

Upon returning home, Patrick enrolled in seminary and was eventually commissioned as a minister. Some years later God spoke to Patrick in a dream, commanding him to return to Ireland to preach the gospel and plant churches for the pagans who lived there. The Roman Catholic Church had given up on converting the "barbarians" of Ireland declaring that they were beyond hope. The Celtic peoples, of whom the Irish were part, were an illiterate bunch of drunk, fighting, perverted pagans. They numbered anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000, they had no city centers or national government and were spread out among nearly 150 warring clans.

In faith, the forty-something-year-old Patrick sold all his possessions, including the land he had inherited from his father, to fund his missionary journey to Ireland. He worked as an itinerant preacher and paid large sums of money to various tribal chiefs to ensure he could travel safely through their lands and preach the gospel. His strategy was unique, and he functioned like a missionary trying to relate to the Irish people and communicate the gospel in their culture

by using things such as three-leaf clovers to explain the gospel. When entering a pagan clan, Patrick would try to first convert the tribal leaders and other people of influence. He would then pray for the sick, cast demons out of the possessed, preach the Bible, and use both musical and visual arts to compel people to put their faith in Jesus. If enough converts were present he would build a simple church that did not resemble ornate Roman architecture, he would then hand over the church to a convert he had trained to be the pastor so that he could move on to repeat the process with another clan. Patrick gave his life to the people who had enslaved him until he died at 77 years of age. He had seen untold thousands of people convert, between 30-40 of the 150 tribes had become substantially Christian. He had trained 1000 pastors, planted 700 churches, and was the first noted person in history to take a strong public stand against slavery.<sup>20</sup>

Patrick stands as an example of an individual whose past experiences shaped his future. Undoubtedly, Patrick replayed in his mind the faithfulness of God over the years while he had been in slavery. That memory factored into his faith that God stood securely in his future; this truth allowed Patrick to bravely go back to the land where he had once been a slave and share the love of Jesus. As a result, an entire nation had been transformed by the power of Christ.

# 4

## SEEK

*"More important than the quest for certainty is the quest for clarity."*

*Francois Gautlier*

### **SEEK - GOD**

There are times that we long to know what God would have us to do in certain situations, and yet He seems so silent. Why would God make it so difficult to know what we should do? Is He toying with us? Are we some kind of divine social experiment, or is the silence part of His plan?

Perhaps you have spent a lot of time in prayer, maybe you've even fasted, and yet... silence. Look at this verse from the book of Proverbs, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter."<sup>1</sup> God conceals? But why? It's not because God doesn't want you to know His will for your life. It's because God wants something far more important for you than simply knowing His will. He wants you to know Him. God wants to reveal Himself to you, and the moment you step toward Him and seek Him... He will reveal Himself to you. He wants to be found.

There is a cosmic game of hide-and-seek going on. Tommy Tenney in his book, *The God Catchers*, tells about playing hide and seek with his young daughter. When it would be his turn to hide he couldn't make it too hard on his daughter or she would give up, and he couldn't make it too easy or the excitement would be lost. So, when Tommy would go to hide, he would leave his foot sticking out just enough so that she could find him. That's what God is like, He will

pull back just enough so that you must seek Him, but when you seek, He promises that you can find Him. “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

He wants you to seek Him and when you do He will reveal the depths of His heart, His character, His glory, and His nature in ways you couldn’t have even imagined. God is dynamic and there is always more to discover about Him. Even if you have walked with Him and have known Him for seventy years, you have yet to experience the depths of His majesty and glory.

As a loving parent, God always makes sure those who take the time to look can find Him. Simply put, those who earnestly seek God will find Him.

At times in our lives, God seems so close to us; our prayer life is soaring, our devotions are rich and meaningful, worshiping God comes as easily as breathing. Then there are times in our life when God seems distant; you haven’t heard His voice in forever, and you feel like you are just going through the motions.

It is not as though God doesn’t want you to find Him or to discover His will for your life; but He does want you to search. If He put His plan for you out in plain view He knows you would not develop the spiritual muscles that He is trying to develop in you.

Seeking God’s will isn’t the main objective; He is the main objective. He wants you to discover Him most of all. God declares, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.”<sup>3</sup>

“This isn’t about you achieving your best life now. He is your best life. God doesn’t want to give you the guide for your life. He wants to be your Guide. The scariest possibility for your life isn’t getting God’s will wrong. It’s getting God’s will right but barely coming to know God in the process. God is the ultimate goal, He is the ultimate prize.

You may want to find the love of your life, but in the process, you could lose your first love - God. You may find the perfect job but then begin to worship it rather than God.”<sup>4</sup>

I know you want some certainty in your life and I’m sure you want to know God’s will, but certainty without God is a wasted life. God wants you to know Him so desperately that He will conceal the matter so that you will seek Him.

### ***SEEK - GOD’S KINGDOM***

There is a conversation that my wife and I have from time to time about how easily I get bent out of shape over the littlest things. I am wired in such a way that when something stressful, painful, or frustrating comes along a switch is flipped and I begin to worry and make life miserable for my family because I stew over it. The smallest set back has the potential to push me to extremes. For example, one fine summer afternoon I was attempting to change the doorknob on the front door of our home. What should have been a simple fix was quickly turning into a headache for me. The parts were not fitting as they should have, the door was wide open letting the cold air out, and flies were barging into our home; I was becoming increasingly frustrated. In my frustration, I started banging on the threshold with my screwdriver and I started saying words that I would never say in public, words like: “darn,” and “gosh,” and “fiddlesticks,” and “ding dang diddly dang.” At just that moment I looked up to see my neighbors walking by, seeing me throw my little tantrum. I was busted. I waved and smiled as if to say, “Hi, I’m the friendly pastor who lives next door.” I look back on that event and think about how immature my reaction was to a small setback.

Frustration, pain, and uncertainty are closely related. In uncertain times we find ourselves overly focused on self. I worry about my family, my money, my health, my time, my future. The result of so much self-focus is a tendency to overlook what God is doing in the moment.

The Bible constantly reminds us that God is not inactive; He is very active. But if we make the mistake of being self-absorbed, we run the risk of missing out on what God is doing. You might even miss out on the grace that God wants to extend to you in the middle of uncertainty.

When Jesus spoke the words that we are about to read over two-thousand years ago, He was speaking to a group of people that lived in very uncertain times. The Jews that Jesus was speaking to had to endure the occupation of their land by the Romans. Their independence was gone, their taxes were high, and they were treated unfairly. The Roman Empire was often callous and brutal in the treatment of its Jewish subjects, they were an oppressed people. In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus looks out on those listening to Him and He says very casually, “Don’t worry.” Jesus just throws out a platitude and those who are listening are thinking, “Don’t worry? Has Jesus not seen what is going on? That’s the best advice He’s got?”

### ***DON'T WORRY?***

If you were to call up a friend and tell them about some stressful trial you are going through and they stop you before you finish your story and say, “Don’t worry about that,” you would probably get a little honked off. You would be thinking, “Wait a minute, you haven’t heard my whole story yet. What I’m going through is really bad. If you would just listen to me you would empathize and tell me just how bad this situation is and agree that I have the right to be mad and frustrated. How about a little empathy here!” When someone unsympathetically says to me, “Stop worrying. Grow up. Get over it. Man up.” I think, “What kind of friend are you?” I want some understanding. I want someone to agree with me and justify my anger. Jesus simply says to this group of people, “Don’t worry.” And that is His advice to each one of us.

If you were to call up the Lord and begin to spill your story to Him, He would hear your story and say, “I know you are worried about

keeping your job and paying the rent. I know you are worried about your marriage falling apart. I know you're anxious about your 401k. I know you are stressed out about the report the doctor gave you... but don't worry." And we would think, "Don't worry! What kind of God are you? That might be nice on a greeting card, but that doesn't translate in my real life." In the book of Matthew, Jesus says, "Let's make a trade, you give me your worry and I will give you something else." The Lord offers you a fantastic exchange amid your uncertainty.

He says, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on."<sup>5</sup> For most of us, we don't wake up in the morning worrying about what we are going to eat or what we are going to wear. You might stress out over what restaurant to eat at, or you could stew over having "nothing to wear" while you look at a full closet. But you don't worry about literally having nothing to eat and literally having no clothes.

We live in a fortunate society where these things come to us pretty easily, but that doesn't mean that we don't have worries. We worry over things like, "How am I going to pay the rent, will I be able to keep my job, can we afford our children's books for school?" Then there are more secondary kinds of worry, "Will I get asked out by that boy? Will I get a raise? Will I be accepted into that college? How do I keep my hairline from receding?" No matter what the worry is, it will begin to consume our emotions; and when Jesus is speaking about worry, He is talking about exactly that, consumption.

So, Jesus looks out over His crowd of listeners and He says, "Don't worry about the essentials that you need to have, or about those nonessentials that you don't have to have anyway." "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"<sup>6</sup> Imagine taking all of the stuff that you spend your time worrying about and packing them into a suitcase. If you were to back away from that suitcase and look at it from down the block, it would appear smaller than you had thought. And if you were to look at it from a birds-eye view



from space you would have to admit that life is far more than the stack of things you worry about. Why then do we commit so much time, energy, and emotion worrying about the “stuff” of life? We have allowed “things” to consume our lives.

Jesus goes on, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them”<sup>7</sup> Birds don’t have 401k’s, or a checking account, but God makes sure the little birdies have plenty to eat from day-to-day. God has created a system where all the creatures, big and small, have food to eat and places to sleep. Jesus is inferring that we begin to think about who it is that has been sustaining you and me. Who is it that has gotten you to where you are today? Too often people take credit for where they are and what they have, they assume they are a self-made man or woman. Have you ever noticed that when things are going good we tend to think that we provided the good things? When things go bad we look to God and blame Him for the bad stuff, or we beg Him to bail us out. Jesus is pointing to the fact that God has provided all of it, even the smallest of things. Our natural tendency is to wonder how God is going to take care of us. But God wants us to focus on who is going to take care of us.

Jesus said about the birds, “Are you not of more value than they?”<sup>8</sup> If God is going to go through the trouble of taking care of animals, don’t you suppose He is going to make sure to take care of you? God is saying, “I’ve been here the whole time, but you had it so good for so long that you lost sight of who is behind all of this. Just as I’ve taken care of you in the past, I will take care of you in the future. What are you worried about?” You would say, “I’m worried because things have changed and I can’t control the change.” Our Heavenly Father says, “Bingo! Now you’ve got it. You are not in control. Trust Me. You are not in charge, I am. Even though you may not know how it is going to work out I’ve got it under control you don’t need to worry.”

