

THE POWER OF COURAGE

CLEAN SLATE SERIES

Nehemiah 2:1-10 // Craig Smith

January 15, 2017

CRAIG: Morning. Hey, just a little acknowledgment. I realize that a lot of you had to ride the shuttle in because our parking lot is absolutely full. Which is fun problem to have, but I also realize that it's not necessarily what you expect when you come in. So, if you had to ride the shuttle in, I guess we apologize for that. But we also thank you for being willing to do that, and be here with us this morning. I'm sure God's got some great things, just know we are full in a lot of our services right now, and we're trying to figure out. In fact if you want something to pray for this week, we had a key meeting on Thursday with all the key departments to talk about how can we continue to make space, to just make room for what God's doing here.

It's exciting stuff, but we certainly don't wanna be turning people away and that is happening a little because they can't find parking spaces. So, I wanna just make this request, if this is church home for you, and 9:30 is the service that you're most able to come to, that's great but, I would encourage you to maybe think perfectly about the possibility of parking in our overflow lot even when you first get here. I mean you may be here early enough that there's still space for you, but if you would actually be willing to park in our overflow lot, that would create space for people who are just coming and maybe they're first time attendees.

So, I just encourage you to maybe personally think through the possibility of doing that. But speaking of making room, we are in our second week of our Clean Slate Series, and if you're here last week, you heard me say that the goal of the clean slate series is not to get rid of everything. It's to make room for something. And that is to make room for something that God wants to do not just in us, but through us. And as we talk about these kinds of things that are on the slates in the back, and we look at them and occasionally we find ourselves go yeah, that one is me, that one is me, that one is me.

There's a few of those that really take up a lot of space in our lives. The counter intuitive way to deal with those things is not to push in and go, you know, "I gotta fix this. I gotta get this out of the way. I gotta somehow take care of all this." but it's rather to ask the question, God what do you wanna do through me? Because as we begin to get on board with what God wants to do through us, we find that other stuff takes care of itself. Because as we're moving in alignment with God, the Holy Spirit begins to take care of this other stuff that we're powerless to take care of on our own. But the reality is, and I know this in my own life that, understanding what God calls us to isn't the same thing as embracing it. And that there are things that keep us often from embracing the things that we begin to understand God's moving us towards and the biggest thing that probably keeps us from embracing what God's calling is to is fear.

How many of you have ever experienced fear at any time in your life? And so, you know how powerful it can be, right? And fear can trap us in places that we're not happy being, but we're afraid to move out of them. I had a real powerful experience about a couple years ago, I was in Yosemite National Park with my nieces and nephews, and we were doing some rock climbing and we'd set up a top rope, top rope means that the rope goes all the way to the top of the cliff, goes through some gear and it comes back down. So, when the person is climbing, they're always supported by the rope. And my niece, her name is Emerson, was climbing and it was kind of a fun route and she got about halfway up, there's a little ledge which when you get to the ledge you can just stand on it, which is great if you're real secure and then you can climb on. Well, she got to the ledge and then she realized that the next couple moves are pretty hard and so she decided, "Yeah, I'm kind of done." and we said, "That's fine just come on down." And that's when things got weird. Because she was standing on this great little ledge, and she's like, I'm good. I feel secure. I like this place. I'm not happy about being halfway up this big rock face, but I feel pretty good about where I am and what I was asking her to do was step backwards off of that thing. And she was like, "No, that's not gonna happen."



And I understood. I mean I've been there. It's a scary thing to kind of suddenly have to step away from where you are, even if it's a place you're not comfortable being. Even as a place you're not totally thrilled that you're there. I'm at least familiar with it, right? And she felt reasonably secure, she wanted down, but she wasn't willing to let go and to step back off that cliff and let me catch her. And I get that. And fear does that, right? Fear can trap us in places that we don't wanna be, but we can't quite find the courage to move forward from.

So, the question before us today is, what's the recipe for courage? What's the recipe for that thing that will allow us to move beyond where we are, to the thing that God is calling us towards. If you have your bible, I'd love to have you turn with me to Nehemiah Chapter 2. We're gonna pick up where we left off last week. While you're turning there and you'll find it... by the about a third of the way through the Bible if you're not familiar with that particular book. Once you find first and second Chronicles, keep going, you hit Ezra and then you hit Nehemiah. If you hit Esther, you've gone too far, back up a little bit. And while you're finding that, let me just recap the story at this point.

