

THE COST OF FEAR

The Real Jesus

John 11:45-54 // Craig Smith

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| [Video]

No one gets through life without picking up some baggage along the way.

From heartaches to hurt to guilt for what we have done -- or failed to do, it gets pretty heavy. In fact, the baggage we accumulate can be downright unbearable. This Easter, we'll explore the only way to check that baggage, to hand it off to someone who can take care of it in a way we cannot. This is the hope that God offers us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the chance to start living life guilt free from the burden of all of our baggage.

[End Video]

Craig // How many of you have already picked up some of these to invite people to our Easter services? Thank you, thank you. Thank you. How many of you have already used them to invite somebody? Thank you, thank you, thank you. That's awesome. I would like to take a minute right now to pray for our Easter services coming up in a few weeks. Would you join me? God, we thank you for the resurrection because it is the centerpiece of our faith, the reason for the hope that we have. We thank you so much for the confidence that we have in the Christian faith because of the reality of the resurrection. Lord, as we look forward to celebrating the resurrection on Easter, we also look forward to sharing the good news of the resurrection with those that don't have the hope that we have. Lord, would you give us courage to invite people to come, to hear the good news that has so transformed our lives. How can we possibly hold it to ourselves? In Jesus name, amen.

Today we are going to take a look at one of the things that I believe is probably the greatest obstacle to experiencing this thing that Christians like to call the abundant life, which is a very religious sounding thing. If you were here a few weeks ago we looked at the Gospel of John where Jesus said, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly, or as we said, that means excessively. It's a life of so much good that it overflows. Our lives can't contain it. That's what Jesus wants for us, and that's what he accomplished. That's why he went to the cross, but I find that we don't always experience that kind of life even as followers of Jesus. Today we are going to look at the number one reason I think we don't experience that. It basically has to do with the fact, as we said a few weeks ago, the abundant life, this life of excessive good, it's not a gift that's static. It's not something he hands to you and says, you are on your own now. The abundant life is a proximity effect. We only experience it because we stay close to Jesus which means that -- we have to stay close to Jesus, and there are things that get in the way of that, right?

Today we are going to look at what I think is the number one thing that keeps us from sticking close to Jesus, and that thing is fear. Did you know that God commands His people to not fear or fear not 87 times in the Bible? Did you know that? He says it different ways. It's fear not. Do not fear. Do not be afraid, but 87 times God commands His people not to let fear get in the way of following Him. To put that in context, the Bible only commands us not to build or bow down to idols 14 times. The command not to commit adultery, 9 times. The Bible only commands us not to murder 8 times. I think we can all agree, those are things we should not do, and yet even if you add all of them up, you are not getting close to the 87 times God says to His people, do not be afraid.

Which suggests, I think, and I realize I'm way out on a theological limb here, but I think that means that God is pretty concerned about the impact fear has on His people. Does that seem safe? Why is that? Why don't you grab your Bible and join with me in John Chapter 11 and see what fear does to God's people. We are going to be picking up the story where we left off last week. Last week we saw Jesus do one of his most famous miracles. That is he told a man name Lazarus who had been dead and buried for four days to get out of the grave, and he did. He came back to life. What we are going to see today is the response people had to that miracle. John Chapter 11:45 says therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. Can I just get a duh? How do you not, right? Anybody can exclaim that they are the Son of God, but only the actual Son of God can tell a dead man to get back up, to not be dead anymore, and it works, right? So Jesus has really conclusively proved that he is who he says he is, and so of course people believed in him. The bigger question would be how do you not believe in Jesus, at this point? And yet verse 46 says, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told what Jesus had done.

Some of them went to the Pharisees and told what Jesus has done. Which is a weird thing to say because it sounds like they went and tattled on Jesus, doesn't it? They tattled on him for raising a dead man. What's happening here? Honestly, we don't know why they went to the Pharisees. We don't know if they were tattling on him, or maybe they said I know you guys have made up your minds about Jesus, but based on what I just saw, you might want to rethink that. Maybe that's what's going on. We don't really know. All we know is they went to the Pharisees. We need

to talk a little bit about the Pharisees. If you spent time in church, that may be a familiar word. If you haven't spent a lot of time in church, that may be a completely new word, but I want to make sure we are all on the same page and understand who the Pharisees were. The Pharisees were one of four groups of people that existed in ancient Israel, four groups of people that developed in response to a puzzling situation.