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”<sup>9</sup> Have you ever realized that worrying doesn’t get you

anywhere? If not, I'd suggest you run a little experiment and set aside two hours a day to just worry. You can pick any time of day; just make sure that you are consistent in your worry. You know what you will have at the end of the week? The result of your worry will be a family and coworkers that do not want to be around you, sleepless nights, headaches, and very likely some nasty heartburn. You get nothing good for your worry. Leo Buscalia said, "Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy." Someone else has said, "Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere."

Jesus said to His listeners that day, "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."<sup>10</sup>

Think about all the emotion and time that we focus on our image. I can't even begin to calculate how much of my time has been spent worrying about how I look to others; a majority of that time was consumed during my years in school. Maybe you can identify with that. I worried about having the right shoes, jeans, shirts, hairstyle, etc. Have you ever seen a lily, or taken a good look at any of the other ten thousand or more species of flowers? On your best day, and with all the money in the world, you can't compete with God and His ability to create a beautiful image. I've seen some great paintings, but all of them pale to the creative ability of our God. It's not bad to do your best with your image, but don't worry and stress about it. Your Heavenly Father has the ability to take care of your image inside and out. If you are going to spend energy focusing on something, God has better things to put in front of you, which Jesus will address in a moment.

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the

Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”<sup>11</sup>

When Jesus refers to “Gentiles” seeking after all these things, He is referring to those who don’t know who God is. Up to this point in history, it was the Jews who knew the one true God. Jesus is saying that those who don’t know God spend their time worrying about all this stuff. I would venture to say that if we were to make a list of the things that we worry about the most, and if you were to hold it up against the list of a person who doesn’t have faith in God, those lists wouldn’t look all that different. We end up worrying about stuff that those who don’t even believe in God spend their time worrying about. That is why Jesus can say to those who do know the one true God, “Don’t worry.” You don’t need to worry because you know the One who feeds you, clothes you, and loves you.

### ***WORRY ABOUT THIS***

Now Jesus puts a little spin on worry. He says, “You want something to pursue, something to seek, something to be concerned about, something to spend your energy on? Try this on for size.” “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”<sup>12</sup> At the top of your list of concerns should be God’s kingdom and His righteousness; when that is the case, all the stuff you had been worrying about will be given to you.

God wants you to take all that time and energy that focuses on you; your uncertainty, your money, your health, your family, your job, your time, and redirect it. You need to begin to ask yourself, “How can I begin to further God’s kingdom and not mine.” To seek the kingdom of God means to seek His agenda. You begin to ask God what He is worried about.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus says, “Seek God. Seek His righteousness.” There is a grace and peace that begins to settle in for

the person facing uncertainty when they step back, take a breath, and decide to seek God's kingdom first, and trust Him to supply the rest. In the moment of uncertainty, the Lord asks that you would begin to seek what He is up to.

Do you know what God is consumed with? He is passionately pursuing people; bringing them into His kingdom. The greatest tragedy for a Christian is to curl up in a corner, consumed by their uncertainty, and worry while the world around them passes away into a Christ-less eternity. So Jesus says, "I will take care of your worries and uncertainties if you will take care of seeking Me and My kingdom."

What if you and I were the kind of Christians that handled the stress of everyday life, or the uncertainty that is facing us, with a calm certainty that God will take care of us? I believe that is the kind of example that would speak loudly and clearly to a world in need. The world sees enough people who are self-consumed, shallow, and bent out of shape when they don't get their way. The world has enough people living in fear of tomorrow and not enough people living out their faith in the King.

In the midst of uncertainty – seek. You seek what God wants, not in spite of, but through your uncertainty and pain. In uncertain times God isn't asleep or inactive, He is more active than ever. You can't afford to bury yourself under your concerns. This doesn't mean that you are not honest with your own fears and worries, but it does mean that you won't allow those things to define you or make you ineffective.

The most amazing stories that I've ever heard have come from people who have not shrunk back in uncertain times. The amazing stories of God's kingdom advancing come from people who have prayed, "I don't know how all of this is going to turn out; but God, in the middle of this uncertainty if there is something that You want to use for Your kingdom and glory... You go right on ahead." In

that moment of surrender, those individuals found the courage and motivation to see first the kingdom of God before their own.

The Bible is filled with accounts of people who have faced uncertainty. Their experiences were not only for their benefit but also for those who would come after them and be inspired by their life of submission to God. I'm confident that your circumstances are no different. Could it be that the uncertainty you face is not simply about you? Could it be that God is telling a larger story about His glory and His kingdom through your life? I believe your life will be a source of encouragement to those that see you put God's kingdom first.

## SEEK : POLYCARP

Polycarp was a second-century disciple of the Apostle John. As a young man living in Smyrna, Polycarp was able to learn from the Apostle John for a short time. Polycarp's education and devotion to the Lord allowed him to later become the Bishop of Smyrna.

As Polycarp grew older things in Smyrna got increasingly rough for Christians. Smyrna was a center of emperor worship. Sometime between 81 and 96 AD, emperor worship became mandatory for every Roman citizen on threat of death. Once a year, every citizen had to burn incense on the altar to Caesar and say, "Caesar is Lord." Because of their commitment to Jesus, the believers in Smyrna couldn't do it. Perhaps nowhere in the Roman world at that time was life more dangerous for a Christian than in that city.

One day, during a bloody martyrdom when wild animals in the arena were tearing apart Christians, the crowd became so crazy that they demanded more blood and cried, "Down with the Christians; find Polycarp." Since Polycarp was a leader and a holy man, he was

a prime target. By this time Polycarp was now in his eighties.

Polycarp was calm but others persuaded him to leave the city and hide at a nearby farm. For three days he hid and spent his time praying for the Church. As the search for him closed in, he moved to another farm, but the officials discovered he was there by torturing two boys. As the officials entered the house, all Polycarp asked of them was that they give him an hour to pray. Well, he spent two hours praying for everyone he had ever known and for the Church throughout the world. His captors started to wonder why they were arresting this holy, eighty-six-year-old bishop.

But that didn't stop them from taking him into the arena on the Sabbath. As he entered the arena, the crowds let out a roar like the lions they cheered. The proconsul begged the eighty-six-year-old bishop to give in because of his age. When he asked Polycarp to swear by Caesar to save himself, Polycarp answered, "If you imagine that I will swear by Caesar, you do not know who I am. Let me tell you plainly, I am a Christian."

The proconsul urged Polycarp to renounce Christ, but Polycarp said, "Eighty-six years I have served him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

The proconsul threatened him and said he would burn him alive, but Polycarp said, "You threaten fire that burns for a season, but you're ignorant of the fire that burns forever for the ungodly." That did it, the officials grabbed Polycarp and they went to nail him to the stake, but Polycarp said, "Leave me as I am. God has granted me the grace to endure the fire." So, they tied him to the stake to be burned and he prayed out loud.

The fire was lit as Polycarp said Amen, and then the eyewitnesses said they saw a miracle. It may be legend, it may be true, but the eyewitnesses say that the fire burst up in an arch around Polycarp, the flames surrounded him like sails, and instead of being burned he

seemed to glow like bread baking, or gold being melted in a furnace. When the captors saw he wasn't being burned, they took a dagger and plunged it into his chest. The blood that flowed put the fire out.

Polycarp died as one of many faithful martyrs who put the kingdom of God before their own desires. Polycarp's concern was not for himself but for his witness of Christ and His kingdom.

# 5

## FOLLOW

*“When you come to a fork in the road, take it!”*

*Yogi Berra*

For many people, uncertainty tends to lead to paralysis in their lives. Since they don't know what life is going to bring, they tend to just sit there and do nothing. By doing nothing they think they are safe, but that is not the truth.

Too many of us suffer from “paralysis of analysis.” We spend all our time planning, watching and waiting for the conditions to become just right and we never quite get around to executing our plans. If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done. How many times in your life have you told yourself that you would get around to doing something as soon as your circumstances change?

There is an animal known as an “African impala,” it is similar to a deer. The African impala has the ability to leap nearly 10 feet high in the air. He can also leap over 30 feet in distance.<sup>1</sup> I have heard that even though they can leap high and far they can be kept in a zoo by a solid wall that is only a few feet high; because the impala will never jump over a wall if they are unable to see where their feet will land on the other side.

The same is true for many of us. We are captive to our fears and uncertainty, unwilling to take the leap of faith because we don't know where we are going to land. But if you know how things are going to turn out, then it is not called faith is it?



Faith is trusting God when we don't know the outcome. The Bible tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. There will be times when you simply act on what faith has been given to you and jump. Faith comes from God and it is like a muscle, it needs to be exercised to be strengthened.

In times of uncertainty, it is difficult to place your faith in God. When we are happy, healthy, and have money in our bank account, it is so easy to say, "God is good." When things begin to go south we start wondering where God went and all of the sudden God isn't all that good anymore.

It is hard to follow God in uncertain times because He seems to be so quiet and distant. You pray to God with earnestness and, at the end of the prayer, you are wondering how soon He will answer you. Nothing happens, so you pray harder... and still nothing. Meanwhile, your circumstances get more and more uncertain. What do you do during that very quiet, very trying time? How do you follow God in times of uncertainty?

In chapter two we learned that when we find ourselves in uncertain times we need to pray. We need to **pray** not just some basic "help me, bless me, save me God" kind of prayer. We need to pray the kind of prayer where we slow down, get alone with God, and wrestle with our fears and desires. In chapter three we discovered that during times of uncertainty we must **remember** God's past faithfulness. God's past faithfulness foreshadows His faithfulness in our future. We have also seen that when uncertainty looms we have to **seek** the Lord and His kingdom. If we seek His kingdom first, He has promised that He will take care of those things that tend to overwhelm and worry us.

### ***FOLLOWING THE WRONG GOD***

In uncertain times not only do we pray, remember, and seek; we must then follow. This is one of those concepts that is easy to talk about, but so much harder to do because following God in the good times

is simple, but to follow Him in the bad times is challenging. I've seen people completely turn away from God when their life becomes painful. On the flip side, I've seen people lean more deeply on Him in the middle of their pain. It seems to me that when people follow Him when times are tough, that is when He gets the most glory and they receive the biggest blessing.

We all tend to lean toward idolatry. That is, we tend to put our faith in things that have been created rather than in the Creator of all things. People will put their faith and trust in many things outside of God. They will trust in their bank account, health, looks, their reputation, education, etc. We all wrestle with those things that compete with God in our lives. When we put something else above God, we are putting an idol in place of Him. The reason idols are so tempting is that they bring some satisfaction for a season, but the shelf life of an idol is temporary.