Nehemiah is a man who is historically from the Nation of Israel. That is, he's an Israelite by blood, by birth but, he's not living in Israel. He's part of a group of exiles that ended up in the Babylonian Empire, which then became the Persian Empire. And Cyrus the Persian emperor, had allowed the Jewish exiles to go home, but Nehemiah's from part of the family that decided to stay where they were. And so, he's in service to the King as a cup bear to the king. About 100 years have passed since the Jewish people have been allowed to go back and start rebuilding the city, and Nehemiah had an opportunity to ask what's going on with them? What's going on back there? And as we saw last week, there was a progression that happened. That he began with an interest that deepened into a concern, which ultimately matured into a passion.

So, God allowed his interest to deepen into concern, which matured into a passion, and that was the way that Nehemiah began to understand that God was calling him to something. As we pick up the story in Chapter 2, four months have passed. And there's two things that have happened during those four months. The first one is, his passion has matured. It's deep into the point that he can't sit still, he doesn't have to have anybody else on board with what he's concerned about, he just has to do something about it. And that passion is important because concern comes and goes. It waxes and wanes but passion burns bright, and passion will take us through when things get difficult. And so that has happened in Nehemiah's life in the last four months.

But the other thing that's happened these last four months is, he's had an opportunity to strategize. To begin thinking, what could I do? What would I do if God provided this opportunity? And so, as we pick up the story, we find that opportunity coming. And Nehemiah's ready for it. In the month of Nisan, the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him. I took the wine and I gave it to the king. On the surface that might sound like an everyday occurrence for Nehemiah, he's the cup bearer, that's his job. He tastes the wine to make sure it hasn't been poisoned. He tasted for quality, he brings it to the king, but there's a phrase in this verse that's important to notice. And it's the phrase that my translation says, when the wine was brought for him.

And most of us understand that that's an unusual statement. It literally says that wine was brought before the king. And what it seems to suggest is, a lot of wine was brought before the king. Lots of different... I'm not a wine guy, but lots of different varieties and ages, and lots of wine was brought in. It strongly suggests that there's a festival about to happen. This is a special occasion and the Persian kings actually were famous for their drinking festivals. You can read about them in Esther, there's another one mentioned in Ezra and the ancient records are, you know, full of descriptions of these massive drinking parties that the Persian kings would engage in.

But there's an important thing that happened during these big parties, and they were actually maybe two things. Number one, at least early in the party, the king was usually in a pretty good mood. And number two, it was common during these special occasions for the Kings to grant special favors to people. And so what's really happening here is a description that, this is an



opportune time, and Nehemiah recognizes this is the chance that I've been waiting for, okay? Nehemiah has been looking for this opportunity.

Wisdom understands that timing matters, right? How many of you know that? If you have to have a difficult conversation, there are times to have it and there are times definitely not to have it. When you need to ask from somebody for something, you choose your timing carefully. I remember my dad had a really high stress job. He was an Air Force Intelligence Officer. He worked...I got to see his office one day, he worked behind a door that was six feet thick. Which I always thought was a little bit overkill. Like what, you know, what can't get through a three foot thick door, right. Where do you need to go six, unless it's the terminator showing up which I don't think actually happens, that just felt like overkill, but it was a great sort of symbol of how stressful and high pressure his job was.

And so, I learned pretty early on that when Dad came home he needed a little bit of time. You didn't ask dad for money the moment he walked in the door. He needed a little bit of rest, he needed a beer, he needed to chill out a little bit and then you could tell him what had happened or you could ask the thing you need to ask. So, timing mattered, okay? And we all get that instinctively and Nehemiah is waiting for the right timing. But I wanna suggest that, there's a little bit more going on than that. He's not just waiting for the right timing. What he's really doing is he's recognizing that wisdom practices active waiting. Wisdom practices active waiting. He's not just waiting. He's doing something in the meantime. And that's an important ingredient in the recipe for finding courage.