See when God called the nation of Israel into existence, He gave them a promise. He said as long as you obey me, you will have freedom. As long as you obey me, you will have sovereignty in the land. You won't be subject to foreign oppression. You won't be enslaved by other peoples, as long as you obey me, but at the time that John is writing this, Israel has been enslaved by foreign nations for centuries. First by the Babylonians and Persians and Greeks and most recently by the Romans. They have this promise, but they have this experience, and there is a gap between these two things. Four groups arose in response to that gap between the promise and their experience. Four groups that basically had different answers to the question, how do we get back to God's good graces.

One group was called the Zealots. The Zealots said, we need to fight. They were early proponents of the God helps those that help themselves theology. We need to fight. We need to get the Romans out of here by force. They didn't have many numbers so what they tended to do was what you might call terrorism. In fact, they might be some of the earliest examples of terrorist activity. They would sneak up behind Romans in crowded markets and things like that where they had a crowd to hide in, and they would stab them in the back, and they would try to get away. The idea was maybe if we can demoralize the Roman army, they'll pull out and let us go free, but that's how the Zealots responded. They said, we need to fight.

There was another group called the Essenes who said, we need to start over. They said the problem is spiritual. God said if you obey me, we'll be free. We are not free, therefore we are not obeying. They looked around at Israel and said Israel is so corrupt. They are so far off of God's intentions at this point, there is no way we'll be able to fix this country. We need to start over, so they pulled back and they built communes in different places in remote areas, and they tried to create a new Israel, a more spiritual community. We don't see a lot of those in the Bible because they had withdrawn. You may know of one of those groups. They are called the Qumran Community. They are famous because they withdrew and they took a bunch of Biblical scrolls with them and kept them in caves near their commune, and we rediscovered those scrolls in those caves in the 1940's and we call them thee -- anybody? Yeah, the dead sea scrolls. The Denver Museum of Natural History has a great exhibit going on right now where you get to see some of those. Well, that was from the Essene community. We just need to start over.

There was a third group called the Sadducees. The Sadducees tended to be rich. They tended to be the powerful and the Elite of Israel. They kind of looked around at Roman occupation, and they went, honestly, guys, this is not that big of a deal. Honestly, this might even be a good deal because they are protecting the caravans which allows us to send trade goods out. We are making money off of this, so the Sadducees said, we need to cooperate. We need to not make waves. Let's not upset Rome. The Sadducees tended to be what we might call theological liberals. They didn't believe anything except the first five books of the Bible. So everything else in the Old Testament they went, that's not really the Word of God. We don't have to believe anything that it says. So they didn't hold to a number of beliefs that were core to the Jewish faith. They were theological liberals.

On the other side of the spectrum from theological liberalism was another group called the Pharisees. Pharisees are what you call theological conservatives. What they did, they looked around and they said, we need to get back to the Bible. They said, it's a spiritual issue. God's told us what we need to do to experience his blessing. We are not doing it, so we need to get the nation of Israel to get back to the Bible and start obeying what the scripture says. You might be thinking, well that sounds a lot like Evangelical Christians. Yeah. Now, the Pharisees -- I mean, they had a couple of tendencies to get things out of whack. Evangelicals don't have this problem -- What are you laughing about? I haven't even said it yet. I mean the Pharisees had a tendency to go, let's get back to the Bible. You know what, honestly, the best way to get back to the Bible, we not only need to ask all the people to obey the rules, we need to make up more rules to make sure that they are not getting too far away from obeying the rules, so they created some additional rules. Thou shalt -- I know God doesn't say that, but it will be helpful for you to do the things that God says if you just do these other things we are also saying, so they added some additional rules. And they had a little bit of a tendency, as we have seen over the last few weeks, to allow following the rules to become a replacement for their relationship with God rather than a result of it, and as I said, Evangelicals don't struggle with any of that, so --

Those are your four groups. Four different responses to how do we get God's blessing back? There is a little bit of a chain reaction happening. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Some people go to the Pharisees, and the Pharisees -- they go to the chief priests. They go to the ruling council of Israel, verse 47. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin -- that's the ruling council. What are we accomplishing, they asked? Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come, and they'll take away our temple and our nation. That last bit is really important. You might want to highlight. Then they'll take away our temple and our nation. You know what that is? That's fear. That's what they are afraid of.