Many times, when uncertainty enters our lives it means that those things that we have propped ourselves up with have been kicked out from under us and life becomes precarious. When the bank account you have relied upon for security is depleted, you feel chaos rushing into your life. When the person that was your "everything" takes off, it feels as though your world is crumbling. When your health deteriorates the despair is almost overwhelming. But it is during those times that if you will turn and follow God, then He will use the trial as a means to transform you and bring glory to Himself.

To "follow after God" is not a simple cliché, it is a spiritual principle that has the potential to alter your life. To follow after God sets your feet in a new direction; it moves you from hopelessness and despair to hope and healing.

## **JOSEPH**

We find this principle at work in the life of Joseph as seen in the book of Genesis. Joseph's father, Jacob, had a couple of wives and one wife

was his favorite. The children of his favorite wife were his favorites as well, and Joseph was the favorite child of all the favorites. Joseph was given a special coat by his dad. It was multi-colored and I imagine it must have been pretty “fly” back in the day. Joseph’s brothers were understandably jealous, as anyone would be if their sibling received special treatment.

One day, Joseph’s dad sent him to go check on his brothers who were out working in the fields; and that is where we pick up on the account. “They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.”<sup>2</sup> You may have had some run-ins with your brother or sister but I doubt you have ever come to the point where they have made plans to actually kill you.

“They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.”<sup>3</sup>

### *IN THE PITS*

They throw Joseph in the pit; which, by the way, is where the phrase “the pits” comes from. So As he is in the pits his brothers have a little argument over selling Joseph to make a buck or two, or just killing him. The “sell him” plot wins out and they pawn him off to some Ishmaelites passing through on their way to Egypt. The brothers strip off Joseph’s robe, douse it in blood and take it back to their father to convince him a lion killed Joseph. Don’t you wish you could be part of such a loving family?

Seventeen-year-old Joseph is now a slave. Moments ago, he was from a wealthy family and had a bright future in front of him. Life was great and now his hands and feet are bound, marching across the hot sand to Egypt. The Bible tells us he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s army. “Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard,

an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph”<sup>4</sup>

Whoa wait a minute, back the truck up, “The Lord was with Joseph?” That is odd. When your brothers want to kill you, you are taken from your home, sold into slavery, that is when we think that God has completely abandoned us. Here is a guy who has gone from being a success to a slave overnight and the Bible says the Lord was with him. If you were Joseph wouldn’t you have questioned a statement like that?

It is easy to see God when things are good, but when things go sideways it is much more difficult. Just ask the parents whose lifeless infant is lying in their arms. Stand with the pastor as he breaks the news to the newly married woman that there was an accident and she is now a widow. Sit with the man who has just discovered his wife’s adultery. Look into the eyes of the young adult who has just heard the doctor say, “bone cancer.” Tragedy strikes, uncertainty is thick in the air and we think, “The Lord is with me? You’re kidding. God is nowhere to be found; and if He is around, He is punishing me!”

“The Lord was with Joseph.” In spite of the way things look, in spite of what has happened, God was with him. “His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.”<sup>5</sup> It appears that things are taking a turn for the better for Joseph, but more trouble is looming.

“Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness

and sin against God?”<sup>6</sup>

To which many people in our culture would look at that last statement and say to Joseph, “Excuse me, Joseph, do you mean the God that has allowed you to be taken from your father and sold into slavery? Do you mean the God that is allowing you to be tempted and put in this terrible predicament? You are going to say ‘no’ to this woman? Don’t you think God owes you something?” Many people would think that you don’t need to be faithful to God because He has not been faithful to you; yet, Joseph remains faithful in spite of the circumstances.

I’ve had people say to me something like this, “Well if I’m living for God doesn’t that mean that He will bless me?” If they are really spiritual they might even quote the Bible, “The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.”<sup>7</sup> or, “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!”<sup>8</sup> I had a conversation in a coffee shop with an individual who said, “Doesn’t God want me to be happy? Doesn’t He want me to have joy?” I explained that “blessing” does not always mean, ease of circumstances or happiness. There are times God will bless us with easy circumstances but being blessed by the Lord is more than that. It is about experiencing Him in the midst of life, no matter what we are facing, and it is even possible to have the joy of the Lord right in the middle of very painful moments. Very few people quote this promise from Jesus, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”<sup>9</sup>

Life just isn’t as predictable as we tell ourselves. Let’s not be mistaken, the scriptures don’t try to convince us otherwise. God’s Word is realistic about the twists and turns of life.

Potiphar’s wife continues to pursue Joseph and one day she catches him alone in the house, “She caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.”<sup>10</sup> Why would God let this happen to Joseph? Shouldn’t

God swoop in and remove Potiphar's wife from the picture? For that matter, couldn't God have caused Joseph's brothers not to throw him in a well and sell him into slavery? Hasn't Joseph been through enough already? Doesn't God owe him? Doesn't God owe you?

## *IN THE PRISON*

Look how God "rewards" Joseph: Potiphar's wife lies and says Joseph tried to rape her but she got away "As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison"<sup>11</sup> What are you doing God? This kid just did a noble thing, he did the right thing, and his reward is prison? Joseph cannot seem to catch any breaks.

There is a lesson to be learned here, a principle to apply to our lives. When uncertain about what path to take, do the right thing. I remember hearing a piece of advice by a godly person that has stuck with me, they said, "When you don't know what you need to do next, do the last thing God asked you to do." Don't stop doing what God has called you to do just because you are uncertain. Joseph didn't stop and have a theological debate with God when facing these trials; he was simply going to do the right thing with the hand he was dealt. As Dr. Charles Stanley says, "Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him."

Again, the Bible tells us that God was with Joseph. God was there in the pit, he was there in Potiphar's home, now God is with Joseph in prison. "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."<sup>12</sup> We might read the words, "steadfast love" and think, "Wouldn't it be loving to have bailed out Joseph long ago?" At this point, I would be complaining to God and telling Him, "I don't deserve any of this. I didn't choose to be a slave; I did the right thing and ended up getting the short end of the stick, and now I'm buddies with a prison warden. This isn't fair. I don't know why I follow you at all if this is what I get

for it!” For so many of us God is good as long as things are good; but when things are bad, God is not all that great.

While in prison Joseph’s buddy the warden puts him in charge. Meanwhile, in the palace, Pharaoh gets honked off at his cupbearer and baker and throws them in prison. The cupbearer and baker have dreams and they come to Joseph and Joseph says, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”<sup>13</sup> Joseph continues to recognize and honor God even while in prison. Joseph interprets the dream and gives the cupbearer the good news that he will be getting out of prison and returning to his day job. Joseph begins thinking strategically as you or I would do. This is what he tells the cupbearer, “Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”<sup>14</sup>

It looks like the plan is finally coming together. Time goes by and the cupbearer is restored to his old position, but he didn’t remember Joseph. Do you ever feel forgotten by God; like you were down in the pits and everyone else was soaring high? Maybe for a moment you saw a glimmer of hope, this is your time, your moment to shine, God is going to finally come through for you! But it doesn’t work out, and you feel forgotten.

Joseph is now twenty-eight years old. If you recall, all this began when he was seventeen; for years God had been silent. No miracles, no intervention and all sorts of uncertainty. Over and over in the life of Joseph we read that God was with him. The truth is, God may not have been clearly seen, but He was not inactive. God was working behind the scenes of uncertainty.

God has promised you that He will never leave you or forsake you.<sup>15</sup> Do you know why that verse is in the Bible? It is because God knew that there would be times you and I would look around and think

that He has abandoned us. God knew there would be times you would look around and believe that, because He was silent, He was absent. There will be times in your life when you will feel forgotten by God, but do not despair because He is with you.

Two years pass by and Joseph is now thirty years old when Pharaoh has his own dream that can't be interpreted. At this moment the cupbearer does a "face palm," lets out a Homer Simpson, "d'oh!" and finally remembers to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph is now standing in front of Pharaoh and is asked to interpret his dream. Joseph says, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."<sup>16</sup> Joseph continues to honor this God that has seemingly been silent in all of his horrible circumstances.

### *IN THE PALACE*

Joseph interprets the dream and warns of an impending famine. Pharaoh responds this way, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command."<sup>17</sup> Joseph went from inmate to in charge in a moment. If you are keeping track, Joseph has gone from the pit to Potiphar, to prison, to Pharaoh, and then to the palace. Joseph is now in an amazing position that he could not have scripted if he had tried. Only God could do something like this; He had been at work the whole time perfectly positioning Joseph in the middle of his uncertainty and pain. God may have been silent, but He was not still.

Joseph came up with a plan to save Egypt and prosper Pharaoh that at the end of fourteen years Pharaoh owned everything. Not only did Pharaoh end up with more land and money but lives were spared because of Joseph. The famine that struck the land was devastating, but Joseph had arranged for grain to be stored and used during the drought. Nations were rocked by uncertainty, people were starving and frightened about their future, but once again God had a plan, a plan that leveraged one man's pain to save thousands of lives.



The famine is what brought Joseph's brothers to Egypt and eventually, Joseph revealed himself to them and said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life... so it was not you who set me here, but God."<sup>18</sup> Joseph's entire family moved to Egypt and was spared from the famine.

Joseph's statement to his brothers reveals something that many people fail to see; he saw God in the middle of the uncertainty. Joseph clearly saw that God did this to accomplish something great. "God sent me here. God had all of this planned. I was uncertain, but He wasn't."

When Joseph's father died, his brothers were afraid that Joseph would seek out vengeance, but Joseph looked at his brothers in that moment and said something so profound. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."<sup>19</sup> Joseph had not been a victim of circumstances, he had been a part of a much larger story that God wanted to have played out.

How do you follow God in the midst of uncertainty? Like Joseph, you remain confident that God is with you. To follow God you live and respond like a person who is confident that God is with you even in the darkest moments. You simply do the next right thing; be obedient and leave the consequences to God. You live as a man or woman who has a certainty that God may be silent, but He is not stagnant.

God is with you; right now, in this moment, He is with you. God has not left you or abandoned you. In time you will look back and you will see the hand of God. What your spouse meant for evil, what your boss meant for evil, what your friends meant for evil, what that organization meant for evil, or whatever comes at you, in time you will look back and see that you were not a victim. You are a child of God and you are part of a larger story to bring God glory. Your task is to get up each day and live, while uncertain about your

circumstances, knowing that God is with you. Your job is to follow Him and do the next right thing. If you will live confident that God is with you it will reframe the way you view your circumstance.