Active waiting does three things at least. The first thing it does is that, it's faithful where God has planted us. Do you hear me? Active waiting looks at where God has put us and it says, "I'm gonna be faithful right here. Yes, God may give me an opportunity to move to something else, something better, maybe on the rise and God may be moving me to something new, but right now, I'm right here and I'm gonna embrace that. I'm going to be faithful in it right here, right now." Four months has passed and I guarantee you Nehemiah had not spent that time hanging out in his room mourning and fasting and praying. He had been doing that every single day, we saw the last week. But he'd also been doing his job, because can you imagine if he hadn't done his job for four months, and now he comes to the king and he asked for a favor, that would never have gone anywhere.

So, he's been faithful all along the way, and that's an important part of setting the stage for what comes next. The second thing that active waiting does is that, it expects God to provide the right opportunity. It expects that God is aware of our need. It expects that God cares about the things that we care about. And so it expects that God is gonna bring the right moment. He's gonna bring the right timing and so he looks for it. It's actively looking, "Oh, is this the right time? No, okay? How about now?" So, that by looking for the right time, it doesn't miss the opportunity when God begins to provide it. The third thing that active waiting does is that, it plans for when God provides the right opportunity. It plans, okay? When God moves, when God provides the right timing, when God makes it clear that now is the moment, what am I gonna do? How should I respond? How should I look to move forward? And so, it plans for that and Nehemiah has done all three of those things. He's experienced and practice active waiting.

And Nehemiah says, "I had not been sad in the King's presence before. And so the king asked me, why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart. I was very much afraid. But I said to the king, may the King live forever. Why should my face not look sad, when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

So, Nehemiah has chosen this moment, he's understood that this is the right moment. It's the right opportunity and he's ready with a plan. And the first part of his plan is that, for the first time he lets what's going on in his heart show up on his face. Apparently up to this point, he hasn't done that and there's good reason not to have done it before this moment. Persian kings are famous for refusing to allow any of their servant's personal problems to intrude into the court. We have ancient documents from Persia that basically, their commands being given, you know, "Thou shall not bum me out." Basically is what it boils down to. They did not wanna be depressed by their servant's problems. The expectation was, "Listen, you put on the right face." and



Nehemiah to this point has done exactly that. He's been faithful where he was planted. He responded to the king's commands and wishes. He didn't let his inner turmoil show up on his face, but this day is different. This day he intentionally, lets the guard down. He lets his face show what he's struggling with inside, and the King notices, which by the way, he wouldn't have. Had Nehemiah not been faithful up to this moment?.

It's a change for Nehemiah and the King recognizes it. And so the king says, "Hey, what's going on?" And he says that Nehemiah was very much afraid, which is entirely understandable because Persian kings are also famous for executing the people who didn't obey their commands. So, Nehemiah realized what he was about to do, what he had already done actually, when he already begun the road, he had begun to walk down this moment, was potentially life threatening. It was entirely possible that this would not end well for Nehemiah. But here's the thing, passion drives us to act courageously. Passions say, "I can't sit still anymore. I've been waiting and now God has provided the opportunity, and I have to move no matter what the costs."

Nehemiah begins to practice what I will call courageous faith. And here's the good news. God loves to move in response to courageous faith. God loves to move in response to greatest faith. It's not a formula to mix God up. We can't force God into anything. But God loves to respond when his children go, God I'm gonna trust you and this is really scary and I don't know how it's gonna turn out, but I believe that you've provided the opportunity and I think I understand what I'm supposed to do. I'm scared to death but I'm gonna step forward. And God is gonna go, "Yes. Yes." God loves to respond to courageous faith.

But the other thing I want to notice about Nehemiah is that, not only is he acting courageously, but he's also acting carefully. And I know our initial reaction to that is, "Wait, do those really fit together? Can you be courageous and careful?" I mean the idea of careful, courage almost feels like an oxymoron. But it's really not because courage is just the willingness to move forward in spite of danger.

Courage is the willingness to move forward in spite of danger. Being careful means trying to find the right route to move forward through the danger. The route that will give us the greatest chance of success, and God calls us to do exactly that. God says to do things like count the cost before you begin the projects, okay? God is not opposed to looking forward and going, this is gonna be dangerous. This seems like the best most reliable pathway through the danger. And courage says, even though you can't solve all the equations, even though you can't take care of all the variables, having chosen what seems like the best path, courage says you're gonna go forward. And God's okay with careful courage. In fact I would argue this that God expects us, He calls us to act with careful courage. God calls us to act with careful courage.