And what we need to understand is that everything happening here is being driven by this fear, and there are all kinds of things happening here. All kinds of things are really the result of fear. The first thing is that fear causes us to ignore the undeniable. I want you to notice, they said here is this man performing many signs. They didn't say here is this man claiming to perform many signs. They didn't say, here is this man people think might be performing many signs. No. It's undeniable. Here is this man. He's performing many signs. Lazarus was dead. He's alive. There's no

question about that. It's undeniable. There was a blind man we saw a few weeks ago. He was blind from birth and Jesus opened his eyes. That's undeniable. It's not even just those two miracles. They didn't say he performed two signs. He is performing many signs. They are acknowledging this is an undeniable reality. He is performing many signs. Ideally, they would have looked that undeniable fact of the signs he was performing and gone, what does that mean?

As we said a few weeks ago, they would have clung to the undeniable rather than the inexplicable and realized he was the Messiah. He was exactly who he claimed to be, but that's not what's happening? Why? Because fear causes us to ignore the undeniable. It blinds us to the reality of what God has already done. I don't blame them because I struggle with exactly the same thing. It's such a natural tendency. I'll be honest, leading a church the size of Mission Hills involves a certain amount of fear, and every time God calls me to trust Him in a new way, my first instinct is to go, but what? But what does that mean? But what if? What, what, what? What's happening in that moment, I'm forgetting all of the times in the past that God has shown me that He is faithful. He's shown me that He can be trusted and there are so many instances of that, so much undeniable evidence of God's undeniable faithfulness and yet what fear does, it causes me to be blinds me to that. It causes me to ignore it. May have you have the same experience in your life.

I'll tell you what I learned that I have to do, and I have to do this on a daily basis, a daily discipline, I have to replace but what -- with but when? Instead of going, what if? No, no, no. But when I needed God to show up, He did. But when I didn't know how I was going to get this thing, God provided it. But when I didn't know where the mortgage was going to come from, God provided. But when I thought this might be the end of the story, God wrote a new chapter and led an even better story. Instead of but what, I have to replace it with but when. If we don't do that, what happens, fear causes us to ignore the undeniable, and leaves us trapped where we are. Another thing that fear does, fear causes us to compromise our principles. It causes us to take those things that we hold true, that we believe our lives need to center around, and it causes us to go well, maybe I'll just sit that aside a little bit. It causes us to compromise our principles. We see it here with the Pharisees because the Pharisees, as I said, they are the back to the Bible people.

As I gave you the four groups of people, and I gave you some descriptions, you should probably understand that those four groups hated each other. I mean, honestly, they really didn't have anything to do with each other, but there were two groups in particular that hated each other more than anybody else. There were two groups that were on such opposite sides of the spectrum that they made the republican/democratic split look like a walk in the park. The Pharisees, more than any other group hated -- you want to guess? The Sadducees. And the Sadducees felt exactly the same way about the Pharisees. In fact, there's all kinds of first century literature that's basically the Pharisees talking smack about the Sadducees, and the Sadducees shooting it right back. They hated each other, but you have to understand, for the Pharisees, it was a matter of principle because the Sadducees denied a huge chunk of the Word of God. They didn't believe in core teachings of the Jewish and thin ultimately the Christian faith which means the Sadducees and the Pharisees did nothing together because from the Pharisees perspective, that was selling out, and yet, where did the Pharisees go? They went to the chief priests. They went to the Sanhedrin which in the first century was controlled by -- you want to guess? The Sadducees. They set aside their theological convictions, they set aside core believes to go work with a group of people. Why? Because that's what fear does. It causes us to compromise our principles. I was walking through this message with some of the staff. I do that on Tuesday morning to get some feedback. We have a young woman on staff that said, that really resonates with me. I said, why? She said, well, I'm single. I'll be honest, I struggle with fear that I'm never going to get married, that I'm never going to find the guy, and she said that fear tempts me to want to lower my standards. You see, she wants a Godly man. She wants a man who doesn't just claim to love Jesus, like following Jesus is his heartbeat so he will lead her and he will lead their family well. That's what she's looking for, but she said the fear that I'm never going to get married, it causes me to go, maybe all I need is this, or maybe even this, to lower the standards of what she's looking for. Fear causes us to compromise our principles.