## **CHOICES**

So, we are to follow God, but what do we do when we are not sure of the choice that God would have us to make? I like to put the choices into two categories, I refer to them as “right and wrong choices” and “right and left choices.”

“Right and wrong choices” are moral dilemmas where one choice leads to righteousness and the other leads to sin. Frankly, it’s pretty easy to know God’s will because He has revealed it in His Word. We may need to pray and ask God to help us hold fast to righteousness in these decisions, but we sure don’t need to ask Him to reveal His will as He has already shared His thoughts on the matter in the Bible. Sometimes, like Joseph, the choice you have to make is the narrow way, the road less traveled.

“Right and left choices” are decisions in our lives where we have to choose among morally neutral options. Things like, which outfit should I choose, or where should I go to college? Which job should I choose, or which restaurant should we go to? In those cases I don’t think that God is overly concerned with you “getting it right,” and if you choose Chili’s over Applebee’s I don’t believe you cause a cosmic rift in the universe.

Far too often, Christians are looking for some kind of insider information so we can get a guaranteed deal or we can blame God if things don’t work out. But the truth is, faith in God is more important than faith in favorable outcomes.

I’m obviously not saying that we shouldn’t pray and ask for God’s direction, but we also have to avoid the position that many believers put themselves in where they just won’t decide until they get some

kind of sign from God. Sometimes, even then, they still won't act until they get another.

I'm convinced that if we really love God and are following after Him, in most of these "right and left" choices we need to simply make a decision and follow through with what we want to do. I know that sounds pretty radical, but I think there is adequate scriptural support for it.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."<sup>20</sup> This verse is not saying, as some people try to use it, that you can just ask God for anything you want and He'll give it to you. Instead, it says that if you delight in God, He'll put His desires in your heart. And when that happens, you just need to make a decision based on those desires and follow through with it. Even though we may not understand God and His ways, that is not an excuse for idleness.

Our God is large and in charge; uncertainty does not take Him by surprise, it does not shake His world. This is the God that takes chaos and puts it in order. In times of uncertainty, God is still certain; and we can lean on His truth and follow His leadership.

If ever there was someone to put your faith in and follow, He is the one. When uncertainty strikes; pray, remember, seek, and follow. Live as one who is confident that God is with you. What would a man or woman in your circumstance do if they were absolutely confident that God was with them? You do that, and you will see the faithfulness of your Heavenly Father.

# FOLLOW : DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who lived from 1906 to 1945. He was a brilliant and bold Christian man who was a leader in the protestant movement that arose in opposition to the Nazi government. It was Bonhoeffer's virtually lone voice that called for the Christian Church in Germany to stand up against Hitler's persecution of the Jewish people. Bonhoeffer stands as an example of someone willing to follow God down a narrow difficult path and do the right thing in the face of opposition.

In early 1939 Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced a dilemma; he learned that he potentially would be drafted into military service. He couldn't swear an oath to Hitler and fight in a war that he was opposed to. Adding to this predicament was the fact that refusing to fight was a capital offense and refusing to enter the Nazi military would cause problems for the church movement he was a part of; although, not joining would be frowned upon by a majority of German churchgoers.

Faced with uncertainty about what to do Bonhoeffer prayed and approached trusted friends to ask advice. Unbeknownst to him, the wheels had been turning in American academia and he was invited to the states to teach at the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Still unsure of what exactly he should do, Bonhoeffer decided to accept the invitation and boarded a boat for America.

In America, Bonhoeffer was receiving the royal treatment from his hosts and was safe from the turmoil and danger of Hitler and the Nazis; however, he could not escape the feeling that he was out of the will of God. His mind raced, he was unsettled. How could he flee Germany while his Christian brothers and sisters faced danger? How could he live at ease and escape tribulation while Jews were being persecuted? Within days of arriving in America he wrote in his journal, "It is almost unbearable... Today God's Word says, 'I am coming soon' (Rev. 3.11). There is no time to lose, and here I am

wasting days, perhaps weeks. In any case, it seems like that at the moment. Then I say to myself again, 'It is cowardice and weakness to run away here now.' Will I ever be able to do any really significant work here? ... I cannot stay outside [Germany] by myself. That is quite clear. My whole life is still over there."<sup>21</sup>

He prayed for more guidance, he wrote, "God, grant me in the next few weeks clarity about my future and keep me in the communion of prayer with the brethren." The next day, after having spent less than two weeks in America, he decided to tell his academic hosts that he was leaving for Germany. That evening, alone in his room he wrote, "It is remarkable how I am never quite clear about the motives for any of my decisions. Is that a sign of confusion, of inner dishonesty, or is it a sign that we are guided without our knowing, or is it both?"

Bonhoeffer caught the last ship out of America before the start of the war. While on the ship bound for Germany he wrote, "Since I have been on the ship my inner uncertainty about the future has ceased."<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer's decision to leave would lead him to a torturous Nazi prison and then to a hangman's noose on April 9, 1945; just a month later the war was over. Bonhoeffer's theological works, and the example of his brave life, have been influential upon modern Christianity; influencing such men as Martin Luther King Jr. and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.<sup>23</sup>

# 6

## RISK

*“A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.”*

*William G.T. Shedd*

When we face uncertainty, our natural tendency is to withdraw and try to protect ourselves from perceived harm; but in fact, many times we should do the opposite. Nearly every biblical example that I could point you to has the main character embracing the uncertain outcome by faith and stepping into a grander story.

To avoid the uncertainty is to miss out on the adventure. Faith itself is filled with uncertainty. Here is how God’s Word defines faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>1</sup> Isn’t that what fills you with apprehension, the fact that you can’t clearly see the outcome? And yet we hope for a favorable result and we have a conviction that even though we can’t see the outcome, God has the end in mind.

You may need to take a risk; perhaps you need to be generous with your time, to utilize your talents, or leverage your treasure for the glory of God. There comes a time when you finally need to take the risk and step out in faith. This doesn’t mean if you step out in faith and take a risk that everything will be perfect. You can pray, seek wise counsel, apply every ounce of faith you have, and fall flat on your face. Does this mean that you heard from God wrong? Does it mean you didn’t have enough faith? Does it mean that God is punishing you for some misstep?

Your current troubles may or may not be proof that you did anything wrong by the choice you made. If the choice was sinful, obviously that was not the right decision, but if the choice was neutral, your current troubles may not be because you did anything wrong.

That's a bitter pill to swallow when you're in the middle of a mess and you thought you did the will of God. The Bible is filled with individuals who may have felt like failures even while accomplishing the will of God. Men and women like: Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Peter, and the list could go on. Every one of them must have had moments when they questioned themselves and wondered, "What have I done? What have I gotten myself into? Did I mishear the Lord?"

Hebrews chapter 11 is a list full of men and women who embraced the uncertain life even when things were not working out the way they may have wanted. The list is full of accounts of murder, natural catastrophe, family treachery, physical weakness, failed dreams, missed opportunities, sibling rivalry, etc. The common denominator with all of these individuals and their stories is... faith. The kind of faith that hopes while veiled in uncertainty. The kind of faith that risks because of hope and conviction.

## ***A B R A H A M***

Take Abraham for example. The Bible explains that Abraham obeyed God's call at huge personal expense. He left his homeland and his family to go in the direction that God commanded. Abraham was obedient even when it would be physically painful; circumcision would have to be an ultimate act of faith and obedience for an adult male! The account of Abraham portrays that obeying God doesn't always turn out the way we would script it.

When we first meet Abraham he is living in a place called Ur, which is not far from the Persian Gulf. Ur was a world-class city, leading in mathematics, astronomy, and commerce. Ur would have received an

award for top ten best places to live in the Middle East. Abraham was a prosperous, middle-aged man; he and his wife, Sarah, were living the dream and had no reason to complain.

Then God speaks to him, audibly, distinctly, clearly. What God tells Abraham to do will alter the course of his life, and ultimately, alter the course of the entire world. Abraham is about to step out of what he has pictured for his life and step into the world of uncertainty.

Uncertainty runs on a parallel track to faith. To live by faith means that we are willing to accept God's call even when we don't know where it may lead us. Faith is risky; many times it runs in a counter-cultural, counter-intuitive direction.

By faith, Abraham went out, uncertain of where he was going. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."<sup>2</sup>

### ***ABRAHAM HAS LOST HIS MIND***

Abraham's friends and extended family must have thought he was crazy. They may have said, "Why would you ever leave Ur? It's one of the top ten places to live. Where are you going to go? What are you going to do? Where will you work?" Obeying God's call meant leaving behind friends, family, career, home, comfort, position, and influence. It meant risking everything on the call to go, trusting that God was going to show him where.<sup>3</sup>

So, Abraham left everything to follow God's call. People in the world look at that and say, "That's kind of strange, isn't it? Why would anyone walk away from a secure and certain future?" When God calls, there are no guarantees; that is why it is called "faith." All Abraham knew was that God called him to go, everything else was up in the air.



Have you been there before, certain that God was leading you to an uncertain adventure? I've been there. In 2009 I began sensing God leading me to help plant a church in Southern California. At the time I was the Senior Pastor of a growing church in Indiana; I was paid well, we had a new home, we were comfortable and living the American dream. I was resisting God's call because I know how hard it is to start a church. I began rationalizing that God wouldn't mind if I applied to established churches instead. In my mind, it was much safer to enter into a church that already had a large number of people than struggle as a church planter and potentially fail. I began applying to other churches, but no one was calling. The sense that God was calling me to help start a new church was growing; uncertainty filled my mind. What was I to do? Should I leave behind what was safe and comfortable, or do I step out in faith and leave security behind? Finally, I yielded to the call to help start a new church in California.

One of the challenges of moving to California and starting a church is the cost of living. However, we had several things going for us; the economy had tanked and the housing market in Southern California was about half of what it was several years before. Moving to California with no job, no home, and no income was an overwhelming thought. In order to raise enough for a down. We decided to sell everything we owned. When I say we sold everything, I mean everything. Our daughter Shelby sold her bicycle and parted with toys, Tammy sold her dishes and furniture. We downsized to one car and put our house on the market. We were bound and determined to follow God's call; it was California or bust.

It was winter and our home had been on the market for nine months; there was no movement toward it selling. Soon I would have no job and I began to wonder what I should do. Do I stay in Indiana and look for work while our home stays on the market, or do we step out on faith and begin the move to California? I prayed for God to help us weather the uncertainty, and to help me provide for my family. It seemed a step of faith was needed once again. We set a date and

decided that June would be when I would move to California and begin the process of finding work and a home.

