



COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH

FEAR FACTORS

Part I

Daily Scripture Readings for
April 13 - May 10

Monday, April 13 - Luke 24:13-35

Before we move to our next topic, we have one more story of Jesus because the glory of Easter does not end on Resurrection Sunday. The events of Easter morning extend throughout our lives. It certainly did for the women at the tomb. For the disciples, Jesus' return was life-changing. And for the two men on the Road to Emmaus, this was a moment never to be forgotten. Jesus' impact on our lives must not be confined to Sunday.

These men were on the road to Emmaus. There is not much information about Emmaus. It was a small unknown town. We do not know why the men were headed there. One thought is that they were escaping to "the next town over" to get away from the turmoil in Jerusalem. The famous 20th century preacher Frederick Buechner says Emmaus is the type of town where you go "to make [yourself] forget that the world holds nothing sacred." In other words, Emmaus is an escape. It is the book you read to forget about the news. It is the movie you watch to postpone making a difficult decision. It is the diversion from real life.

We will never know the reason the men were traveling to Emmaus. What we do know, however, is that the Lord met them on the way there. As they were leaving, reflecting on what just happened in Jerusalem, the Lord appears. In the moments we want escape, or in the moments we believe we need to just get away from it all, God is present. When we just *need* that extra hour of sleep or bowl of ice cream or time alone because of the events in our life, God is present. So in a way, this passage is a perfect transition to our next topic: Fear. The two men were afraid. Then Jesus appears. "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 27:1). This is the topic we will begin to discuss tomorrow.

FEAR: WEEK 1 - WHERE CAN WE GO WHEN WE ARE AFRAID?

Tuesday, April 14 - Psalm 23

One of the most famous lines during a presidential inauguration speech was delivered on Saturday, March 4, 1933 by Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the beginning of his first term as President. His election was the first election during the Great Depression after the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Fear was rampant in the country with unemployment around 25% as he delivered his first speech as president. FDR calmly took the podium to say the words we all know: ““We have nothing to fear except fear itself.”

Fear is rampant in our world again. As you read this, the world is a lot different than it was just six weeks ago. People are afraid. Our world looks too much like the Great Depression of the 1930s. In all honesty, life changed in a moment. It reminds me of James 4:14: “For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

Where can we go when we are afraid? Our first devotion of this series answers the question. Before we talk about all of the different fears we have in life, I want to give you the answer. “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” No matter the unemployment rate, no matter the amount of money you have in the bank, no matter the number of cases of COVID-19, remember Psalm 23:1. “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”

Also remember Psalm 23:4. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death; I fear no evil; for you are with me.” Did you hear that? It does not say the shepherd will keep you out of the valley. It says we do not have to fear the valley because the shepherd is with you. So whenever someone asks (or maybe you ask) “where is God?”, here’s the answer. God is here with you. In the valley of the shadow of death. And because he is here, we have nothing to fear.

Wednesday, April 15 - 1 Samuel 24, 26

In both of the chapters you read today, we see a similar story. David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but he doesn't. In both places, David says that killing Saul is not permissible because Saul is the Lord's Anointed. Even though we clearly know by this point that David is God's Anointed One, Saul is still technically the king. David doesn't want to set a precedent for violence against the king. God chose Saul at one time, and God will choose when the time is right for David to take the throne. David shows great restraint here against the wishes of his army. It is this type of leadership that once again shows us that he is God's man for the job. Let's talk more about David and Saul's encounters on Facebook tonight at 6:30 pm.

Thursday, April 16 - Genesis 6:11-14

We most likely know the story of Noah's Ark. What I want to tell you about today is what the early church thought of when they read the Noah's Ark narrative. They read the ark as a metaphor of the church. A place to go when the storms of life assail you. A place of protection, refuge, and sanctuary. Too often, we try to go through the difficulty of life on our own. We do not seek help from any other source. However, when the floodwaters of life rage, when fear is overwhelming, we should not go it alone. We should get on the ark!