The second big ingredient in the recipe for courageous faith is careful courage. Nehemiah demonstrates careful courage in at least three ways here. The first one is we've already said is that, he waited for the right time. He waited for the opportunity that God stirred up and because he was looking for it, he recognized it when it came. Second way that Nehemiah demonstrates careful courage is, he's careful with his words. He's clearly formulated the way he wants to ask this question of the king. The King asked him, why he's so sad and his response was this, "Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins?"

And you notice he doesn't say the word Jerusalem. That's the name of the city. It's almost certain that Artaxerxes knew Nehemiah was an Israelite, he knew about the city of Jerusalem. So, Nehemiah leaves awful word that we would expect him to use, but there's a good reason for it. And that is he's in a public setting and had he said the word Jerusalem, he would have put the king in a difficult spot. He would have put the king in a spot where the king really couldn't respond favorably because here's the interesting thing Nehemiah was actually the king that was largely responsible for the difficult situation of Jerusalem. When Emperor Cyrus had allowed the Jews to go back, he said, "Go back so that you can rebuild the wall, you can rebuild the temple." And they tried to do that, they ran into all kinds of problem and opposition from the foreign peoples around them, and it was a constant start and stop process.

Ezra, while...or just a little bit before this had gone back and was in the same mess of opposing peoples, keeping them from



getting things done. And when Artaxerxes came to power, when this king came to power, some of the enemies of Israel sent a letter to him and they said, “Hey, I don’t know if you’re aware, but the city of Jerusalem has a long history of rebellion. And if it gets rebuilt and if the wall gets rebuilt, you know what? They’re gonna rebel and you’re gonna lose your fortress and your stronghold in this part of the world. So, we would really encourage you to make sure that it doesn’t rebuild.” And Artaxerxes said, “Yeah, I don’t want that city rebuild.” so, he sent a letter back saying, “Hey, stop. Stop rebuilding the temple, stop rebuilding the city, stop rebuilding the walls.”

So, the city that Nehemiah is concerned about was in the difficult place because of the decisions of the king he was talking to. And in this public setting with all these people around this festival he said, “Yeah, I’m just concerned about Jerusalem, what that would have been was a rebuke against the king in a public setting.” I mean at that point, there’s no way the king could have responded well and saved face. And so, Nehemiah very carefully avoids mentioning the name of the city even though he fully expects that the king will know. But he hasn’t put the king in a difficult spot. He’s spoken wisely, he’s spoken carefully. Now, he’s still being courageous. What he’s saying is still quite potentially life threatening. But, he’s carefully chosen his word. That’s careful courage.

The third way that he demonstrates careful courage is that, he built common ground with the king. He speaks about the city where his ancestors are buried. And we know from ancient records that Artaxerxes came from a family line that cared a lot about the burial ground of their ancestors. That was holy to them, it was sacred, it was important to them. That wasn’t true of all of the Persians. Some of the Persians actually they didn’t bury at all. They just put their dead out in the fields for the animals to come and take care of. I know. But Artaxerxes family was different. They were unusual actually, among the Persians. They cared a lot about burials. They put a lot of time and effort and money into the burial grounds and the tombs of their ancestors, and they revered the tombs of their ancestors.

And so when Nehemiah says to the king, “The city where my ancestors are buried.” He strikes a note that resonates with Artaxerxes. He’s building common ground. He’s connecting to something that would they have together. Which is also could wisdom. And we see that throughout scripture when Jesus spoke to fisherman, he talked about fishing. When Paul spoke to Greek philosophers, he quoted Greek philosophy, he built common ground.

In all these ways, Nehemiah demonstrates careful courage. It’s still courage. He’s still moving forward into very dangerous territory. But because he’s been careful about it, he’s minimized the danger to some extent and God calls us to act with careful courage. And so the king says, “What is it you want? And that’s, you know, that’s where everything kind of gets hushed. That’s for the moment, it’s all sort of balance on that knife’s edge. The king says, “What do you want? What are you asking for?” And I think you can almost hear in those simple words, I know where you’re talking about, be really careful now, what is that you want?