Meanwhile, God was working behind the scenes. In February of 2010, Tammy received the devastating news that her father had died unexpectedly in Iowa. Tammy's father had not been active in her life for many years and his untimely death came as a shock. While processing the news we soon learned Tammy was the only beneficiary named in his will, the entire family farm would belong to her. Originally, we assumed this would include a dilapidated farmhouse filled with old family heirlooms and some land. We were shocked to learn there were tens of acres involved. We already had generous offers coming in on the farmland and home. Suddenly the issue of finances was resolved. The uncertainty seemed to be lifting, or so it seemed.

An estate auction was held in Northern Iowa back on Tammy's family farm. Since we lived in Indiana it wasn't feasible for us to attend the auction. A few days after the sale was completed, we received news from Tammy's mother that a gentleman at the auction had stepped in a hole and hurt himself and was now suing the estate, which had no insurance on it. For months we were in limbo; we had no idea how much the man was demanding, and the estate funds were frozen. I was flooded with emotions as everything just seemed to hang like a heavy fog over me. I was imagining everything from the estate going to this man rather than to our family. Uncertainty seemed to be the common denominator in our life, and I was ready for some certainty to come our way.

I spent a lot of time in prayer; and to be honest, I spent too many hours worrying. After many months of worry and prayer, we received word that the man would settle out of court for a much smaller figure than I had ever imagined. Miraculously, funds from the sale of the estate became available the very week I moved out to California to begin looking for a place to live. We had also found a buyer for our home in Indiana just before June. God had taken care of every detail

needed, maybe not in the timetable we would have liked, but there was no denying that God was caring for us.

It wasn't until we made the risky decision to sell everything, to leave comfort and security behind that God put into motion the miraculous. We moved across the country to start a church. Some might say, "What happens if the church doesn't grow and you don't succeed?" My response: Success is not a growing church, success is obedience. We've already succeeded. We had done something very few people ever do; we stepped out in obedience to God, even when it was challenging. And we saw Him do amazing things.

Along the journey, it seemed that a step of faith was required as uncertainty mounted at each fork in the road. Once a decision was made to take steps of faith God moved in fantastic ways. The important thing was to keep taking steps along the path and to continue to follow God's call. How else would we have seen God work if we didn't use our faith?

We naturally gravitate toward assurance, comfort, safety, and stability. We want to grow old comfortably, die peacefully, and slip into a happy eternity. We live boring, unadventurous lives because we don't want to fail or experience pain. We want to live the safest, most comfortable life possible. God is not interested in your safe, faithless, avoid any kind of uncertainty life. "Without faith it is impossible to please [God]."<sup>4</sup> Living by faith means that we have no guarantees about the future. Faith, at times, is risky.

## ***RISKY BUSINESS***

Abraham's life was filled with faith and risk. The request for Abraham to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac, is a perfect example. Abraham and Sarah had no children and God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. The miraculous birth of Isaac was the fulfillment of that promise. After Isaac's birth, God instructed Abraham to offer the only son born to him and Sarah as a

sacrifice.

At this point, if you're Abraham, you're beginning to wonder when things are going to turn around. I mean, he has left everything behind, he lives in tents, and now God is asking for the one good thing in his life. This is a huge risk. We are told that Abraham had faith in this instance, but he had no idea how it was going to play out. The impending sacrifice of Isaac is filled with uncertainty. I can't imagine tying my child down and raising a knife. Abraham is simply going to risk it all on God's goodness and faithfulness.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."<sup>5</sup>

If you truly want to do God's will, sometimes you will find yourself exactly where Abraham was; setting out on a new journey that doesn't seem to make sense from the world's point of view. Risking it all in one climactic moment of truth. Beyond the distinct voice of God, everything else facing Abraham was a mystery. A fantastic mysterious adventure awaited him. At each moment of decision, Abraham obeyed.

Living by faith while yet uncertain means stepping out in faith and leaving the results to God. If you take faithful risks, I cannot guarantee you a long, happy life filled with worldly success. What I can promise you is an adventure and the assurance that you are walking by obedient faith.

### ***GOD'S TIMETABLE***

There is no better way for us to live, even if we don't experience everything we hoped for in this life. "By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and

Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.”<sup>6</sup>

Tents represent something temporary and potentially transient. Even in the Promised Land, Abraham had discovered that his stay was only temporary. The promise of God remained, but Abraham was only passing through. He never actually saw the promise fulfilled in his lifetime.

Abraham was in the will of God, doing exactly what He wanted him to do, and yet there was no sense of permanence or stability. Abraham had risked everything and was following what he had been told to do, but his life was not easy. Someone looking in from the outside might say, “Why wasn’t God coming through for Abraham?” The reason is God’s timetable is not the same as ours. God doesn’t have to rush and sweat; He is not in a big hurry. God will work across generations and continents to accomplish His plans; and sometimes, the rewards from godly risks aren’t visible in this life.

“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”<sup>7</sup> Abraham was “looking forward,” do you know why? Because he never experienced all he was looking for in this life. Life hands us a full helping of frustration, disappointment, and unrealized dreams; the best we can do is look forward to something better.

The “father of our faith,” Abraham, “was looking forward to the city that has foundations.” Abraham was looking for a stable city to one day inhabit, not some lonely little spot to pitch his tent in the desert. He was longing for a place with foundations, a place of permanence – heaven. We are not there yet. God intends that our ultimate place of rest and safety occur in the future, in heaven, with Him forever.

Abraham’s faith is exemplified in the Bible because it wasn’t contingent upon his own success or comfort; it was focused on obedience to his Heavenly Father and the promise of a future with Him. This explains how Abraham could leave behind wealth, family,

and comfort. Abraham had his eyes on a future with God in heaven. That changed his whole perspective on life and allowed him to embrace the risk.

Following God may lead you to make decisions that others around you won't understand. That's okay, you be obedient to your Heavenly Father anyway and leave the results in His hands. You keep your eyes on the prize. One day we will be standing before the only One whose opinion matters, and we will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."<sup>8</sup>

Following God's will doesn't guarantee worldly success; it doesn't guarantee a trouble-free life or even safety. To be honest with you, not following God doesn't promise you success or safety either. But if you are willing to follow Jesus Christ and do the will of God, I can promise that you'll never be disappointed with that decision; in fact, for all eternity you will be thankful that you set out on that adventure with Him.

If you ever decide to make God's will your greatest priority, you will discover that it is an incredible journey that is anything but boring. You may find God calling you out of your comfort zone and into an arena of living by risky faith. A certain degree of uncertainty may run parallel to the path of faith but you can be certain that you won't walk that path alone.

## RISK : JIM ELLIOTT

Jim Elliott lived out a risky faith. In 1945, Jim entered Wheaton College, a private Christian college in Illinois. While he was at Wheaton, Elliot's interest in missions solidified. He desired to translate the scriptures into the language of people groups that had been previously unreached by other missionaries.

In order to further his skills in Bible translation, Jim attended Camp Wycliffe, a linguistics training school. While at Camp Wycliffe, Elliot worked with a former missionary to the Quechua people. The missionary told Jim of the Waodani – also called the “Auca,” the Quechua word for savage – a group of Ecuadorian indigenous people considered violent and dangerous to outsiders.

Jim felt called by the Lord to go and minister to the Waodani of Ecuador. His parents and friends wondered if he might instead be more effective in youth ministry in the United States. Youth ministry would have been the much safer choice; but considering the church in America “well-fed,” Jim felt international missions should take precedence.

Elliot arrived in Ecuador on February 21, 1952, with the purpose of evangelizing the Waodani Indians. Four other missionaries joined him: Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Nate Saint. On October 8, 1953, Jim married fellow Wheaton alumna and missionary Elisabeth Howard. The couple took a brief honeymoon to Panama and Costa Rica, and then returned to Ecuador. Their only child, Valerie, was born February 27, 1955.

In September 1955 Elliot and the other missionaries began the first stage of “Operation Auca.” The plan was to search for the Indians by airplane while using a loudspeaker and a basket to pass down gifts. By the end of the month, they had identified several clearings in the jungle. Meanwhile, Elliot learned several phrases in the language

of the Indians from a young woman who had left the Auca's and became friends with Nate Saint's sister, Rachel. The missionaries hoped that by regularly giving gifts to the people and attempting to communicate words of friendship with them in their language, they would be able to win them over as friends.

After several months, the men decided to build a base a short distance from the Indian village, along the Curaray River. There they were approached one time by a small group of Waodani and even gave an airplane ride to one curious Waodani whom they called "George," his real name was Naenkiwi. Encouraged by these friendly encounters, they began plans to visit the Waodani.

One morning, after numerous songs of praise and prayer, the men radioed their wives saying they were going to go into the village and would radio them again later. "Operation Auca" was underway. The next day, a group of Auca warriors approached the missionaries' camp. Little did these five men know that this would be their last few moments of life. The last radio contact they made was Jim calling Elisabeth saying, "We'll call you back in three hours." Jim Elliot's body was found downstream with three others. Their bodies had been brutally pierced with spears and hacked by machetes.

His journal entry for October 28, 1949 expresses his belief that mission work was more important than his life. Jim had written, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

The news of their deaths was broadcast around the world, and Life magazine<sup>9</sup> covered the event with a photo essay in January 1956.

The deaths of the men galvanized the missionary effort in the United States, sparking an outpouring of funding for evangelization efforts around the world. Several years after the death of the men, Elisabeth, her daughter, and Nate's sister, Rachel, moved back to work with the Auca Indians. As a result of their loving forgiveness, many of



the Indians received Christ as their Savior. Jim's life was not a waste; in fact, God used his death to bring life through salvation to many Aucas and encouragement and inspiration to thousands of believers around the world.<sup>10</sup>

# 7

## LEAD

*“Uncertainty will always be part of the taking charge process.”*

*Harold S. Geneen*

I'd like to take some time here and address how to lead in an atmosphere of uncertainty. You may be in charge of an organization, the manager of a department, you may lead your family, or you may only be leading yourself right now. No matter the scope of your responsibilities, navigating leadership in light of uncertainty is a necessary skill.

We had a little tradition back in high school after our football team would win a game. I don't know when the tradition started, but it had gone on for as long as I could remember. After we won the football game a large mob of people from the stands would gather in the end zone around the football team. We would hoist our football helmet into the air as everyone gathered in the end zone and chanted at the top of our lungs, “I am the Duke of York, I have ten thousand men! I march them up the hill, I march them down again! And when you're up, your up, and when you're down, you're down! And when you're only half way up; you're neither up nor down!”

