

Fearless

Week 2

January 14-15, 2017

I love the word fearless. It sounds like something we all want to be. Yet, there is a difference between fearless and being reckless. This fall I was driving down I-79 during deer mating season. All of a sudden I see a huge buck. Now bucks are known for being extremely cautious animals and spend their whole existence in hiding except during mating season. During this two week period every year, these overly cautious animals absolutely lose their minds and all sense of fear as they're out and about looking for the girl of their dreams. Like I said, I was driving down I-79 with heavy traffic zipping down the highway and from a hill on the opposing side of the highway I see a buck come zipping down and through the traffic like an 80's arcade game of Frogger. It stopped in the median and I could see it scanning the other side for its future queen; not even looking at the traffic. I thought quickly, "Surely you're not going to take another run right now, all the lanes have traffic." And without another thought, the buck darted across the highway like an NFL running back, dodging and darting cars like it was just another day at work. I couldn't believe the fearless foolishness in that animal that had its eye on the prize.

Needless to say, every deer isn't that lucky. Being foolishly fearless like that is not the fearlessness that we are talking about in this series. So what are we talking about when we say that God is calling us to be Fearless? Does it mean that I should invest all of my money on whichever stock that my finger lands on while I am blindfolded, trusting in the Lord's goodness? Nope. Does it mean that I can quit my job tomorrow without a game plan because I really believe God must have something better for me? Nope. Does it mean that I should sew together a crime fighting outfit and take it upon myself to rid the city of villains because God wants a peaceful city? Nope. (By the way, if you're contemplating this, let's go to lunch together. I want to hear what's going through your mind because I'm currently out of Netflix series and could use some stimulating conversation.)

So, what type of Fearlessness are we talking about today? Being Fearless means we put our eyes on Jesus instead of the storm around us. Being Fearless means we trust the Lord with our future here on this earth and in eternity. Being Fearless means that we walk in faith through the trials of life. Being Fearless means that we obey God even when all those around us are doing what their hearts desire. Being Fearless means we trust that God is with us each and every moment of the day. Being Fearless means we know who holds our future so that we can walk in His peace today.

So as we journey through Daniel 3 today, I want to talk about two topics that typically bring fear into our lives. Yet, I want to challenge us to not allow these frightening things in life to paralyze us emotionally or prevent us from pursuing the promptings that God calls us to in our work life, family life and God given dreams. So I will openly admit that today's message is challenging because I am teaching that we should be Fearless in situations that typically cause fear in almost every human. What I want to do is to help you navigate these and overcome your fears.

We are going to touch on two subjects today; Safety and Suffering. We will also look at a story in the Bible that will inspire us to be Fearless in the Lord even in the midst of situations that lack safety and can bring levels of suffering.

So let's tackle the first Fear...the Fear of being unsafe. Let's do a survey to see how relevant this topic is today. Raise your hand if you lock your doors at night. Raise your hand if you lock your door when you leave your house? Raise your hand if you have an alarm system. Now, since some people are secretive about this next one...wink discreetly at me if you own a gun. During Christmas I stayed at my 89 year old grandmother's bunker, I mean house. Alarms are always set. She even has clubs on her doors that not even a police battering ram could penetrate. She proceeded to tell the family at Christmas dinner that she has two guns and she will not tell any of us where they are, because she doesn't want us to take them from her. Now, there's nothing wrong with taking precautions. But our American obsession with safety sometimes bleeds over into our lifestyle. Now what do I mean by that?

We not only want safe houses with digital safes to keep our keep sakes safe, but we want safe relationships, safe conversations and safe careers. Our obsession in our culture with safe relationships and conversations has bled into an epidemic of Political Correctness that causes us to go out of our way to never offend someone by sharing our faith. We hold our relationships with our friends so sacred that we fear offending those close to us by sharing about who Jesus is. Our obsession with safety has made us fearful of sharing our testimony because we fear being labeled as the office Christian, or ostracized from the social circles at work or even in our family. It's much safer to remain quiet than to put ourselves out there with fearless faith.