But here's the dilemma: you can't get on the ark like you have for your entire life right now. You can't go to the church or meet with the pastor in the office. You can't share in fellowship person-to-person in Bible Study or a Lunch. You feel alone. The church building is closed. I read a news article the other day that said even the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is closed to visitors. This is the first time it has been closed for an extended period since 1349, when the Black Plague ravaged Jerusalem! We are truly living in a future history lesson.

The church building is closed, but the church is certainly not. YOU are the church. You are the ark for each other. We are the group to help each other in times of need, and now we get to get creative. You are not alone. The church is not closed. The ark is here, and you will not walk through these uncertain days alone. I want you to call three church members today. No agenda. Just a time to talk and catch up. I want you to write at least one card to another church member to let them know you are thinking of them. How else can you show love and fellowship to other church members today? Get creative and let me know what you do! Not because you want a pat on the back or I'm checking grades, but because your creativity could become the next great way our church works together to keep the flood at bay.

Friday, April 17 - Psalm 27:1

Where can we go when we are afraid? Like most church kids, my Bible Study class had a running joke with our teachers. If we didn't know the answer to a question he/she asked, we would say "Jesus." Why do you say Jesus? Well, as many of you know, Jesus is always the answer! Also, there was a pretty good chance that the answer would actually be Jesus.

So, where can we go when we are afraid? The answer really is Jesus! When the Lord is the controller of your life, when the Lord is your Savior, of whom shall you be afraid? I love the way that Romans 8:31 expresses this truth: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" When we boil down life to a couple of simple truths, the truth of Psalm 27:1 is of the utmost importance. Whatever is happening in your life, it is not stronger than God. Pray today for God to give you peace. Believe in your heart that God is for you and is the stronghold of your life!

Saturday, April 18 - Lamentations 3:17-24

Hope is a word we all cling to during times of fear. Hope that all will be alright in the end. Hope that this might just be a bad dream. Hope that it isn't as bad as it seems. Hope the doctors find a vaccine or a treatment quickly. Hope that God will intervene and give us the miracle we need. In the face of adversity, we must choose to have hope. Hope in a God that will never fail us. God's love never fails us nor forsakes us. Great is His Faithfulness.

You might be feeling like the one lamenting in our verses today. Your fear, the prospect of sickness, or your boredom in isolation might have made you say "you've forgotten what happiness is." You have no joy in your heart (it's possible us pastors have overblown the difference between joy and happiness. Another topic for another day). In times of fear and grief, even though you are confident in your relationship with God, your hope will come and go. Life has been disoriented. Your current emotional state is normal. During your dark days, rely on scriptures such as ours today. The lamenter went back and forth as well. But remember the love of the Lord never fails. Take a deep breath and put your hope in God. Great is His Faithfulness.

"Great is Your faithfulness," O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with You;
You change not, Your compassions, they fail not
As You have been You forever will be.
"Great is Your faithfulness!" "Great is Your faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Your hand has provided—
"Great is Your faithfulness," Lord, unto me!
Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness

To Your great faithfulness, mercy and love.
Pardon for sin and a peace that endures,
Your own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Sunday, April 19 - Psalm 40:4

What false gods tempt you to go astray? Trust in the Lord alone. Let's worship together on Facebook this morning.

FEAR: WEEK 2 - HOW TO STAND AGAINST FEAR

Monday, April 20 - Daniel 3:13-18

“But if not...” I hope these are the words I can utter when I am standing in the face of fear. This week, we are going to read five different stories of people who stood against fear. We are going to learn about how we can also stand when fear assails us.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego lives were on the line. They had disobeyed King Nebuchadnezzar by worshipping God instead of him. The king brought them into his presence in order to force them to bow to him. It is then that they deliver the perfect response. Allow me to paraphrase. We do not have to bow to you. We won't bow to you. And our God can save us from whatever you are about to do to us. But even if he doesn't save us, we will never bow to you.

These three men had courage in the face of fear. Do you think they were afraid? How could they not have been? Wouldn't you be? Having courage is not being unafraid. Courage means doing what we should do even knowing the possible consequences. Standing up against fear means doing what is right even if it is unpopular, even if it causes pain.

Let us all stand against fear because our God can save us from struggle. But even if he doesn't, let fear know you will never cower to it.