Our head football coach was a history teacher and I think he got a big kick out of hearing us share a bit of history following the football game... didn't matter, we loved it, and we shouted with all our might knowing that we were walking off of the battlefield as victors. We were proud to have fought and won.

I don't think many of the players gave any thought to the meaning behind the Duke of York. Historically, it is unclear who this rhyme is actually attributed to and the circumstances surrounding it. Several candidates and military campaigns have been suggested: Richard, Duke of York (1411–1460), James II (1633–1701), and the most common attribution is to Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany (1763–1827). Frederick was the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army during the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars. The battle in the rhyme may have been the Flanders Campaign of 1793–1794. If so, the “hill” spoken of would have been the town of Cassel, which rises nearly 570 feet above the flatlands of northern France.<sup>1</sup>

I'm not sure who is the historical figure behind this rhyme; and to be honest, I really don't want to know. I don't want to know because it may ruin the image I have in my head every time I would recite this at the end of the game. I always had this picture of a fearless and noble military leader on top of his horse out in front of his soldiers with his sword drawn leading them up a steep hill. I could hear him inspiring confidence in his men by shouting to them, “Be brave, be courageous! Give it your all men! When we are up, we are up, and when we are down, we are down, but we will not settle for anything less than all we can give!”

There are so many people in life that are neither up, nor down. They live life in the middle. The safe, comfortable, wishy-washy middle. If you're going into a battle you are either in it, or you're not. Good leaders know when to lead their “troops” forward, or even when to lead them backward.

Figuratively speaking some leaders like the middle; it's safe, no feathers are ruffled and no difficult conversations are had in the middle. However, if you lead from the middle you will usually end up inconsequential, insignificant, and irrelevant. Facing uncertainty as a leader has the potential to woo you toward the middle.

Have you ever noticed that we tend to remember wartime presidents better than peacetime presidents? Leadership matters most during a period of stress and uncertainty. True leadership is seen when it is least clear which course you should follow.

Uncertainty does not necessarily have to be something frightening, it can be exciting. Embracing and acknowledging the existence of uncertainty, and its impact on all that we do, allows us to create, plan, and execute. In front of you lies an adventure, the possibility of a great victory. Many leaders and organizations logically resist uncertainty because they focus on what they could lose. Great leaders, however, embrace it; and those who do have just as much to lose but realize they also have much to gain.

So, what do you do when you are the leader, the parent, the supervisor, and you're not certain which direction to go? Allow me to introduce, or reintroduce, you to a few ideas about how to deal with uncertainty in your role as someone who makes decisions that affect others.

## ***BE - CLEAR***

As a leader uncertainty is acceptable; what is unacceptable is being unclear. When uncertainty hits, and it will, the danger is fear, which leads to ambiguity. A good leader will make a clear choice in the face of uncertainty. Uncertainty is the arena in which good leadership is identified.

I was at a conference in Irvine, California in 2009 where Pastor Andy Stanley gave a message in which he asked the thousands of leaders in the building to repeat this phrase after him, "I will always be uncertain... I'm certain of it." We will always be uncertain. As a leader uncertainty becomes a natural part of daily life. There seems to be no shortage of it, especially in leadership. If left paralyzed by uncertainty it can easily derail your leadership and even your life.

As a leader, you do not have to pretend like you have all the answers. Did you know it is possible to confidently express your uncertainty? For instance, you could tell those that you lead, “I have no idea if this will work, but I believe this is the best course of action at this time” or “I’m not sure right now, but I know we can figure this out together.” Regardless of the level of uncertainty, there should be a high level of consistent clarity in your communication to others that you lead.

### *I’M NOT SURE BUT...*

One of the best examples of clarity in the face of uncertainty in the Bible would have to be the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In 605 B.C. the Babylonians invaded Palestine and carried their Jewish captives back to Babylon. Among this group were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The king at the time was a puffed-up pretentious man named “Nebuchadnezzar.” King Nebuchadnezzar had set up an image of gold that was over nine stories tall, and he commanded that whenever the band would strike up everyone must fall down and worship the statue. Very likely the statue may have been an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself.

To defy the command of the King meant death; anyone who would refuse to worship the image would immediately be thrown into a hot furnace. Obviously, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow before anyone but God. Some men in the King’s court who were jealous of our three fellas. These “haters” told the king that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow. So the king called for the three Hebrew boys and commanded that they bow before the image.

This is how they answered the king, note the clarity in their response: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand,

O king.”<sup>2</sup> Seems like they are making it pretty clear to the king, they won’t be bowing down, and they believe their God has the power to save them. Notice the uncertainty of their situation peek through, “But even if he does not.”<sup>3</sup> Here’s what they are saying, “We believe our God is able ...” But at the same time, there is a level of uncertainty “...but even if he does not...” They are sure He can, they just don’t know if He will. Now they make it clear in case the king is missing anything, “We want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”<sup>4</sup>

Here is what we need to remember, when uncertain be clear. When the heat gets turned up – be clear. You may be unsure of the outcome, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t clearly state the course of action you think is best.

## **BE - BOLD**

“The antidote for the fear of failure is not success, but small doses of failure.” Mark Batterson, *Chase the Lion*.

Being bold in leadership involves confidence. Confidence doesn’t mean that you have all the answers, it is trusting in the One who is the answer. If you are actively involved in leadership you have been called by God, which should fill you with confidence; not in yourself, but in the confidence God has in you.

Everyone stops in their tracks at the thought of “what if I fail?” “What if I’m publicly humiliated? What if I lose my reputation? What if I end up owing money? What if I blow my one shot?”

Leadership takes a lot of courage; courage to potentially fail when attempting to attain the vision that God has laid on your heart. Failed plans are not the death of a vision... but failing to plan may be. Get to the drawing board and create a plan that may or may not fail, but will take you one step closer toward the vision. No one ever goes down in stock from attempting something great, even if they fail. Our version

of safety and security is forgettable, overlooked, and not really safe at all.

## *SLAYING FEAR*

The account of David and Goliath serves as an example in overcoming fear. Saul had been rejected as king and the Lord instructed the prophet, Samuel, to go to Bethlehem and anoint a new king. Samuel went to the house of Jesse, who brought out his strapping young sons and, despite their appearance, none of them were who God had chosen. Young David, who had been out tending sheep, comes in and Samuel anointed this little shepherd boy as the next king. The prophet leaves town and David, the newly anointed future king, goes back to tending sheep.

Some time passes and conflict developed between Israel and the Philistines. The two armies are squaring off near the Valley of Elah and David's brothers are down along the battle lines. Jesse tells David, "I want you to take some food to your brothers."

As David approaches the Israelite camp he hears a loud voice bellowing from the Philistine camp. He looks down into the valley and he sees this 9'6" hulk of a man named Goliath. This giant, who would make Shaquille O'Neal look like a little schoolboy, is covered in armor from the Big and Tall store. Goliath is taunting Israel to send someone to fight him and he offers this challenge, "If your representative defeats me then we Philistines will serve you, but if I defeat him then you must serve us."

As David is taking all this in, he cannot understand how the Israeli army would allow Goliath to keep talking smack about them and their God! So David boldly volunteers to go out there and fight the giant. Considering there were no other volunteers everyone was like, "Okay kid, good luck."

Armed with a slingshot, David bravely marches onto the battlefield.

When Goliath mocks him, David says, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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.”<sup>5</sup> With that, David takes a stone, slings it at Goliath’s forehead, and knocks the giant to the ground—dead. Stunned at what they have just seen, both sides watch as David takes Goliath’s sword and lops off his head.

Be bold. Be courageous. Don’t let the fear of the unknown hold you back. You can face any challenge as long as you have determination, conviction, and the strength of the Lord on your side. Leaders make the bold move while others sit back.

## ***BE - LIEVE***

“The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today” President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

President Roosevelt’s three terms as president included the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, and World War II. Despite these overwhelming circumstances, the message Roosevelt consistently offered was one that did not get caught up in doubts, fears, and uncertainty. Instead, he focused on communicating about working for a new and better tomorrow. With this mindset, he created social reforms, commanded a war victory, and ushered in a new era of peace.

As a leader, it becomes your job to believe in what can be and to cast a bold vision of the future. It is amazing what can be accomplished when there is someone who has belief in the vision that God has placed inside their hearts. At the birth of this nation, the founding fathers shared their vision of a free and independent United States. Individuals and families rallied around that belief in freedom and they defeated an entire British Empire. How did such a young, inexperienced nation with only a handful of colonies, hardly any army, or resources defeat the powerful British army and navy? It was



the power of belief and their vision of freedom. Vision ultimately empowers people and gives them a reason for living. Belief in a vision trumps power, it trumps technique, it trumps a well thought out plan.

To cast a compelling vision, you must remember what originally motivated you; the cause, the mission, the purpose, and then allow that passion to be expressed. There is a natural tendency for groups and individuals to drift from their original purpose. That is why it is important to come back to your purpose and vision often. It has a way of refocusing those you are leading. There will be plenty of people around you filled with indecision and uncertainty. In those moments, it is important that you do not project undue worry and fear on those you manage or lead.

Imagine a business owner unloading his fear of economic conditions or a downturn on his employees. The business owner who calls into the business daily to get the financial numbers and then expresses fear over the numbers to his managers has the distinct possibility of spreading his fear to the employees. When those that we lead operate out of fear, productivity is diminished. When the business owner calls in and receives negative financial numbers, not saying anything at all would be far more productive than expressing fear and negativity. In this case, vision casting with a reminder of purpose and values would be more productive which in turn, would provide the desired outcome for the owner.

When dealing with uncertainty remain positive and believe in a better future. You don't have to pretend when things are bad, simply acknowledge the challenges and move boldly into the future, trusting that a sovereign God will order your steps. To navigate through uncertainty requires a voice of vision that clearly paints the picture of a brighter more productive future.

## **NEHEMIAH**

To lead through uncertainty be bold, be clear, and believe. A perfect

example of a leader exemplifying these traits would be Nehemiah. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian emperor, Artaxerxes. This was a significant position of trust for a member of a Jewish minority in the Persian court. Over one hundred forty years had passed since the sacking of Jerusalem by the conquering Babylonians, and generations of Jews had been in exile. It all began with a conversation of divine destiny.

“Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”<sup>6</sup>

As Nehemiah learns of the condition of Jerusalem and the remnant of the Jewish people living there, it clearly has a profound effect, moving him to a period of fasting and prayer. Out of this prayer, Nehemiah senses a clear calling and vision; a calling that will completely alter Nehemiah’s life and require a career move.

Up to this point, I’m sure Nehemiah was a good and trusted leader since he was the cupbearer to the king. But this news of tragedy was the first step in catapulting Nehemiah into becoming a great leader.

Nehemiah believed that God was calling him to do something about the travesty of Jerusalem’s walls being destroyed. He began envisioning a repaired wall and a safe Jerusalem. This vision was translated into specific and measurable needs; and, at the right time, Nehemiah clearly and boldly presented his plan to King Artaxerxes. Fortunately, the king caught the vision and vowed to assist with everything Nehemiah would need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

To pursue his plan, Nehemiah was eventually required to leave his position in the court of King Artaxerxes and relocate to Jerusalem.

He had to leave the security of what was known and step into uncertainty.

Three days after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he went out to survey the wall. At that point, he had not told anyone about the plans God had put on his heart for Jerusalem. Nehemiah did not communicate his vision or go public until he gathered the facts, received direction from God, and formulated a plan.

Many times when you step out to do something bold, people will criticize you. Pastor Rick Warren has said, “When you’re small, they’ll dismiss you; when you’re growing, they’ll criticize you; and when you’re large, they’ll resent you. So ignore ‘them’ and get on with whatever God has told you to do!” Nehemiah was plagued by the criticism of a few guys that I call the three stooges, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

You can do everything right in working toward accomplishing the vision God has given and you will very likely catch flak. If you are pursuing a God-ordained vision, people will criticize you, they will misunderstand you, they will misrepresent you. For this reason, a belief in the vision that God has given is paramount.

How did Nehemiah respond to these critics? He prayed and continued to work on the wall. He reminded those working on the wall with him why they were there and then they boldly kept working away.

In spite of the opposition, and fueled by their belief in what they were doing, Nehemiah and his crew worked at break-neck speed and they completed the wall of Jerusalem in less than two months.

I am certain that you will experience uncertainty of varying degrees as you seek to be the type of leader that God has called you to be. To fully realize your vision, regardless of how certain or uncertain everything may be, your communication must have exceptional,

consistent clarity; and you must face the uncertainty boldly, trusting in the One who has called you to the work.

## LEAD : SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill had been out of public office for ten years before finally becoming elected British Prime Minister in 1940. On the night he was elected he wrote, “It was as if I were walking with destiny and all of my past life had been but a preparation for this hour.” Churchill was loved at moments and despised at moments by the British; but no matter the opposition or circumstances facing him, he had clarity and focus.

In the darkest hours of WWII, the weight of leadership fell on Churchill and he seemed to be matched to this particular moment. He rarely tired and was extremely demanding of those around him. His speeches rallied people to become heroes and to work twice as hard. He believed that great events required great oratory, which meant a lot of late nights and a lot of energy on his part.

At the end of May 1940, German troops had pinned down the allied forces at Dunkirk and over three hundred thousand British and French troops had to be evacuated. While panic could have overtaken the British people, Churchill’s speeches rallied the morale of the nation.

Churchill told his countrymen, “Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fall, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us

therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour!'" (June 18, 1940)

Late in June of 1940, the French were on the verge of surrendering to the Germans. Churchill flew to France to meet with their war cabinet; he told them that even if they surrendered Britain would never yield to the tyranny of Hitler. France signed an armistice with Germany; undaunted Churchill determined to stand alone against Germany. Now Churchill awaited a German invasion. He requested France to move their ships out of port so that the Germans couldn't use their former allies' ships to attack Britain, France refused and Churchill made the gut-wrenching decision to have the French fleet sunk.

For months Churchill tried hard to get America to join him in the conflict. While the United States provided additional armaments, they would not pledge a single soldier. President Roosevelt was under pressure to keep America out of the war. Even without the assistance of the United States, Churchill determined to stand against the German empire. Churchill would not bend, even when it appeared that the odds were stacked against him, because he believed his cause was just.

October 29, 1941, Churchill declared, "Never give in — never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

After months of standing alone, everything changed when the United States was attacked by Japan on December 7, 1941. The U.S. now became an ally of Britain; it was the lifeline that Churchill had prayed for.

The allied forces eventually defeated Germany on May 7, 1945. On Victory in Europe Day, Churchill broadcast to the nation that

Germany had surrendered and that a final cease-fire on all fronts in Europe would come into effect at one minute past midnight that night. Afterward, Churchill told a huge crowd in Whitehall: "This is your victory." The people shouted back, "No, it is yours."<sup>7</sup>

# 8

## CERTAINTY OF CHRIST

*“If a man fights his way through his doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, he has attained to a certainty that the man who unthinkingly accepts things can never reach.”*

*William Barclay*

As you’ve read in this book, and as you know from personal experience, uncertainty constantly surrounds us. While life is riddled with uncertainty there is a place we can turn to find confidence. Look at how many times the Apostle John points us to the certainty of knowing truths about the Lord and our relationship with him...

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

Eight times in eight verses John writes, “we know”. Those are confident statements of truth, which stands in sharp contrast to a day and age where we are told that we can’t really know anything. In a culture of relativism where truth is always subjective to one’s particular frame of reference, isn’t it refreshing to hear the words, “we know?”

It is important to note the certainty that John mentions is only available to Christians; to people who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. For the believer, there is a certainty that God is in control and that we have a solid promise of eternal life with Christ.

“Next time you’re in an airport notice the difference between passengers who have confirmed tickets and those on standby. Those who have confirmed tickets are relaxed, they’re confident and expectant. Those on standby hang around the ticket counter, they pace and smoke, pace and smoke, pace and smoke...all because of uncertainty. God offers us freedom from the burden of uncertainty, so we can know for sure where we stand with God.”<sup>2</sup>

As followers of Christ, we have a hope that unbelievers do not have. Over and over the Bible speaks of it. The skeptic may say, “I thought we were talking about certainty. Why would the Bible use the word ‘hope’ so many times and yet you claim to be certain?”

In our everyday conversations, our use of the word “hope” is usually based on uncertainty. Suppose a mom is throwing an outdoor birthday party for her five-year-old son. She writes on her Facebook page, “I hope it doesn’t rain on Saturday for the party!” In saying this, she is saying the possibility of rain is there, but her preference is for no rain.

When we read the word, “hope” in the New Testament, it is based on certainty. It’s stating an absolute fact that hasn’t occurred yet. It is faith in a certain future. Let’s go back to that mom and the birthday party. Suppose it’s Friday night before the party, and she says, “I



hope tomorrow is going to be Saturday.” If she said something like that it would be weird; of course tomorrow is going to be Saturday! It might rain, it might not; it could be cold, it could be hot. But no matter what, the day after Friday is Saturday, and nothing can change that. When we see the word “hope” in the Bible it is doing something like that. It is pointing to a certainty that has not yet occurred. In this sense, hope is expectant waiting. We are certain that it will be Saturday, and between certainty and reality is the desire that the weather will be good.

Hope is certain belief in a positive outcome. For instance, we can be certain that we have eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> We can be certain in our hope that God hears our prayers.<sup>4</sup> We can be certain in our hope that when we ask for wisdom God will give it.<sup>5</sup>

All of this hope is not just a positive feeling; it is a hope that is placed in God. “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”<sup>6</sup> Our hope is set on the living God. Certainty about Jesus Christ is not wishful thinking; it is a gift from God.

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”<sup>7</sup>

The certainty of our relationship with Christ doesn’t come in the form of proof, assumptions, guarantees of comfort, wealth, or a fantastic future. It comes in the form of a relationship. That’s it. It’s not about what is, or what will be; it is not about what we will do, or what will happen to us. It is all about to Whom we belong and to the One who holds the past, present, and future in His hands.

My prayer is that you have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Life

is far too short and too uncertain not to have the assurance of a relationship with Him. If you have never made that decision, you can do so right now. It is a matter of simply saying, “Yes” to God. “Yes God, I am a sinner in need of your saving. Yes God, I believe Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. Yes God, I want Jesus to be my Lord and my Savior. Yes God, I want to live for you.” When you place your faith in Christ and turn away from your sin you can be certain that you have a relationship with Him now, and a life with Him in heaven forever.

What if, in making our plans, everything became subordinate to knowing Christ? What if, in this life that is permeated with uncertainty, you had an anchor, a sure hope, and a solid foundation? There is One who is certain in all matters, you can be certain of it.

# STUDY AND DISCUSSION



# INTRO / CHAPTER 1

## *Danger of Relying on Yourself*

1. Where were you on September 11, 2001 when you heard about the attack on the World Trade Center? What was your initial reaction that morning and the days immediately following the attacks?
2. Name a biblical character or two who faced uncertainty. How did it turn out for that person? What lesson(s) can we learn from their example?
3. What trials, past or present, have filled your life with uncertainty? What did God teach you during that time?
4. What typically happens when you try to handle all of life on your own?

*“The Bible has a word for that thing in us that wants to control everything... “Flesh”. Our flesh is that part of us that tries to operate outside of the control of God. Your attempt to manipulate your surroundings, circumstances, and even people around you comes from your flesh.”*

5. Why is trying to “control” everything and everyone so dangerous?

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Romans 8:5-8*

6. From this passage in Romans 8 Paul is very certain that a sinful mind cannot submit to or even please God. Why is he so certain of this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. From your own life or the lives of people you know, reflect on the hostility toward God that happens when the mind is set on the flesh. What examples can you think of? Does this help you to understand in verse 8 that, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God?”

# CHAPTER 2

## *Pray*

1. How would you describe the depth and consistency of your prayer life?
2. What were your prayers like when you were a child?

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*  
*Philippians 4:4-7*

3. What words or thoughts stand out to you in Philippians 4:4-7?
4. How would you define the words: “rejoice,” “prayer,” “supplication,” and “thanksgiving?”

*“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”*

5. What is the typical response of someone who is experiencing pain in his or her life? What should the Christian's response be when experiencing pain or trials in life? When have you experienced God's peace in your life while you were going through difficulties?
6. If you had to make a list of what you were most anxious or worried about, what would be on that list? What is your greatest concern?
7. What are you afraid will happen if your circumstances don't change or your worst fear is realized? What are you afraid of?
8. Wherever there is uncertainty there is fear and the flip side of fear is...desire. Think about your most recent uncertainty. If you were to get to the core of that uncertainty you would be able to say, "The reason I'm anxious about \_\_\_\_\_ is because I'm afraid that \_\_\_\_\_;" just fill in the blanks. In that fear there is a desire or longing that you may not have realized was even there.
9. What are the deepest desires of your heart? Would you be willing to give those desires back to God and trust Him with them? God's hands are the most capable of handling any uncertainty you would ever face.