By the way, if I could speak to the single people in the room for a second. I want to say two things to you. The first one is just, it's just an apology. I'm sorry. I am coming more and more to realize that the Evangelical church, the conservative church often somehow communicates to single people that you are second-class Christians. If you have ever felt that in the church, I'm sorry. It's not true. Second thing I want to do, I want to speak a truth into your life, and you need to hear me. If you are single, you need to hear this truth. Marriage is not the highest calling of the Christian life. Mission is. Marriage is not the highest calling of the Christian life. Mission is. If you spend your whole life unmarried but on mission with Jesus, you will receive nothing less than a hero's welcome when you walk into his arms someday. You are not a second-class citizen. If you have every felt that way because of the way the Evangelical church does things, I'm sorry.

Do not let your fear cause you to compromise your principles. That's true not just for single people, it's true for every one of us who when I say fear leads us to compromise our principles, you know what that is for you. You say in this area of my life, fear makes me want to pull back on my principles. Don't. Do not let fear lead you to compromise your principles. There is a third thing that fear does, and that is that fear causes us to overvalue what we have, and to undervalue what God can do. To overvalue what we have and to under value what God can do if we would just follow him. Here we see it. When the council says, if we let him go on, everyone is going to believe in him, and then the Romans will come and they'll take away both the temple and the nation. Do you understand what's ironic about that? They didn't have a nation. They are acting as if they have a free sovereign nation, but they don't. They have been enslaved to the Romans since the 60s, 63BC. Before that the Greeks. Before that, the Persians. Before that, the Babylonians. They have been an enslaved nation for literally centuries at this point.

It's a little bit like a few weeks ago we saw that Jesus said to the group of religious leaders anyone that sins is a slave to sin and they shot back, we have never been a slave to anybody. I guarantee if Jesus was ever short of words, it was at that moment. You have never -- what are you talking

about? At this moment when these people go if Jesus keeps getting popularity, the Romans are going to come in, they'll take away our nation, and I understand, Rome does that, right? Rome is quick to squash any rebellion. They are quick to jump to kill any even hint that there might be a rebellion forming, so their fear is legitimate, but what's interesting is the idea that they are going to come and take away our nation. You don't have a nation. You are an enslaved people. There are all kinds of things the Jewish people wanted to do, but Rome said, no you are not going to do that. There are all kinds of things they didn't want to do and Rome said, you don't really have a choice because you are a Roman province. We own you. We call the shots. You only have as much freedom as we let you have.

Yet they are afraid that they are going to lose their nation, but they don't even have it. That's what fear does. It causes us to overvalue what we have and what God could do if we just trust him. As I share this week, another woman on staff said that makes me think about my mom's relationship. She was in a physically abusive relationship with a guy for years. He physically abused her for years and she stuck with it because she kept saying, but at least there's food on the table. But at least there's a roof over my head. She was over valuing what she had and under valuing what God could lead her to. It was only when she finally trusted God and she stopped allowing that physical abuse to happen that she moved out from underneath that huge weight that she began to experience freedom and joy and hope in a way that she didn't realize that was a possibility. She waited so long because she overvalued what she had and undervalued what God could lead her to. That's what fear does.

I think about this church. Back in 2008 or so when Pastor Mike Romberger, my predecessor here and the elders came to understand that God was leading us to leave our former campus and to move down here to the South Park area, and there was all kinds of fear involved in that because they went that is going to involve a lot of money, a lot of debt. Do we even think we can do that? Should we do that? That's a scary thing. They were people that said you shouldn't do that. If you do that, we are going to leave, so there was the possibility that the congregation would lose people, which -- honestly, is exactly what happened. There are people that didn't make that transition with us, and honestly, it would have been so easy to go, why would we risk all of that? Because honestly, that location was up on Orchard. That location -- this location is fine. It's perfectly fine. It's a good location. There's nothing wrong with it, and fear could have easily led them to overvalue what they had and undervalue what God could do, but they didn't do that, and they made the move, and somewhere in the midst of that, Mike shared this with me. Somebody said, can you imagine like what -- what could be?