Tuesday, April 21 - Esther 4:12-17

“If I perish, I perish.” It is with these words that Queen Esther stands against fear. She had good reason to be fearful. So fearful, in fact, at first she said no to Mordecai's request (Esther 4:11). If the king did not request her presence, then she was not supposed to see him. If she did approach the king, and this displeased him, then Esther could be killed on the spot. Mordecai is able to convince Esther that she must act on behalf of her people. That she has become queen in order to save them. That God has been at work in the background to take care of his people. So she makes the choice. She will face death. She takes her stand against fear of the loss of her life.

Often we face a choice in life. Stand up for those who cannot stand for themselves or only look out for ourselves. There can be negative consequences for doing the right thing. It is much easier to give into fear and just lie down and play dead. Our consequences range from ridicule, embarrassment, or even loss of a way of life. Let's use our current predicament as an example. We have all been staying home for over a month now. I'm guessing you are over it. Let's move on with life again. You might say “I'm tired of this. I want to go out and take the risk.” That is only looking out for yourself. Looking out for others right now means staying home. It means continuing to cancel plans. It means doing exactly what you don't want to do. Can you face the frustration from family who just want to get together again? Or the ridicule from friends who say it won't be a big deal? We face a choice in life. What choice are you making? Looking out for yourself or looking out for others?

Wednesday, April 22 - 1 Samuel 30-31

We will finish 1 Samuel tonight as we study David's life (Note: we skipped chapters 27-29 for lack of time, but you can read them on your own if you choose). It is in these two chapters when Saul and his sons die. David is about to become the true king of Israel. We continue to see David develop as a leader, especially in 1 Samuel 30 as he leads men into battle. The two chapters really show us that it is David who is exhibiting leadership qualities necessary to be king, and Saul's Kingdom is over. Let us talk about Saul's end and David's leadership more on Facebook tonight.

Thursday, April 23 - Acts 2:1-4

LeeAnn will tell you that I have a lot of pet peeves. Many of them are about misinterpretation of Scripture. The phrase "God won't give you more than you can handle" causes much frustration in me. Most people quote that phrase as if it is a Bible verse. Trust me when I tell you, it's not. The closest verse that I can find is 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." Yes, God tells us that we will not be tested beyond our strength, but notice the rest of the verse. It is God who provides a way out. So if you want to use the correct phrase, you can say "God won't give me more than *God* can handle."

So how does God handle it for you? The Holy Spirit. If you are a child of God, you have the Holy Spirit inside of you. And the Holy Spirit is how you can stand against fear. The struggles of this life and the acute problems you will face in moments of your life will be more than you can handle. However, the Holy Spirit will be able to handle it.

This reminds me of one of my favorite passages to interpret: Luke 18:18-30. In this account, Jesus proclaims that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." The people are

perplexed, shocked, nervous so they asked “who then can be saved?” Jesus’ answer gives us all comfort: “what is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” It is impossible for a person to stuff a camel through the eye of the needle (I believe Jesus is talking about a literal eye of a needle). But for God? It’s nothing. It’s easy. He could do it in his sleep.

That power is what is inside of you. If God can fit a camel through the eye of a needle, he can take care of the troubles that are too big for you to carry. Let the Holy Spirit stand up to your fears and insecurities. The disciples were told to stay home until they got help. They did so, and the Holy Spirit showed up and helped them overcome their fear. Don’t be afraid. You have God inside of you ready to take care of whatever God has allowed for in this season of life

Friday, April 24 - Joshua 1:5-9

Be strong and courageous. They are words all of us need to hear when we are uncertain of what will happen next. Be strong and courageous. When you face the loss of a loved one, be strong and courageous. When bills are coming due and there’s no money to pay them, be strong and courageous. When the demons are at the door and you are wanting to give in, be strong and courageous.

For Joshua and Israel, this is the second time they’ve been knocking on the door of the Promised Land. There was fear of the people who were already in the land. Now, there is uncertainty after Moses has died. God speaks to Joshua to reassure him that God will continue to be with Joshua. God tells Joshua that Joshua can go into the land and lead Israel with confidence because God will always be with him.