This safety fear keeps us from having that long overdue talk with our spouse and our children about how God wants a different life for our household. We forsake the true peace given by God for a false peace that comes by never rocking the boat spiritually within the four walls of our home. This safety fear also keeps us from our God given dreams. There are many of you in this room for whom God has birthed His dreams into your souls, yet fear of being ridiculed or having shade thrown at us by doubters keeps us from taking fearless steps of faith. So we keep them to ourselves. This safety fear keeps us from taking steps to go back to school or go for the promotion or to start a new career path.

This isn't anything new by the way. For centuries people have shied away from being bold in what they believed God wanted them to do or say because it doesn't feel safe. When we get to the 3rd chapter of Daniel, we see that the Jews had been deported to Babylon. They were living in a new society with a new king that had a completely different belief system. There were some gifted, young Jewish men who had caught the attention of this king and had risen to prominence in the kingdom. This was like hitting the lottery when you think about all of the conquered people over the history of humankind. Most were killed or enslaved. But, here we have three young men who found success in a foreign land after they had been conquered and deported.

The king of Babylon built a statue and at a certain time when musical instruments were played all of the people of that country were to bow down and worship the false god. Now, this had two purposes. First it united the people of this kingdom under one religion. Secondly, it caused all of the conquered foreigners from many different countries to leave their religion behind and thus lose their foreign identity. Yet, three men refused to do so.

Daniel 3; ⁸ “At this time some astrologers^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews.⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.’ ”

This was not the safe thing to do. They were fearless about their faith despite the circumstances that surrounded them. What did they risk by not bowing down?

1. They risked their jobs. How could they work for a king that they disobeyed?
2. They risked their social circle. People would not want to associate with them because they would have feared being lumped in with them.
3. They risked their lives. They knew the stakes before they chose not to bow down. They would be thrown into a fiery furnace.

It doesn't get more fearless than this. These men put their concern for safety aside because obeying God had more worth to them than their own safety and lives.

I have to admit that I'm not batting 1000% in this category. Recently, I was a guest of a Crossroader at the opening of a new business in downtown Pittsburgh. While we were there I got engaged in a fascinating conversation with a gentleman. About 10 minutes into the conversation, I got the dreaded question that usually ends many of my conversations. What do I do for a living? I laughed out loud because I knew the reaction was going to be hilarious because this gentleman had a well developed vocabulary. I think he had received a PH.D in vulgarity or at least a master's degree. So I told him I'm a pastor to which he immediately told me he was a sinner. No matter how hard I tried, he thought we were in a confessional booth. (Private investigators should tell people they are pastors)

Well, I walked away feeling good about sharing Christ's love to that man and speaking hope into his life. While we were walking back to our cars that evening I said to the Crossroader how I preferred to have protection on me when I walked through downtown at night because I didn't feel safe. In a very kind, non-judgmental way the Crossroader shared about his heart for those on the street in our downtown area and how he often ministered to them and prayed for those he met on the street. I immediately thought to myself, “Look at me, willing to share the gospel at a black tie event while wishing I had a black tire iron in my hand as I walk back to my car.” The Lord really spoke to my heart through that Crossroader who pastored the pastor on what it meant to be a pastor. I was more concerned about my physical safety than the eternal destiny of those who I walked by. So I prayed and asked God to give me a Fearless heart that was ruled by his love and not my fear.

Today, I want you to consider what areas of your life have you become too safe in? Circle the one in on your outline where you need to become more fearless.

Faith Conversations with: FAMILY FRIENDS CO-WORKERS PEOPLE YOU MEET

God Given Dreams: SCHOOL NEW CAREER NEW VENTURE MINISTRY

Other: _____

Another area that we have a hard time being fearless in is suffering. We want to be safe from all harm, disease, failure, or misfortune because we don't want to move into a season of suffering. Suffering is the byproduct of our safety being violated. No sane person likes to suffer. We don't want to suffer financially, physically, relationally or mentally. Suffering is a major fear for any human. I have heard it said multiple times that people are not so much afraid of dying; they're afraid of suffering before they die. Someone who has a disease is almost always described with the prefix, "They suffer from." No one wants to "suffer from" anything. Yet, what does it mean to be fearless about suffering? Does it mean that you don't care if you suffer?