What if God doubled our influence as a congregation for the Gospel? What if God doubled our influence? God went, that's adorable. We are not going to double you. He quadrupled our influence as a church in about three years. Quadrupled. Allowing us to do things like not only do we have that number of people to impact here and send out into the community fueled up to be on mission with Jesus just here, but beyond that, like last year we spent \$1.2 million in overseas missions spreading the Gospel around the world to people that don't have it. \$1.2 million. That was an unbelievable number back in 2008 when they started this idea of moving here. What would we have missed out on if they had overvalued what they had and undervalued what God could do? Even as we speak right now, we are out of space here, and so we are adding seats, and we are building campuses, and we are doing ministry around the world that they could never even have dreamed of back then because they didn't allow fear to force them to overvalue what they had and to undervalue what God could do.

Another thing about fear is that fear often ends up accomplishing the very thing we are trying to avoid. Did you know that? Fear often causes us to accomplish the very thing we are trying to avoid. They said the Romans will come and take away our nation and our temple. That's what they were trying to avoid. That was their fear, and it was their refusal to follow Jesus that led to exactly that. If they had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, what they would have done is they would have been returned to experience the blessings of the Old Testament, if they had followed, but they didn't. In a few weeks we are going to talk about as Jesus came into Jerusalem on that last journey, some people began to sing his praises, and the religious leaders tried to get them to shut up. They said, Jesus, you got to get these guys to be quiet because the guards are here. They are going to notice. Rome will pay attention to this. These people are claiming you are the Messiah. They are claiming that you are the Savior. You have to get them to shut up. Driven by fear.

Jesus said kind of a famous thing. He said, if they don't do it, even the rocks will cry out. I don't want to give too much away, but he's not saying if you guys don't sing, then the rocks will pick up a harmony. That's not what he's saying. He's quoting from an Old Testament prophesy that says the rocks of the wall, the stones of the wall will cry out about the sin that's accomplished inside that place. Jesus is quoting from that, and he's saying if they don't recognize me, the rocks of this place will cry out in judgment, which is exactly what happened. Not long after that the Roman army came in and they wiped out the nation of Israel so thoroughly that we didn't have a nation of Israel for almost 2,000 years. They destroyed the Temple so completely that not one stone was left on another, so the stones of the Temple cried out, which is exactly what they are trying to avoid.

It's exactly that fear that's keeping them from seeing the truth about who Jesus is, and yet their fear ends up accomplishing the very thing that they are trying to avoid. It's exactly that fear that's keeping them from seeing the truth about who Jesus is, and yet their fear ends up accomplishing the very thing they were trying to avoid. I remember when my dad was teaching me how to drive, he gave me a great piece of advice. I have since realized that it wasn't just good driving advice, it was really good spiritual advice. He said hey, what you need to do, you need to fix your eyes on a spot in your lane further down the road. I remember going, but dad, there's fences and trees over here, I want to make sure I don't hit them. I need to be looking at those. He said, no, no, no, because what happens is, we inevitably drift wherever our eyes are focused. If you are looking at those things on the side, you will find you are going to drift over. You need to fix your eyes on where you are going. That's great advice. That's great spiritual advice because if our eyes are fixed on the things that we fear, what's going to happen is we are going to inevitably and find ourselves drifting in that direction and end up bringing to pass the things we are trying to hard to avoid, the things that are keeping us

from following Jesus, but if our eyes are fixed on what Jesus is calling us to, if we are fixed on where he's leading us, all of those things we are afraid of just keep falling further and further in the distance.

If -- if we refuse to allow fear to drive us. There is one other thing that fear accomplishes, and that is fear causes us to miss out on God's greatest blessings. I mean that's really kind of the whole thing summed up right there. Fear causes us to miss out on God's greatest blessings. I think this is the reason God says 87 different times, do not fear. Do not be afraid. Fear not. Do not let fear drive you. Because fear causes us to miss out on God's greatest blessings. Verse 49 says one of them named Caiaphas that was the high priest that year spoke up. He said you guys know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own but as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation and not only that nation but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and to make them one, and so from that day on they plotted to take his life.