This is how you can stand against fear. Know that God is with you wherever you go. Know that God will never fail or forsake you. No one can stand against you. Be strong and courageous! Pray that you can live your life with that reassurance today.

Send an encouraging note or email to someone who needs to hear that God is at their side. Know that I am praying for you.

Saturday, April 25 - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

On the day I am writing this, I am actually in my office at church. It's been rare for me to be here over the past few weeks, but as I'm in here, I noticed my white board. It has the "high leverage" areas of the church on the board. These were brainstormed by our Long Range Planning Committee last summer. The three headings are Bible Study, Children, and Community. The reason these three areas have been singled out is people like to gather, so we want to focus our efforts on ministries where people gather regularly.

Humans are created to be social beings. Being isolated goes against our very nature. Part of the reason this is our nature is because of the truth that our passage today tells us. Two is stronger than one. Three is even stronger. We are stronger together. We are stronger gathered together with God in the middle. That is how we can stand against fear.

But how do we do that when we can't see each other? We get creative. Even while we are social distancing, the areas of Bible Study, Children, and Community are our focus. These need to be the groups we are focusing on if we want to continue to thrive as a church. Have you made efforts to connect to your Bible Study class this week? Have you made an effort to join a Bible Study class recently? What about joining in virtual fellowship and conversation with members of our church community who are of a different generation than you? How have you connected with them since we haven't been at church for over a month? What about our children's ministry? How have you interacted with them lately?

Your initial answer might be I don't know how to do that. Don't stop there. Brainstorm how you can get involved while we are social distancing and when we can

get together again. Two is better than one. Three is better than two. The more we work together, the stronger we will be.

Sunday, April 26 - Psalm 41:1-3

Whether you are ill or well this morning, God is protecting you. Worship that God today!

FEAR: WEEK 3 - WORDS OF COMFORT

Monday, April 27 - Isaiah 12

Over the first two weeks of looking at Fear, we have learned and remembered that God is the one who we can go to when afraid. We have seen examples from the Old and New Testaments of people standing up to fear. All of those examples and knowledge about God can be helpful, but the process of Fear still plays out in our lives. Knowledge doesn't always calm emotions. This week, we will look at passages which give voice to our fear. They are passages with which you can practice *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for "divine reading." When you read scripture in this way, you aren't quickly reading in order to read as much as possible, but you slow down to meditate and reflect on the passage being considered. You are praying these Scriptures. You are listening for God to speak to you through these short passages. You are not reading just once, but twice, maybe even three times. What words stand out to you? What is speaking to you today? How is God trying to speak to you today?

The words that stand out to me in Isaiah 12 are mostly in verse 2. The words that stand out to you might be different. "Trust" and "strength" in verse 2 really force me to contemplate my relationship with God. If I'm being honest, I try to do things on my own. I don't want help from other people. I think I can do things better. And then something like COVID-19 comes along, and I see how powerless I actually am. I can't rely on

myself. I must trust in God's strength for protection. I need to trust God like my kids trust me.

I am a jungle gym for my kids. They climb on me. I throw them in the air and catch them. They climb onto the stairs and jump into my arms. They fall backwards and know that I will catch them. They completely trust me. Why don't I trust God like that? I'm paralyzed with fear and won't move. I need to live out Isaiah 12:2. I know that God is my salvation. I must trust in him and not be afraid. Will you join me in that trust?

Tuesday, April 28 - Jeremiah 29:10-14

If I'm allowed to say this, I have a love/hate relationship with this passage. I love it because it has some great eternal truths about God's role in the world. I hate it because people misinterpret the passage ALL THE TIME. First, the misinterpretation. People single out Jeremiah 29:11 alone. They see it as a promise that no harm will befall them. That life will generally be fairly easy. That he is in charge of all things and won't let anything bad happen to them. This is only partially accurate. When you read the context, you see that God is telling the people these words when they are about to go into exile. Israel is being conquered and these individuals will never see their homes again. It is only after seventy years that God will allow their descendants to come back. Yes, God has a plan. Yes, Israel will be saved and come home. No, it's not going to be easy.

