

Fearless: Fear of Running Out Sunday, 5/9/21

Last week we faced the fear that we've irrevocably disappointed God; that God is forever ticked off at us and there's nothing we can do about it. But the truth is that Jesus demonstrated once for all that God's love and grace are bigger than our sin. Jesus died and rose again that we might have life, not condemnation.

This week, we face our fear of running out of whatever it is we imagine we most need.

Have you ever played chicken with your gas gauge? Not because you know the gauge is wrong; not because you haven't seen a gas station in a long time; and not because you can't afford to fill up the tank? I remember doing that while driving through the mountain passes of Virginia, and I can vividly recall the adrenaline rush that came on as the needle moved closer and closer to "E." Why did I do that? Was I bored and just trying to stay awake? I can't recall. Why do you do it? Is it a gateway sport for those who go on to become bungee jumpers or cliff divers? It doesn't seem like an especially good idea, and in fact I read this week that it can actually reduce the life of your fuel pump.¹ Yet we do sometimes seek out dangerous situations precisely because they're dangerous. It can be a unique kind of fun, and we call the people who do those things "thrill-seekers" or "adrenaline junkies."

But thrill seeking isn't what we're going to talk about today. Instead, I want you to remember the last time you were really scared of running completely out of something unintentionally: Running out of gas and becoming stranded on a dark highway in the middle of nowhere without a cell signal. Running out of time and missing a deadline that you promised you'd make; Running out of patience and treating someone badly whom you really want to love; or running out of money while the bills pile up and you wonder if you'll soon be living on the street. These may indeed be adrenaline-filled moments, but I've never met someone who actually enjoyed them. Every day we face the prospect of running out of something and face the attendant fears that come as our imaginations begin to imagine the consequences of running out.

Jesus knows our predilection to worry about running out, which is why he made his famous speech about not having enough of the staples of life: food, drink, clothes, and the

¹ <https://driving.ca/column/lorraine/lorraine-complains-playing-chicken-with-your-gas-gauge-is-a-fools-errand>

money we need to buy them. If he had given that sermon today, he might well have included gasoline, utility bills, and rent or mortgage payments. His point is clear: Worrying about running out is misplaced focus and energy. Instead of investing in our fear of what tomorrow will bring, Jesus says, stay rooted in today, and look around and enjoy all that you do have. If God provides for the flowers and the birds, surely God will provide what we really need as well. That's not to say that we don't run out of things. We certainly do. And not all birds survive the winter. The point is not that God will absolutely keep us from all hardships, but that the act of engaging our worry is both self-destructive and contrary to what it means to follow Jesus.

In *Fearless*, Max Lucado compares worry to a photographic enlarger.² Before the advent of digital cameras, photographers used film in their cameras that after being exposed to light required a chemical process to produce a photographic negative. They're called negatives because light areas in an image appear dark in the negative, and vice versa. The negatives are then usually placed in an enlarger, and paper prints are produced by shining light through the negative. The negatives are enlarged, meaning the prints that are produced larger than the negative original. Jan Heyerdahl told the confirmation class recently that "worry is where the devil takes us to develop negatives." In other words, Satan loves it when we spend time dwelling on negative distortions of reality, making them more and more real. Max Lucado takes this metaphor a step further and writes "Worry is the darkroom where negatives become glossy prints."³ In other words, just like a photographic enlarger, worry enlarges our fears, making them larger than life and exaggerating their most fearful elements. Surely there's a better way for us to face our fears. In our reading from Matthew, Jesus said that the solution is to "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."⁴ In our next reading, Jesus offers a living laboratory of one way to do that. **{Read John 2:1-11 NLT}**

Notice what Mary did and didn't do at the wedding when she noticed that the hosts had run out of wine. Rather than let her concern for the hosts' embarrassment develop into

² Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, p. 38. Thomas Nelson (2009).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Matthew 6:33. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

worry, she turned to the one person capable of handling the situation, Jesus. And when Jesus refused her the first time, she took a pass on arguing with Jesus or developing any number of other maladaptive, anxious responses. She simply directed the servant to share her focus on Jesus, saying, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Can you imagine some of the ways that scene might have played out if Mary had capitulated to worry and allowed herself to become a “drama llama?” Her simple advice to the servant remains good advice to us when we find ourselves in need. Focus your attention on Jesus, then do whatever he tells you!

Max Lucado offers eight practical things we can do to head off worry when we face the fear of running out.⁵ Naturally, they form a word: PEACEFUL. To absolutely nobodies’ surprise, the P reminds us to “Pray first.” Instead of complaining, criticizing, lamenting, or catastrophizing, begin with a simple, heartfelt prayer for help. Do as Peter suggests: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”⁶

The first E in PEACEFUL stands for “Easy, now. Slow down!” Patience is a great enemy of worry and fear. Resist the temptation to spring into action immediately, and like Mary, take the time to look around and find Jesus first. Take the advice of the psalmist, who wrote, “Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act.”⁷

The A in PEACEFUL stands for “Act on it.” Max Lucado suggests that many of the things we worry about are actually small matters, like annoying mosquitos that we can either listen to buzzing in our ear all night long or squash flat with a flick of our wrists. If you have nuisance worries distracting you, take the simple actions needed to get them out of your life. As Max Lucado writes, “Be a doer, not a stewart.”⁸

The C in PEACEFUL stands for “Compile a worry list.” This is basically a journaling exercise in which you keep a written record of all the things you worry about for a week or even a month, and then go back over the list and compare what actually happened against what you were afraid would happen. Some of our fears do come true, but I’d guess the

⁵ Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, p. 49-51. Thomas Nelson (2009).

⁶ 1Peter 5:7. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁷ Psalm 37:7. Ibid.

⁸ Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, p. 49. Thomas Nelson (2009).

majority of them never amount to anything but lost sleep.

The second E in PEACEFUL stands for “Evaluate your worry categories.” Go over your journal and see if you can detect patterns of common fears, like assorted worries revolving around the fear of running out of money. Pray about your preoccupation with common fears, and ask God to set you free,

The F in PEACEFUL stands for “Focus on today” As much as we like to have everything lined up in advance, Max Lucado points out that “God meets daily needs daily.”⁹ We know this, right? It’s why we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,”¹⁰ instead of, “Give us a one-hundred-year contract with a security deposit against breach of contract.”

The U in PEACEFUL stands for “Unleash others for prayer.” Asking other people to pray with and for you is actually a blessing rather than a burden, because it helps them fulfill their need to draw close to God in prayer and to love their neighbors as themselves.

Finally, the L in PEACEFUL stands for “Let God be God,” or as Lucado puts it, “Let God be enough.”¹¹ Do you remember that famous sermon of Jesus that we started with today? “[Y]our heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”¹² From start to finish, our fear of running out needs to be rooted in the belief that God does know what we need and that seeking God’s Kingdom is the most direct path for us to meet those needs.

I know what you’re thinking. It’s so much easier to describe how to remain peaceful on the course of a short sermon than it is to actually remain peaceful when we’re frozen in the grip of fear. That’s all too true. And yet, we seldom grow if we wait until we’re in trouble to begin seeking our God’s presence and God’s wisdom. Now is the right time to confront your fear of running out, by examining and changing the ways you think of those fears and respond to them. A good place to start for today is to reaffirm how generous God has been in pouring out love and grace into your life.

Please take some time now to reflect on God’s faithful provision in your life.

⁹ Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, p. 50. Thomas Nelson (2009).

¹⁰ Matthew 6:11. New Revised Standard Version

¹¹ Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, p. 51. Thomas Nelson (2009).

¹² Matthew 6:32-33. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)



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