What John says here basically that he was an accidental prophet. I didn't even know that was a thing. That's what he says. When Caiaphas said what he said, he wasn't trying to make a spiritual statement, he was just being practical. He was like, it's better to get rid of Jesus than for Rome to come and do this thing we are so worried about, take away our nation and our temple. And John says, you know, it's ironic that, that's almost what Jesus intended to do himself. One man to die for the whole nation. One man to die for the sins of all Israel, but not just Israel, for the sins of all mankind. For anyone that believes in Him shall not perish. Anyone who trusts in the work that Jesus did on the cross is set free. Jesus intended to do exactly that. What's interesting is that Caiaphas practical prediction and his practical advice leads him to begin seeking Jesus' life which ends up accomplishing the very thing that God wanted to do in the first place, but, and this is an all important but. Did Caiaphas and the other religious leaders, did they experience the blessing of what Jesus did on that cross?

No. They couldn't stop it, but they didn't experience the blessing that came from it because they wouldn't follow it. Here's the thing, we can't fight God. You cannot fight God, but we can frustrate His purposes in our lives by allowing fear to keep us from following. We can't fight God. We can't stop God's purposes, but we can frustrate His purposes in our lives, we can keep ourselves from experiencing the benefits of all that God does, the blessing, when we allow fear to keep us from following. I think John illustrates that in an interesting way as he closes this passage. He says, therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. There are two interesting things there, two interesting details. The first is he says is this village was near the wilderness. This wilderness is this barren bleak place. I was in Phoenix this past week with some pastors. When I flew out of there, I looked down on the surrounding areas around Phoenix and I thought, this place is awful. Phoenix is fine, but you get just a little bit outside of Phoenix, it is a wilderness, it is bleak, it's barren. It's desolate. There is nothing for miles and miles and miles. That's kind of the geography John's talking about here when he talks about the wilderness.

It's a place where there is just very little that looked like it had any value to it. And he says on the edge of that wilderness there is a town called Ephraim. And that's where Jesus went and he settled his disciples for a while. Ephraim is an interesting name. It's not an important town, but its name is important because Ephraim in Hebrew means fruitful. Actually, it means doubly fruitful. And I think what Jesus was doing by settling in that town for a little while, and what John is doing by telling us about that, he's sort of symbolically showing us that where Jesus is, there's fruit, and no matter how much everything else looks like wilderness, no matter how desolate things might look around you, if you are with Jesus, there is fruit. There is blessing. There is power. There is hope. There is joy. There is peace, there is all of those things that are true of this abundant, excessive life that Jesus came, if you are with Jesus. Wherever Jesus is, there's fruit.

But fear does its worst work by keeping us from following him. As I said, this abundant life, this excessive life, it's not a static gift. It's a proximity effect. To experience it, we have to stick close to Jesus, and that's exactly what fear keeps us from doing, so what do we have to do? Don't be afraid anymore. We good? A little more complicated, right? Here's what we got to do. Two things I realize about fear. Fear and faith, they are really kind of opposites, right? But as opposite as they are, both fear and faith have two things in common that I think is paying attention to. Both fear and faith grow when you feed them, and they shrink when you don't. Both fear and faith grow when you feed them and they shrink when you don't. If you feed fear, it will just get bigger. But that's true of faith too. The more you feed your faith, the greater your faith will be. If you starve your fear, it will get smaller. If you starve your faith, it will get smaller, so here's what we have to do, feed your faith and starve your fear. Feed your faith and starve your fear. Let me give you three steps practically that I think allow that to happen. The first step is this, it's just to ask the question, what has God done? What has God done? What are the undeniable things that God has done in your life?

You need to have some kind of a practice that allows you to remember those things. One of my favorite hymns, we actually sang it today, "Come Thy Fount" has a line says, "here I raise my Ebenezer," which is a weird line, right? Because most of us are like, what are we hoisting old British men? What's happening at this point? Because we think like the Christmas carols, right? But Ebenezer, it's the Hebrew word for stone of remembrance, and it's thing that they would do. They would pile stones up. They would build these little monuments, and they would say God has brought us faithfully this far, and so we know He can be trusted to carry us on. They were monuments to remember everything that God had done, and you need that kind of thing in your life. I don't know what it looks like for you. Maybe it's journaling. I have a good friend. I was with him this past week. He said he has journaled every single night for the last 20 years.