Now, in the full context of this passage, I love these verses. I think they are more impactful knowing the full context. God will take care of you even when it seems like your world is ending. God has a plan. God is at work. God is listening to your prayers. God will gather us back together. I believe that the church will be stronger when we are able to meet together again. We will no longer take for granted meeting together for worship. We will no longer go through the motions. There will be happy tears on that first Sunday we can come together. God knows the plans he has for us. It might seem

like we are in exile now, but God will bring us together again, and we have a future with hope!

Wednesday, April 29 - 2 Samuel 1

A time to mourn is always necessary after the death of someone close to you. The story cannot just keep going without time to reflect and remember the deceased. In a way, that's what 2 Samuel 1 is in David's Story. Saul and Jonathan have died. Others in Saul's family have died as well clearing the way for David to assume his anointed place as King of Israel. There will be time shortly for him to take this leadership role. We will start looking at him as king next week. This week, we see him mourn for people he was close to. One thing that I think this can teach us is that even though life never stops, it's ok to take a break and catch your breath. It's ok to mourn and catch back up later. Let's study how David mourned and see how that can be an example for all of us tonight at 6:30 on Facebook.

Thursday, April 30 - Isaiah 41:8-10

My words will be short today because I want you to spend extra time reading our passage. It is hard to put into words how special we should feel that God has chosen to have a relationship with us. That he has looked upon us and chosen to be our God. That he wants to help you and help me. Thank you, Lord, for being my God. Spend time in prayer, reflecting on these truths that can give comfort in times of fear.

Friday, May 1 - Philippians 4:6-7

How can one define peace? Peace is typically defined as the opposite of fighting. It is not defined on its own, but must have a companion noun. To explain the concept of peace, you must first teach the definition of war. Peace as we understand it in the world is a period of inaction. It is seen as just the absence of war.

The peace of God is not just absence of war. Peace, when it comes from God, is about total well-being. It is spiritual, emotional, and physical peace. It is a peace that is active when you are sharing of the same mind and spirit of Jesus (cf. Phil. 2:5). If you are a Christian, then this peace resides in you. It is a peace that allows us to not be anxious, but instead, when anxiety rears its ugly head, you can take your concerns to God.

This idea is certainly comforting; however, we have a problem. We don't do what these verses tell us to do. Yes, maybe we give in and say some words to God and verbally go through the motions that we are giving our fears to God. But in our hearts? Not a chance. We truly do not cast our cares upon Him. We do not lay all of our burdens down at his feet.

Am I describing you right now? I want to complete an exercise for me. It may seem silly at first, but please trust me. In your time of prayer right now, I want you to hold out your hands palms up. I want you to audibly say your fears while holding out your hands. And I want you to give those fears to God. When you are ready, flip over your hands and let go of your fears. You are showing God and yourself that you have given your anxiety to God. You will not pick it up again, but you have laid it down and given it to God. Do not worry. Let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds.

Saturday, May 2 - John 14:27

As we have been practicing this principle of *Lectio Divina* this week, this is a great verse to use. I want to walk you through another form of *Lectio Divina* today. Start with a time of prayer thanking God for today. Thank Him for the breath of life. Then, thank God for five things you are thankful for in your life. Now, read John 14:27. Next, pray for God to speak to you as you reread John 14:27. Tell Him your fears and concerns. Ask yourself: what is greater? God or your fear? Remind yourself of the five

things you are thankful for. Next, sit in silence. Listen for God to speak to you. After enough time has passed (you will know in your heart what amount of time that is), read John 14:27 one final time. Finish your time of prayer today with words that express your commitment to God no matter what happens in this life.

Sunday, May 3 - Psalm 42:1-5

In these five verses, the author of the psalm is longing to go back to the Temple. He is thirsting to be in the presence of God. While I understand many of you have this longing to return to the church building, please know that you do not have to thirst for the presence of God. God is not in a building, but in the hearts of his children. As of writing this, I do not know if we are meeting together this morning, but whether we get to meet in person or virtually, may we see the face of God in worship today.