And then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried. So that I can rebuild it.” Nehemiah’s practice active waiting. He’s gotten ready for this moment. He’d figured out his approach, he realized the approach is still dangerous, but above all else, Nehemiah is courageous. That’s what passion does. To understand that in the midst of his beginning to act right now, he still relies on the principle we talked about a little bit last week which is this, he understands that only God can change things.

But he often chooses to act through his people. Nehemiah knows that no matter how well he’s planned, a man how wisely he’s spoken about, how careful his courage. No matter how courageous he is, at the end of the day unless God is in this, there is no hope for success. And so, even in this moment, the king says, “What do you want?” and Nehemiah first response is to do what. He prays.

Now, that’s probably not a prolonged prayer. That would have gotten awkward, right? “What is it you want?” “Hang on.” No, no. I mean it’s a quick. I mean it’s probably...it’s probably silent. It’s in his heart. He’s like, God that’s because what he’s doing is you



putting God front and center, because he understands unless God is in this, nothing can happen. But he also knows that, God may be waiting for his people to act courageously to unleash the power of heaven. So, he prays, he invites God into the center of it and then he speaks and he says, "Would you let me go and rebuild it?" And then king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take? When will you get back? And Nehemiah understood that, was the king saying, "Okay, yeah." So he says next, he says, "It please the King to send to me." and you can almost hear Nehemiah's a little giddiness going on there, right?

The king said, "Yes." It please the King sends me. And so I set a time. Now, here's the thing, I don't know about you, but if I had been in Nehemiah's place and I had gotten up the courage to step forward and ask this incredibly threatening question to really... even though I'm careful with the way I say it I'm really kind of calling the king's previous decision into question and, and I'm asking him to not only reverse the decision to let the city be rebuilt, but I'm asking him to send me one of his servants to go and rebuild it. Like if at that point the king said, "Okay." like I would have gotten out of there as fast as possible, right? Like I would have left a trail of fallen servants as I pushed through that crowd, I could not have gotten out of there quickly enough to get going on it, right? Like he said, "Yes." Yeah, I don't wanna risk this. I don't wanna put this into jeopardy. I'm just gonna do this, but what's fascinating to me about Nehemiah is that, when he realizes that God is moving, that God is responding to this, instead of being satisfied with a little bit, he pushes in and he asks for more.

So, I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of the trans Euphrates, so they will provide safe conduct until I arrive at Judah?" And, the goal of this man. "And may I have a letter to a Asaph, the keeper of the royal parks, that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residents I will occupy?" What he's basically saying is, "Hey, you said I could go back and do this work. That's great. Would you guarantee my safety? Oh, you will? How about this, will you pay for it?" Can I use the royal timber to do it? I mean good heavens.

And so I sent... so I went to the... Oh, and because the gracious hand of my God was upon me notice that. It's not just his wisdom. It's not just the king's niceness. He understands God is in this. God is responding to his courageous faith because the graces hand of my God was upon me, the King granted my requests. And so I went to the governors of Trans Euphrates and I gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. It's the other ingredient for courageous faith. In my understanding when God's moving, we're supposed to ask big. When God's moving that's not the time to go, oh good enough. When God's moving, it's the time to totally commit ourselves to him and say, "Okay, God can we go bigger than this?"

And again, this is not a formula for forcing God to act. But as we said earlier, God loves to respond to the courageous faith of his people. And when we ask for too little the God goes, "Okay. But let's say that I give you that thing you're asking for, you're asking for something that's so small. You're not even gonna know that I did it. You're gonna find yourself getting what you asked for and then wondering well, is that just chance? Is that just coincidence? Is that just because I said it right? Is it just because I found the right path? Because they were in a good mood, is because the wine had begun to flow." I mean, what God saying is, "Listen, when I'm moving what you need to do is you need to ask for something that only I can do, so that you will know that only I have done it." And Nehemiah understands that and Nehemiah begins to understand that God is in this. Nehemiah goes big. And he asked for what is ridiculous because he understands that if he gets it, no one will have any question that it was only God who provided it.