I was like, I started that process 15 years ago. I have gotten to about a page and a half so far. Journaling is not my thing. For whatever reason, that's not it, but I found other things in my life that I do that allows me to remember what God has done, like when we put up the Christmas tree every Christmas. Every ornament that goes on, we look at the ornament and we say there is something about this ornament that reminds

me about what God has done this year, and we say it when we put it up there. And it's sometimes a little weird because my mom sends weird ornaments, but every ornament we put up we are like, this thing here reminds me of this thing God did, and we declare that, so the tree itself becomes a monument.

If you drive by my house, right, at the corner of my yard there's a little pile of rocks. We put them there when my oldest daughter went off to college. We gathered as a family. We put these rocks down. We talked about, hey, Rochelle, you remember God did this? Do you remember this? So every time you drive into my house you go past this little pile of rocks, she sees it when she comes home. I see it every time I drive in and out. We have to have these ways that we remember what God has done because it's in that, that we find strength to go forward, right? That's your first step, what has God done? You need to find a way to do it. Maybe it's journaling. Maybe it's building things. Maybe it's creating art. Maybe it's putting together Pinterest boards, I don't know. I don't care, but find a way to do it.

The second step then is to ask the very sobering question, what is the true value of what I have versus what God is leading us to? What is the true value of what I have versus what God is leading us to? We have to very soberly assess those things that make us go, but at least -- anytime you say "but at least" that's fear telling you, you don't dare move away from that. We have to ask the question, is what I'm holding on to -- or really, that's not quite right. Is what is holding me here really comparable to what God is calling me to? I had a conversation last weekend with a young woman who came up after one of the messages. She said I'm struggling with this idea of trusting Jesus. She said, I'm afraid if I really trust him, he might take some of my dreams away. I think she was hoping I would go, no, no, no. That's not going to happen. I said I have bad news. You are probably going to lose some dreams. I told her a bit of my story. I said man, when I was your age, I had all kinds of these dreams, and God took most of them away, but he replaced them with much, much better dreams. Honestly, what God replaced them with -- it's -- they are not even in the same zip code with what I was dreaming of. I can't promise God's not going to take away, but I can promise anything God takes away he will replace with something infinitely more valuable.

We cannot allow fear to keep us where we are, so we have to ask the question what is the value of what I'm holding on to, or what is the value of what is holding on to me versus what God is leading me to? And the third step is just this, what promises do I need to remember to move forward? What promises do I need to remember to move forward. Not only has what God done in the past given me confidence, but what God promises for my future. If you are not sure, the Bible is full of promises. Start looking them up. Start repeating them to yourself. Memorize them. If you want a place to start, we actually put a web page together on the website, missionhills.org/promises. Go there sometime this week. It will be on the app a little bit later too. Take a look at those promises, and start to reflect on them and realize that these are promises that God says apply to His people if they will just trust Him. Hold on to those.

Here's the thing, fear will never propel you into the future. Fear will only chain you to the past. Do not allow fear to cause you to miss out on God's greatest blessings. Honestly, the best way to feed your faith and to starve your fear is to take steps of faith. The best way to live courageously, to learn to live courageously is to practice courage. Will you pray with me?

Jesus, we confess that we are a fearful people. I know it's true for me, and I think it's true for almost all of my brothers and sisters here. We have seen the evidence of your faithfulness. We have seen the evidence of your trustworthiness. Yet, when it comes time to trust you again, fear kicks in, and it does all of its work in our lives, and it wants to hold us where we are instead of releasing us to follow you to what is so much better. We confess that to you, Lord. We thank you for the -- undeniable evidence of your faithfulness in the person of Jesus who died on the cross for our sins and then rose again to offer us new life. Lord, we look back on our own lives, and we ask that you give us vision to see all of the ways you provided, all of the ways you have cared for us. Lord, give us the ability to with courage look to the future of following you, to staying hard on your heels, because that's the only place that we will experience the abundant life that you came to give us. Lord, we renounce our fear. Help us to starve it as we feed our faith. In Jesus name, amen.