FEAR: WEEK 4 - WHEN FEAR OVERCOMES

Monday, May 4 - Matthew 26:33-35, 69-75

Stories do not always have happy endings and whether it's one episode or your entire life, sometimes fear wins. This week, we will look at stories where fear wins the battle and how we can learn from the failures of these characters. Today, we see the story of Peter denying Jesus when Jesus is arrested. As one might say, life came at Peter fast. In the evening, he is confident and prideful saying even if he dies, he will never desert or deny Jesus. And then, not even before the next sunrise, Peter has done exactly what he was sure he wouldn't do. Why has he done this? It's obvious to me that fear has taken control of his life. Even though he said he would die with Jesus if necessary, when that actually became a possibility, he ran away.

How can we avoid being like Peter? How can we stop fear from taking over? I think we can practice. Please understand that the easy, quick answer to this question

all week could be pray or give it to God or trust God. These are all true. What I am hoping to do this week is be more specific. So to reemphasize, how can we confidently tell others we belong to Jesus? We practice. Think through the situations you may need to share your testimony. Practice a short testimony of how you have come to your faith and how God has helped you in your life. Know a few Bible verses that start to explain the Christian faith. Memorize your testimony and these verses. Enlist the help of a fellow Christian to practice with them. And then pray that God gives you an opportunity to share your testimony. Pray that when someone asks you “are you one of those Christians?,” you will be able to say “yes, I am and here is why.” Learn from Peter’s mistakes. Be ready to say you belong to Jesus.

Tuesday, May 5 - Numbers 13:30-33

In the new Disney/Pixar movie *Onward*, the main character can be described at the beginning of the movie as “afraid of everything.” His growing bravery is one of the main plot points of the movie. During one scene of the movie, he must walk out onto an unseen bridge. The rule about this bridge above a deep canyon in the earth with no bottom is that if you trust that it is there, it will be there, but if you waver in your confidence, the bridge will be no more and you will fall forever. I’ll let you watch the movie to see what happens, but since it’s a kid’s movie, I bet you can guess if he succeeds or fails.

Our passage today shows us why the Israelites wander the desert for forty years. God has promised them the land of Canaan. All they have to do is enter the land. And yet, they become fearful. They are fearful of the occupants of the land; they compare the current residents to the Nephilim, the mixed spiritual and human beings (see Gen. 6). All they needed to do was step out on faith and trust that God would take care of their steps into the land, and they chose to stay put. Fear overcame their decision.

How can we avoid being like the Israelites? Trust that God will remove the obstacles that seem to be in your way. God promised the land to Israel. God is faithful in his promises. Believe in all your heart that God will protect you along life's journey. A second way to not be like the Israelites is don't exaggerate the problem at hand. The spies said the inhabitants were like the Nephilim. The Nephilim were killed along with the rest of the world minus Noah's family in The Flood (Gen. 6-9). When we are afraid, our adversaries look bigger than they actually are. Like a shadow at sunset, our problems seem magnified. Look at the struggles you are facing with a rational mind (easier said than done). How big is the problem really? And remember, God is on your side. No problem is too big for God.

Wednesday, May 6 - 2 Samuel 2-4

After remembering Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1, the ruling of Israel must continue and David is proclaimed King. He won't become king over all of Israel until 2 Samuel 5. In 2 Samuel 2-4, David faces other opponents to being the King of Israel. Remnants of Saul's Kingdom and family fight to overtake the throne. This is the action we read in these three chapters. Let's talk tonight about these chapters tonight.

Thursday, May 7 - Mark 10:17-22

When you are scared to make changes in your life, you miss the best opportunity in your life. When you are known for one thing, and God asks you to get rid of it, what do you do? The rich man in our story today turns away from Jesus, presumably to never come back (I say presumably because we don't know the rest of his story. Some suggest that Zacchaeus is this man and does return to Jesus. I'm not convinced of that hypothesis). I tell people that this is the saddest story in the Bible. The rich man is presented with the choice of following God, yet he chooses his money instead. He was

earnest in his questions to Jesus. Jesus said the one thing he didn't want to hear, so he left.