I don't think it means that at all. I think that to be fearless in suffering means that despite the physical pain and mental or physical agony that we go through we decide to honor God through our suffering with our witness, words and our inner faith that propels the former two actions. In other words, we still bring God glory through what we say and do in the midst of suffering, whether from relationship troubles, disease, persecution or financial troubles.

Let's look again at how the three young men of God were willing to suffer in a way that honored God. **Daniel 3:15b** " *...if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?* " ¹⁶ *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us[c] from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'* "

I'm going to reread that last statement because it describes what it means to be fearless. "God can deliver me...He's able, He is powerful enough, but even if He doesn't, I am with Him through thick and thin." That's like saying I am with Him whether I am well fed or go hungry. I am with Him whether I am sick or in good health. I am with Him in good times and in bad times. This is covenantal language. So much of scripture is focused on God's faithfulness to us. How refreshing it is to read about 3 men who were faithful to God despite their potential for suffering.

There are moments I will never forget when I've witnessed people of God who praise him throughout their cancer diagnosis and treatments. Or when a Believer has been wronged by another person, but forgave them and didn't trash their name all over town. Or when I've seen people lose jobs but express to everyone that they trust in the Lord. In other words, the Lord can immediately fix this situation I am in and save me from any suffering, but if He doesn't I will still praise Him and honor Him with my actions and words.

²³ *... "and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'" They replied, 'Certainly Your Majesty.'* ²⁵ *He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'* "

I don't know whether this was an angel or as some scholars have said throughout the centuries that it was Jesus himself; either way God was with them in the midst of their suffering. I can't help but think that if God wanted them to not burn, he could have simply made them flame retardant. Yet, maybe because of their dramatic step of faith, God was so moved, so

touched, so proud, that He just wanted to be there with them. I would love to know what He said to them in that fire. No matter what God said to them in the midst of the fire, God was making an eternal statement to all who would follow Him into the fire of suffering and trials, "I am with you."

Our fearless faith invites Jesus to walk with us through our seasons of suffering.

And not only does He walk with us through it, but God brings fruit that impacts the world. Whenever I think of fearless faith through suffering I can't help but think about Jim and Elds Croucher. Twenty years ago Jim and Elsa's teenage daughter Tina was in a physically abusive relationship with her boyfriend. She was involved in the youth ministry at the church and with the encouragement from her friends decided to end the abuse and broke off the relationship with her boyfriend. While Jim and Elsa were at work one day they got a phone call to come to their house. When they arrived, they found out that the boyfriend had come over to the house to try to reconcile, and after Tina wouldn't, he pulled a gun on her, murdered her and then turned the gun on himself.

Jim and Elsa were devastated but they allowed God to walk with them through their suffering. In the midst of their fire, they let the world know that God was walking with them, leading them through the flames. In response to their suffering they started CADV or Citizens Against Domestic Violence. Over the next 20 years they spoke to tens of thousands of students throughout the country about teen dating violence and how to prevent it. They focused not only on teens, but on adult women who were abused. This was not just an informational ministry; Jim and Elsa made it their full time life's work to rescue women and children out of their abusive homes. In 2009, the Ohio Senate unanimously passed the Tina Act so that every school in Ohio must include training on teen dating violence as part of their curriculum and the staff must be retrained every five years on picking up signs of the abuse.

When you and I remain Fearless through suffering, God draws other people to Him through our witness. Other lives are impacted by our faith and witness. Our fearless suffering changes the lives and perspectives of those around us. Let's finish the story from Daniel 3.

²⁸ "Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.' "

How crazy is this? The faith of three young Jewish boys turned an idol worshipping king into a preacher. Only God! Every day you will have to make a decision. Will I play it safe or will I be fearless with my faith? When you come into a season of suffering, and we all will, will you have fearless faith in the midst of the fire? Just always remember this; your God loves you and He walks with you. Look over your shoulder, there is someone else with you in the fire.