10. What would it practically look like for someone to turn all of his or her fears and desires over to God?

Take some time now to tell God what you are afraid of. In that fear is the request that you must make known to God. If you will hand that to Him, eventually you will experience Him; replacing that fear with His peace and the calm assurance you've been longing for. You do what only you can do, and God will do what only He can do. Even if your circumstance doesn't turn out the way you want...you can still know the peace of God.



# CHAPTER 3

## *Remember*

1. How does remembering God's faithfulness for us in the past help our faith in the future? How would this be beneficial when you face uncertain times?
2. Take a stroll down memory lane and remember as far back as you can and pinpoint those moments in your life when God's faithfulness has been evident. Take a piece of paper and make a timeline with these events marked along the line. List as many moments of God's faithfulness as you can up to the present moment. Plot along the line the significant life experiences that have shaped who you are today. This may include events from childhood, your religious upbringing, your education, a person who entered your life and impacted you, the moment you accepted Jesus as your Lord, etc.
3. Was there something that you included on the timeline that you hadn't remembered for a while? After being reminded of God's past faithfulness, what does that do for your faith now? What does it do for your faith moving into the future?
4. When did you accept Jesus as your Savior? How did your life change as a result of that decision?

5. Your deepest regrets and the memories that you may like to suppress may very well be attached to this whole issue of uncertainty and an inability to manage the fear and anxiety associated with it. How can fear and uncertainty drive us to make poor decisions? In what ways do you see uncertainty and fear driving people's decisions around you?
6. Have there been times in your life where you felt like God had abandoned you? What were the circumstances regarding this feeling? How would the memory of an ever present and loving God have changed your feelings during that experience?
7. We naturally forget things, even the things we say we will remember. A positive habit that will help remind you of God's faithfulness is journaling. You can journal your prayers and the current events in your life. If you go back and occasionally reread entries in your journal you will be reminded of God's past faithfulness to you and you will find your faith increasing because you are then reminded to factor God into your future.
8. As I look back and remember God's faithfulness it gives me the confidence to face the future with certainty. Remembering creates the context for you to begin to recall the truth that God walks with you now and into the future. When you face times of uncertainty it is crucial that you remember His past faithfulness.

*"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?" Psalm 77:11-13*

# CHAPTER 4

## **Seek**

### **Seek – God**

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt closest to God. How did that sense of God's nearness affect your spiritual life, e.g., your prayers, devotions, worship, etc.?
2. What emotions or thoughts go through your mind when God seems to be distant/silent?
3. Why do you suppose God would appear to be silent in someone's life? What could He potentially be trying to communicate?

### **Seek – God's Kingdom**

4. What is your first reaction to frustration or pain?
5. Who do we typically focus on when we are frustrated, in pain, or uncertain?

*“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.” Matthew 6:25a*

6. You may not be worried about what to eat, drink, or what you will wear, but what is on your list of worries today?

7. How much of your time and energy this week was consumed by your worries?

*“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” Matthew 6:26*

8. Who is it that has gotten you to where you are today?

9. What can we learn from this lesson of the birds being fed?

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6:33*

Jesus is basically saying, “At the top of your list of concerns should be God’s kingdom and His righteousness.”

10. What percentage of your time this last week was spent on thinking about the Kingdom of God?

11. What is God concerned about accomplishing in His Kingdom?  
See James 1:26-7, Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 12:28-34,  
Matthew 28:18-20.
12. What happens when an unbelieving world sees Christians  
more concerned with their personal kingdom than with  
God's kingdom?
13. In light of Matthew 6:25, why should we trust God? What  
will it take in your life to really trust Him? What are some  
specific things that would change if you trusted God more?

It may be helpful to memorize Matthew 6:25a, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life." or Matthew 6:27, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" You may want to write these verses out and place them on your mirror or in your car as a reminder to begin your day worry free.

# CHAPTER 5

## *Follow*

1. What are some of the things that our society leans on to find support or safety?
2. What do you have a tendency to lean on other than God? What happens when that “thing” you have been leaning on has been kicked out from under you?
3. What is the common reaction of people when they see someone else catch all the breaks while they seem to get the short end of the stick?
4. There is a common misconception that if someone believes in God, or does the right thing, that their life will be easier. We see in the life of Joseph, in the book of Genesis, that this is not the case. Why wouldn't God design life to work in such a way that if we simply believed in Him our life would be simpler?
5. In the account of Joseph it had appeared that God had forgotten about him as he faced numerous trials. Can you describe a time in your life when you felt like God had deserted you? How did you respond when you felt God had abandoned you?

6. What lessons do we learn from the life of Joseph regarding uncertainty when God appears to be silent?
7. If God seems to be silent in your life does that mean that He is inactive? How do you typically respond when God is silent?
8. What words of encouragement would you give to a friend who is going through a difficult time and feels like God is silent and uncaring?
9. What emotions or thoughts do you have when you see someone follow God and do the right thing even when their life is difficult and filled with uncertainty?
10. Take a moment to consider the darkest moments in your life. How has God used those events to bring you to where you are today and to shape your character?
11. Some decisions are obviously morally right or wrong, other decisions may be neutral. When you face a moral decision where should you turn to help make up your mind?



12. Sometimes the choice you have to make is the narrow way and it is the road less traveled. The beautiful thing is, you never walk that path alone. See Romans 8:35, 38-39. How does knowing that God is with you, and that He is sovereign over every part of your life, affect the way that you begin to view uncertainty?
13. What if in making your plans everything was subordinate to the call and action of God? What would your life look like?
14. What would a man or woman in your circumstance do if they were absolutely confident that God was with them?

# CHAPTER 6

## *Risk*

1. In what areas of your life are you playing it safe?
2. How do you respond when you are unsure of how your decision will turn out? Do you generally take the calculated risk or do you prefer to make no decision at all?
3. How are faith and risk related?
4. How do you respond when you take a risk and your plans fail?
5. Take a moment and read Hebrews 11. In your opinion, which characters faced the largest risks? What would you have done if you were in their shoes?
6. Have you ever sensed God leading you into an area of uncertainty and risk? How did you respond in that situation? What was the ultimate outcome?

7. It seems that the goal of many people is to have a safe, comfortable, easy life. Is that the kind of life we see revealed in the Bible?

*"For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." Hebrews 11:10*

8. Abraham had his eyes on a future with God in heaven. How does focusing on heaven change your perspective on life and risk?

Let me ask you a challenging question, how long do you have left to live? Given the statistical average, when will your loved ones gather around your casket? Twenty years? Forty years? Maybe you are young and you've got another sixty years. Of course, none of us can be sure how much longer we will live; there are no guarantees. Just realize that it is not how many years you have left, it is what you do with those years. I've known many people who "died" at a very young age and were not buried until years later. They gave up on the dream, wasted their life in trivial things, pursuing worthless endeavors. They missed out on the excitement of a life of faith.

# CHAPTER 7

## *Lead*

1. Everyone is a leader or influencer of others to some degree. Who do you lead or influence?
2. What emotions do you have when you think about being a leader? Is it something that you dread, or do you look forward to the challenges?

## **Be-Clear**

3. When uncertainty hits, and it will, the danger is fear, which leads to ambiguity. Read Daniel 3:8-18. Were the young men absolutely positive how everything would turn out in the end? (see v. 18a) Were they ambiguous about their decision? (see v. 18b) How can being clear, even when uncertain, give direction and motivation to those that we lead?
4. Your leadership matters most when you, or those who follow you, are uncertain. What uncertainties are you, your company, or your family currently facing? What is being communicated verbally? What is being communicated non-verbally?

## **Be-Bold**

5. Read 1 Samuel 17:41-47. Where did David's boldness come from?
6. What fears naturally come to your mind as a leader when uncertainty enters the picture?
7. What holds you back from dreaming and making big plans for your future as a leader?
8. How often do you lack the courage to enact a plan because of the assumption that if the plan fails then the vision or dream has failed?

## **Be-lieve**

*"There are many qualities that make a great leader. But having strong beliefs, being able to stick with them through popular and unpopular times, is the most important characteristic of a great leader," former New York City Mayor, Rudy Giuliani.*

9. What beliefs are at the core of who you are and your leadership?

10. Nehemiah believed strongly in the vision that God had given him to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem. Read Nehemiah 4:1-23. What things did Nehemiah do in response to those who were opposing him? (see v. 9, 14, 16)
11. Thinking about your vision, is there any opposition to it? If so, is it active hostility or passive resistance? Are others seeking to distract you from the vision you have? How will you respond when others try to sidetrack or derail the vision?
12. What part has prayer played in the times of vision and calling that you have encountered?
13. If you are in the process of developing or sharing a vision right now, what strategic analysis have you done?
14. Which of these three areas do you need to improve in your leadership: clarity, boldness, or belief? What steps can you take to begin improving in that area?

# CHAPTER 7

## *Certainty of Christ*

1. Relativism is a popular thought today. It is the belief that points of view have no absolute truth; “truth” is subjective and can have different meanings depending on your perception. Perhaps you’ve heard someone say, “Well, that’s your truth.” What are some relativistic beliefs that people would propose in our culture today?

2. What are some things that you are certain of?

Repeatedly the Bible offers absolutes. One such place is 1 John 5; read this chapter and note the comments of certainty.

3. The Apostle John says that we can know that we have eternal life if we know Jesus as Lord. If you personally have this kind of certainty what does it do to your faith and outlook on life? How does it begin to shape the way that you view uncertainties in your life?

4. Is it possible to be certain while hoping? See Romans 8:23-25.

5. In the book of Luke, he begins to unfold the gospel for Theophilus. Luke states that he has made a careful investigation and he has written to him so “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”<sup>1</sup> God’s Word has been given to us so that we can have certainty about who He is, what He has done, and what is to come. What is the result if the Bible offers suggestions rather than absolutes?

6. How does someone’s faith or lack of faith in a sovereign God affect the way that they begin to view uncertainties that arise?

*“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”*  
1 Peter 3:15

7. If you have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ, how would you respond to someone who asks you about the hope that you have in Him?

8. How will the certainty of what Jesus has done on your behalf help you navigate the uncertainty of the future?



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## **Study and Discussion Guide**

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