How can we avoid being like the rich man? Do not let your place in life lead to a fear of change. The rich man was comfortable. He had a routine. What Jesus was asking would completely alter this life. He was afraid of change. Is there something that God has asked you to do, but you've been afraid? Is there a change you need to make, but you are nervous about the repercussions? Don't let fear overcome you. If God is asking you to do it, it is the best choice you can make.

Friday, May 8 - Ecclesiastes 2:4-11

The kids today call it FOMO, *Fear of Missing Out*. In the past, it's been called keeping up with the Joneses. When my kids were toddlers (or when I was one as well) and they would fight taking a nap, my parents called it MMSS, *Might Miss Something Syndrome*. Whatever we call it today, the Bible actually calls it coveting, and not doing it is one of the Ten Commandments. You may not realize you have FOMO or whatever you want to call it. However, every time you see on social media or hear about one of your friend's vacations and you get jealous, you are fearing what you are missing. You fear you are getting left behind, so you try to buy the latest and greatest. You save enough money to take that trip that you think is going to make you happier. And you know what happens? You probably do have fun, but then you are left wanting more. Psychologists even have a term for this: *hedonistic adaptation*. We may say it as "always looking for the latest and greatest adventure."

Traditionally, we believe that Solomon was the writer of Ecclesiastes, and our passage today shows he had some serious FOMO. He built and bought and had everything he could ever want. And what did he discover? All of that stuff is meaningless. It's vanity. The houses, gardens, vineyards, animals, friends, money, etc. None of it gave him satisfaction.

How do we avoid having FOMO? How do we avoid being like Solomon? For one, remember this: what other people tell you or what you see on Facebook is only one small part of your friends' lives. They are choosing the good parts to tell you. Internally, we need to retrain our minds to focusing on what we are blessed to have, instead of what we do not have. We must have gratitude for what God has given us. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul says "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This type of gratitude is exactly how we combat the *fear of missing out*. At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes similarly. He has done everything under the sun trying to discover the meaning of life, and he has been left unfulfilled. His conclusion to life is this: "worship God and keep God's commandments."

The pursuit of happiness will continue to elude us. But pursuing God's will for our lives will bring contentment and joy in life. We've been apart for awhile now. I'm writing this a month in advance so I do not know what type of separation we have today, but I know there's a part of us who fear we are missing out on what is happening outside of our homes when we are bored at home. Instead of focusing on what you are missing, focus on what you do have in your relationship with God. Don't be like Solomon in Ecc. 2. Instead, use your time to grow in your relationship with God.

Saturday, May 9 - John 6:53-69

I do not like not excelling at what I am doing. It has caused great anxiety and fear in my life. When things get difficult or when I discover I am not the best, I have a tendency to consider quitting. When I was in college, I would say "if you can't do it the first time, then it's not worth doing." (I'm glad you didn't know me in college. I was insufferable. It's a miracle LeeAnn did know me and chose to marry me.)

In our passage today, the followers of Jesus early in his ministry were faced with some of the hard teachings Jesus was commanding. Faced with a choice to continue

or to go back to what they always knew, they left Jesus. They feared the unknown, so they went back to what they were comfortable with. Like the rich man we read about earlier in the week, they feared this new life Jesus was requiring of them.

Do you fear God asking you to do something you are uncomfortable with? Maybe it's a teaching about starting a friendship with one the world considers your enemy. Maybe it's bending a broken relationship with one who hurt you in the past. Maybe it's sacrificing more time, energy, or money that you would prefer to use something else. What have you hidden from God because you are afraid?

Do not let that fear overcome you. Spend some time in prayer this morning asking God to reveal to you what you are keeping from him. Ask him what he wants from your life. Spend time listening for God to respond. Be like the disciples at the end of this passage, knowing who Jesus is, so you want to do as he asked. Call a friend who can keep you accountable to what God is requiring of you. Do not fear overcome you in your pursuit of Jesus. It is hard to be a disciple of Jesus. Do not let that stop you.

Sunday, May 10 - Psalm 43

Happy Mother's Day to all of the moms! I pray that it is a wonderful day. (This psalm has nothing to do with Mother's Day. I just wanted to say Happy Mother's Day.)