And here's the other reality. God often blesses courageous faith with more than we dared to hope for. God often blesses courageous faith with more than we dared to hope for. In this particular case, Nehemiah asked for the moon and he got it. But he got more than that, the last part of that part that I read was the King had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. Apparently, at his own initiative. Apparently Nehemiah at a certain point goes, "Okay. I probably better stop." And the king goes, "Hey, hang on a second, I'll give you the letters, but I'm also gonna send some army people with you."

So, Nehemiah rides back into the city, that this king once gave the word should be destroyed, should not be allowed to rebuild. Nehemiah rides back into the city, with the Army of that King there to protect him as he begins the rebuilding. That's something



only God can do. But it was even more than Nehemiah dared to hope for. God often responds to create his faith in ways that we would never even have dared to ask for. And here's where this gets a little bit tricky. This is not a formula for success from an earthly perspective. It's important to understand that, it's not a question of if you practice active waiting, plus careful courage, plus you ask big, you're going to succeed from a worldly perspective. Especially if from a worldly perspective, you mean things are gonna be easy from here on out because this is not the case. Getting on board with what God calls us to isn't an easy thing.

In fact, if the book of Nehemiah continues on, it's clear that it's not smooth sailing. It's clear that he encounters obstacles in very difficult circumstances. These things are not a formula for smooth sailing into the future. These things are ingredients for courageous faith, and while courageous faith does not guarantee smooth sailing in the future, it does guarantee something far more important. It guarantees that we face that future with God, because courageous faith aligns us with God. And there's no better place to be, no matter what the future holds, being aligned with God is the best place you can be and as you move into it.

And courageous faith aligns us with God and there's absolutely no better place to be. So my question to you today is simple this, how is God calling you to embrace courageous faith which is to say how is God calling you to align yourself with him? This week, let's make it practical. This week, how is God calling you to embrace courageous faith? To act courageously in alignment with God which puts you lockstep with him, which puts you right up next to him so that no matter what's coming, you're facing it in his presence. What is God calling you to do this week to embrace courageous faith? Maybe some questions can help as we've already sort of discussed pieces of this one of them is just this. What's one way that I need to practice active waiting? It maybe that's where you are, maybe embracing courageous faith means staying where you are but preparing for what's going to come, preparing for the opportunity that you know that God will provide and you're looking for, and you're getting ready to be able to seize it when you see him move. That is courageous faith.

Sometimes courageous faith doesn't mean doing, it means waiting but trusting in him. And not taking matters into our own hands because the timing isn't right, that God hasn't moved yet and so we wait upon him. That's courageous faith. Another way we embrace courageous faith is simply that we practice careful courage. So, how is God calling you to practice careful courage to act in a way maybe you're at that place that God's providing the opportunity, but how do I act in such a way that I'm being courageous, but I'm also being careful. I'm being wise as God calls me so, Jesus said be innocent as doves, but wise as serpents. Is this your way to God's calling you to practice this careful courage and in that way, to embrace courageous faith or is it possible that embracing courageous faith this week means asking God for more than you have dared to ask for yet?

Am I insulting, this is a question I've asked myself a fair amount. Am I insulting my great God by asking for too little? And I honestly believe that sometimes what I ask for God goes, I'm not gonna give you that yet because it's so small that it's an insult. And it's so tiny that if it happens you're not going to be convinced that I'm moved, you're gonna wonder if maybe that was just coincidence that was just circumstance. Not at all, I want you to know my child that I am with you. And that when you're aligned with me that we face the future together and there's no reason to be paralyzed by fear, so ask bigger. So there'll be no doubt that I'm the one who did this.

Embracing courageous faith is not a formula for worldly success. It's not a formula for everything being smooth-sailing. But courageous faith does align us with God and there is absolutely no better place to be no matter what it is that you're facing this week, this year or in the years to come. Let's pray.

Jesus would you breathe into us courage, courage to be able to respond to the ways that you're moving. Courage to be able to wait if that's what you're calling us to, but in that waiting to be active to prepare and to plan for the moment that you move as we expect you will, to be ready to seize the opportunity that only you have provided. Would you breathe into us courage that we might serve you faithfully, and that we might trust you passionately. And Jesus, thank you for being willing to walk this journey of life with us. Thank you for being willing to come alongside us and to move us forward from where we are, if only we will get the courage not to be paralyzed by fear as we trust you, in Jesus name. Amen.

